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

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of

Master of Arts
in
Psychology

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
PALMERSTON NORTH, NEW ZEALAND

February 2008

"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)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the many people who have given me support and encouragement throughout my journey of completing this thesis.

Firstly, I am eternally grateful to the six women who were brave enough to speak to me of their experiences, and put their trust in my ability to tell their stories. Without your participation this study would not have been possible. I learnt a lot from each of you and after each interview I came back to my work re-inspired and excited by the research process, and even more determined to ensure that your stories are heard. Thanks also to Karen, for your proof-reading and thoughtful comments.

Secondly, I want to express a big thank you to my family. To my children, Dana and Briana, who have been so understanding of Mum's having to work, and to Morgan, and Riley, who came along during the process. Though you have all been a distraction from my work, you have provided so much joy in the journey. To my mother, Barbara Jordan, and my sister, Sue Crabtree, thank you both for your practical and loving support through all the highs and lows, as well as your academic guidance. You have both set the example of learning for me to follow. And to my partner, Martin, thank you for listening to my thinking out loud, and for offering your own (sometimes challenging) perspective. Thank you to you all for your ongoing words of encouragement in this long process and for your never-ending faith in my abilities.

Finally, thank you to Associate Professor Mandy Morgan, my supervisor. I would not have been able to complete this thesis without your support and academic guidance. Many thanks, Mandy, for all your care and understanding, for your belief in my abilities, and flexibility with our timelines.

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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CHAPTER ONE : INTRODUCTION

They took him out the door and I thought fuck what the fuck am I meant to do? I just sat in the courthouse. [Jane]

1.1. Introduction

In 2006 in New Zealand almost 6,000 men were in prison (Department of Corrections, Annual Report, 2006), with a further 335 women also incarcerated. The imprisonment per capita in New Zealand is higher than in comparable countries such as Australia and Canada (Department of Corrections, Annual Report 2005/2006). How incarceration affects the lives of the women and families on the 'outside' is becoming increasingly important as those numbers increase significantly, and are predicted to rise as high as 9,000 – and perhaps more - by the year 2010. In his foreword to the Department of Corrections Annual Report (2005/2006, p. 56), the Chief Executive, Barry Matthews, explains part of the reason for the increasing prison numbers as “a series of legislative changes in the last five years [have] had flow-on effects in terms of the increasing number of people in the prison system, the full impact of which has still to be felt”, coupled with increasing prosecution rates and longer sentences being given to the most serious offenders.

In this first chapter I introduce the aims, justifications and background for undertaking this project. My own position is identified and an overview of each chapter is presented.

1.2. Aim of the Study

The aim in this research study is to explore the effects of imprisonment on the lives and families of women whose partners are in prison. I aim to contribute to an understanding of the impacts of imprisonment, stimulate debate and draw attention to a silenced and undervalued population within our communities.

1.3. Background to, and Justification for, the Study

Thousands of women each year experience the critical loss of a husband or partner as a result of incarceration. As noted above, the numbers of prison inmates are increasing, as are the numbers of loved ones affected by their incarceration. Carlson and Cervera (1991) suggest that even short periods of incarceration are an extremely stressful experience for family members of an inmate. Despite this, there remains very little research on the effects of imprisonment on those left on the outside – the women and families within the New Zealand context.

One of the New Zealand Government's stated priorities for the next decade is that "all families, young and old, have the support and choices they need to be secure and be able to reach their full potential" (Department of Corrections Annual Report, 2005/2006, p. 12), yet families affected by incarceration have "virtually been left off the family preservation agenda" (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003). This silence alone speaks to what society values. Programmes within the Department of Corrections itself, designed to reduce reoffending, neglect to give serious attention to the problems of the offender's family. This is noteworthy, given that research has shown that "inmates who maintain stable family ties while in prison have a better chance of remaining out of prison after their release" (Fishman, 1981, p. 372).

With the numbers of prison inmates climbing, the need to examine the impact of imprisonment on families and communities becomes urgent. More often than not it is

women – wives, partners, daughters, mothers – who maintain the relationship with the incarcerated man. Comfort (2003, p. 79) notes that:

Women whose loved ones and close acquaintances are caught in the revolving door of “corrections” experience restricted rights, diminished resources, social marginalization, and other consequences of penal confinement, even though they are legally innocent and reside outside of the prison’s boundaries. This punishment of women reverberates through their interactions with community members, employers, children, and other kin and can result in poverty, homelessness, physical and mental health problems, family disruption, or stigmatisation.

The current socio-political atmosphere in New Zealand demands harsher sentencing (see, for example, Roberts, 2003) and gives little consideration to the effects of imprisonment on the wives and partners and other family members of an offender. It is for this reason that I chose to examine the impact of imprisonment on women whose partners are in prison. In exploring the impact of incarceration on women in New Zealand, I believe that I, by means of this study, can contribute to an understanding of just how deleterious imprisonment can be for those left at home. It helps to draw attention to the needs of a silenced group within our population.

1.4. Declaring my position

My interest in justice and prison issues began during the final year of my Bachelor’s Degree in 2001, situated within women’s studies and psychology. In 2002 my partner became a Corrections Officer and over the years we have debated, from our opposing positions, the impacts of - and necessity for - incarceration. My feminist standpoint led me to an interest in the impact of the incarceration of men on their womenfolk. I acknowledge that I approach this topic from my position as a student and have not been a part of any support or political groups that are available for those who are affected by imprisonment.

I have a strong belief that incarceration alone does not change criminal behaviour, nor does it solve the issues or causes of crime in society. I believe that, in some cases, imprisonment does more harm than good, and that alternative options, which may be more effective in creating change - must be examined.

I also acknowledge my position as a middle-class, Pakeha (non-Māori white New Zealander) woman. My positioning is no doubt reflected in this thesis.

1.5. Review of Chapters

In Chapter One I introduce the thesis topic and aims, the background and justification for the current study. My own position is declared and an outline of each chapter is provided.

In Chapter Two I examine the literature surrounding imprisonment and its effects on women and families who have loved ones in prison. What the literature reveals is that there is a paucity of material relating specifically to women whose partners are in prison, particularly within New Zealand. This silence in itself may point to what is considered important in our society. There is, however, a general consensus that imprisonment of the men in their lives is harmful in its effects on women, their families and communities. I look also at literature relating to women whose partners are absent for reasons of employment, and make some comparison to the social illegitimacy of grieving for an incarcerated mate. Finally, I make some comments on problems with the currently available literature.

In Chapter Three I provide an overview of the philosophical underpinnings and the research method. A qualitative narrative approach within a feminist epistemology was chosen as the most appropriate for understanding the experiences of women whose partners are in prison. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from six women whose partners were imprisoned, and justification for using a small

sample is provided. A thematic analysis using the constant comparison method offered a flexible way to analyse the interviews.

In Chapter Four I present the analysis of data from the interviews using relevant literature to frame and further develop excerpts from the participants. The narratives of the six women are presented thematically and not in their entirety in order to maintain sensitivity to the possible identification of their unique stories. Ten themes emerged from the data material and these are discussed using excerpts from the interviews.

Chapter Five is the final chapter and in it, I discuss some of my interpretations and insights gathered throughout the research process. I revisit some of the material discussed in the analysis chapter and explore some ideas for future research, including some recommendations for how the impact of imprisonment of their menfolk on women and families can be minimised. I present some personal reflections on the research process and comment on the effect of the interviews on the participants. Limitations of the current study are identified and I offer some concluding statements.

1.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the thesis, which explores how a group of six women whose partners were in prison experienced the impact of imprisonment on their lives. I have introduced the topic of incarceration and provided a brief background and justification for the study. I have declared my personal position in relation to the topic and in this way I declare my own subjectivities and how they have guided and influenced this project. In the following chapter I review the literature surrounding imprisonment and its effects on women and families left at home.

CHAPTER TWO :

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced my aims in this study and provided an overview of my thesis. In this chapter I review relevant literature in the area of imprisonment and women whose partners are in prison. In this examination of the literature I explore the context of the current study.

Initially I look briefly at some of the published material, both within New Zealand and internationally, relating to the general prison population. The effects of imprisonment on children and families are explored, and affective responses to the loss of a partner due to imprisonment are examined. Literature on families with absent partners for reasons other than imprisonment is examined, and I look at the social acceptability of grief for women whose partners are in prison, before turning my attention to specific research related to the current topic. Finally, I make some comments on problems and issues within the relevant literature.

2.2 Current situation in New Zealand

In New Zealand in 2006 there were 5,905 men in prison, with a further 477 on home detention (Department of Corrections, Annual Report, 2006). (Women in prison are, comparatively, a very small population in New Zealand, with 335 female inmates at the 2003 census {Department of Corrections, 2004}). And the numbers are growing. The Ministry of Justice predicts that there may be up to 9,000 prisoners in total by 2010 (Retrieved February 26, 2008 from <http://www.justice.govt.nz/pubs/reports/2007/2006-nz-prison-forecast-technical->

report/overview.html). The new prisons currently being built to accommodate the growing number of prisoners are expected to cost the taxpayer \$800million (Retrieved February 26, 2008 from http://www.howardleague.co.nz/factsheets/factsheet_37.html). Each inmate costs the Department of Corrections \$188.71 per day to house, an increase from \$161.91 per day in the 2004/05 economic year (Retrieved October 27, 2006 from <http://www.corrections.govt.nz/public/pdf/annualreports/ar2006-complete.pdf>.) The main reason for this large increase is the output by the Corrections Department for building new facilities in order to house the increasing numbers being sentenced to prison. This expenditure by taxpayers to house inmates does not take into account the effect and cost of the incarceration of a loved one for the women, children, families, and ultimately the community, who are left on the outside. The partners and children of incarcerated men are the most directly affected by their menfolk's imprisonment, yet in public discussions and calls for harsher sentencing of convicted lawbreakers, the families of the men are rarely mentioned.

Of the 5,905 men in prison, 1,154 (24%) reported having a partner or spouse at home, and 575 reported 1 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 menfolk, not including the wider family members. Almost 40% of those men in prison currently have 2 or more years of their sentences still to serve (Department of Corrections, 2004); a long time to be absent from their families. There is currently very little research in New Zealand into the effects of incarceration of husbands/partners (many of whom are also fathers) on these women and their families on the outside. Internationally, there is a paucity of literature regarding the plight of women whose lives are transformed by the incarceration of their partners. In the international literature that is available there is a general consensus that the incarceration of their partners is a stressful experience, and has a detrimental effect, on the women involved.

Strong family ties and a stable home to return to following incarceration have been shown to be positively related to a successful release from imprisonment (Carlson & Cervera, 1991), and an intimate relationship that survives a man's incarceration can be considered a major asset for his rehabilitation. However, this relationship appears

to be the “most vulnerable to deterioration during imprisonment” (Bakker, Morris, & Janus, 1978, p. 144). Women whose lives are affected by their partners’ incarceration suffer a “secondary prisonization” (Comfort, 2003, p. 101), a “weakened but still compelling version of the elaborate regulations, concentrated surveillance, and corporeal confinement governing the lives of ensnared felons”. Through their marginalisation in our communities and the stigma attached to their intimate association with convicted criminals, these women become the “hidden victims of crime” (Bakker et al., 1978). This marginalisation and stigma add to the difficulties of losing a partner (if only temporarily) and, in some cases, becoming a single mother - which puts further pressure on what is often already due to imprisonment, a strained relationship.

Literature specific to the New Zealand prison population includes research on the innovative Kowhai Alcohol and Drug Treatment Unit programme (Huriwai, 2002), the impact of home detention in New Zealand (Gibbs & King, 2003), the effectiveness of the current security classification system with female inmates (Collie, 2003), need areas and demographic and offence-specific variables of female offenders (Moth, Hudson, & Jarvis, 2003), and prevalence studies (e.g., Brinded, Simpson, Laidlaw, Fairley, & Malcolm, 2001). The Department of Corrections requested an “Inmate family relocation study”, in which the number of inmates and their families who relocated to the area (Wanganui or Rimutaka) where the inmate was imprisoned (Waldegrave, 1999) was examined. They found that the majority of participants in the Wanganui region were originally from outside the area, but that only 8% of those participants reported movement or planned movement by family or friends to be closer to the inmate. None of these reported movements were intended to be permanent once the inmate was released. Of the Rimutaka participants, 9% reported movement or planned movement by family or friends to be closer to the inmate. All relocations by family or friends were reported by the respondents to improve visits to the prison and support the inmate. Of interest here is that support of an inmate impacts so dramatically on family members causing even a relocation of their home. This study, however, was for the Department’s ‘site acquisition process’ and the effects of imprisonment on the family, or the effects of relocation were not investigated. Morris and Reilly (2003) conducted a national survey of crime victims in New Zealand. However, they gave no consideration to the effects of crime and

justice on the families of the offender, people who are also affected by crime. Thus, while in New Zealand there has been considerable research on inmates in general, little attention has been paid to the area of prisoners' families. This is particularly so with regard to women whose partners are in prison.

In their study on the impact of home detention in New Zealand, Gibbs and King (2003) note that most sponsors were women (wives, partners or mothers) who often had children to look after. Approximately half of the sponsors and detainees in Gibbs and King's study reported stress and tension in their relationship as a result of the home detention. One of the purported benefits of home detention is to allow the detainee to be with family with the ultimate aim of reducing re-offending. However, according to Gibbs and King, some sponsors resented the surveillance expectations placed on them by the justice system, and felt that the home detention system was too rigid to allow for family outings and a true family atmosphere. On the other hand, home detention was generally found to be favourable as it "promoted family cohesion and meant fewer visits to prison" (Gibbs & King, 2003, p. 12). Gibbs and King also note that the most obvious benefits were in family situations as this had a positive impact on the children in the family, while knowing that the detainee was at home allowed the sponsors a sense of security and freedom from the fear for their loved one's wellbeing in prison.

Internationally, there has been a large amount of research on the prison population. However, there remains a paucity of research into the effects of imprisonment on the partner. Within the international prison population, research has been conducted in areas such as inmate family functioning (Carlson & Cervera, 1991; Klein, Bartholomew, & Hibbert, 2002); mental health issues (Kroll et al., 2002); gender differences and comparisons in a variety of issues (e.g. Harer & Langen, 2001; Suter, Byrne, Byrne, Howells, & Day, 2002); bullying in prisons (Ireland, 2002); and substance use (eg, Huriwai, 2002; Phillips, Nixon, & Pfefferbaum, 2002). There are extensive research and literature in relation to AIDS and HIV and the inmate population (e.g. Zaitzow & Justice, 2001; Farabee & Leukefeld, 2002; Ehrmann, 2002); and how to protect inmates' partners from contracting AIDS and HIV (e.g. Comfort, 2000). As the prison population is predominantly male, much of this research is focussed on the male population. Research specifically with women in

prison is not as prolific as research on men and the general population of prisons. Research with women in prison covers topics such as mothers in prison (eg. Luke, 2002; Radosh, 2002; Gat, 2001), prison nurseries (Carlson, 2001), parenting stress for women in prison (Houck & Loper, 2002), the children of mothers in prison (Myers, Smarsh, Amlund-Hagen, & Kennon, 1999), the effects of imprisonment on mother/child bonding (Morton & Williams, 1998), women's experiences of grief in prison (Ferszt, 2002), eating disorders and food (Milligan, Waller, & Andrews, 2002; Smith, 2002), recidivism (Harm & Phillips, 2001), adjustment to prison (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002), reproduction (Bortner, 2002), and risky behaviour in women inmates (Cotten-Oldenburg, Jordan, Martin, & Kupper, 1999). In the United States, Pogrebin and Dodge (2001) have examined the subjective experiences of women who had previously been imprisoned. In their discussion, they point to the fear and violence of prison life as a crucial element for women inmates to deal with. One of the most painful aspects of imprisonment for many women, though, was the loss of outside personal relationships with husbands or children, and the costs of being an imprisoned mother were very high, perhaps representing a "punishment well beyond what the law intended" (p. 531). It would appear that this sense of loss of outside relationships is more predominant among the female prison population than among the male prison population, perhaps because more women visit their men in prison than the other way round.

The needs of inmates following their release to the community are also an area of interest, though not as extensively researched as the inmate population. Jacoby and Kozie-Peak (1997) found that social support after release increased the quality of life for mentally ill offenders, though it did not affect recidivism. Parsons and Warner-Robbins (2002) also found social support and supportive friends assisted in women's successful transition to the community following their release from prison. Petersilia (2001) investigated the political, economic, and social consequences of parole release in the United States, and Richie (2001) used life history interviews to look at the challenges women face as they return to the community. Both conclude that better service delivery and improved community support will increase successful return to society following imprisonment and decrease recidivism and rearrest, particularly within low-income communities. O'Brien (2001) found relationships to be crucial for

the women in her study in managing their release from prison. Family resources were drawn upon not only for concrete and practical assistance, such as accommodation upon release, but also for caring for children, financial assistance, and facilitating a successful transition to the community. A successful integration to the community, O'Brien says, requires the woman's "developing a sense of self-efficacy and her strategic use of family, correctional and community resources" (p. 293). Such success, then, requires a supportive family for the released inmate to turn to, as well as correctional and community resources being made available. Such resources, unfortunately, are too often not available. O'Brien emphasises that empowerment, assistance, and healing, as opposed to a solely punitive approach, are important in supporting inmates and their families in improving their situations. For families to be able to support their incarcerated loved one, they too require support.

2.3 Effects of incarceration on children and families

There exists a plethora of literature on imprisoned parents and the effects of this on their children. Much of this literature notes that parents, while physically absent, can remain emotionally present for their children, and that policies, programmes and services need to be geared towards facilitating the parent-child relationship during imprisonment. This is in accordance with the view that strong family and community ties have been shown to support reintegration following release from prison, and to reduce recidivism. It has been noted that the incarceration of a mother is more disruptive to children than the incarceration of a father (Myers et al., 1999; Simmons, 2000), due to the increased likelihood that the mother was the primary caregiver prior to her imprisonment. This leads to an increased probability that children will be displaced from home when a mother is incarcerated. Because there are fewer female prisons, children also must often travel long distances in order to visit their mothers, resulting in fewer visits with incarcerated mothers. An increased risk of poverty, law-breaking, and emotional trauma, school and relational problems has been found in children of incarcerated parents, alongside a decrease in sympathy and support offered. Arditti (2005) comments that individuals who are socially devalued, such as

children and prison widows, have less legitimacy to grieve. Therefore, the grief associated with the loss of a parent to imprisonment is often either considered to be insignificant, or (worse) completely overlooked in children. A decrease in self-esteem and identity coupled with a lessened chance of a normal future are subtle losses that also may not be recognised (Crenshaw, 2002). Media coverage and “get tough on crime” attitudes that portray offending parents as villains also add to the stigma attached to children of incarcerated parents (Myers et al., 1999).

Much of the research on families and children of inmates shows that the imprisonment of a parent can have both immediate and long-term detrimental effects on children, and causes economic, emotional, psychological, behavioural, and school performance issues with children (Lowenstein, 1986; Mazza, 2002; Myers et al., 1999). The emotional responses of children following the arrest and incarceration of a parent include - but are not limited to - anger, fear, shame, anxiety, guilt and depression (Hagan & Dinovitzer, 1999; Mazza, 2002; Myers et al., 1999). Behavioural difficulties that arise after the incarceration of a parent include withdrawal, low self-esteem, truancy and a decrease in school performance, increased aggression, and drug and alcohol use.

The incarceration of a parent can also cause a sense of instability for children, which may lead to behaviour resulting in their own eventual incarceration. Children of incarcerated parents are five times more likely to end up in prison themselves than are other children (Mazza, 2002; Simmons, 2000). King (1993) notes that the effects of incarceration of a parent are similar to those of divorced families, where the entire family system suffers. Financial, psychological, emotional and interpersonal problems abound, creating stress on family relationships at a time when the support of each other is most needed. The emotional problems make it much more difficult for families of incarcerated men to deal with everyday practical problems, while the attached social stigma exacerbates emotional difficulties within the family (King, 1993). King goes on to say that the fact that many children of incarcerated men “become productive citizens, is testimony to the resourcefulness of the female partners of these men” (p. 148). Children often suffer grief at the loss of their parent, and are often not told the details of where their parent has gone, why, or for how long. Such deceit can create feelings of fear and abandonment in children (Myers et al.,

1999) and not openly discussing a parent's incarceration, or keeping it secret, increases anxiety, shame and guilt (Mazza, 2002). As discussed above, the grief of children is often overlooked or considered insignificant (Crenshaw, 2002), creating its own further difficulties for children.

Families of inmates also face the stigma of being a single-parent households, albeit temporarily. As with any single-parent household, the loss of a partner to imprisonment has concrete and practical effects on the family. The loss of an income earner causes financial strains and stress. This effect is often compounded by the need to provide for the imprisoned partner. For the single parent there are also practical issues such as childcare and support in running the household. There arises a need for reliance on family resources and community support, which are all too often not offered or not available due to the nature of the new, and involuntary, single parenthood. Lowenstein (1986) discusses the involuntariness of being made a single-parent family by imprisonment. The fact that the temporary status of single parent is involuntary, she says, creates emotional, interactional, and behavioural difficulties within the family. On the other hand, involuntary single parenthood due to socially accepted situations, such as loss by accidental death, is more likely to engender social support. Loss of a partner due to incarceration, however, may be seen as voluntary (Arditti, 2005) and as such does not engender social support. The nonincarcerated partner is seen to be at fault; the illegal behaviour of the inmate becomes extended to the inmate's family due to their intimate connections with the lawbreaker.

Lowenstein (1986) also likens the effects of the temporary status of single parenthood to those families with fathers suffering mental or chronic illness. She found that the mothers' familial and personal resources were important to the ability of the children to adjust to their fathers' imprisonment. The nature of the crime, as well as the stigmatising effects of the criminal event, also impacted on children's adjustability.

McEvoy, O'Mahony, Horner, and Lyner (1999) note that prior research found that families of politically motivated prisoners in Northern Ireland did not suffer so much as "ordinaries" (non-politically motivated prisoners) from stigma. However, in their own research they found that political ideology did not insulate families from practical and emotional issues of having a family member imprisoned. In fact, they suggest concerns and anxieties around the eventual release of the prisoner were

heightened in this group of families. In addition to the usual concerns for families of “ordinary” prisoners, the families of “politicals” had the added worries of harassment by “security forces” and victimisation by “state agencies” upon release of prisoners (McEvoy et al., 1999). These authors also found that despite Northern Ireland’s highly developed system of services for families of prisoners, this group of families appeared reluctant to make use of services available. They did find, however, that families of politically motivated prisoners offered stronger support than did families of “ordinaries”, as evidenced by more frequent visits, accompanied by children, and more regular letter writing. This lack of support for “ordinaries” may be due to the stigmatising effects that are attached to intimacy with a lawbreaker, and the nature of the crime committed.

2.4 Affective responses to loss of a partner due to incarceration

Arditti, Lambert-Shute & Joest (2003) looked at the implications of incarceration for families and children. They conducted semi-structured interviews with 56 visitors (mostly women) of jail inmates in an American state. Written from a family systems perspective, they found a decrease in health of both caregiver and children, and their perceptions of support. They also noted an increased risk of economic hardship, strain on emotional, coping and parental relationships, and social isolation experienced by the children and families. They made recommendations for family policies and practices within the justice and social systems, including information and training to assist in the development of preventative strategies, and on-site support services during family visiting hours. They conclude that incarceration is socially and economically harmful beyond the individual inmate and comment that from a harm-reduction perspective, the punishment of incarceration should do no more harm than the original crime. They also comment that “an overreliance on incarceration as a means to punish is poor family policy” and that alternative approaches to dealing with crime need to be sought in order to lessen the negative economic effects of incarceration (Arditti et al., 2003, p.202).

In their research on inmate family functioning, Klein et al., (2002) showed that inmates' family life was not as different as they had expected from non-inmate family life. However, the most significant family process that did not work well in inmates' families was the ability to make use of social networks and resources outside the family. This is interesting to note, as having positive family and community relationships outside of the prison setting is a consistent factor in a successful release (Carlson & Cervera, 1991). The implications of this are that family interventions for inmates and their families should focus on strengthening connections within the family as well as working on strengthening social networks outside the family. In their review of the literature, Klein et al. (2002) found that the maintenance of family ties during incarceration is related to lower recidivism rates, and inmates are less likely to become part of a prison subculture while imprisoned. The period of incarceration can be an important time for both the inmate and the family to "give attention to destructive familial contexts" (p.95). This period may provide the motivation for the inmates to make changes in their family roles, especially their role as father, as well as an incentive for the family to seek and accept outside intervention. Such intervention is especially salient if there is to be any hope of preventing the children of incarcerated parents from continuing the cycle of criminality.

O'Brien (2001), writing from a strengths perspective, talked to former female inmates about what aided their successful transition from prison to the community. In discussing relationships and connections with others, partners were the least mentioned. The most important relationships were with the women's children, and with their mothers. In their relationships with their mothers, the women commented that healing old wounds and building new relationships were significant to their successful transition. Much of their success could also be attributed to issues around regaining custody of their children, and attaining what was necessary to achieve custody. This is interesting to note in comparison to former male inmates where a strong relationship with a partner is consistently seen as a predictor of reducing recidivism and assisting a more successful transition to the community (Petersilia, 2003). Many of the women in O'Brien's study also mentioned the importance of a sense of community membership, whereby these women worked in positions where they were able to assist other women in similar situations. Again, the use of family,

correctional and community resources featured as an important part of the process of a successful transition from prison to the community.

In her (1981) study, Susan Fishman discusses four points of crisis for women and families throughout the process of the incarceration of their menfolk, from initial arrest to eventual release. During the first point of crisis, prior to sentencing, women experience confusion and disbelief following the initial arrest and throughout the trial period. Being unable to make plans for the future leaves women feeling as if they are living in limbo. During sentencing, women are often unprepared and have unanswered questions regarding the prison and their visiting options. Women are concerned about how they are going to cope; they worry for themselves, their menfolk and their children. Following the initial incarceration, women often experience difficulties with visiting, concern over what to tell the children, conflicting emotions and financial loss. Fishman compares the loss of a partner to imprisonment to loss by death, but with the difference of the social unacceptability of the illegal act which has brought about the loss, meaning that women are "denied normal social outlets of grief" (p. 373). The final point of crisis for women and families is the pre/post release period. Both the woman and the incarcerated man often have unrealistic expectations for the future. The inmate may expect to resume his role in the family, while the woman's new-found sense of independence may be seen as a threat to him. Laura Fishman (1995) also found it common for women whose partners were imprisoned for the first time to be more likely to have romantic visions of their future together, while "old timers", women whose partners had been imprisoned more than once, were less likely to believe that their men had truly reformed and could return to their conventional lives.

However, it becomes necessary to distinguish between those separations that are socially sanctioned, and those that are not (Lowenstein, 1986). Parental separations due to incarceration have unique effects on the family, especially the children. The separation of an intimate couple due to incarceration is not socially sanctioned, and thus the involuntarily single woman, who is often also a parent, suffers the attached stigma of being intimate with one who has broken the law.

2.5 Similarities for families facing partner absence for reasons other than incarceration

Other researchers have looked at the effect on families of an absent partner or spouse due to job requirements. In their study on separation and reunion among army wives, Wood, Scarville, and Gravino (1995) interviewed 35 wives of soldiers before, during, immediately prior to return, and 6-8 weeks following the soldiers' return from a six month deployment to the Sinai. They found that the adaptation abilities of the family were influenced most by the resources (access to community resources and assistance from family and friends) and strengths of the family, and by a positive perception of the situation. When the soldiers were deployed, these army wives experienced the strains of rearranging familial roles, financial and childcare concerns, children's behavioural and emotional difficulties, and affective responses (loneliness, anger, depression), but had the additional concerns for the soldiers' safety when they were deployed to combat or hostile zones.

Similarly, Zvonkovic, Solomon, Humble and Manoogian (2005) looked at families of men whose jobs required travel and sometimes long periods of absence, specifically commercial fishing and long-haul trucking. They commented that the central focus of the couples in these families was around his need to be away as a function of his breadwinning role. Thus, it was not only his absences that must be accommodated for, but also his presences, both of which influence and affect the family systems.

In both of these studies, the authors found that communication between the couples during the spouse's absence was a key factor in maintaining closeness within the family (Wood et al., 1995; Zvonkovic et al., 2005). This communication, facilitated through phone contact and letter writing, helped to intensify the relationship and maintained an involvement in home life and with the children for the absent spouse.

In contrast, women whose partners are in prison must cope with more than just the absence of their men. These women are not simply separated from their mates, as in other cases, but must also continually face the problems associated with the type of

separation they endure (Fishman, 1995). Such problems include encounters with police, courts and prisons, and stigmatisation from the community due to their close affiliation with a lawbreaker, all of which have a continuing significant impact on the women's lives. This is the difference between separations that are socially sanctioned and those that are not (Lowenstein, 1986). Partners of prisoners must also deal with the changing roles of family members. The imprisoned man loses his status as breadwinner, along with responsibility and influence within the family (King, 1993). The woman on the outside must pick up new roles both in the home and throughout the stages of arrest, sentencing and court appearances. Once her partner is imprisoned, she often becomes his sole link to the outside world, and will be his provider for material and practical requirements during his imprisonment. This brings about additional financial as well as emotional stress for the woman on the outside. She is also faced with the added concern for his safety in prison, including his emotional well-being.

2.6 Social Illegitimacy of grieving for an incarcerated mate

Arditti (2005) likens the incarceration of a family member to the "social death of the loved one" (p. 253), a loss, however, which cannot be socially or publicly acknowledged and grieved for. Doka (1989, 2002) named this *disenfranchised grief*, defined as a loss that "cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported" (Arditti, 2005, p. 253). Thus, a woman whose partner has been imprisoned may suffer a grief and feelings of loss similar to those experienced as results of a spouse's death, but she is not socially sanctioned to mourn his loss. Because her loss is considered outside of social norms, she is not offered the support so often available to other women who have lost their partners in more socially sanctioned circumstances. More specifically, becoming a single parent due to the incarceration of one of the caregivers is seen as voluntary because the surviving parent on the outside is seen as being at fault, held accountable for the others' illegal behaviour, and therefore undeserving of help (Arditti, 2005). The illegal behaviour of

the incarcerated person, and the attached stigmatisation and blame, become extended to the entire family.

In a discussion of chronic victimisation, Shaw (2001) says that the effects are similar to those of bereavement. Shaw states that those who have suffered chronic victimisation go through a four-part process of numbness and dazedness; anger and acute emotional pain; depression, disorganisation and despair. Shaw suggests that the final stage, resumption of everyday life and acceptance, does not necessarily occur for chronic victims. This concept could be applied to the families of inmates who may experience chronic victimisation due to their loved ones' incarceration. The every day contact with stigma and shame of having an intimate family member imprisoned can have the effect of chronic victimisation, preventing the resumption of normal life. In fact, many women report efforts to normalise their lives in order to minimise contact with shame and stigma (Fishman, 1990).

2.7 Specific Research

In my review of the literature, I have found no published research conducted with this group of women in New Zealand. In the United States, Megan Comfort (2003) has examined the social and cultural impact of incarceration on the partners of male inmates at California's San Quentin State Prison. Her research was focused on the "regulation and distortion of women's lives" during the incarceration of a loved one, through the experience of visiting an inmate in a correctional facility (Comfort, 2003, p. 79). Comfort discusses the "secondary prisonization" of these women through their treatment at the hands of the penal visitation systems. The support of loved ones on the outside fosters prison adjustment and can lead to better societal adjustment after prison, leading to lower rearrest rates. Such stigmatisation and humiliation of the women who visit their partners does not support their efforts to be there for their partners and loved ones. Fishman (1990, p. 230) also found that correction facility rules for visitation and the treatment women received from prison staffs were "perceived as ever-present reminders that wives shared their husbands' stigmatised

status". She comments that prison policies, designed to improve the functioning of the institution, often have "dysfunctional consequences for prisoners' wives".

Seka (2001) used published literature and case examples to understand the experiences of women who become involved with incarcerated men. Again, a meaningful relationship to return to following release from incarceration was shown to be the best predictor of a successful release. Seka concluded that social services provided to the partners of male inmates could be expected to lead to a decrease in prison costs and crime rates. In their discussion of the special problems that families of inmates experience, Bakker et al. (1978) recommend the establishment of helping agencies tailored to the specific needs of this group. Such services would not only assist in alleviating the immediate concerns of these families, but would also add to the chances of an inmate's successful release from prison and, in the long run, could prove beneficial to society in general. The costs of providing helping services to the families of inmates would be far less than continuing to house the inmates in prisons, by contributing to lowering recidivism. Though written thirty years ago, these recommendations still apply today. However, such helping agencies remain minimal and under funded (see, e. g., Prisoners Aid and Rehabilitation Services (PARS) at www.pars.org.nz; The Howard League for Penal Reform at www.howardleague.co.nz)

Fishman (1990) compared wives of prisoners to alcoholics and batterers in that they view marriage in traditional terms; that is, the wife belongs in the home and that the man is the breadwinner and head of the household. As traditionalists, these women believe that with their love and support they can bring about desirable changes in their husbands. Fishman also notes that the wives of inmates wanted "individualised justice". They expect the Court system and judges to consider the background and history of their husbands in their sentencing. The wives of inmates wanted someone – the Court, lawyers, judges – to care about them and the impact of sentencing on them and their children, to give consideration to why their husbands had engaged in criminal behaviour and to recommend treatment to change that behaviour, rather than to condemn the men, and their families, to a prison sentence.

In her study, Fishman (1990) found that the wives of prisoners felt a sense of differentness from those around them. She found that these women employed “accommodative strategies...at different stages in the criminalization (*sic*) process” (p. 8) in an attempt to preserve their marriages and make life bearable. Two strategies Fishman identified were manipulating the definition of their husbands’ behaviour and their own relationship to it, and developing a lifestyle to normalise life. Women devised interpretations or accounts of their husbands’ behaviour that limited his responsibility for his behaviour; they would assign blame to outside forces or to themselves. These rationalisations serve to “normalise” the men’s behaviour, which in turn diminishes the women’s sense of differentness from those around them. Fishman also comments that the imprisoned partners of the women in her study were using telephone contact as a means to check up on wives and maintain authority and dominance over the women, creating a sense of imprisonment for the women, who were expected to be home when he called. Some women, Fishman says, may also create their own prison by putting their lives on hold while waiting for their partners to return. She concludes that the increased hardship created by the cost of contacts, providing material goods for the imprisoned partner, increased parenting responsibilities and loneliness combine to create a “socioemotional impoverishment” for women whose partners are incarcerated.

As a “prison widow” herself, Arditti (2002, 2003, 2005) researched the effects of incarceration on children and families. She advocates strongly for criminal justice reform which recognises the “need to minimize the use of imprisonment in the first place” (2003, p. 135) while also addressing the needs of families and children. The over reliance on incarceration coupled with the policies and procedures of corrections facilities appear to “promote family disintegration”, Arditti (2003, p. 135) says. Arditti argues that the cultural and social stigma attached to incarceration permeates every aspect of the family members’ lives and further intensifies family problems associated with incarceration. Such problems include the issues of single parenthood, lack of social support, emotional stresses, work-family conflict, declining health, and a decrease in financial resources. Arditti discusses that the loss of a loved one to incarceration involves an “ambiguous loss” which is characterised by remaining “unclear, indeterminate, and unvalidated by the community” (Arditti, 2005, p. 255) and can lead to emotional ambivalence.

2.8 Some comments on problems/issues

In much of the international research on inmates' families, the focus appears to be on the need for the women on the outside to stay strong in the families in order to reduce their partners' criminal activities. The responsibility of preventing or reducing recidivism is placed on the women. While this is an approach that works well for offenders and does seem to have the effect of reducing recidivism, it creates pressure and responsibility that do not justly belong to the offenders' partners.

There exists in New Zealand a reliance on under funded volunteer organisations for providing community support for both the prisoners and their families. Such organisations often have a majority of female volunteers. From a feminist perspective, this situation means that women's unpaid labour in the home and in the community is being relied on by the state to support the imprisonment and rehabilitation of men. The Department of Corrections itself acknowledges its reliance on "community volunteer groups" to help make their programmes and services more effective in reducing re-offending (Department of Corrections Annual Report, 2005/2006, p. 6).

PARS (Prisoner Aid and Rehabilitation Services) is the major support agency within New Zealand for prisoners and their families. Like so many community services, PARS is underfunded and run mostly by volunteers, the majority of whom are women. PARS provides service referral and advocacy to inmates and their family/whanau, accommodation and travel assistance, assistance in court, visits to inmates by volunteers, and social, informational and practical support, as well as post-release support and other programmes and special projects. PARS' major funding comes from a contract for services from the Department of Corrections though both the national and local societies raise funds from other sources also. PARS have always provided more hours of service than have been contracted for by the Department of Corrections (Retrieved October 27, 2006 from www.pars.org.nz).

2.9 Problems of research

There is, both within New Zealand and internationally, a paucity of research in the area of women whose partners are incarcerated. Additionally, international research on inmates' families focuses more on supporting the women so that they are better able to support their incarcerated mates, thereby reducing their criminality and recidivism, rather than focussing on the needs of these women during their partners' incarceration period, and the effects that this has on them and their families. Research that does focus on women whose partners are imprisoned points consistently to the detrimental effects and attached stigma.

A review of the literature shows that the majority of past and current research has focussed largely on the incarcerated population. This focus has led to a neglect of attention to a group of people who are severely affected by individuals' incarceration: their partners. In turn, this neglect supports social practices of silencing and devaluing women's experiences, forgetting that these women, and their families, are the "hidden victims of crime" and suffer "secondary prisonisation" due to the imprisonment of their partners. As unacknowledged victims of crime, these women are also not eligible for many of the support services available within their communities. Nor is their loss, and its associated grief, allowed a public forum. Research into the effects on the women partners of incarcerated men thus needs to address a wide range of issues: financial, emotional, social, psychological and familial.

These women, who are neither victims nor perpetrators of crime, nevertheless suffer the consequences of crime. With little support and even less education on what support may be available or how to seek it, and perhaps being unaware of the important role they play, women whose partners are imprisoned are also often held responsible for prevention of their partners' recidivism.

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the literature surrounding imprisonment in general, and women whose partners are in prison, and examined some of the problems and issues with the material that is currently available. What the literature revealed is that there is a general consensus that imprisonment has a detrimental impact on families and communities alike. This literature review also shows a paucity of research specifically concerning women who experience partner imprisonment, particularly in New Zealand.

How does imprisonment impact on the lives of women whose partners are in prison? To help us to truly understand the social costs of the rising number of women whose partners are in prison, we must situate our research within the narratives of those who live the experience. In this study, six New Zealand women tell their own stories of their lives during their partners' imprisonment and the effects of this imprisonment on them.

Having reviewed aspects of the literature pertinent to this study, in the following chapter I will present the methods used in this research process.

CHAPTER THREE : METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I reviewed some of the literature surrounding imprisonment and its effects on families. In this chapter I discuss the research process, including philosophical underpinnings and the research method.

My approach to studying women's subjective experiences of their partners' incarceration comes from a feminist perspective and an interest in corrections and justice. I wanted to explore the effects of men's incarceration on the lives of women and their families in New Zealand. In exploring women's experiences, I was interested in finding out what sorts of problems they encounter, how they deal with them, what sources of support are available to them, and what community organisations they might access. I was interested in what coping strategies women might employ, whether or not they have encountered stigma because of their association with a criminal, and in what form/s, and how they might deal with it. According to the findings from overseas research, women and children whose partners and fathers are in prison are a group of people in our communities who are marginalised (Arditti, 2005; Comfort, 2003; Fishman, 1990). They are a group who are not considered in the sentence planning of the individual who has committed the crime. They are a group who, by their connection with a convicted criminal, suffer a "secondary prisonization" (Comfort, 2003). Even though these women live outside the prison's boundaries, they experience consequences of penal confinement such as diminished resources and social marginalisation. I wanted to look at how this position affects women, their lives, and their families.

Families of inmates must cope not only with the loss of one who is often the principal wage earner (Bakker, Morris, & Janus, 1978), but also with the stigma attached to their association with an inmate. Little is done to help this marginalised group in our

communities, therefore they are, as Bakker et al. labelled this group, the “hidden victims of crime” (1978, p. 143). I acknowledge that the families of female inmates often face more complex problems than the families of male inmates (Bakker et al., 1978), especially when children are involved. However, my research approach is focussed on the experiences of women whose partners are in prison. The reason for this limitation is due partly to the prison population’s being primarily male, but mostly to my research approach being informed by feminist principles - namely, that feminist research is for women, based on women’s experiences in defining the problem, design, and collection and interpretation of data (Harding, 1987), and that the research is “oriented towards the improvement of the status of women and is undertaken by scholars who define themselves as feminist” (Eichler, 1997, p. 10). Social change is also an aspect of feminist research, and it is hoped that by enabling the voices of women directly affected by the incarceration of their partners to be heard, this thesis will help to bring this group of people out of the shadows and into public and social consideration. To do this I used a narrative approach of inquiry.

3.2. Narrative Inquiry

The underlying assumption of narrative psychology is that language is not seen as a direct route to the individual’s underlying cognitions. Rather, it is the stories people tell and the way that they tell them which interest the narrative researcher. These stories are themselves the object of study. The narrative researcher understands that there is no direct access to an individual’s primary experience, but must rely on language to stand for, and represent, that experience. Story telling, narratives, are seen as a kind of performance (Riessman, 1993), where the teller needs to convince the listener - who was not present at the event - that something of importance happened. It is the way in which the teller convinces the listener of this importance that the narrative researcher is interested in, as well as the content of the teller’s narrative.

Sarbin (1986) suggests that the concept of the narrative can be seen as a “root metaphor” for the field of psychology. The meaning of human experience is

constructed through social discourse and the storied nature of human experience is assumed in narrative inquiry (McAdams, Jesselson, & Lieblich, 2001). The role of the researcher in narrative research is to connect the understanding individuals make of lived experiences with some form of conceptual interpretation, which is - in turn - "meaning constructed at another level of analysis" (2001, p. xxi). The central question in narrative research is, "How do people make meaning out of their lived experience?" It is through the analysis of the construction and sharing of stories of the self that the narrative researcher can find the individual's meaning-making (McAdams et al., 2001). In the current research, I was interested in what the women selected as important stories to tell of their experience. The women's narratives are representations of significant events and relationships, which relate to their experience of their partners' imprisonment. Collecting and analysing the women's own stories enables us to privilege their understanding of what is important in their own lives. Through privileging the women's knowledge of their own experience we are able to understand more about what it is that is important to the women themselves. Through the analysis of stories shared, commonalities and differences of experience can become apparent. Though coming from different backgrounds, these women shared a common experience and their stories show how the meanings they attach to that experience are similar.

A story usually consists of a beginning, middle, and an ending, an account of human actions (Sarbin, 1986), with a plot and an attempt at resolution. The women in the current research give an account of the actions of their partner, the consequence of which has been their incarceration, putting the women in a position of having to resolve their relation to that incarceration. The concept of time is also important to the narrative; the story requires a temporal dimension¹. A narrative can be identified by pointers to temporality, examples being "I remember once when..." and "... so that's how we ended up here", which indicate the beginning and the ending of a story. Time may be seen as an important dimension for women whose partners are in prison. It is unlikely that a definitive ending to stories of their experiences can be identified when a woman's partner remains in prison, or when the stigma of being related to, or

¹ The meaning of time can also be seen as a cultural construction, with some cultures organising narrative according to themes rather than temporality; see for example, Ellis & Bochner, 2003

otherwise associated with, a criminal continues beyond the prison boundaries and beyond the term of imprisonment.

The objects of investigation in narrative analysis are the stories told by individuals (Riessman, 1993). Since there can be no direct access to the primary experience, talk and text, Riessman says, are represented imperfectly and selectively, “meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal” (p. 15). The meaning of any discourse is created through the process of interaction between people: self, teller, listener and recorder, analyst and reader. Riessman presents five levels of representation in narrative research where interpretation and creation of text occur at each level. Riessman’s first level of narrative representation is *attending to the experience*. The individual in experience makes choices about what is noticed, and what is then chosen to retell. Reality is constructed in choosing to what to attend. This level of narrative representation also applies to the researcher during the interview process, where the researcher chooses what parts of the story represented by the interview will receive attention. This is where transcription can help the listener to attend to, or refocus on, aspects of the narrative that were missed during the interview itself. Riessman’s second level is the *telling of the experience by the storyteller*. The telling of an experience is a performance of a personal narrative, drawing on cultural context. In the talking and listening, asking questions and responding to cues, the teller and listener produce a narrative together. In the telling, the narrator is creating a self; a character who represents how s/he wants to be known by the listener, and so the narrative becomes a self-representation. In the context of the current research, I was interested in what the women selected as important stories to tell, as well as in the meaning of the stories told. These narratives became a representation of what is significant to the women themselves in their experience of having an imprisoned partner. *Transcribing the experience* at level three, Riessman (p. 11) says, is “incomplete, partial, and selective”, as it is at levels one and two, and involves an interpretive process. At this level the transcriber/researcher must decide how much detail to include, what to include and how to arrange the narrative. Decisions made at this level will have serious implications for how the reader understands the narrative. Transcription that does not include adequate detail may mean that nuances of meaning that distinguish subtle devices, such as ironic inflection, may be missing from the representation provided to the reader.

The values, politics, and theoretical commitments of the analyst will impact on level four; *the analysing of the experience*. The analyst creates a summation, an aggregate, of what the interview narratives signify, turning the stories told into a new narrative, a “hybrid story” (Reissman, 1993, p. 13). It is at this level that I, as the analyst, create a new narrative, a metanarrative combining all the women’s stories of what it means to have an imprisoned partner. It is also at this level of analysis that my own cultural and historical background and feminist commitments will impact on the final hybrid story created. The fifth and final level, *the reading of the experience*, is where readers bring their own meaning to bear on the text. In the hands of the reader, the text is open to multiple readings and multiple constructions. The reader becomes an agent of the text, and reads within his or her own historical and cultural context.

Each of Riessman’s levels represents an expansion as well as a reduction of experience, where tellers of experience will select features from the whole experience while also adding other interpretive elements. In the telling of a narrative, the narrator is representing not only events, but also the meaning attached to the events (Reissman, 1993); how the individual understands those events. The meaning of an event is developed through its placement in a narrative (Reissman, 1993) and different interpretations arise when stories are presented in contrasting ways.

The use of Reissman’s framework allows me to be aware of the impact of my cultural background and how that may affect my interpretation. At the same time it allows me to represent a co-constructed version of the women’s telling of their experiences that privilege their point of view. In relation to the current research question, how New Zealand women experience their partners’ incarceration, this approach to narrative research allows space for women to speak as experts of their experience.

3.3. Recruitment of women participants

An attempt was made to recruit women through advertisement in local newspapers and on public notice-boards in courts and community organisations such as PARS

(Prisoners Aid and Rehabilitation Services). Accessing participants for this research was a difficult process. I received a total of seven responses to newspaper advertisements. Of those responses, four women actually took part in the research. One participant was recruited through word of mouth. One woman contacted me after seeing the advertisement on the notice-board at the PARS office.

As this was a problematic population to access, difficulties arose throughout the recruitment process. Two women did not show up at the agreed interview times and further attempts at follow-up contact were not successful. Two other women decided not to participate, one as her partner had been released from prison, and the other because life was “too stressful” for her at that time. Those women who did participate, however, were keen to tell their story, and often started to talk over the telephone when contact was made to arrange a time for the interview. One woman (who did not participate), whose son was imprisoned and who had replied to an advertisement, began to tell me her story in detail when talking on the telephone. It became clear that these women were keen to have their stories heard. This, then, appears to be a contradiction in that there were difficulties with recruiting women to participate in the research, but women were keen to tell of their experiences. During the analysis of the data, some insights were provided on how this contradiction comes to appear, since other women may well be keen to talk - but are struggling with a multiplicity of stressors that conspire against their having the confidence or simply the space to participate in research. This difficulty in recruitment provides further evidence of the marginalisation of women whose partners are imprisoned.

Initially, ten to twelve interviews was the aim of recruiting for this research. However, it became clear that finding an additional six participants would prolong the research beyond the time constraints set for the project. A sample size of six may appear small; however, Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) suggest that, although twelve interviews is preferable to reach saturation of the data, six interviews may be sufficient when the aim is to understand common perceptions and experiences and the focus is on developing meaningful themes and useful interpretations in a relatively homogenous group. These researchers showed that enough data existed after only six interviews to support the development of metathemes for the purpose of data presentation and discussion. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson assumed a certain degree of

participant homogeneity because participants are chosen according to some common criteria, and it is to be expected that the more similar participants are in their experiences the sooner saturation will be achieved. Although we can not assume that I have recruited a homogenous sample in the current research simply because the participants' partners are in prison, it is safe to assume that the women recruited have shared a common process through which their partners have been arrested, charged, convicted and imprisoned.

I held an informal discussion with a member of the PARS organisation, Palmerston North branch, where two possible reasons were suggested for women's resistance to discussing their partners' imprisonment: imprisonment may occur so frequently that it has become a normal part of life, or women may be too ashamed to reveal or discuss the fact that their loved one is imprisoned (personal communication, 26/10/07). Additionally, Day, Acock, and Bahr (2005) comment that collecting data from imprisoned men was much easier than from their partners, due to difficulties associated with contacting the men's partners as well as unwillingness of the partner's to participate in research.

3.4. Ethics

The research was conducted according to the guidelines of the Massey University Code of Ethical Conduct for research, teaching and evaluations involving human participants (2004). Research ethics approval was given by the Massey University Ethics Committee (Protocol# 04/98). Particular attention was paid to the issues of possible harm to the participants or researcher, and the participants' anonymity and confidentiality, informed consent and right of withdrawal.

Exposing participants to unnecessary harm is unacceptable, and every attempt was made to identify and minimise any possible harm. Because of the nature of the population I was accessing, there was some concern over possible harm to either the participants or me, the researcher. In particular, consideration was given to the impact that the interview may have on the relationship of each participant with her partner

given that full or partial disclosure of events may occur. As there was no requirement for the women's partners to be aware of their participation, and all identifying information was removed from transcripts before extracts were used in the research report, it was felt that there would be limited possibility of harm occurring. However, there was some concern that information acquired in response to some questions may require the researcher to break confidentiality. If this situation had arisen, I would have informed the woman that I needed to break confidentiality for safety reasons, and discussed the issues with my supervisor. None of the women, however, disclosed any concerns for their own or anyone else's safety, other than their concern for their partners during their incarceration. As the interviews were conducted at a convenient location for the women, most of them were in the women's own homes. Consideration was given to the need for my own safety, and I carried a cell phone with me at all interviews.

The privacy and confidentiality of participants were respected at all times. However, as this thesis contains extracts from the interviews, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. All attempts have been made to keep the participants from being identified in the research report. Although two of the women were not concerned with confidentiality and did not ask to have their names changed, all of the women participants were provided with pseudonyms and identifying information was removed. At the completion of the project the audiotapes were destroyed or returned to the participants and the transcripts were stored securely to be held for a period of five (5) years from February 2008.

Participants were provided with a detailed Information Sheet (see Appendix A), as well as having the research and their participation in it explained verbally. The right of withdrawal, right to decline to answer any question and the right to edit their transcripts were all verbally explained to the participants. The participants were provided with an opportunity to have any questions answered and their comprehension of their rights was checked prior to their being asked to sign a Consent Form. The written Consent Forms (see Appendix B) were stored securely and will also be held for a period of five (5) years.

In keeping with feminist research principles, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee was considered an important part of the process. An attempt at deconstructing the assumed power of the interviewer was made at the outset of interviews by letting the participants know that it was their story, not mine, which took precedence. The participants' construction of reality was considered at every level of the research and their position as experts of their experience was acknowledged. Interviews in narrative research are unstructured in nature, and the interviewer is acknowledged as a part of the interview process and the narrative constructions. It is important in narrative research to provide a facilitating context in interviews to encourage the interviewee to attend to, and tell about, important times in her/his life (Riessman, 1993). Creating a relaxed and informal atmosphere for such an interview to occur may have been experienced as intrusive, in the sense that some of the interviews were lengthy and explored personal issues. A debriefing at the conclusion of the interview covered this possibility. All of the women commented that the interview was a positive process for them and provided a rare opportunity for them to speak of their experiences. From a feminist standpoint, providing a non-judgmental interview atmosphere and having a genuine interest in the women's stories not only allows space for the women to speak freely and to feel heard, but also provides affirmation to their experience and their unique knowledge.

3.5. The women participants

Six women participated in the research, with an age range of 36 to 45 at the time of the interview. Cultural identification data were not collected in this research, as it was not the focus of the project. Māori are overrepresented in our prisons. "Māori prisoners make up 49.9% of the total prison population while making up 14.5% of the general population" (Department of Corrections, Annual Report 2005/06, p. 164) and the decision not to collect data on cultural identification or ethnicity was made to ensure that a deficit model of indigenous and immigrant women would not be reproduced in this study. I was interested, however, in the importance of cultural identification to the women telling their stories. If cultural identification was personally important to the individual participant, it became a part

of her story. Of the six women participants, one woman identified strongly as Māori, and as such her experience of her partner's imprisonment was strongly influenced by her cultural identification. One woman identified as Samoan and as Christian. For this woman, it appeared that her religious identification impacted more on her experience and coping abilities than did her cultural identification, though the two are intimately connected. None of the other women participants identified any cultural affiliation. One other woman identified as Christian, and this impacted greatly for her on her coping abilities.

Two of the women's partners had recently been released from prison at the time of the interview, so the changing roles associated with having their partners come back into their lives also became a part of the stories of these women. Two women ended the relationship with their partners after the interviews, informing me when they returned the transcripts. One woman's partner was still in prison when she terminated the relationship, while the other ended the relationship following his release and subsequent escalation of abuse of her. It is unclear whether participation in this study prompted the women to end their relationships; however, it is possible that discussing the impact of their partners' imprisonment on their lives contributed to the making of the decision.

3.6. Individual interviews with the women participants

The interviews were unstructured and conversational in nature. Most interviews lasted around an hour, with the shortest being 45 minutes while the longest interview was 3 ½ hours. The unstructured nature of the interviews allowed the women control of the topic, encouraging them to give their own accounts of their experience. Some demographic questions were used at the beginning of the interviews to get the women started (see Appendix C: Interview Questions); however once launched on the topic, most women found they had plenty to tell. Other standard questions were also included, and used - when appropriate - to help keep the participants focussed or as prompting, however for the most part, participants told their stories in their own way.

My participation as the interviewer in the interview is included in the analysis, as it became a part of the shared construction of the narrative.

The majority of the women made first contact, calling the number provided in the advertisements. I subsequently made contact with the women directly and set up a convenient time for each interview. At the beginning of each interview the process was explained to the participant: that the interview would last between 1 to 2 hours, and that I would then transcribe the interview and send her a copy for her to edit and approve before it was used in analysis.

It was explained to the women that they had the right to withdraw at any stage, and that the stories were theirs to be told in their own way. I checked with each woman that she understood the process and her rights and that she was happy to proceed, before asking her to sign the Consent Form. I also disclosed to each woman that my own partner was a Corrections Officer at the local prison, but that there was no discussion between us about our separate work and no identifying data would be available from either of us to the other. In every interview, the women were pleased that I had disclosed this information and were happy to proceed with participation in the research.

3.7. Transcription of Narratives

The interviews were recorded on 90-minute cassette tapes using a quality cassette recorder and were later transcribed. Identifying narrative segments and their representation for transcription is in itself a form of analysis. By its very nature, transcription, the process of transforming talk in to a written text, involves selection and reduction (Reissman, 1993). As the transcription process was an integral part of engaging with the data, I transcribed the interviews myself. I found this to be an important part of the process as it allowed me to hear the women's voices, accentuations and tones, as I later read through the transcripts. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, including colloquialisms, pauses and repeats. This included

sighing, laughing, pauses indicated by [...], and emphasis of words by the speaker. This form of transcription was felt to be adequate to maintain the meaning and importance of what the women were relating. Transcriptions were then returned to the participants for editing and comment. All returned transcripts had very minor changes made to spelling or deletion of names, and correction of spelling and grammar. One woman, whose partner had subsequently been released from prison, added extensive comments to the transcript, which were incorporated into the transcript used for analysis.

3.8. Analysis of Narratives

From the outset, the women participants were assumed to be the experts of their experience, and their stories of their experiences were honoured as a legitimate form of knowledge. As described in Riessman's (1993) second level of representation in narrative research, throughout the interview interaction I collaborated with the women participants in creating stories about their experience of their partners' imprisonment. For example, while discussing her studies with me, Suzette and I worked together in creating a story about how she felt her husband's criminal activities had impacted on her, using the role of organelles as a metaphor for human relationships.

Suzette: ...They are so tiny and so small, but even though they are so tiny, and maybe they look so insignificant, but they have a specific purpose.

And I see ourselves like, not even individuals, the same. And umm, everybody is different, and ah, we all have a purpose.

Angie: I was just thinking, you were talking about tiny organisms ...

Suzette: Organelles, yeah.

Angie: ... and how they all have a specific purpose.

Suzette: Specific, it's not just a, but a specific. We are made like that, but we have to work together as a whole.

Angie: Yeah. But sometimes we don't.

Suzette: Exactly. ... If those little organelles do not work together, then that's why we are sick. So we all work together, each person. I might have what you don't have; you have what I don't have.

Angie: Yeah. And also that works within a relationship and within a family.

Suzette: Exactly.

Angie: Because your husband was not working as a part of your whole, it has affected your whole hasn't it?

Suzette: Exactly. yes.

Due to the uniqueness of each individual woman's story, re-presenting these narratives, either partially or in their entirety, risks breaching confidentiality of the participants. Therefore, the aim of analysis was to produce a 'hybrid story' of the women's experiences. The stories were thematically analysed in order to create a nonidentifying aggregate. The first phase of the analysis involved identifying themes of stories within the interview transcripts. Quotations from each of the interviews demonstrating these themes were then grouped together. This first phase resulted in a collection of similarly themed stories that were used for organising narratives of events and relationships within the women's experiences. It became evident that some of these themes were individual variations of other themes, so were combined. For example, the theme of "contacts with Corrections Officers", was closely related to - and often overlapped - the theme of "visiting experiences". These two themes were combined to create the metatheme "visiting experiences" that encompassed the experiences of other interactions with Corrections Officers that the women reported. As another example, the theme of "media coverage", being so specific to the individual participants and possibly identifiable, was combined with the theme of "societal images". Initially, I had a theme headed "affective responses". However, as I progressed through the analysis, it became apparent that separating the emotions from the events and relationships was not possible. Therefore, affective responses are discussed throughout the analysis.

Throughout the process of transcribing and reading the interviews a method of constant comparison was used to identify similarities and differences within the narratives. The constant comparison method is a key methodology within grounded

theory, whereby meanings are identified through the categorisation of indicators that identify similarities and differences “bringing out underlying uniformities” (Dey, 1999, p. 66). The emphasis in the constant comparison method is on establishing patterns of similarities and difference, “which exist between instances, cases and concepts, to ensure that the full diversity and complexity of the data is explored” (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1997, p. 261). The method of constant comparison of existing data with new sources of data leads toward the acquisition of further evidence. This evidence helps to shed light on existing interpretations, which may then be modified to allow for the new data. This was a helpful tool within the current research; as questions arose from themes identified in transcriptions, which could be further examined with the help of data from interviews transcribed subsequently. The following example from Georgia, discussing the effects of her partner’s imprisonment on her, shows how new data can be used to compare with existing data and to question further in subsequent interviews.

Georgia: This may sound funny, but I don't ever buy anything in the colour red. Clothing. I never buy anything red. Because I remember right in the beginning, when I got the stuff from Rimutaka prison about visiting, it said “no gang colours”. I wouldn't have known what a gang colour was, and I had to ask them, “What do you mean by ‘no gang colours’?” And they said, “You don't wear red and you don't wear royal blue. Because they're gang colours.”

Using the constant comparison method, this narrative from Georgia led me to attend to any similar experiences in other interviews.

The second phase of the analysis involved reconstructing meanings within the thematics identified from stories the women had told of events and relationships. The similarities and differences identified in the women’s narratives were then organised within the thematics so that the resulting hybrid story took a thematic, rather than a temporal, form. This thematic as opposed to temporal arrangement helps to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Stories that are presented holistically make it easier to identify participants, so by presenting the stories thematically I hope to remove one of the most important markers of a specific event:

where it occurred in a sequence of other events. However, although the thematic form took precedence, there are temporal dimensions to the presentation of the analysis. I have begun with the women's stories of their relationships with their partners prior to imprisonment, primarily because this is where the women began their own stories. There appeared to be a need to first establish that a relationship existed before they spoke of their experiences of their partners' imprisonment. Following from this, each theme is then discussed with evidence from the transcripts presented to support my interpretations.

3.9. Conclusion

In this chapter I have located my research within the feminist tradition and the utilisation of narrative inquiry, a common feminist methodology. Riessman's (1993) five levels of narrative interpretation provided a structure for the development of a schedule of guiding questions for use during the interviews of my six participants. Interviews were informal and the women, all with the common experience of having a partner in prison, were encouraged to tell their own stories. The meta-analysis of these six stories, which is the subject of Chapter Four, is an aggregate, and partial representation only, of the individual stories; I accept full responsibility for this, new, story.

The difficult recruitment of participants was discussed, with careful attention to the complex ethical issues, including the participant-researcher relationships and interview procedures. The conducting of the interviews was described, as were the constant comparison procedures for analysis. The following themes have emerged; which are clearly a co-construction between my understandings, developed in the literature review, of what happens for women and families when their partners are incarcerated, and my repeated engagement with the transcriptions of my participants' stories. The emergent themes were:

- Relationship with partner
- Loss of relationships with others
- Taking care of children

- Taking care of her partner
- Taking care of herself
- Visiting experiences
- The “system”
- Disruption and waiting
- Coping strategies
- Societal images

Due to the uniqueness of each woman’s story the data from the interviews have been presented thematically, using the themes listed above, to maintain sensitivity to identification of the participants. In the following chapter I present and discuss these themes, making links with the literature and the participants’ stories.

CHAPTER FOUR :

NEW ZEALAND WOMEN TALK ABOUT THEIR PARTNERS' IMPRISONMENT

I lost myself actually. I lost a big part of who I was. And still to this very day every now and then I get sad and I have a little cry and I just mourn for what used to be. Still now, three years later, I still just sit there and cry and think about how my life should've been and how it's not [Te Aroha].

4.1. Introduction

In Chapter Three I explained the methodology underpinning this study, and the methods used. In this chapter I present and discuss the interview material, using relevant literature to frame and further develop excerpts from the participants. However, it is the women's own voices and their stories that I most want to have heard.

Before discussing the themes that have emerged from the interview material, I will briefly repeat the aims of this research project. I wanted to explore the experiences of women whose partners were in prison and the impact of imprisonment on their families and their lives. As discussed in the literature review chapter, there is general consensus that imprisonment has a harmful impact on families, and there are few studies specifically with women whose partners are in prison, particularly in New Zealand.

The women's accounts consisted largely of stories about relationships and events that were of importance to them. Stories of their relationships usually began with their

partners, children and immediate family, and radiated outwards to relationships with friends, wider family, and people at the prison. Stories of events that were of importance consisted for the most part of their partners' arrests and sentencing, their own visiting at the prison, and other events related to imprisonment of the menfolk. In some cases events included their partners' crimes - but details of crimes were often left out. As I became more involved with the analysis of the women's stories, it became clearer that the life changing and emotionally distressing effects of their partners' imprisonment often involved a shameful sense of association with their partners' crime. This seemed to me to explain why the details of the crimes were often left out of their accounts. Other sorts of events and relationships which the women often talked about revolved around issues concerning their children, work or social relationships.

Although the women's stories were disjointed and fragmentary, many followed some form of organisation, most frequently temporal. In order to establish that there was a pre-existing relationship of some import, several of the women began their stories by talking about meeting their partners and their earlier relationships.

4.2. Relationship with Partner

All of the women spoke of their relationships prior to their partners' imprisonment, with the exception of one woman who met her partner while he was in prison. Mary felt that she needed to establish the social validity of her relationship with an imprisoned man; she seemed aware of others' sceptical judgements as to whether their relationship was worthy of recognition.

Mary: I met him during that time, [he was serving 12 years] doing voluntary work, that's why I said, "It's a bit of a unique, one of those, you know Woman's Day kind of stories!" (laugh)...
I've been seeing him for about 3 and a half years, if you call it seeing him, but I do, call it a relationship, but a lot of people don't ...

I met him through voluntary work, going out there ... we just started writing, as you do, and then, just sort ... Got to know each other, and I felt it was actually better that way than sort of the jumping into bed thing after you just got to know them.

By comparing her relationship with a more conventional understanding of how people may meet and begin a sexual relationship very quickly, Mary establishes the advantage of her relationship as giving her time to get to know her partner well. The comparison effectively enables her to justify the significance of her relationship despite its unusual beginnings.

It seems logical that the women would first attempt to establish the existence and importance of their relationship prior to their partners' imprisonment. For these women the men they knew intimately were not like the social image of a convicted criminal.

Angie: How long have you two been together?

Anna: About 4 years. Half of our relationship he's been in there.

Angie: So you were together about a year and a half before he was, before he went inside?

Anna: Yeah, but me and Tristan have been friends since we were at primary school, and we grew up as teenagers, hanging out with the same people, as really, really close friends

Jane: So there's that he respects me. And when we do go out to socialise he cuddles and kisses me and, everywhere in public. Even when he's not drinking.

For both Anna and Jane the history of their relationships is important to understanding that they are known, loved and cared for by their partners. Their relationships are first and foremost, and everything else came after. Their partners committed crimes; they were caught, convicted, sentenced, and put in prison. Then began the need for the women to in some way maintain those relationships, while coping with what it meant

to them for their menfolk to be in prison. For some of these women, coping with their partners' crimes meant doing the time with them. They would often speak as if they were going through the criminal justice system together; each identified strongly with her partner who was doing the time.

Anna: In the end I, we, decided - look, we should just plead guilty to these.... 'Cause he could've got, if that had gone to trial, worst case scenario, if we 'd lost, he would've got a really, really, really long time

*Jane: We changed lawyers to the young...
[emphasis added]*

Despite the fact that it was their partners who had committed the crimes and were doing the sentences, Jane and Anna saw the consequences as something that “we” need to deal with, together. The consequences impacted on each woman as well as on her partner. This is an interesting aspect of the primacy of her relationship and her role within it, as she did not actually participate in committing the crime, but is taking on responsibility for the consequences of the crime with her partner. By including themselves in the legal decisions of their partners, Jane and Anna point to their commitment to support their partners, and also show that they are aware that their possible imprisonment will impact on them as well as on the accused. Two women, Jane and Te Aroha, also commented on feeling as though they had “done his lag with him”. For each of them, their partner’s imprisonment felt like she was also serving his sentence.

Jane: John going to prison was my sentence, not his, and my life currently is pretty shit. I have a long road to recovery. ... I feel like I'm the one that's done the sentence.

Te Aroha: What Mahina didn't realise was that we, on the outside, did his lag with him. He thought we have our freedom so we don't do a lag with him. And he didn't, doesn't, realise that we still do his lag with him. He goes well, “you didn't lose your freedom. You didn't have somebody telling you to bend over a mirror every visit”. All of that stuff. ... Because

we could go and walk down to the shop, we had a life. He didn't see that we didn't have a life.

He had been locked up, but to some degree she had also lost her freedom. Jane and Te Aroha are referring to the emotional, psychological, physical, familial, social and financial impacts of their partners' imprisonment. Though they had their physical freedom, they felt imprisoned by other factors related to their partners' being incarcerated. When these six women spoke to me, they each drew attention to a diverse array of stressful constrictions, brought about by their partners' being in prison. These constrictions on the women's lives are so entangled that it is difficult to separate them clearly.

To begin with, each of the women had lost her partner in her daily life and thus lost the companionship she usually enjoyed in her relationship.

Angie: *And you miss it?*

Jane: *Yeah, that's the thing I miss the most, it's just the not having someone to cuddle and kiss. And someone to talk to.*

Anna: *I just miss, it's not even the kissing and all that that I miss. It's just all the little things like, I really miss playing with his goatee. ...and rubbing his little bald head and, you know, that's just, oh. ... You know, there's no one at the end of the day to sit down and talk to. And go oh, I've just had, like I can't even ring him up. Before I could ring him up. And just bitch and moan, but, now it's like, whoa shit.*

.... But yeah, it's, it's the end of the day, with no one to talk to, and then going to bed, and then waking up the next day and it's like oh, that's right, here we go again.

...Like, he's my best mate. You know. I haven't just lost, like, ... my umm partner

Georgia: *[tearfully] It's really hard not having him. ... There's a lot of things I miss. I miss having a million texts at the end of the day from him.*

Te Aroha: *So I was stuck at home now [with a baby], six and a half months pregnant, ... partner's gone.*

The women variously mentioned loss of physical affection, conversation, access to their partners, and support. An important consequence for these women was the fact that they had now effectively lost all the benefits of partnership and intimacy and without doing anything to precipitate the ending of a relationship, were now left on their own. Te Aroha, in particular, struggled with the shame and stigma attached to her partner's imprisonment.

Te Aroha: *It meant that my social circle was cut off because of my association with him, I lost a lot of friends. I lost a lot of respect. That was my biggest thing, amongst my peers, amongst my colleagues, amongst my family. I lost a lot - a lot - of respect. Some of that I've never been able to regain back... just simply because your partner's in jail. If he was in for drugs, you're still tarnished with the same, still tarnished with the same brush.*

Te Aroha speaks of being 'tarnished' regardless of what her partner's crime may have been. For her, the shame of prison itself is more than the crime he committed. This suggests Te Aroha's shame of being intimately associated with a man who has been in prison.

Despite the associated difficulties, these women have decided to remain committed to maintaining their relationships with their imprisoned partners. These women report experiencing loss and grief, not only for the separation from their partners, but also for the ways in which their lives have changed. It is also apparent that these women are struggling with issues of shame and anger, and the stigma that is attached to having a loved one in prison.

4.3. Loss of relationships with others

Families are faced with changing roles as the imprisoned partner often loses his position as breadwinner in the family, while the parent on the outside is left “holding the baby”. She now becomes solely responsible for all finances, childcare and all that that entails, as well as running a household on her own. In short, imprisonment breaks up families. Te Aroha exemplifies the effect of imprisonment on families:

***Te Aroha:** What it did was that it separates families. Imprisonment separates families... Imprisonment destroys families. It absolutely destroys families.*

This increased parental responsibility and loneliness can create a “socioemotional impoverishment” (Fishman, 1995). The participants spoke of their experiences of losing contact with friends and family. Georgia felt she no longer had the support of her mother or her daughter. Anna chose to end friendships after her partner’s imprisonment in an effort to withdraw from “that world” where committing crime was commonplace. Te Aroha chose to maintain her relationship with her partner for the sake of her children’s relationship with their father - but as a result of this, she lost support from friends and family.

***Georgia:** And umm. I have had no support at all, from anyone in my family. Nobody at all. ... And not only that, I had outright fights with one of my daughters, I’ve got a daughter, and umm, she didn’t even talk to me for 6 months.*

***Angie:** Because of what he was accused of?*

***Georgia:** Umm yeah, and of where he was, and you’re wasting our inheritance, our money on him and going to see him and supporting him.*

***Georgia:** And... I don’t see a lot of my mother anymore. Not because she doesn’t want to see me, but.. she’s never once mentioned to me about him being in there. But she had told other family members about it. She never said to me, why, she didn’t even ask, why all of a sudden, I learnt to drive,*

bought a car. All of a sudden I'm going up [north] every other week, she doesn't even ask me why. I can't get why she doesn't ask me.

Georgia points to her confusion over her mother's refusal to speak to her about her situation. She interprets this as a lack of support and limits contact with her mother.

Anna: Since Tristan's been in jail I've cut off ties with every single friend we have had

Te Aroha: I was getting, my family was gonna disown me, umm, my friends stopped talking to me because they didn't agree with it. Out of all my friends only a couple of my friends still remain my friend now. Yep, I lost a lot of friends over that.

The additional emotional strain caused by this loss of support can be linked to Lowenstein's (1986) findings that the familial and personal resources of the mother are important to the ability of the children to adjust to their father's imprisonment. The loss of support mentioned by the women has made the experience much more difficult for them. It is not only separation from their partners that the women are facing. Because they have chosen to continue their association with convicted law-breakers, these "prison widows" are often shunned by family and friends. As Arditti (2005) states, the "surviving widow" is considered at fault along with her imprisoned partner. This perception of blame contributes to the lack of social support offered.

4.4. Taking care of children

Added to the struggle of dealing with their own emotional issues of having their partners imprisoned, women often also have to struggle with the emotional problems their children may be facing and the difficulties of social stigma that may be passed on to their children, who now have imprisoned fathers. This was especially so for Te Aroha, whose partner was in prison for a violent offence.

Te Aroha: *And you know, like, their cousins, [...] would turn round and go, to the boys, at 3 and 2, "Haha! At least my dad's not in jail, least my dad's not in jail".... so I'd go, "Don't!", you know, I'd say to their cousins "Hey, don't say that to the boys! It's not their fault that their father, it's not their fault that your uncle went to jail. Don't give the boys a hard time about it". So I have to defend my boys now.... and I'd say to their parents "Hey, ya fuckwits, don't teach your kids that it's OK to say that to my boys! Don't make my boys pay for what their father did!"*

Te Aroha: *It's about makin' it good for my kids now. And I'll try to not have ... their father's prison sentence to not impact on them. But of course it comes with their story, too. ... You know. so I've yet to come up with a way to make their story nicer than what my story is. ... How to make it OK, how to make, yeah, how to make it OK. I haven't worked out how to make it OK for them yet.*

Three years after her partner was first arrested, Te Aroha was still in the process of coming to terms with what that meant for her and her family, and how best to cope with the needs of her children. In this sense Te Aroha understands that it is not only her partner and she who are "doing the lag", it is her whole family, and she cannot prevent or repair the damage.

Coping with single parenting and loneliness were important issues. Georgia and Jane were left with an overwhelming sense of loneliness. As well as feeling lonely, Suzette and Anna no longer had someone to help care for the children, especially while they were studying. Te Aroha, coping with unexpectedly being a single mother, was juggling childcare with her need to work while also grieving for the loss of the life she had known.

Suzette: *I have been playing netball and he was around to look after the kids, and he is no longer around to look after the kids so I can play netball. Now I've put on some weight (laugh)... I must organise myself, it's time to go to bed now 'cause look, Mum's got all her time management mapped out and it's time for you to sleep now so Mum can study, but no - they're*

still jumping up on the bed. And I start yelling, "Get to bed!" And you know those cartoon characters with those, yeah, I'm like those with my eyeballs popping out, so.

Suzette refers to the practicalities of no longer having another adult to help with the childcare. She uses the visual example of a cartoon character to illustrate the exhaustion and frustration she experiences in caring for her children on her own.

Anna: It just gets a bit much some days when I finish course at 2 and then go to work, and pick Jack up at 4 and then come home and ... he wants to play outside, like all afternoon, and it's like oh yeah, got housework and ya can't do it while he's playing outside, and, it's hectic sometimes. Man, I just, yeah. So like then I go to sleep and wake up and feel like I haven't even been to sleep. You know, and it's ready to go again, and it's like oh, I'm not ready for this, I wanna go back to sleep. But it's 6 o'clock every morning, up, yay.

Anna describes her "hectic" days, demonstrating how busy her life is with studying, working, family, and running a household on her own. Her story of these "days" that "get a bit much" tells of the relentless work of caring for children without support. This experience is not unique to this group of women; however, Anna also copes with the additional emotional strain involved with her status as a "prison widow".

Te Aroha: ...He was there the day son was born, and then he had to leave [due to bail conditions]. So on the day my son was born, I was left here by myself again. But I had Takiri back by that stage. He had just turned one. So the day, that morning I gave birth, and that afternoon, by 2 o'clock in the afternoon, I was at home. By myself. With these two kids. Again. ... I'm, I've become a single mother. Of two young kids. So that's what his jail sentence did. It took us from being a family to being a single mother, with babies.

Angie: Yeah.

Te Aroha: That's pretty horrendous on its own. Just the break up is horrendous, without adding anything else to it.

... I had the household to run, I had to, all of a sudden instead of that shared responsibility, all came back on me. And it still impacts on me to this very day.... Because that's what jail did to me, it made me feel like I was in this world by myself. ... But it was the jail sentence that made me feel like I was in the world by myself.

Te Aroha reiterates her aloneness after her partner was incarcerated. Te Aroha also felt abandoned by friends and family because of her decision to remain in a relationship with her imprisoned partner. She lost not only her partner's support, but also the support of those closest to her.

While issues of single parenting are not unique to this group of women, it is compounded by the situation in which they were made single parents: issues such as shame and coping with the impact of parental imprisonment on children arise. The social stigma associated with having a partner in prison can also exacerbate emotional difficulties within the family (King, 1993) and can make dealing with everyday problems of living more difficult.

Te Aroha: I think he's not ever gonna know the full impact of how it was for me. The true impact of what that meant. It meant that I never got a break from the kids...

4.5. Taking care of her imprisoned partner

Not only do these prison widows take on responsibility for their own families and homes, but they also need to provide support - both emotional and financial - for their imprisoned partners. Providing material goods, such as clothing, stereo, TV, and cash and the cost of contacts and visits, increases the hardship these women face. This puts additional strain on their coping abilities as well as on their financial positions. Jane had been supporting her partner prior to his incarceration, though he had enough income to pay for his own alcohol and cigarettes. With her partner in prison, Jane

was now providing for all his personal material needs, as well as having to cover her own living expenses. Added to this, Jane's partner had left a lot of debts because of his drinking and illegal behaviour prior to his incarceration.

***Jane:** The stress is.... Not only do I have to keep... him in money, I've got debt collectors hunting him down and now they're coming to me. His car out back, they're coming to get. 'Cause I just can't pay the payments. Umm, people knocking on the door asking for money because he owes them money. ... He went to jail on the Wednesday, I get my phone bill on the Friday, and the bastard in his drunken state had rang his friend on his cell phone three times on one night ... \$150. So I got that hanging over me head. Last week I pawned his tool box. Just to pay some bills. HIS bills. 'Cause when he had the accident, I've still got the man ringing me, wanting money for the car that he hit [when he was drunk]*

***Jane:** But now that he's in jail, he smokes \$80 a fortnight, he wants money for coffee 'cause he doesn't drink tea and then he says to me, "I want books and I want this and I want that..." and it's just, fuck where's it all coming from? ... I mean I can't carry on like this much longer. Eighty dollars a fortnight out of my wage is just too much. But I wouldn't leave him in the lurch, so....*

Jane expresses her anger with her partner who, because of his actions, has left her with the burden of debt to "carry" on her own. He then begins to make demands on her for material supplies from within prison. Jane's inadequate resources make it impossible for her to carry this burden indefinitely, yet to not support him means to leave him "in the lurch". Her commitment to her relationship with him is put into doubt if she cannot support him.

The imprisonment of Te Aroha's partner had a drastic financial impact on her and her family. They went from being a well-off double income family to a single mother on the benefit. Te Aroha was no longer able to work as she had lost her partner as childcare support, as well as losing his income. The effect of this double loss of income for Te Aroha added to her shame and stress.

***Te Aroha:** Umm, all of a sudden, we went from, we were creaming it. We were creaming it, mate. We'd have a thousand loose cash a week, after paying our bills, between the both of us.... yeah. So, we were creaming it, we were living the high life. We were eating, you know, two kilos of prawns on a Sunday afternoon because we could. We were, umm, drinking Schweppes lemonade, we were buying expensive takeouts from, you know, Thai restaurant's and we were going to the movies, and we were spending money on wine and beer and, you know, we were living the good life. That, that's how it was, and then all of a sudden I was on this benefit. ... buying second-hand clothes, still paying the rent, still not making ends meet. Having 20 dollars left after my benefit was paid, after my bills were paid. Going, "Oh my God!", having to go in to WINZ to pay my power bill, because it'd got to a thousand dollars and I couldn't pay it. Horrendous, horrendous, horrendous!*

Te Aroha draws attention to just how affluent her family had been prior to her partner's imprisonment. She then points to the shame she feels, being on the benefit, having to go to WINZ for funds to pay her power bill, and buying second-hand clothes. The intense shame that Te Aroha experiences is related to her feeling that she has brought down the mana of her people by becoming another "statistic".

***Te Aroha:** I really feel like I've done, I really feel like I've done my whānau and my people as a whole Māori community a real big injustice by having this happen to me. That's my biggest shame. Is that I have become a statistic and it wasn't what I wanted in my life.*

Although Anna was not financially dependent on her partner prior to his imprisonment, she and her son often went without in her efforts to support him in prison.

***Anna:** Yeah, financially I wasn't dependent on Tristan before so, it's just now he's dependent on me.*

...Because, you know like, I gave him a TV and his jug and his ... hair clippers, and I still, like, it's got harder over the last, I've only started

complaining since I've been in here [a rental property on her own]. Because, I have to buy my own food, I pay for power and the phone. And you know then there's Jack's kindly fees, 'cause it's not all subsidised. And then there's petrol to go out to ... You know, and there's all the running around, and going out to the prison.

... and once all that's gone out I should have, on a off week, a hundred dollars to buy like groceries, petrol, smokes, you know, just all the, and usually I can manage to give Tristan 20 dollars..... usually everything's paid, yeah, I've usually got a bit more, so I manage to give, if I've got it there I don't mind giving it to him.

Anna: *But it is hard sometimes. But like, there's been times that I haven't told Tristan that. ... My mates have got a bit pissed off, 'cause they've come around here and they've gone to go to the toilet or something and they're like, "There's no toilet paper, Anna!" It's like, "Yeah, I know. Well, I can't go and get any". You know, it's like, "Why not?" "Well, I gave Tristan my last 20 bucks yesterday".*

Anna is stretching her finances to the limit in order to be able to provide for her imprisoned partner, while also attempting to meet her own needs and those of her family. It would seem that the cost of supporting Tristan extends beyond finances to Anna's social relationships because her friends become angry that she cannot afford basics while she is meeting Tristan's needs.

Mary was living independently when she met her partner, already imprisoned and nearing the end of his sentence, so the financial impact was not so severe for Mary. Her partner did not ask her for material supplies, nor did she provide any for him, although she did buy telephone cards for their daily telephone contact. Mary commented that as she was working not far from where he was imprisoned, the extra travel costs did not impact greatly on her financially.

Mary: *And we'd also have phone calls, daily phone calls ... it used to be like, when we first started, 20 cents a phone call and then it went up to 50 cents. I'd buy him a phone card.*

Mary: Wasn't too bad [the cost of travel], because I was coming out here as well, it was like 20 bucks a week in petrol wasn't anywhere near as bad as I thought.

Mary's attention to the way in which she was not impacted by a financial burden for travel suggests that the issue of the cost of a partner's imprisonment was well known to her, and she was aware that she was advantaged in ways that women living further from the prison were not.

The financial impact for Suzette was unique in comparison to the other participants. Because of her husband's illegal activities, of which Suzette had been unaware prior to his arrest, they were not living together. However, Suzette never knew when her husband was going to turn up, or what bills she was going to have to cover for him or how else she might need to provide for him.

Suzette: Yes, yeah I can plan. I don't really have that much money because I'm living off the government and off people's taxes (laugh) which umm, with God's help and with, umm, putting my faith into action I will umm succeed and get a better job in the future, and umm improve, yeah ... yeah, and now I can budget, I know what's coming into the ah, the money that's coming in and where it's going to go and you know I have more control now, I know there's no surprises, you know things would just suddenly pop up and you'd think, "Oh what's this?, and oooh!" (laugh). It was like that for so many years.

For Suzette, her husband's imprisonment meant that she was now able to plan her budget and had complete control over her expenses without having to cope with unexpected expenses. Suzette expresses shame to be living on the benefit, but with her studies was proud to be making progress towards becoming financially independent.

Providing money and goods is not the only support these women were giving to their imprisoned partners. In many cases these women, who are dealing with the

consequences of their partners' law-breaking, leaving them emotionally strained, are often also the only source of emotional support for their incarcerated partners. This can be an additional emotional strain that puts more pressure on the women, adding to an already emotionally difficult situation. Anna exemplifies this when she comments that she's "emotionally there for him" but feels that sometimes "he wants too much" from her.

Anna: Like, I'm emotionally there for him, like, all the time. Just a phone call away when he's having a shit day, when everyone's getting on his nerves, and I just sit on the end of the phone and listen. And don't criticise, because I don't feel that I have the right to criticise really. And just listen.

Anna: sometimes I feel like he's really needy. Does that sound mean? Sometimes, sometimes I feel like... .. yeah sometimes I feel like he just wants too much. And not wanting things as in money or things, as in, I feel like... he wants too much from me. Oh, I don't know how to explain that

Angie: No, I get it

Anna: Yeah, sometimes I feel like I've given as much as I can

In their efforts to support their partners during their imprisonment, these women were often left feeling that they were carrying the burden, and that their imprisoned partner was not appreciative of what it means to be on the "outside." In many cases, women become angry at what their partners have forced them to endure through their law-breaking, and feel that the imprisonment has simply made the man more selfish and self-centred. Te Aroha had no hesitation in expressing her anger with her partner. She felt that she had to deal with the consequences of his actions while he was looked after in prison, not having to face any real-world consequences of his own actions:

Te Aroha: Ya get looked after, they get three square meals a day, they get to spend time, they get to play sport when they want to. Sure they get locked down at eight o'clock and then they don't get their gate opened again until six o'clock in the morning, but fuckin big whoopy, I go to bed at 8 at night and don't get up until 6 in the morning, what's the dif?, I'm in

my room the whole time. He had his fucken TV in his room, he could watch whatever he wanted. He didn't have somebody like I did going, "I don't wanna watch that, turn the channel over!" He didn't have kids to look after; he didn't have to find money. It all just landed on his lap, and when they get out that's exactly how they think.

Te Aroha: *that's the other thing that prison does, is it makes men selfish. Because they only ever have to worry about themselves.*

Angie: *You don't think they're selfish beforehand?*

Te Aroha: *Oh, they're selfish, that's why they end up in jail, you know, really.*

Angie: *Yeah. Because they don't think about the consequences of their choices?*

Te Aroha: *They've got no idea of what consequences are in relation to their actions. But, umm, jail makes them even more selfish. If you think men are selfish now, you chuck them in jail, in a male jail.*

Te Aroha: *He's done his time. He got it cushy, mate. He didn't have to find money to feed his kids, he didn't have to find money to provide, you know, for this stuff, he didn't have to provide money for petrol, he didn't have to provide rego's for cars, he didn't have to provide childcare. He did nothing. He didn't have, it completely absolved him of all responsibility. What did his prison sentence do for me? It made me totally responsible for fucking everything*
[Emphasis added]

Prison is seen as supporting men's flight from responsibility (Fishman, 1995), as can be seen in the foregoing quotation. The imprisoned man has the comforts of food, bed, time to pursue interests and constant companionship. He also lacks the worry and responsibility of providing for children and paying for all of those everyday comforts. The woman on the outside does have to provide for herself and her family and does have the responsibility and the worry of ensuring that their needs can be met.

Jane also recognised her partner's self-focus. She felt that he was feeling sorry for himself, without admitting his responsibility for being in prison, and also failing to recognise that his actions were having a very real effect on her and her life.

Jane: But the whole thing is him.

Angie: His, his focus you mean?

Jane: Yeah, it's just all him.

Angie: Yeah.

Jane: 'Cause the first two visits it was just, I'm not giving up anything, people aren't gonna tell me.... {meaning he's stuck in jail and I'm free}

Jane: [following his subsequent release] John feels the world owes him. He feels sorry for himself all the time and he's made my life hell.

When asked, Georgia, Mary and Jane all admitted to feeling anger towards their partners, for their actions and the consequences it had forced upon them.

Angie: Are you angry with him?

Georgia: Ooh, absolutely!. Yeah.

Mary: But I was really angry, when I found out, when I read it for myself, and I could see it, I was so angry with him, how could he be so stupid?

Angie: So.... Even though you are supporting him, there's some anger there too?

Jane: At the moment I don't know what I'm meant to be feeling. 'Cause number one, it's just like, even though he was a drinker, still most nights I would come home to tea cooked, someone to talk to.

At first, Jane was reluctant to admit any anger towards her partner. Jane was still in the early stages of coming to terms with her partner's imprisonment, and felt very confused about how to feel. However, as she spoke, and in subsequent contact, Jane expressed more anger, towards both the Court system for failing to help her partner, and towards her partner for his behaviour.

Jane: I am actually fucked off with him. Because it's his own fault that he's in jail. But then I blame myself. I should've stopped him that night. I should've rung his mother, I was going to ring his mother. His mum and dad would've come down, they would've taken him home and that would've been the end of it.

While admitting her anger at his stupidity, Jane is quick to rationalise her partner's actions. She is also quick to back away from that anger, as if it is not acceptable to be angry with a man suffering imprisonment. Jane also blames herself for his illegal behaviour, and perhaps for the consequences of that behaviour. Jane's self-blame can be linked to her feelings of responsibility for her partner in that she also takes responsibility for not having stopped him "that night".

Georgia believes that her partner is innocent of the crime of which he was convicted and therefore does not feel anger at his illegal behaviour. However, he has since changed his plea in an attempt to shorten his sentence and Georgia stated that she was very angry with him for saying he had done something she believes he did not do.

Georgia: [sigh] I'm angry about that. I'm angry he's said he done it. I'm angry he's turned round and said he's done it when he hasn't. I'm more angry about that than anything.

The need to emotionally take care of their partners can be seen to be experienced as an additional stressor on the women. There are a variety of ways in which the women take responsibility for the emotional care of their partners. This is so even when they feel it is unjust for them to have to take on that responsibility.

4.6. Taking care of self

During their partners' incarceration, these women have taken on the responsibilities of taking care of the household, the children, the finances, and their partners' needs

while they are in prison. These often-conflicting responsibilities can result in difficulties for these women in finding time to care for themselves. The lack of social support, worries about their partners, children and finances may also contribute to prison widows' failure to take good care of themselves.

Participants in the current study reported a variety of ways in which their health had suffered since their partners' imprisonment. Stress was the most commonly cited difficulty the women reported. The stress of having a partner in prison had taken a physical toll on Te Aroha and Georgia.

Te Aroha: And then, of course, after he went to prison I lost weight. I lost so much weight. I was something ridiculous like, my size tens were loose.

Angie: You weren't sleeping and you weren't eating?

Te Aroha: Yeah ... umm, and then he'd go "Who, who, what are you getting skinny for?"

Te Aroha: ...stress levels through the fucking roof. I got so skinny. I lost my hair. My hair would just go, I'd go like this and I'd pull out, you know, I could almost mop the bloody floor with how much hair I pulled out. My skin turned to crap. I just had big, dry, hard, scaly, skin. It was horrible. Stopped getting my period, health wise turned into a nut case. Turned into a fucking nut case. Started hallucinating, needed anti-depressants, thought about killing myself, because of all, just basically because of all the stress.

Angie: And that's all tied up with...

Te Aroha: Him being in jail, and my life changing.

Te Aroha draws attention to just how much the stress of her partner's imprisonment has affected her physical and mental health. These health issues presented while Te Aroha was experiencing stressful changes to her financial situation and her responsibilities for her family, as well as coping with the shame of having her partner in prison. Georgia also spoke of the physical effects of stress for her.

Georgia: *I know health wise, I know the toll it's taken on my health. My blood pressure has just dived through the roof, and the doctors can say what they like, you know, ahh exercise more, cut out salt, do this, do that. I can not change the stress. ... So, I don't know, yeah health wise (chuckle) I've gone downhill quite a lot to what I was like beforehand. ... I'm still really tired.*

Angie: *Still not sleeping?*

Georgia: *Umm, I don't sleep well. I'm on medication, for, umm, things like blood pressure, and I'm really low on iron. And the doctor told me I've got a sinus infection, which is why I'm having dizzy spells and yeah, just stuff like that.*

Georgia expresses her perception that the stress levels are affecting her blood pressure, and changing her diet or exercise regime, as recommended by the doctors, will not change her stress levels. Georgia also states that the quality of her physical health has definitely decreased since her partner was imprisoned. This is in accordance with the findings of Arditti, Lambert-Shute, and Joest (2003) who reported declining health in 48% of participants following their family member's incarceration. In contrast to Georgia's expressed view that "I can not change the stress". Anna talked about looking after herself.

Anna: *I've been forcing myself to go to bed about half 9, 10ish each night. ... Just to make sure I do get, you know, a good amount of sleep. ...*

Anna's attempts to ensure that she gets "a good amount of sleep" indicate a strategy used to counter the effects of increased stress on her physical well-being. Jane also recognised the need to take more care of herself.

Jane: *I'm changing my eating habits. I'm not eating bread, I'm trying to eat to make me feel better. 'Cause I've done some research for my nursing and that, and I need to have more energy. And I need to do some things for me. ... So, I'm trying to make me feel better.*

Here Jane recognises that her stress is connected to her physical well-being. Therefore, she has initiated lifestyle strategies that will help her cope with the stressors more effectively.

The women all spoke variously of the effects of their partners' imprisonment on their physical and mental health. Some had recognised these and had initiated steps to take care of their own health. Others indicated feeling powerless in coping with the stress of the situation.

4.7. Visiting Experiences

Hairston (1998) describes visiting prison as psychologically and physically demanding for both children and adults. Conditions in visiting centres are often poor, especially so in older facilities. Such situations, says Hairston, can lead to a more permanent break in family relations due to the difficulty involved in supporting an enduring bond between inmates and their loved ones. Added to this is the sense of degradation and social stigma when visiting a prison, due to the association with an inmate (Sturges, 1999, cited in Arditti, 2003). Arditti (2003) makes the point that prison visiting facilities act as a "portal" through which the family is impacted by the criminal justice system. Through the visiting room portal families experience, and are influenced by, interactions with correctional staff, other families waiting to visit and their own perceptions of the environment in which they are visiting (Arditti, 2003). As an institution, a prison has rules and policies designed to help day-to-day matters run smoothly. These policies and rules often make it difficult for the loved ones of prisoners when it becomes necessary for them to come in contact with the prison, most notably at visiting times.

The visiting process was an important event for the women participants. Often it was their first encounter with the prison system, and the majority of the women found this a difficult and emotional time. Although some were excited to see their partners, most reported fear and anxiety, both for themselves and for their partners. Anxiety revolved around not knowing about the process of visiting and what to expect as they

entered the facility. For several of the women, the process of organising the visit itself was stressful, as they were not always certain that all was organised as it should be, and often arrived to be told they were not allowed a visit. This occurred most often when visiting soon after an inmate's initial sentencing. Those with children were concerned about what the facilities would provide for them, and how the children would be affected by being in such an environment.

Suzette: The first time was a bit scary because I had never been with the children, but after that it was all fine.

Suzette points to the fear of launching into the unknown, especially considering she had her children with her going into an unknown and undesirable environment. Anna had a different fear for her 3-year-old. While she needs him to be comfortable visiting his father in prison, and values the relationship between her partner and their son, she does not want Jack to grow up wanting to emulate his father.

Anna: I go out three times [a week]. I take [Jack] out on Saturday and Sunday [and] it seems like a really, really long time until Saturday and Sunday roll around again. So sometimes I like to break it down with the odd Thursday every now and then. Just 'cause, yeah, sometimes a week just seems like a really long time.... Tristan's been in there since [Jack] was like 7, 8 months old. And you would never guess that. ... He tells you, "You wanna come my dad's house?" You know, like he says that to his big sister ... I go, "Well, that's what he calls it, you know." I talk to him about how it's a prison, and how it's a jail and, you know, that's where naughty people go, 'cause it is. You know, I don't want him to grow up thinking, "Oh, yeah I want to go to daddy's house."

Anna points to the bond between father and son, despite the separation caused by Tristan's imprisonment since Jack was very young. The bond developed between them is testament to the commitment Anna has made to regular and consistent visiting. Arditti (2005) discusses ambiguous loss in the context of having an imprisoned family member. The two types of ambiguous loss discussed are when family members perceived the incarcerated loved one as physically absent but

psychologically present, and physically present but psychologically absent. The bond between Anna's partner and their son is an example of how an incarcerated father can remain psychologically present for his child while physically absent. However, it has been the commitment of his partner, not prison policies or programmes, which has facilitated that parent-child bond. The very real physical absence of the incarcerated loved one, Arditti (2005) says, can lead to an emotional ambivalence and uncertainty in the relationship. Emotional ambivalence is evidenced by not wanting to visit the loved one in prison and can ultimately lead to a "permanent rather than temporary severance of family ties" (Arditti, 2005, p. 255).

For Jane, who has no young children, the experience of visiting her partner is quite different.

***Jane:** But then it's the visits, I hate the visits. ... I hate the fact..... I feel nervous. I'm sitting there with my licence, my bit of paper and my car keys, and I feel nervous. I feel like. " I hope I don't have a roach on me!" I don't smoke marijuana, and I haven't. But it's like, "Have I got my nail scissors in my pocket?", you know, stupid things like that. And I feel like the whole time I'm being watched. I'm careful about what I wear just in case it's too revealing, I'm careful about how I touch him. It's just, I feel like I'm the criminal. I go through a scanner, I have to hold my hands up, then I'm checked all over with this up between ya legs with this thing just to make sure that you haven't got anything hidden up ya..... And there's no way I could give him anything, cause he's in his zoot suit and there's no way. I mean if you were to put ya hands down there to shove something up ya butt, it's impossible (chuckle). ' Cause they've got really tight elastic. But I just feel like it's really impersonal. ... And the whole environment in the visit room is not nice, but John tells me it's nicer than the cell itself.*

With this comment "I feel like I'm the criminal", Jane draws attention to an ambiguous fear of being found guilty of some unknown infringement. This suggests her fear of the unknown environment that is the prison, with its ill-defined processes and rules. Jane also describes the humiliating procedure she endures in order to visit her partner, drawing attention to the searching process or going "through a scanner"

and being checked with “this up between ya legs with this thing”. She is hyper-vigilant and acutely aware that she is under surveillance. This intense sense of watching and being watched indicates the tension and discomfort that underlie her “hate” of visiting.

Anna was not a first time visitor at prison when her partner was sentenced. Her previous experience of visiting was when she was much younger and one of her friends was in jail.

Angie: So, when Tristan went to prison, is that the first time you've been visiting?

Anna: Apart from when I had friends in prison, but it was different back then, when I was about 17. My best friend's boyfriend was in jail, I went to visit Tristan maybe a couple of times. You know, it was just ever to see a friend, I probably woulda gone maybe 5 times max. And it was all different back then, way, way different. It's so different. And, but not like this. Not with feelings and, you know. Like this is emotionally so hard.

When Anna compares her current experience with her earlier prison visits she talks of the difficulty in relation to her emotional involvement with her partner. The emotional commitment to her partner critically changes her experience of visiting.

When Te Aroha talked of her first visit her story was detailed and she paid particular attention to the emotionality of the experience, not just for herself but for her children and partner as well.

Te Aroha: So, the next day was the first visit in prison, and it was horrendous. We had to wait outside, which was fine, because we had to turn up quarter of an hour before the visit started. We umm, got a special visit. We walked in, we were, we had to produce ID. We had no application form, ahh, so we didn't have an approval form. And they said, "Well you can't visit, you don't have an approval form." And we go "Well he just came to jail yesterday and we were told that we could have a

special visit.” Nope. Attitude from the, the, not, not every prison, what do ya call it, not every screw was like that.

Angie: *Yeah.*

Te Aroha: *Just the particular, one of them was on, there were two of them there, one of them was an asshole, you know. The other one said, “Sweet as mate, I’ll deal with it.” ...*

Te Aroha: *..... He goes, “Right, I’ll take you through to the visiting room.” So we got scanned. ‘cause you have to get scanned to go through, then you’ve got to sign in, then you have to walk through another door and it’s like just a short corridor that’s locked on either side. So ya walk in, that side’s locked, then you unlock the other side and you walk through to the visiting room. But it wasn’t an open visit we were allowed, we were in closed booth visit so it’s through the glass. ... Don’t ask me why it had to be like that. It just did. That was our first visit. So, son, on the 20th of September he would’ve been 2 weeks old, I was [in] huge stress, and I’m crying and crying and crying, and he walks through and it’s the glass. And we can’t even touch each other.*

Angie: *Yeah*

Te Aroha: *And he’s like this, with his hand up against the window. And I’m crying and crying and crying, and I’m going like this, showing him our baby. And Takiri’s like, “Papa, papap!” ‘cause he can’t talk. ... ‘Cause he’s only a year old, “Papapapa!” And he’s [Mahina] like, “Waaahh!”, ‘cause he wants to touch, and he’s like this at the window. And I’m bawling my eyes, I’m crying, and he’s on the other side, he’s hic hic hic [sobbing]. I’ll never forget it.*

The first visit, says Fishman (1981, p. 373), is “particularly important in determining attitudes toward subsequent visits” and is when family members first confront the regulations and environment in which they will be relating with their loved one. Te Aroha points to the humiliation of the procedure necessary to visit her partner, commenting that “you have to get scanned to go through” and drawing attention to the “short corridor that’s locked on either side”. In the detail of Te Aroha’s story she draws attention to the stress and emotion experienced by both her and her partner. Te Aroha also points to the different “attitudes” of the “screws”, one who hindered and

one who helped to make the stressful experience go more easily for her and for her children. Providing an example of non-communication of prison policies and procedures, Te Aroha knows of no reason why the visit needed to be in a non-contact booth. Arditti (2003, p. 132) comments that “touch is concrete” and “important for maintaining bonds between children and their incarcerated parent”. Perhaps if Te Aroha had been aware of the non-contact status of the visit, and prepared for it, she and her children might have had a less “horrendous” first visit with her partner.

When visiting the prison for the first time, participants came face-to-face with the harsh realities of what imprisonment meant for them. All of a sudden they had to come into close contact with walls, gates, barbed wire fences, scanners, locked doors and corridors, and men in uniforms policing and watching the whole encounter. Georgia speaks of the fear and anxiety of this encounter for first-time visitors in telling of her own traumatic experience. For Georgia, the idea of visiting an inmate in prison was so far from her vision of her world that she just wants to “forget it”.

Georgia: And the first time I went in there I was just, “Oh I want to forget it”. Rimutaka, compared with other prisons I’ve been in now is very strict with their ahh, sorry I’ve forgotten the word, the searching and there’s a lot more gates and security kind of stuff, and I was shaking so, so hard when they were scanning me with the scanner that the guard said, “Oh you’re gonna fly away in a minute!” [laugh]. Hands were shaking so much. And I’m just, I mean I’d never ever dreamt that I would go in a prison let alone one so often and for so long.

For some women, learning the rules of the prison was also a difficult process, especially if their partners were moved around to different prisons, where the rules as well as the environments vary. Georgia’s partner has been moved to several different prisons. She now has to travel a long distance to visit him at least once a month, taking a whole weekend for a two-hour visit. However, compared to other prisons she has visited, she says the one her partner is now in is more physically comfortable.

Angie: Tell me about your visits. What it’s like to go in there and...

Georgia: Every prison I’ve been in is different.

Angie: Yeah.

Georgia: Umm, Rimutaka prison is very cold and very umm, honestly you sit on plastic, they look like playground little round plastic seats. They are so uncomfortable. Umm, inmates always have to sit in a certain one and [sigh] yeah, umm. Hawkes Bay was better, you had like dining room chairs and table you could sit round and you could have a coffee you could have, it was more relaxed, I guess. That was a brand new unit up there, they'd been the first inmates in. Wellington prison, again very old and very cold. Umm, [sigh]... Different. Different rules in every prison. He's been in two separate parts of Rangipo prison. The first part he was in you could make a hot drink and you could sit just opposite like we're sitting now so you could, you could hold hands and whatever... Umm, but where he is, he's been moved to a different part of that one now and you sit across a table. It's, it's a visual separation, but it makes it... umm, you feel separated.

Georgia's story of the differences between the prisons moves between attending to the physical comfort (such as the chairs) to the possibilities for interaction with her partner when she visits. Where it was "more relaxed" it was more possible to have an "ordinary" interaction – sitting around a table drinking coffee. Whether or not she was able to have physical contact with her partner – holding hands – also made a difference to her comfort when visiting. Arditi (2003) found that participants in her study experienced prohibition of touch as both confusing and upsetting.

Some of the women commented that simple procedures, such as a poster outside the prison visiting centre explaining the process for first timers, would have alleviated much fear and anxiety for them during their first visit to the prison. Te Aroha points to how some form of simple communication could have helped during her first visit to prison. On the other hand, Jane was anxious that her partner was not informed of the prison rules and processes.

Te Aroha: When we went to prison, no one told us what it was like when we gonna go for a prison visit. Nobody told us the process. The process was not written up on the wall anywhere about what you do. You know.

You will come in, be scanned, sign in, go through the gates, wait for your, wait for the inmate to be called out.

Angie: *Nothing like that?*

Te Aroha: *Nothing.*

Jane: *The worst thing is that, they put him in jail, and he's not given a little pack like I was given from PARS saying these are the rules, if you want a visit It's all learn as you go stuff.*

This apparent lack of consideration for families of inmates and their needs at visiting times contributes to the negative impact association with the prison system has on families.

Staff at the prison can either add to, or alleviate, the stress women experience when visiting their loved ones. While prison policies may serve a functional purpose for the institution, they can have dysfunctional consequences for those visiting their loved ones. Fishman (1990) states that house rules for visiting and treatment by prison staff were often perceived as reminders that wives shared their husbands' stigmatised status as imprisoned law-breakers. This can be seen in the following examples. Many of the contacts with prison staff, be it in person during a visit or over the telephone, appear to be negative. However, these women did report some positive encounters with the staff at prisons. When discussing contact with corrections staff, the women often appeared hesitant and were quick to point out that there were helpful and friendly officers.

Mary's partner was specifically told that he was being transferred because she was 'making trouble'. This served as a clear reminder that she was subject to the judgements and decisions of prison staff, and that their judgements of her could have serious consequences for her partner.

Mary: *... and the manager, to spite me, transferred him probably this time last year to Kaitoke, for no reason, only that um "your partner's causing a lot of trouble and we're transferring you". 'Cause he transferred because I was a shit-stirrer basically.*

Angie: Oh OK, so they told him, they told him he was being transferred because his partner ...

Mary: On the spot.

Angie: His partner was being...

Mary: Was causing trouble.

Both Suzette and Te Aroha spoke of experiences with prison officers that left them feeling as if they were also prisoners or criminals.

Suzette: Just with the umm, like when you are entering the visiting centre, I guess like, umm pretty, I don't know if this is significant or not, but umm, when you're entering, like sometimes, the prison officers there, like ahh, treat us like prisoners. Sometimes they've got to remember to just lay back a bit (laugh). It's not us that's in prison but the people there that we are going to see. I don't know, or maybe, maybe that's just how I feel.

Te Aroha: I felt like the screws, if they didn't know you, treated you like you were the criminal. You know. We weren't allowed to take baby's car seat in, because we might be smuggling drugs in to it. All this sort of absurd shit, that I had never heard of before. You know like, I'd say to this, one of the screws, "Hey, I'm not the fucken prisoner, OK? Don't treat me as if I'm the prisoner, I'm just the person visiting, OK? And don't you know, you know me well enough by now to know that I don't do drugs, I can't fucking stand them, why would I bring drugs in?" You know? It was that whole, that whole, being treated differently because your partner was in jail, and I felt that from some of the screws. Most of them I didn't, they were pretty sweet, you know.

Suzette is very hesitant to express her feeling that she is treated like a criminal because of her association with an inmate whom she is visiting. Te Aroha too expresses feeling treated like a criminal. Such treatment by prison staff serves to remind the women of their stigmatised status as intimate associates of imprisoned law-breakers. These reminders make it more difficult for women to continue visiting their loved ones in prison. While both Suzette and Te Aroha qualified their accounts

of such experiences with prison officers by references to others who treated them well, or by minimising their emotional response ("just how I feel"), these experiences resonate with the emotional burden of sharing their partners' convictions and sentences and the social stigma attached to being in a relationship with a prisoner.

Jane's experience confirmed how she was positioned in relation to her partner when one officer demonstrated that he could exercise power over her, not just over her partner.

***Jane:** He's a good guy, he won't, he'd never be rude to prison wardens, he'd never swear at them. Because there's that respect thing still there. But he does write to me and tell me that the place is run by idiots. Because he would ask a question and the answer is, "I don't know", and that pisses him off, and it also pisses me off. 'Cause I rang up for some information, he says, "Well, I don't know." I said, "Well, isn't it your job to know?" ... And then my second visit the guy said, "I haven't got time", I rung up to confirm my visit, and the guy said, "I'm really busy - I haven't got time for you!" and he hung up on me!*

Jane gives examples of how she feels the prison staff dismiss her; on one occasion her requests for information are not answered, and on another, the officer simply hangs up on her. Jane was the only woman I spoke with who did not perceive any of her encounters with prison staff in a positive manner. For Jane, dealing with prison staff was a distasteful necessity to facilitate visiting her partner in prison. Alternatively, Anna focuses on attempting to make the unpleasant necessity of visiting prison a positive experience. She describes walking into the prison, "head up high", in a proud manner. This may be a coping strategy on Anna's part, an attempt to dispel the negative association of visiting an inmate. Anna also points out that prison staff appear to treat visitors differently, but she doesn't know why some visitors are more harshly treated than others.

***Anna:....** But I think, sometimes out there I've noticed there's a set of rules for some people and if they just feel like picking on them on that particular day I think they'll just pick on ya. You know, it just depends I think. Dunno. There's just some that. I've met some really nice guards*

out there, you know, really friendly, really, really, really nice ones. And then I've come across the odd female ones that I'm sure are on power trips, or something like that.

.... Like I walk in there really proud. I walk in there with my head up high, and you know, have a joke with the guards, and I'm all smiley and all that. 'Cause I feel that, I have to see them every week, I don't want to walk out there and have to worry about them watching me, or thinking I'm up to something, or, you know, anything like that. I just, wanna go in there and see Tristan, and leave. That's it. And you know, some of them are just so nice, they're, yeah, it's just. Like Tristan's taken quite a shining to quite a few of the guards out there. Geez, they must be all right fellas if you. 'cause he speaks quite highly of a few of them. And then there's the other one's that you can see [by] the look on his face [that he does not like them].

Lack of information and attention to meeting the needs of visitors may add another burden of stigma to women whose partners are in prison. How prison officers related to the prisoners could also have effects on the women, as Georgia relates.

Georgia: *...an old guy, and Frank said he was just like his dad and, his dad's dead, and he's been like his granddad. And he[the old guy] died a few weeks ago, and that was, I didn't know what to, I didn't know, [sigh] I didn't know how to tell him. And I thought, "Oh, OK, What I'll do is, I'll ring the prison and see whether I can talk to someone in his unit". And I rang at night and umm, and someone said, "Look, we're not a bloody message service!" one of the guards said to me. I said, "Oh forget it!". He said "Well, who's the message for?" I said, "No, you can get fucked, I'm not gonna bother telling you!" I just thought if you're gonna be like that I'm not gonna bother telling you who it's for because you're gonna go and you know, rark him up by saying, "Ooh, somebody wanted to talk to you, must have been something important, maybe your mother's died." You know, because that, he said that's the kind of thing they do just to piss off the inmates. And umm, I rung back the next morning, and I got a female guard and she's like, "Oh, not a problem, I'll go and tell him."*

And, "Do you want me to get him to ring you, and do you think he'll be all right, do you think he'll need some support from the chaplain?". She was great.

These narratives of the women in the current study support Arditti's (2003, p. 135) findings that most jail staff were perceived by family members visiting inmates to be "hostile and dehumanising" which added to their problems associated with visiting.

Encounters with prison staff outside of the prison situation were often reported as embarrassing and shameful times. Such encounters serve as a reminder of the women's stigmatised status, which remains even when away from the prison environment. This status continues after the release of the offender from prison. For Te Aroha, seeing a Corrections Officer in a social situation, someone associated with the prison, a place which holds so much shame for her, remained an embarrassing and shameful experience, despite the fact that she obviously had great respect for the "old Māori guy" who was involved in this particular encounter.

Te Aroha: *And then we started to see the screws, I started to see the screws that would look after him, out. We'd go to the, I'd go to the [pub] with my Auntie for tea and one of the, ... an old, old, old Māori guy and he's been out there for years and years. And we affectionately call him Koro George, and he was really, really good. Like we had to be there 15 minutes before a visit but he would let me come in, you know.*

Angie: *Yeah.*

Te Aroha: *If I was late, or if the car had broken down, which sometimes it did, if I'd locked the keys in the car, you know, he'd let me. And then we'd start to see him, and seeing them on a social level was completely different. And then, I saw a screw up at the hospital, because his wife was having a baby, and he, the guy, had been pulled out of jail, for his wife to have the baby, with the screw standing outside in the corridor. And I walk past in my uniform and I'm like.... "Hi, how are you?" Shit shit, I know him, he was a screw out at the prison when Mahina was in jail. Shame, shame, embarrassed, so, so embarrassed.*

Te Aroha: *Even now, Mahina went to pick up some groceries and he saw one of the screws who used to look after him. ... I said to him, "How did you feel?" He goes, "It felt weird to see him on a personal level, but it felt like - oh yeah, well, he knows why I was there." Yeah.*

Te Aroha shows how, even after his release from prison, seeing a Corrections Officer can be an uncomfortable experience for her partner as well.

Anna: *I actually ran into one up at the hospital. "Oh, I recognise you! You're from out at the prison aren't you?" She goes, "Yeah," why's that?" [chuckle] "never mind". I just thought, "ok, then". Crikey.*

Georgia: *I just remember one time when I'd been to see him, one Saturday morning, I'd been to see him up at Rimutaka, and then I'd gone to a function afterwards. ... and one of the prison guards was there, that I'd seen that morning. And he kept, the whole time, he kept looking at me. Like, "I know where you've been this morning!" and it was just awful. And I just gave him, and I mean normally I wouldn't look back, but it was just like, you were there because you were doing your job, and I was there because I was doing my job. Yeah. Just things like that.*

Although Georgia felt shame at seeing a Corrections Officer in a social situation, she was not going to let that shame impact on her in public: she was simply "doing her job" supporting her partner through visiting while he was doing his job guarding prisoners. Casual encounters with prison officers could, therefore, act to reinforce shame as well as resistance to the stigma of association with imprisonment.

Visits to the prison and spending time with their partners were precious for many of the women, and having to share that time with others was not always welcomed. Some of the women reported feelings of jealousy of their time with their partners.

Mary: *'Cause ya time is very precious, and I felt even like not resentful, but um funny if even if friends went out there it was like a wasted visit for me in a way. 'Cause one hour is very precious eh? It's all you've got and yeah if ya have a third party sitting there it's not much.*

Georgia: *Except I didn't like sharing my time. I've stopped taking his daughter up there, which I know he's probably not happy with. [...] I actually like to have my time alone with him. I don't like sharing him.*

Mary and Georgia both illustrate how their limited time with their partner is “very precious” and that having another person makes it feel like a “wasted visit”. Such comments support Comfort’s (2003) findings that every minute is so valuable to the visitors. Comfort (2003, p. 92) also discusses the “disparagement of the sanctity of visiting time” by prison guards. Jane and Te Aroha exemplify this below.

Jane: *So I get to this visit. [...] Got there at quarter to one, went in the room. They didn't go and get him until quarter past one. I had forty-five minutes that day, not an hour. The second one, the prison officer come in the room, the clock said five to one, so I said, “I got five minutes!” He said, “Oh that clock's slow” got up, turned it to two o'clock and said “The visit's over!” I couldn't believe him. Why couldn't he wait five minutes? Who cares if the clock is slow, that wasn't the one we were going by. You know?*

Te Aroha: *I'll be honest with you, sometimes they were real slack. Like the inmates wouldn't come out until ten, quarter past eight, quarter past, you know, whatever the hour it was. [...] and we couldn't make that time up at the other end. You know. And depending on which guards you had. Like if you had wanky guards on they'd dick you around like you wouldn't believe. You know. It was horrible. That was traumatising.*

With their stories of having time shaved off their visits with their partners, Jane and Te Aroha show how the prison guards’ “devaluation of prisoners’ kin and kith in the eyes of the authorities” (Comfort, 2003, p. 91-92). When precious visiting minutes are impinged upon by waiting, the prison officers also “deprecate the importance of the visit itself, the preciousness of moments spent with those who are otherwise physically barred from one’s presence”.

Surprisingly, what to wear to the visits was an important factor for most of the women participants. Having to think carefully about how they dressed themselves was not something to which these women were accustomed - however, they now felt it necessary to modify their dress code. In her study of California's San Quentin State Prison, Comfort (2003, pp. 94-95) found the dress of visitors to be highly regulated and commented that "compliance with the ensemble of rules thus results in "docile bodies", inhibited and humbled versions of the visitors' selves suited to the prison environment and its requisites". Adherence to the dress code, Comfort says, can also be problematic, especially for women on low budgets. Georgia became aware of not wearing gang colours in order to comply with prison rules, a practice she carried over to her everyday life. Her partner told Te Aroha what she was not allowed to wear to prison visits. Anna also commented that when she visited the prison after work dressed in her work clothes she felt like a 'showgirl' providing something nice for the other "crims" to look at.

***Te Aroha:** He'd say to me, "Don't wear that out because that inmate over there says to me, 'Oooh, your missus looks all right!'. And then it became, his issue became my issue 'cause I'd go, "O-oooh!", you know. I never ever, I always wore jeans or a nice skirt and a nice top. I never wore anything that I don't normally wear. I'd turn up like this. You know. I never wore anything [revealing].*

***Jane:** I'm careful about what I wear just in case it's too revealing*

***Georgia:** This may sound funny, but I don't ever buy anything in the colour red. Clothing. I never buy anything red. Because I remember right in the beginning, when I got the stuff from Rimutaka prison about visiting, it said "no gang colours". I wouldn't have known what a gang colour was, and I had to ask them, "What do you mean by 'no gang colours'?" And they said, "You don't wear red and you don't wear royal blue. Because they're gang colours." I never buy anything in those colours now, just in case I accidentally wear it there. It's not worth wearing it there. It's nonsense like that. Ummm, yeah. And, you don't dress too nicely, because if you dress too nice they think why is she*

dressed so nicely? Who is she going to meet afterwards? And yet you don't dress too grotty, because otherwise it's like, she's not looking after herself.

Georgia points to her concern over what her partner will think in her consideration of what to wear to prison visits. This is in accordance with Comfort's (2003, p. 98) observation that prison visitors "care deeply about their personal appearances" and will often invest time and money into "cultivating and displaying a fashionable "look" that imbues them with a sense of command denied to them in other aspects of their lives". What these women wear to visit their partners in prison, then, becomes for them a matter of being able to have control over some aspect of their life. On the other hand, these women are visiting romantic partners and are aware that care must be given to their attire as they are entering "an environment of strict social constraint" (Comfort, 2003, p. 95). Jane and Te Aroha both draw attention to the fear of wearing something the other inmates might find attractive. Anna also made reference to concerns around what she wears to prison visits.

Anna: ... I've usually come from work... And so I'm really nicely dressed, and high heel boots and all that kind of stuff, heaps of jewellery on, so everything's going bang, bang, bang, bang all over the place, metal detectors go off. And everyone else looks all... they really are, you know, like, yeah, there's some dodgy shit goes on out there.

These comments point to a distinction between her partner and the other inmates. With her comment, "and everyone else looks all... they really are", Anna draws attention to this distinction between her partner and other inmates. Also, Anna uses the term "dodgy" to describe her feeling of unease with other prisoners. While they know their partners are in prison as a consequence of breaking the law, these women also know that each is different from those other "dodgy" lawbreakers. This serves to further normalise these women, because, although each associates with an inmate, he is not as 'dodgy' as those other inmates.

4.8. Other forms of contact

Prison visits were not the only contact the women had with their partners. Contact also consisted of telephone calls and letter writing. For Te Aroha, this gave her imprisoned partner opportunity to continue to control aspects of her life. As discussed in Chapter Two, Fishman (1995) found that imprisoned men often used telephone contacts as opportunities to check up on their wives, and to maintain their dominance and authority within the family. This can create a feeling of imprisonment for the women.

Te Aroha: Because in the meantime, Mahina was putting pressure on me to be here when he rang. ... But it just made it all about him. "Why weren't you home, when I rang?"

On the other hand, for Anna and Georgia, letter writing and telephone contacts were an important part of maintaining a relationship with their partners.

Anna: ...Just a phone call away when he's having a shit day, [...] and I just sit on the end of the phone and listen. [...] And just listen.

Zvonkovic et al. (2005) found that a strong and cohesive family identity, achieved through situations that allowed for communication and interaction such as telephone contact, was a key factor in achieving closeness despite a partner's absence. Anna used telephone contact as a means of maintaining closeness with her partner. However, telephone contact can be used by the imprisoned partner as a control strategy, as in the quotation above from Te Aroha. The closeness of the relationship is enhanced through phone contact only if the family identity was healthy in the first place. When the incarcerated partner is controlling, and using phone contact as a control strategy, then the contact can have very negative implications for his partner.

Letter writing was a more comfortable mode of communication for Georgia. However, she felt even in this there was an invasion of the privacy of their relationship, being aware that her letters are read by Corrections Officers. As an

additional security measure, this practice adds to Georgia's awareness of the constant surveillance associated with maintaining contact with her imprisoned partner.

Georgia: It's very hard to even, it was bad enough that you can't say... pick up the phone to them, aside from the fact that ringing from up there costs so much. But knowing that your letters are read, I find that really invasive, I find that really hard. Because I'm a great "pour it all out in a letter". And he, and even when he wasn't in there I sometimes would write him a letter, because that's how I relate. Yeah, I can't, you can't write anything, I could write more in letters but I don't want someone else reading my, my stuff that's between me and him, so I don't write it. But it's even hard to know what to write. In the beginning I wrote twice a week, and then it's kind of, sometimes twice a week, and there's a couple weeks where I don't write at all.

Visiting their partners in prison is significant, not only as the portal through which they are able to visit their loved one, but also as the point where the women come into contact with the prison system and the harsh physical realities of their partners' imprisonment. It is here, Comfort (2003, p. 82) says, "through their sustained contact with the correctional institution" that women suffer the consequences of their secondary prisonisation. The women in the current study spoke extensively and variously about their visit experiences and their assorted contacts with the penal arm of the criminal justice system. That the women had so much to say in this arena shows the importance to them of that contact and the impact it has in their lives and their relationships with their partners. Prison visiting facilities, Arditti (2003, p. 133) says, are "not only contexts of punishment for the inmate, but for the families and children that spend many hours waiting and then visiting there".

4.9. The 'System'

Some important relationships and events for the participants revolved around the Court and Justice systems, as well as the Corrections Department itself. Although

these women were not directly involved with the criminal activity or behaviour that led to their partners' incarceration, they were interacting with the Court system, lawyers, police, and ultimately the Corrections Department, at different stages throughout the process: arrest, trial, sentencing, and imprisonment. All of these institutions come with their own sets of rules, which the women were expected to understand and follow. This was a process with which all of these women struggled, for varying reasons. Coping with - and understanding - new rules, and being able to follow the legal jargon of the system were necessary, while the women also did not know exactly what the whole process entails and were coping with the emotional impact of what was happening. Anxiety and fear were prevalent during this time. For several of the women, the level of anxiety could have easily been lowered by some simple procedures, which could have been employed by the Courts and the Corrections Department. Jane draws attention to not knowing what was happening in Court when her partner received sentencing. Te Aroha also describes specifically how much of the Court and prison processes were not explained to her.

***Jane:** Then in the court, the Judge said, " I don't care if you've got a job, you're out to [prison]!" They took him out the door and I thought, "Fuck! What the fuck am I meant to do?" I just sat in the courthouse.*

***Angie:** And there was nobody there*

***Jane:** There was no one there to direct me on what to do or what was happening. [...] So I had to wait oh nearly an hour for his lawyer to come out of court and he says, "No, he's on his way to [prison]."*

Information being prominently displayed as to what the procedure was and what you could expect to happen, even the meaning of certain legal terms such as 'bail' and 'remand,' would have helped these women when they were in the Courts. Te Aroha shows how the lack of information carried on through the prison system as well.

***Te Aroha:** Nobody told me about the court process and how it works, they didn't explain to me what remand was, they didn't explain to me what bail was, they didn't explain to me that when he pleaded guilty that he would be held in custody, they didn't explain to me how things would go out at the prison, they didn't explain to me ahh, the process you had to go*

through to get money to him, to get clothing to him, to get ahh, you know TV and stuff like that to him. [...] They never told us all those things. When we went to prison, no one told us what it was like when were gonna go for a prison visit. Nobody told us the process. The process was not written up on the wall anywhere about what you do. You know. You will come in, be scanned, sign in, go through the gates, wait for your, wait for the inmate to be called out.

For some women, contact with the Court system became an opportunity to attempt to create some change in their partners' criminal activity. Fishman (1990) also noted that wives wanted an "individualised justice"; they expected the court system and judges to consider the background and history of their partners. They wanted consideration given to why their menfolk had engaged in criminal behaviour and to recommend treatment to change that behaviour. They also wanted someone – court, lawyers, judges – to care about them, and the impact of sentencing on them and their children. Jane, in particular, wanted the Court system to help her partner with his drinking problem, which she felt was the source of his offending, but feels the Courts have let both her and her partner down.

***Jane:** I wanted someone to take him seriously. Because, I want him to get Court ordered to get help, or something like that. Sending him to jail is not going to help his drinking, he'll come straight back out and do it again I reckon.*

Te Aroha wanted the Court, during the sentencing process, to consider the fact that she and her partner had just had a baby.

***Te Aroha:** ... We submitted that, is there any dispensation until his Court case because he's just had a baby. The judge turned round and said, "You've gotta be joking! You've just pleaded guilty... that's your bad luck mate, that you've just had a baby. Go!" And he was held in custody from then.*

Jane and Te Aroha both asked for help from the Courts and justice system with their partners' offending and the consequences of that. They both found, however, that the help they were looking for was not forthcoming, and - in fact - they were left feeling that the "system" did not care about their situation and the impact on them.

Te Aroha: *The justice system, I feel totally ripped off by the justice system. It was not informative, umm, it had a closed gate policy, it, like it they never ever sent me information about, you know - like I said earlier - I didn't know what "remand" or "bail" or anything like that was. I was never ever sent any information about it. Umm, it's closed gate policy was that if you didn't ask, they didn't come forward and tell you. Umm, on the day of his sentencing his family got to stand up and speak but we were never told that we could get our family spokesperson to come and speak on our behalves. Umm, we were never told that he was coming up for parole. We were never told that he was going be released or his date. We were told nothing.*

Jane: *I feel really, really disempowered. Really, really disempowered.*

Here, Te Aroha portrays how her feeling of being "totally ripped off" is related to what she perceived as a "closed gate policy", the total lack of information and support offered by the justice system. Jane also exemplifies the lack of understanding of the processes related to the Court and penal systems and the feelings that engenders.

There are a variety of ways in which family members of imprisoned men must come into contact with "the system": from arrest, trial and sentencing through to the prison itself. The women's stories correspond with Fishman's (1981, p. 372) findings that most "family members do not understand the complexity of the court process and find it almost impossible to acquire appropriate answers to the scores of questions they have". This lack of understanding of the processes that impact so significantly on their lives adds to the feelings of fear, anxiety and shame. The perceived silence of the Court and justice systems, the neglect in providing help to better understand the processes, may in themselves send a message about what is valued and what is held

important: the perception being that women and family members of the accused, sentenced and imprisoned man are not valued within this system.

4.10. Disruption and waiting

Fishman (1981) found that following the initial arrest and throughout the trial period, women experienced confusion and disbelief, and felt their lives were in limbo as they were unable to plan for the future. This period, Fishman says, is also characterised by the emotional drain and constant stress of waiting. Due to the long waits between court appearances, conviction and sentencing, Jane had been left feeling unable to plan for the future.

Jane: It's just all the waiting in between. because this happened [four months ago]. And it was Court case after Court case, ... I think it went to Court... three times before he went out on remand. ... But between that, the original arrest and him going to jail, it's just like walking on eggshells. it's this constant..... hanging over your head. ... And he goes to Court [in one month] and I don't know how long he's gonna be given then. He hasn't been sentenced yet! ... So he's getting sentenced... and he's looking at two years they tell me. And then it's, just, where's all this money gonna come from the whole time?!

The problems and stresses of having to wait for the Court cases to be heard are compounded by Jane's money worries. In describing her waiting, Jane uses the metaphors of "walking on eggshells", indicating fear as well as an exhausting process of stressful waiting, and something "hanging over your head" which suggests something threatening.

However, planning for the future appeared to be a continuing difficulty for the women I spoke to. While the period following the initial arrest was reported as being a confusing time, the feeling of a life in limbo was not limited to this point of crisis.

Almost two years into her partner's four-year sentence, Georgia remains unsure of what the future holds for her and her relationship with her partner.

Georgia: *I don't know. I don't know what's going to happen when he comes out. I don't know. ...*

He's gonna be umm, well that plan is at the moment. but it could change, is that he'll go down to Nelson. He's gonna be parolled somewhere [sigh]

Angie: *And he's not allowed to come back to where you guys are, were before?*

Georgia: *I don't know that he's not allowed to but he doesn't want to.*

Umm, yeah. So I don't know what's going to happen, what I'm going to do. Give up my [chuckle] my everything to go where he is?

...I don't know what, I don't know what I'm gonna do when he comes out.

... so I don't know what I'm gonna do. ...but, I don't know what I'm gonna do. But on the other hand, I ... not seeing him? Haven't worked that one out yet.

Angie: *So, you obviously still want to maintain a relationship with him?*

Georgia: *Yeah. I want him to come to my place and live with me ... but it's not gonna happen. It's not gonna happen.*

There is a recurring theme in Georgia's dialogue that she simply doesn't know what is going to happen. This "not knowing" what the future holds for her makes it impossible for her to make plans. Inability to plan for the future means that Georgia has to live through the stress of waiting. Georgia now simply has to wait for her partner to complete his sentence.

This feeling of waiting and inability to plan for the future is coupled with the fact that their partners' incarceration has effectively disrupted the plans these couples had for their lives prior to the imprisonment of the menfolk. Te Aroha and her partner had their life plan mapped out when his actions resulted in his incarceration, meaning their future plans were seriously disrupted.

Te Aroha: *Mahina and I had actually worked it out that because I made \$20,000 more than him a year, he was gonna stay home with the kids and I*

was gonna work. He was gonna take a year unpaid leave ... so that he still had a job till son was one, and I was going to work. And then at one, he was going to go back to work, in which case his money would help pay for the childcare, all the kids would be at Kohanga, and we'd be able to afford that. Because we would have our double income again. When our youngest turned three we were going to have two or three more kids. That's how it was gonna go, but it didn't work out like that. It was just horrendous. 'Cause to me, ... I'd lost my relationship, I'd lost everything, I'd lost my job...

Angie: *Your life.*

Te Aroha: *My life, my life! Everything, everything, everything, everything, changed, in every single way.*

While discussing the plans she had made with her partner, Te Aroha is also describing a life that can no longer be, a life for which she still grieves. To demonstrate how her life has changed so much from what they had planned, Te Aroha reiterates what she has lost, and accentuates her theme that everything in her life has been changed.

Such disruptions to life plans extend also to family and children. Anna had intended to have her children, who had been living in alternative care, come back to live with her, when her partner's illegal behaviour interrupted the plans for her family.

Anna: *Before all this stuff happened with Tristan, when I was pregnant with Jack. The plan was after I had Jack and set up a house they [Anna's other children] were coming back to stay with me. Then me and Tristan up and went on the run. That screwed all that up and their [the children's caregivers] perception of me changed for a little while.*

Anna's decision to support her partner impacted on the perception of her that was held by the children's caregiver. For Anna, this means waiting for her children's caregiver's perception of her to change again before she is likely to be able to resume her plans to reunite her family.

For these women, the waiting and the disruption to their lives and their plans for the future began with their partners' arrests, and continues through their sentences and, for some, even beyond. This may mean for some women, as Fishman (1995) says, that they create their own "prison" by putting their lives on hold while they wait for their partners' return. For others, the disruption to their lives may provide an opportunity to take up different roles. All of these women, however, have developed ways of coping with their situations.

4.11. Coping strategies

As discussed in Chapter Two, the ability of "prison widows" to cope with their partners' incarceration and the consequences can determine whether or not the relationship will survive the prison term, as well as affecting how well their children adjust to their fathers' imprisonment (Carlson & Cervera, 1991). Fishman (1990) identified two accommodative strategies which women with imprisoned partners employed in an attempt to preserve their relationships and make their lives more bearable: developing a lifestyle to "normalise" life, and manipulating the definition of their husbands' behaviour and their own relationship to it. Te Aroha exemplifies the first of these two strategies, where she felt that normalising her life, maintaining the "status quo", was the best way for her and her children to cope with the demands of her partner's incarceration. For her, this meant maintaining her own relationship with her partner as much as she was able, while facilitating his relationship with his children.

***Te Aroha:** I didn't know what to do. But what I did try and do was maintain the status quo of what my life used to be. And that meant having Mahina in my life. So that meant I went out to the prison 3 days a week. And if that meant that I had to take the kids with me, I took the kids with me. And if that meant that I had to stay home to get his phone calls, that meant I stayed home. That was how I got through. Was to make sure that life stayed as normal as possible, and normal meant not changing a thing.*

For Te Aroha, so much of her life had already changed as a result of her partner's offending and incarceration that the best way to "get through", to keep life "normal", was in maintaining the relationship with her partner and her children's father. Anna employed a similar strategy, maintaining her partner's position of authority within the family.

***Anna:** [daughter asked if she could have a new cellphone] I said, "I'll think about it, eh? I'll have a talk to Tristan." "What do you need to talk to him for?" I said, "You know, even though he's in jail, he's part of the you know, decision-making process."*

***Anna:** It's kinda just like he's in the army or something, overseas, or you know. You're just not around, but you are.*

Anna also attempted to normalise her life by imagining her partner was simply away "in the army" and by ensuring she got enough sleep.

Both Georgia and Suzette drew on their Christian faith to help them cope with the daily stresses of their partners' imprisonment. Georgia felt supported by her personal relationship with God, while Suzette held to the belief that her partner's imprisonment was a part of God's plan for her partner, to help him see the error of his ways.

***Suzette:** I'm just saying that it is God's will. I believe that if it is God's will for my husband to come out, he's already changed, he will come out. He's already changed, he's gonna come out.*

***Georgia:** If I didn't have a very real and very everyday faith in God, I don't know, I don't know what I would do. But that's, that's one of the things that keeps me going. Yeah. Just little things, if I'm reading my bible, there'll be a little something that umm, that just sort of leaps out at me and it's like a confirmation that, yeah, that you know, that one day it's gonna be all right. Yeah. It's, I've got nothing else to, I guess, to rely on. Nothing else to umm, probably to have any kind of hope in. It's nothing to do with the church or anything, it's just something between me and God.*

Carlson and Cervera (1991) found that maintaining a positive attitude and using religion were two coping strategies used in adjusting to incarceration. Georgia points to her recognition of her need for hope and having something to rely on. Her faith in God provides confirmation for her that things will be all right. It may be that, for Georgia and Suzette, their faith and relationship with God is especially important at this point in their lives in providing support when support from others is lacking.

While relying on her faith to help her through, Georgia also felt a need to change aspects of her previous lifestyle: namely her consumption of alcohol. Georgia was aware that she was looking at four years of her partner's imprisonment to survive, and decided that she would not rely on alcohol to help get her through. She has also recognised some positive changes that have happened for her while her partner has been in prison. She has been granted her driver's licence and purchased her own car. She has also learnt to stand up to other people's expectations and demands on her.

***Georgia:** There was a bottle of brandy on the dressing table, and I thought I would just have one. You know, just a glass of brandy, just to get me to sleep. But, I knew if I just, if I had one, it would be more than one, and it would be every night. Every night I would have the excuse that it's just to get me to sleep, so I've never touched it. I've never touched a drop of alcohol since he went to prison. ... I don't know. There's just, there's a lot of things. Ummm. I don't take crap from people anymore. 'Cause I've had to, I've had to stand up for myself more*

***Georgia:** There's a lot of stuff that I've done that I'm proud of. A lot of stuff that I never would've done. I never would've got a driver's licence. I just was never gonna drive.*

Georgia has also found solace in the distraction of her new grandchild.

***Georgia:** Just a few months after he first went in, my first grandchild [was born], so that's been a welcome distraction. I think if it wasn't for that I don't quite know how I would've coped. He, my little grandson, takes up a lot of my time.*

Georgia comments on “taking up time”. This connects to the feeling of having to wait, of having her future on hold, until her partner’s release. This use of time has helped Georgia to cope with the waiting. Georgia’s grandson also offers the opportunity for her to pay attention to a different role in her family, that of grandmother, which provides her with a purpose and relationship that are not directly connected to her partner and the issues of his imprisonment.

Jane, whose partner had been in prison only four months, was not coping very well when I spoke with her. When her partner was first convicted and sent to prison, Jane says she felt “terrible, terrible despair” and turned to prescription drugs to help her survive. Jane has recognised the dangers inherent in such a strategy and has begun making efforts to improve her situation, changing her eating habits and seeking support with supervision through work

***Jane:** The first week was terrible. I cried every day at work, I cried on the way to work, I cried on the way home. I vomited constantly, I had no sleep, I'm on [prescription drugs] now. I've always had [prescription drugs] for my anxiety, but I have gone through more [prescription drugs] in the last three weeks than I have done in the last six months. The fear is that it's addictive, so it's that fear of trying - now that I'm feeling a little bit better - trying not use it.... But it's just the only thing I could to get to sleep. I just couldn't sleep. ... I'd get home from work, have a shower, ... take two [prescription drugs] and go to bed, 'cause I just couldn't deal with anything*

While Suzette felt her partner’s imprisonment was God’s will, she was also moving on with her own life, studying a subject that was a passion for her.

***Suzette:** But now I've got my studies, and we're happy talking, and I've been visiting him and that he's, he's um more, a bit more focussed now.*

At the time of her partner’s arrest Suzette also felt a huge relief because she was finally able to understand what it was that had been happening in her partner’s life

that made him behave so strangely. For Suzette, discovering her partner's illegal activities was a relief from the burden of confusion with which she had been living.

Suzette: *Oh it was miserable! Oh it was such a miserable life for me - and I was so sad and it was just like two years ago since the investigators arrived here and ummm the police arrived here to actually um search the house ... with a warrant. That was the time I felt all the burdens lifted off from me and even from himself too. I was so happy. ... But I didn't know. You know it was, the things were slowly coming into like into um the puzzle they were all, it's like a jigsaw puzzle all coming into place and finally um I've, I knew, you know, that there was something illegal that he was up to, you know.*

Suzette's comments here support Carlson and Cervera's (1991) findings that maintaining a positive attitude coupled with assessing and redefining stressful events help as coping strategies – as illustrated by Jane and Suzette - and with acceptance of their partners' incarceration as a part of their lives.

In accordance with Fishman's (1990) findings, the participants in my own research have made attempts at normalising their lives during their partners' incarceration. They have also attempted to normalise their partners' illegal behaviour through explanations of why their partners behaved in such a manner. Suzette explained that her husband, being educated outside New Zealand, was unaware of the fraud laws in New Zealand.

Suzette: *...He was sort of educated, you know, but he had his education in [another country] therefore, not knowing how society is living here in New Zealand. You know, he didn't have that background... 'Cause he was sort of supported by the [national] community to do a lot of things for them.*

Jane's partner suffered from depression and she believes he used alcohol to mask it.

Jane: *Because he was arrested two years ago for [assault charge], but I don't think that's got, but that was for alcohol-related then. Because he*

has a drinking problem. ... and I wanted someone to take him seriously. Because he's been drinking all these years to mask depression, 'cause he has terrible depression.

Anna's partner was brought up in an environment lacking in unconditional love, which forced him out on the streets at an early age, where he became vulnerable to gang involvement, eventually leading to his illegal behaviour and imprisonment.

***Anna:** But all he's grown up to do is hate, hate, you know, just rip people off and hate. It's because he's been chucked around from foster home to foster home. No one's bothered loving him. You know, because he was abused as a child, and you know, that's gotta give a man a bit of homophobia going on there and, you know, all these other issues and But honestly it all does explain a lot, eh? It really does. You don't turn out like this for no reason.*

In Mary's case, her partner's involvement in the gang environment meant that he was unable to speak out against the people who committed the crime for which he was imprisoned:

***Mary:** ... not speak out. But with those gang things they're quite, umm, you know - you wouldn't dare... Your life would not be worth living and that's what it came down to, I think*

Georgia believed her partner to be innocent of the crime of which he was accused and convicted:

***Georgia:** He didn't....He..... didn't do what he's been accused and found guilty of doing*

Te Aroha offered no explanation for her partner's illegal actions, but she gave an in-depth account of the stress her family had been experiencing at the time, and she felt that the issue revolved around his intent at the time.

Fishman (1990) found that women developed interpretations of their partners' illegal behaviour that limited their responsibility. Blame was assigned to outside forces or to the women themselves. Such rationalisations served to normalise the men's behaviour, enabling the women to distance themselves from that illegal behaviour and lessening the shame involved in remaining in relationships with law-breakers.

While the accounts discussed above help the women in coping with stigma and shame, they also show that the women care about their men. These narratives provide evidence of the women's compassion for their imprisoned partners, despite the serious impact on their own lives and their, at times, anger with their partners. A part of the stigma and shame that these women are coping with comes from the images they perceive from the media and from society in general.

4.12. Societal images

Several of the women spoke of the image which "society" has of prison, the people who are sent there, and the women who are in relationships with men in prison. They also spoke of the media, which serve to reinforce and feed the societal images of imprisonment and prisoners.

Georgia: *I just... people are so cocooned in the world that they just.. they have got no idea. They, they think that prisoners are in there eating steak, I mean even the media, you know, that they're eating great food, and they don't. They get crap food. And they don't get enough of it. They don't get enough.*

Te Aroha: *So I think it's about society feeding into that as well. I think it's about the media feeding, you know that whole media frenzy, feeding into those statistics [of high Maori criminality] which I don't think does us any favours.*

Mary: *You know, society has a funny, well, an image of what is out there. ... It's the media [reinforcing that image]*

... Did you see that documentary about the Scott Watson's wife? ...He met her with the letter writing so of course that just got on my goat because it was so stereotyp[ical]. And I don't think I fit that picture. You know, I've done a degree through this relationship and I've raised four kids alone through it and I don't. That's why I'm quite passionate about this whole topic.

Angie: *Yeah, but there is no stereotypical picture.*

Mary: *But there is. They [society] think they're dumb or whatever or - God! What was it? My stupid father cut it out and gave it to me. It was in the paper, something about "desperate" was the words, it was in the paper write up. Desperate, lonely, women or something. It was like, oh my God, I nearly hit the roof!*

That these women spontaneously spoke about the media and societal images points to their knowledge and understanding of the social stigma attached to their association with prisoners.

During her partner's imprisonment, Georgia has done some research and self-education through publicly available material, via the Internet and support agencies such as PARS.

Georgia: *There's a lot of stuff on websites about people in prison ... especially for violent offenders and that. And they're just, that Sensible Sentencing Trust ... People can put stuff on there, and it's not necessarily the truth. How do they find out? Some of the Sensible Sentencing stuff is good, but some of it is absolute crap.*

While this strategy has assisted Georgia in her understanding and coping with her current situation, it also serves to reinforce her awareness of the negative images society holds of prison inmates.

4.13. Conclusion

In this analysis chapter I have explored the ways in which the women interviewed experienced their partners' imprisonment, the effects it has had on their lives, and some of their coping strategies. By attending to the stories of women experiencing partner imprisonment, by using their own words, we are able to see how imprisonment has directly impacted on their lives. As I examined the interview material it was readily apparent that the imprisonment of their partners had a detrimental and lasting impact on the lives of these women. What was also clearly illustrated was the ways in which the women struggle to cope with the impact of imprisonment and minimise its effects.

The six participants spoke of their relationships with their partners, and their efforts to maintain those relationships during the arrest, trial and subsequent imprisonment. They also each illustrated how their partner's imprisonment had impacted on relationships with their friends and family members, and how the shame and difficulties associated with their partner's imprisonment was compounded by the loss of support from others.

In this chapter I have presented the interview material from the women participants. In the following and final chapter I discuss some insights and understandings that have emerged from the research, discuss some ideas for future research and make recommendations for minimising the effects of incarceration on women whose partners are in prison. I also present some personal reflections on the research process and discuss the impact of the interviews on the participants.

CHAPTER FIVE :

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING STATEMENTS

But it was the jail sentence that made me feel like I was in the world by myself. [Te Aroha]

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter I have presented the analysis of data from the interviews with the six women. In this final chapter, I will discuss some insights and understandings that have emerged from the research and consider some possibilities for future research. The limitations of the study are identified and I offer some concluding commentary.

The process of undertaking this research, including the participants' interviews, a venture into the literature, and reflection on my own knowledge, experience and cultural construction of imprisonment, have contributed to the construction of the implications, limitations and suggestions that are discussed here. When I began this thesis I had no concept of where the process would lead me, and my understanding has changed throughout the journey. My initial focus was on how women experience their partners' imprisonment and how that impacts on their lives. However, I have found that it was not possible to focus on the women's experiences without considering the wider context within which imprisonment, and events that lead to imprisonment, take place.

During the process of undertaking this work, I have come to see imprisonment and its effects, as well as the cultural construction of what it means to be intimately

associated with one who is imprisoned, with greater clarity. I feel I have a deeper understanding and renewed awareness of the lived impact of imprisonment of a loved one. At the same time, however, I feel at a loss as to how we, as a community and as a nation, could solve the many and conflicting issues arising from crime and its consequences. I concur with Arditti (2005, p. 258) when she says:

Any discussion of incarceration and families is incomplete without recognizing the need to minimize the use of imprisonment in the first place. An ecological framework recognizes the profound implications of the deep break and the need for policy that acknowledges the interrelatedness of crime, poverty, and family life. Public policies that treat these conditions independently may inadvertently make these problems worse.

By my presentation of this thesis, and any subsequent research publications, it is hoped that readers may also gain increased understanding. I argue that, even though these women live outside the prison's boundaries, they experience consequences of penal confinement such as diminished resources and social marginalisation. I can now see that these consequences come about largely due to our cultural and social constructions of what it means to be in prison and to be associated with one who is imprisoned. I am reminded that the experiences of which the women spoke remain "embedded in a broader sociocultural network that stigmatizes involvement in the criminal justice system" (Arditti, 2003, p. 116) and that we, individuals, the media, and policy makers, all play a part in creating that network.

Even now that I know the domino effects of one man's imprisonment on his family, his children, his community, I find it difficult to envision a workable solution. How do we satisfy our society's need for punishment of those who go outside the boundaries of our laws, without punishing also those who are intimately associated with the lawbreakers? The families of imprisoned men are an understudied group and it is therefore difficult to know how many of them are able to overcome and avoid some of the more adverse effects of their association with a loved one in prison (Arditti, 2005).

In this concluding chapter I explore my interpretations and insights from this research. Initially, however, it would be useful to revisit the aim of the current study.

5.2. The aims revisited

My main aim in this thesis was to explore the reported experiences of women whose partners are in prison, and the impact that imprisonment has on their lives and their families. I aimed also to draw attention to an understudied and silenced group of women and to contribute to an understanding of the impact of imprisonment on them.

This study was undertaken in a qualitative framework, within a feminist epistemological framework. I have presented the interview material, along with my analysis, in a way that allows the women's own voices to be heard. However, I acknowledge that the conclusions are my own interpretation of the data, and another researcher, working within his or her own framework, may find different interpretations. My interpretations have been aimed at "revealing what is hidden" (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 372) by allowing the women's words to tell their unique stories. To facilitate this I used a narrative methodology, utilising the constant comparison method, allowing the research to be co-constructed between the participants and myself. This narrative approach privileges the women's voices.

5.3. The impact of imprisonment on women

During the current research I spoke to six women whose partners were in prison. They told me their stories of how their partners' imprisonment impacted on their lives. The stories that Te Aroha, Jane, Georgia, Suzette, Mary and Anna shared with me support, and are supported by, prior research that shows that the imprisonment of a loved one or partner is detrimental to those left outside the prison boundaries. Most of the women in the current project began their stories by establishing that they had a relationship of significance with their incarcerated man. These six women then told

heartbreaking, often disjointed and fragmentary, stories of how that man's imprisonment had had a detrimental effect on their lives. There are common threads throughout the stories of these women impacted by incarceration, however, the diversity of their experiences is evident in their ability to overcome and cope with their adverse situation (Arditti, 2005).

For the majority of the participants, the nightmare of their partner's imprisonment began immediately upon his arrest, or with the first contact from the police prior to arrest. From that moment, they were living with fear, anxiety and stress. Fear for their future and their relationship coupled with anxiety about the unknown compounded the stresses associated with their partner's imprisonment. These reports are supported by Susan Fishman's (1981) early findings that during the initial point of crisis, prior to sentencing, women experience confusion and disbelief and are left feeling in limbo being unable to plan for the future. Although Fishman's research is 27 years old, there appear to be no changes from the experiences she documented then. The emotional responses of confusion and anxiety, and the feeling of living in limbo, became parts of the women's lives for the duration of their partners' incarceration. The women also spoke of anger, directed at their partners for having committed crimes that ultimately created the situations with which they were forced to cope. They also reported anger at their partners' perceived selfishness while in prison, their demands for material supplies as well as their need for emotional support from their already stretched partners. These six women also reported fear for their partners' safety and health during their imprisonment, a concern that added to the women's stress.

In accordance with prior research, the six women I spoke with reported a financial impact associated with their partners' incarceration. Financially, only one woman, Suzette, reported a positive outcome for she was now able to plan and budget without her husband's unpredictable expenses that had been associated with his criminal activity. For others, the loss of an income earner in their families was compounded by the need to provide additional supplies to their partners. Although Anna, Mary and Georgia reported being financially independent, they also incurred additional costs associated with their partners' imprisonment, as did Jane and Te Aroha. Such additional costs included providing their imprisoned partners with material goods

(such as TV, radio, and clothing), providing cash for tobacco and other consumables, the cost of telephone cards for maintaining contact, and the extra cost of travelling to visit their partners in prison. For Georgia, in particular, the cost of travelling was significant because of the long distances she needed to travel to see her partner. Due to the loss of her partner's income, Te Aroha reported a significant and economically downward change in lifestyle associated with becoming a single mother and prison widow.

The six participants discussed their physical health as a concern. Georgia, Te Aroha and Jane, in particular, mentioned several health concerns that were directly linked to their partners' incarceration and associated problems. These concerns were both physical and psychological. Ardit, Lambert-Shute, and Joest (2003) also found a decrease in health in both caregivers and children after the imprisonment of a loved one. The participants with young children also commented on concerns with their children other than health. Te Aroha discussed her worries about the emotional well-being of her sons, who were being teased about their father's imprisonment. Anna also worried about her son's physical health, although she did not associate his illness with his father's imprisonment. Georgia, whose children were grown, was concerned that her relationship with her imprisoned partner was impacting negatively on her relationships with her children and other family members. She reported decreased contact with her daughter and her mother associated with her partner's incarceration. The other women also reported decreased social support associated with their partners' imprisonment. Damage to family relationships and a decrease in social support, coupled with economic hardship and associated emotional difficulty, create a "socioemotional impoverishment" (Fishman, 1990) for women who have a loved one in prison.

One issue I found particularly interesting to note was the contradictions involved in recruiting participants. Despite the fact that it was difficult to find women who were willing to share their experiences of their partners' imprisonment, the women who did participate appeared keen to talk. As discussed in Chapter Three, there may be several factors contributing to this perceived contradiction. However, I believe that the most salient factors are the stigma and shame the women experience, compounded by the emotional and practical difficulties associated with their partners'

imprisonment. These factors combined to create the difficulties, for me, in recruiting, and difficulties for women in feeling safe to speak about their experiences.

5.4. Future research and recommendations

It is clear that further research is needed on the impact of the imprisonment of their husbands/partners on women and families. Throughout the process of the current project I have considered several areas of research the results of which would assist in determining the needs of families with a loved one in prison. These ideas are discussed below. Throughout the process of the research the women participants put forward some of their own ideas and as a final paragraph to this section I also offer their suggestions.

Research similar to Comfort's (2003) investigation of families visiting loved ones in prison would be an important avenue of research within the New Zealand context. Such an approach would provide a base-line of the visiting experience within New Zealand prisons, and suggest further directions for research as well as providing helping agencies, such as PARS, with valuable information about how visiting experiences impact more broadly on the families of those who are imprisoned.

Within the Corrections context, it may be useful to conduct interviews with Corrections Officers concerning their perceptions and understandings of prisoners and their families and how these may impact on their work. What Corrections Officers observe in visiting centres in prison could also be an interesting avenue of research. It may also be useful to consider how, if at all, families are taken into consideration within the criminal justice system, and how workers within the criminal justice system and Corrections think about the families of convicted prisoners.

In order to be able to provide more effective and compassionate services to visitors, consideration must be given to training Corrections staff members in prison visiting centres to adopt an orientation more towards human services than towards focussing solely on security (Sturges, 2002, cited in Arditti, 2005). However, in such an

approach the conflicting roles and policies for employees of the Corrections Department may need to be considered.

The Department of Corrections contributes to “‘reducing re-offending’ through changing offending behaviour by providing targeted rehabilitative and reintegrative initiatives, including education, work experience and skills” (Department of Corrections Annual Report, 2005/06, p. 11). Such initiatives would also benefit from programmes targeted at supporting loved ones of offenders. As discussed in Chapter Two, research has shown that successfully reducing recidivism is related to the maintenance of strong family relationships and support (Carlson & Cervera, 1991; Klein et al., 2002; O’Brien, 2001). Initiatives that support and strengthen families who are affected by imprisonment, then, can be a strategy for improving prospects of rehabilitation and reducing re-offending.

As suggested by Arditti, Lambert-Shute, and Joest (2003), an in-depth longitudinal exploration of solo parenting and child development in the context of a parent’s incarceration, and an investigation of the connections between incarceration and economic risk also seem to be important avenues of research. Such an approach would help to further determine the needs of families affected by incarceration, the impact incarceration has on child development at various stages, and the difficulties of solo parenting in association with imprisonment. An exploration into economic risk could also determine the additional costs generated by imprisonment for families in our communities.

Providing basic information to family members and loved ones of prisoners in the form of posters in the Courts and prisons would contribute to alleviating stress and anxiety for first timers. In the Courts, displaying posters with basic common terms, such as *bail* and *remand*, would help them to achieve some understanding of the procedures which they are likely to encounter in Court. As the women in this project related, a lack of understanding of what some basic terms meant, and processes were, intensified their fear and stress. In prisons, displaying information about the process visitors will need to go through to visit their loved ones would contribute to minimising anxiety associated with the unknown environment of prison, as well as

providing understanding of the prison procedures. This seems to me to be a relatively simple and basic form of communication with visitors that is currently not provided.

From their perspective of living the experience, the women participants made some suggestions about what could be done to assist women in their situation. Many women do not seek out, or are not aware of, the services provided by community organisations such as PARS. Some form of personal contact, similar to the way victims of crime are contacted by Victim Support, could be a more effective way of offering support services to first-time prison widows. “Family Days”, particularly for Georgia, were reported as a helpful experience, both to help understand their partners experience of imprisonment, and as an opportunity to further maintain the relationship. However, it seems that very few prisons within New Zealand provided such opportunities for families. It may be helpful for the Department of Corrections to look at expanding this service for the families of prisoners. Te Aroha and Jane were both concerned that their partners were not informed of their rights, as well as things to which they were entitled, as prisoners, and felt that their partner’s rights were not attended to. Te Aroha in particular was also unaware of her entitlements as the victim of a crime. It would seem, then, that the Department of Corrections, as well as individual prisons, need to be more thorough in ensuring that prisoners are informed of their rights and entitlements. Victims of crime also seem to be missing out on receiving vital information.

5.5. Personal Reflections

These accounts were often difficult to listen to. During the transcribing process, I often needed to take breaks simply to clear my head, and allow the tears to dry. I realised after the third interview that I needed to finish this project and have these stories put out where they might make a difference to the experiences of other women, in the future. The women participating in this project gave such powerful accounts of their experiences that I feel impelled to honour their trust in me. These six women who had told me their stories all indicated that they perceived a lack of support for women and families who have a loved one in prison. They had told me

their stories in the hope of achieving some difference, not necessarily for themselves, but perhaps for other women who, through no fault of their own, will find themselves in the same situation.

At the close of the interviews, after the tape was turned off, most of the women indicated a sense of relief at having been afforded the opportunity to share their experiences. Georgia commented that she appreciated the chance to speak freely, without fear of being judged. At the end of my interview with Jane, she said that the experience “was really good, just all this stuff [off my chest gesture]”. Te Aroha and Anna also indicated a sense of release at being able to talk openly about their partners’ imprisonment and its impact on their lives. For me, as I listened to each of their stories, I felt a heavy burden and a motivating desire to share their experiences with others. I felt a responsibility to them to contribute to raising awareness and stimulating debate about the situation of “prison widows” and their families. Women whose partners are in prison carry, often, sole responsibility for their partners and their families, while facing the additional difficulties brought about by their public association with a convicted criminal. Additionally, they find it difficult to establish relationships in which it is safe for them to share their stories. Given the contemporary social and cultural conditions in which these women also “share” their partners’ imprisonment and the shame of their offending, I feel that it is vitally important - having been made painfully aware of their situation, and being strongly motivated to do something positive and practical to help - to share, and publicise, these stories so that those with the power and influence necessary to effect change might also be made aware of the problems and share in finding solutions.

5.6. Limitations

This was a small study involving six women whose partners were imprisoned, and myself as researcher. Although the findings are not generalisable to all women whose partners are in prison it provides some specific accounts that enable the reader to acquire an understanding of particular kinds of problems that these women shared. To take account of the diversity of women’s experiences, further studies focussing on

social and cultural diversity are important. In this study, all of the women participants' partners were male, although I would have been very interested in talking to women whose imprisoned partners were female. Four of the women were Pakeha/non-Māori, one was a Pacific Islander, and one Māori. Women from other cultures may report different experiences from a different cultural perspective and experience different cultural constraints. All of the women lived within a one-hour drive of a prison in the North Island, though some of the women's partners were in prisons much further away. Women who live in more remote settings, such as the South Island (where prisons are more widely dispersed) may also have a different perspective.

However, all women in New Zealand live within a similar societal context, and when their partners are convicted and sentenced, they are in contact with the same judicial system. This study provides one perspective and some insights into the experiences of six women in New Zealand whose partners were in prison, and the impacts which imprisonment has had on their lives and their families. The New Zealand Government and the Corrections Department recognise and acknowledge that imprisonment is not the answer to reducing the rising offender population. The next step, I believe, is for policy makers to also recognise the detrimental impact imprisonment has on women, families, and ultimately our communities. Support for those families with a loved one in prison must follow such recognition of the need.

5.7. Concluding Statement

In this thesis, I have not sought to provide answers to the issues that have been highlighted. Rather, it is my intention to stimulate debate and draw attention to the plight of a segment of our population that has been silenced within the judicial and penal systems, as well as within our communities. Women and families who have a loved one in prison are a growing population. In 2006 almost 6,000 men - and 350 women - were in prison. The average prison population increased by almost 10 per cent between 2004/05 and 2005/06 (Department of Corrections Annual Report,

2005/06), while the occupancy rate peaked at over 100 per cent in December 2005. The New Zealand Department of Corrections has experienced an “unprecedented growth in the demand for its services” (Department of Corrections Annual Report, 2005/06, p. 6) in recent years and acknowledges that the use of “non-custodial sanctions may be more productive, and a smarter, more effective use of taxpayers’ money” (p. 15). The Report continues:

Experience and overseas research has (sic)demonstrated that the suite of programmes, services, and other interventions designed to reduce re-offending are more likely to be effective where there is (sic) both integrated service delivery internally and strong external partnerships with communities and community volunteer groups. (p. 6)

It is clear then, that the Department of Corrections is aware of the need for their department to liaise with, and support, communities and volunteer groups. However, it is also clear that there is a perceived lack of support available. Volunteer groups, such as PARS, require more funding to be able to provide the necessary services to their communities, and the Department of Corrections itself needs to improve its communication with loved ones outside the prison boundaries.

I finish with the words of the women who participated in this research, words that exemplify the effects of imprisonment on women and families.

It's not as simple as him just being locked up.

I don't think there 's enough support there for partners of men in prison.

I come home and everything of [his] is here. but he 's not.

They're not dead, but they're not here.

Imprisonment destroys families. It absolutely destroys families.

On Massey Letterhead

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher:

This research is being conducted by Angie Crabtree as part of a Master's thesis in psychology, through Massey University, Palmerston North. It will be supervised by Mandy Morgan. Our contact details are below:

Angie Crabtree: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Mandy Morgan: School of Psychology, Massey University
(06) 350 5799 ext. 2063
C.A.Morgan@massey.ac.nz

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask. I can also answer any questions you may have at the interview, should you choose to participate.

Participants:

Participants for this project are being recruited through advertisements in local newspapers and on public notice boards. Participants will be women over the age of 19 years whose partner is currently in prison. Twelve participants will be needed for the research. This is the most that can be dealt with in a project of this size and nature.

No reimbursement is being offered for participation in this project. However, petrol vouchers will be provided to compensate for any necessary travel expenses.

Summary of Project:

I am interested in how women's lives have changed (if they have) while their partner is in prison. There is very little research on the lives of women in New Zealand, and what happens for them (and their families) when their partner is imprisoned. I want to talk to women about any problems they may have encountered, and about social, health, financial, or other impacts this experience may have had for them. I would also like to hear about anything women may have found helped them through this experience, and what they think could be done to make life easier.

Research Procedure:

The researcher will interview each participant at a place that is safe and convenient. Interviews will be audio taped, and then the tapes will be transcribed. Each participant will have the opportunity to read their transcript and make any changes they want to make. I will use the transcripts to identify the ways in which women's lives are changed when their partners are in prison. I will use analytic strategies to identify how women account for their experience of their lives when their partners are imprisoned. This will help to gain an understanding of how service providers could provide better support for women who are affected when their partners are imprisoned.

I will keep the transcripts in locked storage. Your name will be changed to protect your confidentiality.

If you decide to participate, you may enjoy talking about your experiences with me, and being a part of the research project. Because this topic is so personal, you may also choose to share information that is upsetting for you. I will take care that you do not leave the interview in a distressed state, and can recommend counsellors for you if this would be helpful.

The tape of the interview can either be returned to you after it has been transcribed, or destroyed, to protect your identity. A summary of the research findings will be sent to you if you wish.

Participant Involvement:

The interview may take up to an hour and a half. It and will be conducted in a safe place which offers privacy, and is convenient for you. A copy of the transcribed interview will be provided so that you can make changes to it if you wish. Reading and changing the transcript may take up to another hour and a half.

Participants' Rights:

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- *decline to answer any particular question;*
- *withdraw from the study within one month after the interview;*
- *ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;*
- *provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;*
- *be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.*
- *ask for the audio/video tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.*

Thank you for your time

Angie Crabtree

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, PN Application _04_/_98_ (*insert application number*). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Sylvia V Rumball, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Palmerston North, telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethicspn@massey.ac.nz.

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Angie Crabtree

This consent form will be held for a period of five (5) Years.

Ψ I have read and understood the information sheet and have had details of the study explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

Ψ I agree/do not agree to the interview being audio taped.

Ψ I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the information sheet.

Ψ I wish/do not wish to have my tapes returned to me.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Full Name - printed _____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Early in the interview, I will ask participants how their partner came to be in prison, and what this means for them. I will pick up and develop themes introduced by the women, especially those which focus on their experiences and their subjective accounts. The following questions will be used primarily as a guide for the interview and as prompts when needed.

1.0 Demographics data (to be asked at the beginning of each interview):

1.1 Marital Status

1.2 Age

- 1.2.1 What is your age please?
- 1.2.2 What is the age of your partner?
- 1.2.3 What was your partner's age at his first arrest (if applicable)?
- 1.2.4 What are the ages of your child(ren)?

1.3 Income

- 1.3.1 What is your current primary source of income?
- 1.3.2 What was your primary source of income prior to your partner's incarceration?

1.4 Children

- 1.4.1 How many children do you currently have in your care?
- 1.4.2 What sort of relationship do they have with your imprisoned partner?

1.5 Accommodation

- 1.5.1 Do you own your own home or are you renting?

2.0 Interview Questions

2.1 Tell me about what your life has been like since your partner has been in prison

- 2.1.1 Has life changed for you? If so, how? For better/worse?
- 2.1.2 Have you had any difficulties socially since your partner went to prison?
- 2.1.3 What has been the financial effect, if any?

2.2 What might a so-called 'ordinary day' look like for you, and is that different from before? If so, how?

2.3 Do you visit your partner in prison?

- 2.3.1 What is that like for you? How do you feel going to the prison?
- 2.3.2 How do you get there and back?
- 2.3.3 How long do you stay?
- 2.3.4 How long does it take?
- 2.3.5 What is it like for the children?
- 2.3.6 Do other members of your family visit your partner in prison?

2.4 Are there any organisations that help you or support you while your partner is in prison?

- 2.4.1 Can you tell me about your experiences with these organisations?
- 2.4.2 Do you think they have been helpful?
- 2.4.3 Would you use them again? Recommend them for support?

2.5 Can you tell me a little about how your partner came to be imprisoned?

- 2.5.1 For example, was it sudden and unexpected, or was there a long period between his initial arrest and subsequent imprisonment?

2.6 How has his imprisonment affected your relationship with your partner?

2.7 How have you managed to cope with the lifestyle changes since your partner was imprisoned?

2.8 Can you tell me about community and social support?

2.8.1 For example, have you told your friends and family about your partner's imprisonment and how have they reacted?

2.8.2 Have you told your children's school and have they offered support?

2.9 Is there anything else about how your life has changed that you would like to talk about?

As the interview comes to a close I will check with the woman if there are any unclear points from our discussion that she would like to go over, and if there is anything else she would like to add or ask. I will check with the woman that she is comfortable to end the interview, and turn off the tape.

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