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**HOW NEW ZEALAND WOMEN EXPERIENCE THEIR  
PARTNERS' IMPRISONMENT**

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*“What is particularly interesting here is that, almost universally, it is women who must cope with men’s problems. Throughout their lives, these women have been faced with difficulties arising from male criminality. These problems do not end when husbands are incarcerated. They do not simply vanish when the men disappear behind prison walls. Husbands continue to have a significant impact on their wives’ daily lives”*

*(Fishman, 1990, p. 262)*

*“Through their experiences of the “pains of imprisonment” at the border of the correctional setting, women assume the peculiar status of quasi-inmates, people at once legally free and palpably bound.”*

*(Comfort, 2003, p. 103)*

*“they were grieving but had no body and couldn’t really grieve in public because going to jail is not acceptable. You are supposed to hide this fact, but if they had died then they could grieve publicly and get the support needed. But when someone goes to jail and you lose them from your daily life, almost like a death, you cannot grieve out loud, you have to grieve silently or else risk shame.”*

*(Arditti, 2003, p. 128)*

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## ABSTRACT

In New Zealand in 2006 there were almost 6,000 men in prison, with predictions that the numbers may rise to 9,000 by the year 2010. Almost a quarter of those imprisoned men reported having a spouse or partner at home, and almost 600 reported one or more dependent children. This means that there are at least 2,500 women and children in New Zealand who are directly affected by the incarceration of their man. My aim in this research was to explore the impacts and meaning of imprisonment for those women whose partners are in prison, and thereby to contribute to an understanding of these impacts, stimulate debate, and draw attention to a silenced and undervalued population within our communities.

In-depth, unstructured interviews were used to collect data from six women whose partners were in prison. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using a narrative approach of inquiry.

Data analysis supports prior findings that the impacts of imprisonment of a partner are generally detrimental to women and families. The women interviewed reported difficulties related to their partners' imprisonment in almost every aspect of their lives: emotional, physical, financial, social and familial. There is currently little social, community, or government support for these women and families, despite the recognition that family well-being is critically important in reducing recidivism. I offer some recommendations for improving the situation for women whose partners are in prison, and make suggestions for future research.

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