



**Paying the Price:**

## **The Cost to Families of Imprisonment and Release**

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# Paying the Price: The Cost to Families of Imprisonment and Release

Dr Briega Nugent  
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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction and Overview**

Ten years on from Dickie's landmark original research on the costs of prison to the families left behind, and following a decade of austerity, pandemic and cost-of-living crisis, the context in which families are living is harsher than ever.<sup>1</sup> One in six UK households (4.4 million) is now in serious financial difficulties,<sup>2</sup> 27% of children are living in poverty, and in areas such as Glasgow, this rises to one in three<sup>3</sup> (Stone, 2022). Single parents have been especially affected, and the worries parents face about putting food on the table and paying bills is described as a 'toxic brew' having an adverse impact on mental health.<sup>4</sup> abrdn Financial Fairness Trust funded Families Outside to hear from directly from families affected by imprisonment to understand the impact of this specific circumstance. This report presents findings from 49 women, one teenage girl and one man interviewed from across Scotland.

### **Background information on interviewees and context**

This research highlights the role of prison in creating, sustaining and deepening poverty (Barkas et al., Jardine, 2019). The cost of prison is overwhelmingly borne by single women on low incomes, with most in this study (31 people) supporting their son or partner. 30 were the main carers for 58 children, and 3 were kinship carers. Only five earned the Minimum Income Standard and had around £1200 to spend a month after paying rent. For the other 46, after tax and rent, people were living on around £500 a month. All were the main source of support for the person in prison, and this sense of obligation, as defined by one woman, was a 'momentous task.' Many recognised their mental and physical health was adversely affected, such as getting frequent headaches and feeling exhausted.

One person was in prison for his first time on remand; the group was otherwise split between those supporting someone serving their first sentence and those who had spent a significant amount of time in prison. One group (21 people) had a partner, husband or son that had contributed on average £890 a month to the household before going to prison and shifted from being 'stable' to 'unstable'. The second group did not incur financial losses in terms of household income, but the costs related to prison meant they moved from 'struggling' to 'really struggling'. Three women also had to leave their homes - a significant cost - because of harassment as a result of the offence. Around half (25) were supporting someone who was not in the local prison, adding unnecessary hassle and additional costs. Two-thirds were reliant on public transport.

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<sup>1</sup> Dickie, D. (2013) *The Financial Impact of Imprisonment on Families*. Edinburgh: Families Outside.

<sup>2</sup> Evans, J. and Collard, S. (2022) *Under Pressure: The Financial Wellbeing of UK Households In June 2022*. Bristol: University of Bristol. Available at: <https://www.financialfairness.org.uk/docs?editionId=e2e69bf8-2b51-4ee1-bf44-a53df25cc775>

<sup>3</sup> Stone, J. (2022) *Child Poverty Across the UK*. End Child Poverty Coalition. Available online at: <https://endchildpoverty.org.uk>

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children (2022) *Delivering for Families?* Available online at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/delivering-families>

### **Costs of Remand: Time and Money**

- Remand was an **especially uncertain, stressful and costly time for families.**
- The average distance travelled per visit was **74 miles, took 5 hours and cost £70 a month. £60 per month was spent on snacks at visits, £100 into the personal account and £55 on other costs.**
- The total cost to families for remand was **£300 per month.** Several (6) spent all of their income to afford this, and most were spending around a half.

### **Cost of Sentence: Time and Money**

- On average, people in prison had served 6 years. Most families travelled twice a month to see them, a distance of 106 miles each visit taking 6 hours, costing £77 a month on travel and £36 on snacks, £88 into the personal account and £75 on other costs. The median **total spent per month was £180 a month - around a third of the household income - and £2,160 per year** supporting the person in prison.
- **A day and a half a week** were spent on calls and visits supporting the person in prison.

### **Impact of the Pandemic**

- The main impact of the pandemic was the lack of contact, uncertainty and stress caused. Costs dropped for around half because visits did not go ahead; the other half said costs stayed the same as they had to pay to post clothes into the prison. Many said their family members never received the parcels because of claims that traces of drugs were found, and only one woman successfully challenged this.
- Only a fifth (10) had made use of video calls. Half (25) were not able to set up these up because they did not have the 'right' technology or identification. Internet provision was increasingly being cancelled because it had become unaffordable.
- The 310 free phone minutes provided per month were greatly appreciated.

### **Cost of Supporting Someone on Release: Time and Money**

- A third (16) had supported the person when they had been released, costing between £30 to £1000 a month; the average was £300. They felt that support fell to them alone.
- The first two months after the person was out of prison were the most stressful and costly, as the person was often without any money until their benefit claims were set up.
- Belongings lost when Councils cleared a person's housing fell to the family to be replaced.
- Supporting people to make social work appointments also fell to families.
- The imprisoned family member's home leave cost one woman £240 a month - a third of the family income.

### **'Coping' with the Costs**

- Women 'coped' by careful management of already pressured budgets through their own self-sacrifice and silent suffering, such as skipping meals and not buying clothes.
- A fifth (10) were reliant on food banks. Women covered up their situations and weight loss by dismissing it as being down to a diet to retain their dignity.
- Fuel poverty was common, and the rising costs were of particular concern.
- All had stopped socialising or engaging in activities that cost money, leading to them having a diminished lifestyle and in turn affected their mental health.
- A fifth (6) could not afford to send their children to activities, and many said the concept of 'family time' no longer existed as it had done before. Holidays were not attainable.
- Around a half (27) had lost connections to friends and/or family.
- Families Outside and the Visitor Centres were praised for the emotional and practical support provided such as helping families access information.
- Other services, such as SACRO's door to door travel service, supported families to make visits.

- Although peer support was mentioned by only a few people, it was greatly valued.

### **Ideas for Development and Suggestions for Change**

Interviewees wanted information to be clear and accessible; stigma to end; toiletries, prison clothes and footwear to be free; for calls and the canteen to be cheaper; for wages in prison to be better; for people to be held in their local prison; for more funding to be accessible throughout the year to families rather than just at Christmas; for public transport to prisons to be improved and ideally more services like SACRO's travel service made available; for the current system for travel expenses to prisons for visits to be reviewed; for visits to be family friendly; and for prison truly to be a last resort as punishment.

*It is part of my life now. I am resigned to it...I think it is horrific the way families are treated... It is a terrible strain to have someone in prison and to be responsible for the little things that get them through. It is a momentous task.*

- Lorna, 50s, working, supported son for many years who has served remands and short sentences often 280 miles away and is currently out of prison

abrdn Financial Fairness Trust funds research, policy work and campaigning activities to tackle financial problems and improve living standards for people on low-to-middle incomes in the UK. It is an independent charitable trust registered in Scotland (SC040877).



Families Outside is the only national charity that works solely on behalf of families in Scotland affected by imprisonment. It is company limited by guarantee registered in Scotland (SC236539) and is recognised by OSCR as a Scottish Charity (SC025366).



## 1. Background and Context

About five and a half million people live in Scotland with just over 7,400 people in prison, 96% of whom are male (Scottish Prison Service, 2022). In 2021, the prison population rate per 100,000 inhabitants was 134.9 in Scotland, 131.5 in England and Wales and 73.8 in Northern Ireland; this compares to a Europe-wide average of 116.1 (Scottish Legal News, 2022). Scotland has the highest imprisonment rate in Western Europe (Prison Reform Trust, 2022). Dickie (2012) observed that there had been much research on the social, health and emotional impacts of imprisonment on families but very little focused on the financial. The landmark study that followed heard from 24 families and an analysis of data drawn from the Families Outside - the only national organisation in Scotland supporting families affected by imprisonment.

The findings highlighted the cost of: calls; visits, with travel amounting to between £4-£30 each time; purchasing food at visits; significant amounts being paid into prisoner accounts which ranged from £3-£50 per week; postal orders or having to send post by recorded delivery; home leaves; the person being at home on an electronic tag; and of supporting them on release (Dickie, 2012). The research also spotlighted the losses family incurred, with the drop in income ranging from £50 to £300 per week; impact on individuals' ability to work; impact on benefits, housing, with some even becoming homeless or having to move to a smaller place. The author drew attention to grandparents who had taken on the role of being a kinship carer and the lack of wider data around this. Starkly, women bore the brunt of costs. The effect on them was to tighten already tight budgets, one-third took out a loan, and half relied on family support, which put pressure on relationships. As is the case now, people held in prison came from the most deprived areas in Scotland, and many families were dealing with other issues such as mental health, disability and substance misuse.

Ten years on, a decade of austerity, pandemic and cost-of-living crises means the context in which families are living and the backdrop for this new study are harsher than ever. Alston (2018: 22), the United Nations Special Rapporteur, described poverty as 'a political choice'. Austerity marked cuts to statutory services, the closure of community-based support, welfare reform and housing insecurity, which led to more families experiencing destitution and more complex needs (Galloway, 2020). There is growing alarming evidence of the current situation families are facing with the fallout from the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. Research commissioned by abrdn Financial Fairness Trust based on over 5,000 households shows that one in six UK households (4.4 million) are now in serious financial difficulties, worse than any point during the pandemic (Evans and Collard, 2022). In response, 71% of families reported reducing the quality of food they ate, 60% avoided turning on their heating and 31% reduced their number of showers or baths. Single parents and those earning under £10,000 per year have been especially affected. Inflation is now close to 10%, and families already surviving on very low incomes face devastating struggles to make ends meet (Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children, 2022). Parents worried about putting food on the table, and paying bills has been described as a 'toxic brew' having an adverse impact on mental health (*ibid.*).

The Minimum Income Standard (MIS) is a vision of the standard of living that provides a degree of security and stability (Davis et al., 2021). It includes more than food, clothes and shelter, but also having the opportunities and choices necessary to participate in society and to live in dignity, such as going to the cinema or on holiday as a family. Based on the figures, a single person needs to earn £20,400 a year to reach the MIS level. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation's research into the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) for the United Kingdom in 2021 found that people are being held back by unstable markets and inadequate levels of income. During the pandemic, the Government's furlough scheme and increase in Universal Credit (UC) helped raise living standards, and the Foundation advised the Government to continue the £20 per week for people on Universal Credit to keep them out of poverty. Families out of work and on Universal Credit fall about 40% short of the income needed, and those without children fall 60% short to meet the MIS. The Government response was to remove the £20 per week, and it is worth noting that in Scotland, the Child Payment of £25, which does not exist in the rest of the UK is now viewed as a lifeline (*ibid.*). There have been calls to raise the level of benefits in line with inflation (Parenting Across Scotland, 2022). There is also a need for employability to be more accessible to parents and the benefits system simplified, removing the current average five-week wait on Universal Credit, threat of sanctions, and parents no longer paid in arrears for childcare (Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children, 2022).

Particular groups such as children of lone parents, those who have a family member in prison, disability or are from an ethnic minority background are at a heightened risk of living in poverty because of the lack of social support structures and discrimination they experience (Treanor, 2020; Cebula et al., 2021). An estimated 27,000 children in Scotland are affected by a parent's imprisonment, and as reflected by Families Outside, this is more than those who will experience divorce (Jardine, 2019). Families facing economic disadvantage are often pathologised and the unemployed and underemployed held in the lowest esteem (Treanor, 2020). Connections and support are highlighted in the literature as important to mediate against the effects of poverty (Treanor, 2020). These are really important points to consider in light of those affected by imprisonment, who through shame and stigma can be especially vulnerable to isolation (Souza et al., 2020; Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT), 2021). The impact of poverty is often under-reported because of the shame felt (Walker, 2014). The struggle pervades all aspects of people's lives, to the extent that it has been described as a permanent form of lockdown, with people unable to afford even the basics, let alone a social life (Includem, 2021).

According to the most recent Scottish Prisoner Survey, 61% of people in prison have a child (Carnie and Broderick, 2020). The most common forms of contact with family were telephone (58%), letter (57%) and visits (43%). Over half said their visitors had problems when visiting them. The most common issue was around the distance to the prison (72%), lack of transport (65%) and the costs involved (57%). Other reported problems were due to location (41%), time limits (40%), and the stress of the visit (33%). Over a quarter reported issues with staff attitudes (27%). Just over a third (37%) were receiving visits from their children. A third had received help from the Family Contact Officer. Over the pandemic, families lost in-person contact, and there was an emphasis placed on video calls, with the Scottish Government in 2021 setting out a digital strategy to ensure 'no one is left behind' (Scottish Government, 2021: 24). However, the reality is that people living in poverty are

still digitally excluded. A study in 2019 focusing on Glasgow and 15 deprived communities found that a third did not use the internet, and half only access it through their phone (Kearns and Whitley, 2019). One of the emerging findings from this research, as will be reported, is that as a result of the cost-of-living crisis, the internet is becoming increasingly unaffordable.

Even where budgets are extremely tight, families may feel they have little choice but to cover the costs related to prison, as these are a key way for families to remain in contact. Given that very little financial support is available to families, Barkas et al. (2020) and Jardine (2019) contend that it is important to consider the role of the criminal justice system seriously, and imprisonment in particular, in creating, sustaining and deepening poverty amongst children and families. This highlights the need for more to be known about these families and the real cost and impact of a family member's imprisonment to their lives.

## **2. Aims and Methods**

### **2.1 Aims**

abrdn Financial Fairness Trust funded Families Outside to hear from families directly about the costs and losses financially as well as the impact on their time experienced as a result of supporting someone in prison and on release.

### **2.2 Methods**

Recruitment for the research was advertised through organisations such as Families Outside and open to people currently supporting someone in prison or who had supported them within the past year, and on release. The topic guide and research tools were designed in partnership with representatives from families who were part of the Research Advisory Group that oversaw this study. Fifty-one interviews were conducted between January and July 2022. Three were through a digital platform, and all others were by phone. A small number of interviews lasted around 30 minutes, with most taking around 50 minutes to one hour, and the longest took an hour and 45 minutes. Interviewees received a £20 voucher by way of thanks. Interviews were transcribed, made anonymous with pseudonyms and some details changed where the person may have been identifiable. Interviews were analysed thematically. Drawing on the work of Nowell et al. (2017), this involved six phases, namely becoming familiar with the data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and finally producing the report.

The limitations of this study are that this has been reliant on participants taking time and being willing to share their stories. Participants defined for themselves the level of information they wished to provide. For those who had a loved one in prison over a long time ago, reflecting back to when they had been on remand or early in their sentence was a challenge, and in some cases not possible. Interviewees also often either rounded up or rounded down the costs, but as far as possible this report has tried to be as accurate, reporting figures for income after tax and taking account of rent. For example, when people were asked about the percentage of income that was being spent on prison, they were offered help in working it out, and in most cases this was taken, but it wasn't required for

all. Google maps was also used to calculate the distances between the person’s address and the prison, so distances reported are under-estimates for many, as they were reliant on public transport. The other main limitation is that there was only one man and one young person who took part. No families were interviewed who were supporting someone from HMPs Cornton Vale or Grampian. Further research into the specific support for women, people serving long-term sentences and people who are from the Islands and rural areas would be beneficial.

Studies in this field have drawn attention to the lack of male perspectives; however, it should also be recognised that the cost of prison is overwhelmingly undertaken by women, that is partners, wives, mothers, friends, aunts, and grandmothers. Therefore, this research is a fairly accurate reflection of the reality of who bears the cost. For example, Families Outside reports that 85% of people they support are women. All people interviewed who had children were asked if they would consent to them taking part, but only one parent agreed for this to go ahead. Parents were reluctant for their children to discuss this aspect of their lives and wanted to protect them from feeling exposed, however, it does mean, as raised in other studies, that the impact on children is an area where there has been limited research. The challenges related to accessing children affected by imprisonment is also documented in other research (e.g. Long et al., 2019).

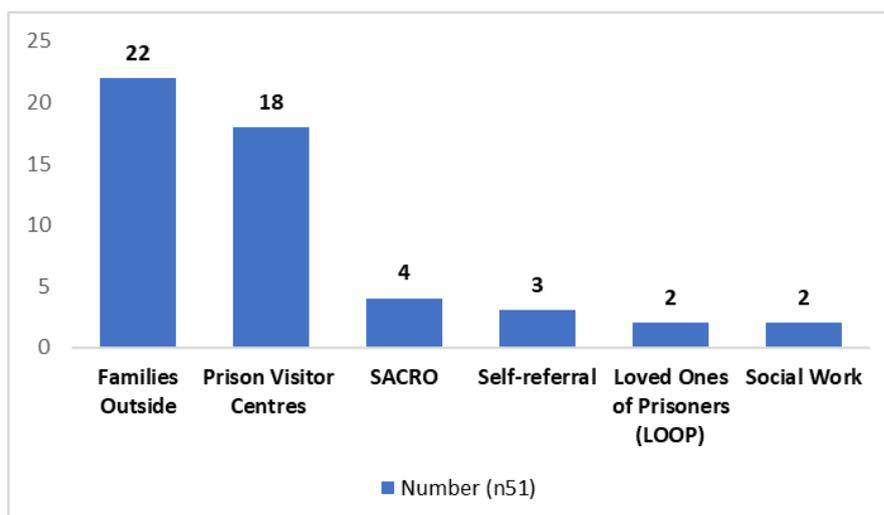
### 3. Background Information of Interviewees and Context

#### 3.1 Introduction and Overview

In this section, the background information on interviewees and whom they are supporting is given to provide some context to the following sections which are focused on costs.

#### 3.2 Referral Sources

A summary of the referral sources for interviewees is provided below:



### 3.3 Gender, Age and Area

Only one man was interviewed for this study, and this interview was arranged by the researcher through speaking with the woman who had been out of prison and was being interviewed as part of another study. The study achieved wide participation from across Scotland. The age profile of interviewees and area they came from is shown below:

Age	Number (n51)
11-20	1
21-30	5
31-50	23
51-60	16
61-70	6

Local Authority Area	Number (n51)
Glasgow	13
East Ayrshire	8
Aberdeenshire	4
South Lanarkshire	4
North Lanarkshire	4
Angus	3
Edinburgh	3
Highlands	3
Midlothian	2
West Lothian	2
Scottish Borders	1
Fife	1
North Ayrshire	1
Perth and Kinross	1
Moray	1

One woman's family was homeless because they had to flee abuse directed towards them as a result of her husband's crime. This meant the children had to change schools, and their 'whole life' as she described it, had been 'upheaved'. One other woman was about to become homeless because of the financial situation she was now in, which was through supporting her son. One other woman was in the process of trying to move to a different area because of her neighbour's abuse as result of her son's crime. Another woman described how initially she had moved away to stay with her sister when her son's crime was made public. This meant she had to pay rent on three properties, that is her own, her sister's and her son's, 'obliterating' her savings.

### 3.4 Care of Children

Two-thirds (30) were the main carers for 58 children, three of which were grandmothers and kinship carers to four grandchildren. One woman was also pregnant. As will be

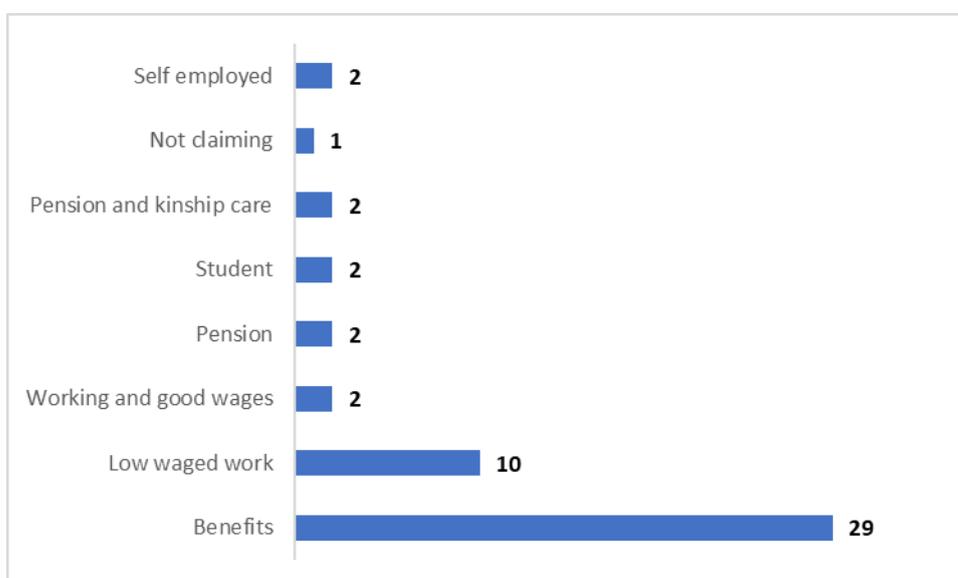
discussed in more detail, becoming the main carer, often on their own, was a major source of stress for interviewees. The kinship carers, aged in their late 50s onwards, discussed how they had hoped at this age, it would have been 'their time,' but this had not been the case, and indeed they felt they had 'no time' to themselves at all.

### 3.5 Complexity

Interviewees reported dealing with many other issues in their lives. Specifically, most reported dealing with mental health issues that were affecting them physically. Several (6) interviewees said they had some form of disability, making it difficult for them to walk. One woman had kidney disease, while another said she was anorexic. Several (6) interviewees reported that they had been abused by the person in prison, and in five of these cases they had stopped providing support to the person in prison within the past six months. One had regained contact and was back in the relationship. Four said that their son had autism and ADHD and had issues all their lives. Two women were now in recovery, one from alcohol use and another drugs. One woman was also supporting her father who had dementia, and another woman was the main carer for her father who was terminally ill with cancer. Two women were each supporting two people in prison. One woman was also pregnant.

### 3.6 Source of Income

Of the 50 adults interviewed, the following provides a summary of their source of income:



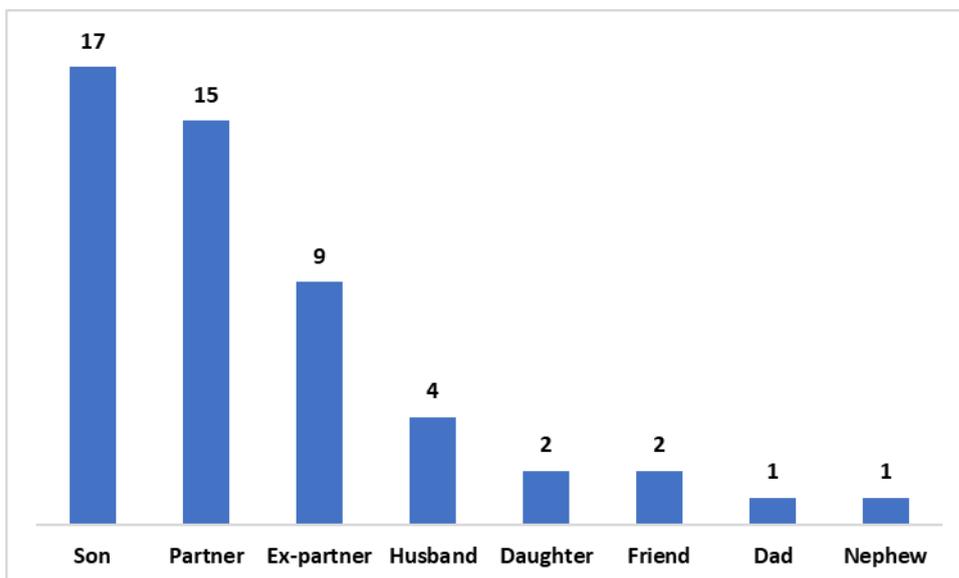
As can be seen, around two-thirds were on benefits, and several (6) were receiving more than basic Universal Credit. The least amount earned on benefits was a young woman who was getting around £250 a month, and the most reported was £900. The average person on benefits from the 29 earned around £500 a month, with rent paid through housing benefits. For those working, earnings per month ranged from £185 for someone who was self-employed to £2025, and the average was £1000, with all greatly impacted by the pandemic. One student had a bursary for £400, and another was earning £500 a month as a carer, but one other person was not earning anything. Based on the three pensioners and kinship care allowance being gratefully received, the average for this group was £1900 a month. In the

cases of the pensioners, two had their mortgages paid, and one had their rent paid through housing benefit. For those earning, one woman earned £700 a month but was mortgage free. However, for the others, rent had to be deducted, and this meant that available income was around £400 per month. Across this whole group, only five earned the Minimum Income Standard and had around £1200 to spend a month after paying rent. For the other 46, after paying rent and after tax, people were living on around £500 a month and in some cases as little as £300.

Nine had given up work because of illness directly related to the stress of their loved one being in prison and no longer being able to juggle all the responsibilities of care they had taken on alone. A fifth (10) said they were on 'low wages', or as one woman put it, 'getting pennies.' The current definition according to the Scottish Government of 'low income' is that a person earns less than or close to £1608.75 per month before deductions. Only two people in the study were earning closer to £2,000 a month and therefore above the lowest threshold. They described themselves as earning 'good wages' but spent £700 on rent and council tax, which means they were actually closer to the lower thresholds when these costs were taken into account.

### 3.7 Relationship to the Person: Main support 'A momentous task'

The following provides a summary of the 51 responses describing the relationship to the person in prison.



Most interviewees were supporting their son or partner. Only two women were being supported in prison, both of whom were daughters being supported by their mothers. Several were also supporting their ex-partner, to ensure the connection with the children remained intact, and as will be discussed, there was a distinct difference between these groups in terms of the level of financial support and time given. Three people had recently left prison and were being supported to resettle. Notably, only two interviewees - two mothers, one who was supporting her son and another her daughter - said they had someone else in their lives to rely on. In both cases, though, the husband had stopped

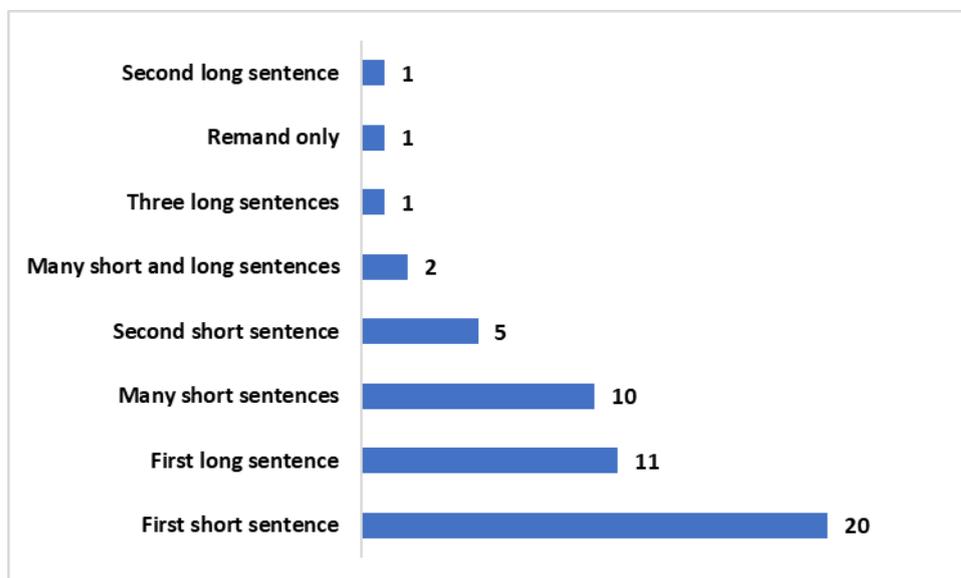
attending the visits years ago. All other interviewees were single. All felt they were the main support for the person and, as described by one woman below, this was a momentous task:

*It is part of my life now. I am resigned to it that he is always going to need. He is alive. There were times he has been in intensive care... I think it is horrific the way families are treated. If you were better to the families, the justice system would be better. If you help the people who are in crisis. Families who are downtrodden accept it, maybe their own education is poor, or just depressed and fed up. It is a terrible strain to have someone in prison and to be responsible for the little things that get them through. Visits means so much to them. That lies heavily on you. It is a momentous task.*

- Lorna, 50s, working, supported son for many years who has served remands and short sentences, often 280 miles away, currently out of prison

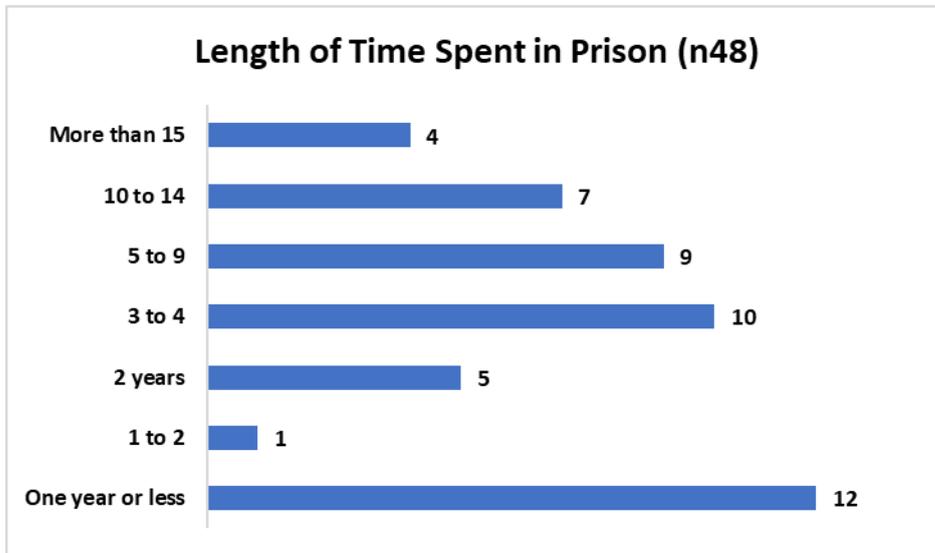
### 3.8 Summary of Person's Time in Prison

Two people were supporting someone who was now out of prison, and nine were on remand. The family member of one interviewee had been on remand for almost two years, with their case repeatedly delayed because of the pandemic. Most people (39) were supporting family members who were serving a sentence. Interviewees were asked to describe the time or sentences the person had served in prison over their lives, or the period they had known and supported them. The following chart sets out a summary of the 51 responses:



Apart from one person who was in prison for his first time on remand, the group is split between those who are serving their first short sentence and those who have spent a significant amount of time in prison. Two interviewees were supporting someone serving a life sentence, while the shortest length of time in prison was one man who had been on remand for six months. Family members of the remaining 48 interviewees had served 268

years between them - an average of five and half years each. A more detailed breakdown of the length of time served across their lives is presented here:



### 3.9 Location of the Prison

Prison	Number (n50)
Kilmarnock	11
Edinburgh	9
Addiewell	7
Barlinnie	5
Glenochil	3
Perth	3
Polmont	3
Shotts	3
Greenock	2
Inverness	2
Dumfries	1
Castle Huntly	1
Low Moss	1

Half of interviewees (25) were supporting someone who was not in their local prison. Two mothers felt this was better for their sons: because of the type of offence, being local would have made them more likely to be harassed, affecting their mental health. But for the rest of the group, the person not being local was felt to be an unnecessary source of stress and additional cost. Two women were worried about their sons serving a long-term sentence and having to move to a different establishment to do certain courses for their parole, and both felt that when this happened, they would not be able to make the journey. They hoped in the future these courses would be available to people closer to home or through digital platforms.

*We have a local prison up here, why can't he be up here? They are in there for a reason, but they should think about the families. Especially if like me, you don't drive, are on benefits and not well. I have fibromyalgia, IBS and diabetes. Travelling that day...I was in my bed for three days after. To look at me you wouldn't think I had this. I have to keep those appearances up. I don't want to worry him (son in prison).*

- Joanne, 50s, on Universal Credit, supporting son serving his first short sentence 157 miles away

### **3.10 Transport**

Nine interviewees came from a rural area, four of whom were reliant on public transport, while the other five 'needed' their cars. The rising costs in fuel were a particular concern. Trains were more expensive than the bus but took less time, but in general people relied more on the bus simply because it was cheaper. Women with young children said these trips were especially stressful and expensive, as they often had to buy snacks as well as cover the costs of travel. However, some also noted that because some of the prisons were so far away and remote, an hour by car ended up being many hours by public transport. Some said they had to cut the visits short in order to make the return journey back in time. Many also observed that the nearest bus and train stations were not always close to the prison, and you had to walk some distance to get there. One woman who had moved a few times because of harassment by 'neighbours' because of her husband's offence reflected that, each time they moved, it took her a while to understand the public transport available, and during this time she was reliant on taxis. Four people depended on SACRO's door-to-door travel service, without which they would not be able to make the visits. One of the women was supported to travel the round trip of 158 miles to visit her son twice a month, while the shortest distance travelled was 26 miles. All explained that it wasn't just the practical support in getting to the prison, but they also appreciated having someone they could speak to who understood their situation and did not judge them. As will be discussed later in the report, for many in this study, being able to be open and honest about their situation in relation to supporting someone in prison was rare. Six people, all of whom would have been reliant on public transport, did not attend the visits because of the distance involved.

*To get to Polmont I had to leave at 8.30 in the morning and not getting home until 8pm at night. I can remember that journey well. I was getting the bus to the train station, and then to Central and then to Queen Street and then to get another train, then taxi, so exhausted to get to the prison. It took a lot of me on my health... It was taking that day, I don't keep too well. I am bed ridden most of the time. When I go for a visit, it takes me two days to recover.*

- Louise, 50s, on Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) supporting son serving his first short sentence 55 miles away

### 3.11 The situation before the person went to prison and now

The analysis shows that there were two different groups in relation to how things were before, and how things were after the person went to prison. Group one could be defined as shifting from being 'stable to unstable', with financial losses incurred as well as costs. Group two did not incur financial losses but did incur costs related to prison and have always faced some form of instability, shifting from 'struggling to really struggling.'

#### *Group 1: Stable to Struggling*

In the simplest terms, in the first group, almost half of interviewees (22) had a partner, husband or son who contributed to the household before going to prison, mainly through wages they earned at work, and the family life had been 'stable'. When the person was sent to prison, the loss of wages or contribution per month ranged from £30 - £3600. The lowest figure lost was for a student who had received maintenance money of £30 per month from her partner, and the highest drop was from £4000 to £400 per month. The average loss was £892, or 48% of their income. On average, people had been earning a combined income of around £1500. This dropped to around £600, and in these cases making rent was stressful. One woman said that over the past three years, she and her husband had calculated they had lost £200,000 in earnings. One other woman said that her boss had been very supportive, and as a result her wages were not affected, highlighting the lack of control people have about the reaction people may have. In most cases, the person in prison had been the main earner, so the financial loss was significant, but they also lost their main support for the care of the children too. There was a marked shift from the person in prison being dependable to becoming a dependant. Although rare, one woman described how her partner had been the main person to carry out more of the administrative side of the relationship too, and she had to learn how to do this when they went to prison.

Interviewees who had been on benefits described their change in circumstances, moving from a joint claim to a single claim, or going on benefits, in some cases for the first time, as being really stressful.

*Going on benefits was stressful. Waiting weeks for UC [Universal Credit]. I phoned Families Outside for vouchers. It really drains you. I think remand was so stressful. No one tells you anything.*

- Angela, 40s, on Universal Credit, supporting partner serving his first sentence 19 miles away

#### **CASE STUDY: Justina**

Justina is in her 40s, works part-time and has one child with her husband. He was on remand for four months and is now on a Supervision Order, where through this he has finally got support for his mental health issues. When he was on remand, the family income dropped from £2,160 to £965 a month (55%), and their rent was £635. He was placed in a prison that was not local - 40 miles away from their home. Justina said she

lived on £300 a month after paying rent, and from this she spent £56 on travel on the buses to get to visit the prison once a week and put £100 into her husband's personal account every month so he could afford to buy toiletries and snacks from the prison canteen.

It is important to recognise that across this group, even the woman who reported losing the least amount of money reflected that this made a significant adverse difference to them, and where they had children, the quality of their lives too. Interviewees across the group reflected that the bills were now increasing, and they were having to manage on less. As will be noted throughout this report, this is also about how women had to change their use of time too. It was very common for interviewees to describe having to 'run around' to make sure their family retained as normal existence as possible, doing all of the pick-ups, drop-offs, shopping and so forth. As will be focused on in a later section, the impact on 'time and money' for visits was a big drain on these women's financial, physical and mental resources.

### *Group 2: Struggling to Really Struggling*

As already stated, apart from two people who said they earned 'good wages', most people were living on benefits or on low wages and described life as having always been a struggle. The person now in prison had not contributed financially, so they did not experience the same loss as the group above, but the costs they incurred supporting the person made a significant impact on their already pressured resources. One woman worked in the hospitality industry and described how her shifts changed all the time, which affected her Universal Credit payments. Three women have had to or are moving away from their homes, as already described. Life had already been hard for this group but had got harder. Two mothers, one wife and one partner said the person in prison had been unstable mentally all their lives. They worried about their mental health but also were relieved in that they were getting, in their view, at least some form of support in prison.

*Me and my kids are homeless, we have been moving into B and B's, hostels. People will not leave us alone. We are having to move all the time because of what has happened. No matter where. We have had six different houses, temporary accommodations. Six different B & Bs, hostels. It is a nightmare.*

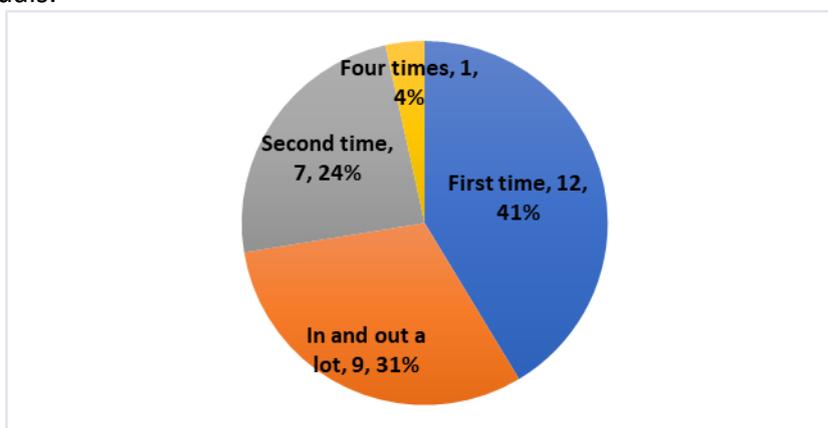
- Carol, 30s, on Universal Credit, has three children and supporting husband who is serving his first long sentence 40 miles away

## 4. Cost of Remand: Time and Money

The following section presents the findings reported on the cost of remand, both financially and in terms of how this impacted on time.

### 4.1 Overview of Remand

Around half (29) were able to report on the costs involved in supporting the person on remand. The reasons given for not being able to report on this were varied: some were that the person had been out on bail, some that they had not been supporting them over this time and a few that they couldn't really remember as it had been so long ago. The description of the extent to which the person had been on remand is provided based on 29 individuals.



Of the 29 who remembered the length of time the person had been on remand, either currently or last time, is provided below.

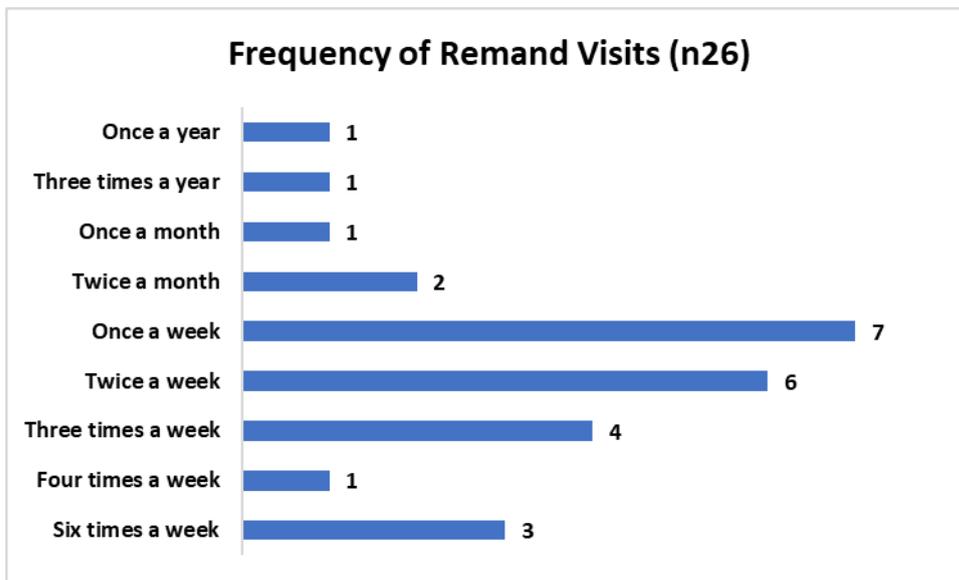
Length of remand	Number (n28)
1-6 months	15
7-12 months	7
More than a year	6

### 4.2 Cost and time to visit someone on remand

Two-thirds (29) travelled an average of 74 miles in total to visit the person whilst their family member had been on remand. The shortest distance was 2 miles, and the longest 560 miles, costing around £550. In the first case, the partner had a disability and used the bus to get to the prison. In the latter case, the mother travelled from an island to mainland Scotland and then to an establishment in the central belt. This journey involved a two-night hotel stay, two planes, two trains and two bus journeys as well as travel by car to get to the airport, costing around £560 each time, a journey she made three times a year. A mother and daughter who faced a 260-mile trip have not seen the person in prison for the past two years, not just because of the pandemic, but because of the costs involved to travel. Four

women reported that they had taken their children out of school in order to be able to make family visits, which were set during school hours.

Two had never been for a visit, and one person had free bus travel. Across the other 26 people, they spent an average of £70 each on travel per month to visit the person on remand. The average length to travel to prison reported was 5 hours and, including the visit, took 6 hours of their day. When interviewees were asked about the longest time they had spent travelling to and from a prison to make a visit, this average raised to 8 hours. Although not the focus of this research, many interviewees said that prison staff could sometimes make the visits traumatic, in the way that they spoke to the families and how they felt treated. The summary of responses in relation to frequency of visits is provided below:



It was notable that those who had been on remand for their first time were when families visited most often. Three visited six days of the week, the maximum allowed, and most were up at least once a week because they were so worried about their loved one.

*I went every day when he was on remand. That was his first time.*

*I had to get a friend to drive me because I was prescribed diazepam, my world collapsed.*

- Sophie, 60s, on benefits after having to give up work, supporting son serving his first long sentence 17 miles away

Those who visited less had supported the person over a longer time and no longer viewed remand and the special conditions of increased visits as something they had to take up. Instead, they continued the normal visiting they had committed to when the person was sentenced or reduced it over time. In a few cases, the distances were so great that the costs and time involved meant they could only afford to make the visits a few times a year. One woman said she had given up on her daughter, as she was overwhelmed having to be a kinship carer to her grandchild with complex needs. It was rare for people to claim back travel expenses for visits, as will be discussed later in the report in more detail. Only a small

number had claimed for some of the costs when the person was on remand, and only after the person had been in a few times and they found out about this option.

### **4.3 Costs at the Visits**

Apart from four people who did not spend any money within establishments at the visit times, interviewees reported spending between £5 - £30 each time on teas, coffees and snacks, paying for these for themselves, for their children if they were also there, and for the person they were visiting. Over the month, the average spent in the canteen at the prison was around £60 per person. It was generally felt that the cost of items was expensive in comparison to prices in the shops and, considering the financial situation of many, should be lowered as much as possible. Some also said that the vending machines regularly 'swallowed' their money.

### **4.4 Payment into the Personal Account in Prison**

Payment by interviewees into their family member's personal account in prison ranged from no money at all in one case to £300 in another per month. The latter woman explained that not only had they been adding money to their abusive ex-partner's account, but the ex-partner had told her he would be bullied if she did not pay money into other people's accounts too. The average payment made by interviewees into a personal account whilst the person was in prison was around £100.

Most interviewees said the majority of the money was spent on phone calls, with costs to mobiles higher than landlines, and only a few had a landline. Two reported they spent between £25 - £33 a month to keep the cost of calls from the prison down, and another had been able to get her mobile reconfigured so that it was registered as a landline. As well as the costs of calls, the price of basic items from the shop such as coffee and vapes was reported to be expensive. A few said they had bought their son a games console and games. It was felt that the items on the 'Argos catalogue' (required for items sent into prison) were inflated.

*The phones are so expensive. They are connected through BT company, and it is 20 minutes for £1.50. The money is going down quickly, and I have to put in extra...But if you have £5 on your phone, she is 4, she doesn't understand, when the phone cuts off she doesn't understand that the money has run out.*

- Jane, 30s, on universal credit, one child, supporting partner serving second short sentence in prison 30 miles away

### **4.5 'Other' Costs**

Many interviewees (23) had other costs related to supporting the person on remand, such as paying for stamps to send letters, covering the cost of the 'Email a prisoner' system, and in private prisons paying for a bank transfer. In addition, there were significant costs reported in relation to buying clothes for the person and, during the pandemic, having to

post these in. These average 'other' costs came to £55 per person per month. In addition to these, a couple of women said they had got internet into the house just so the family could use 'Email a prisoner', so this was another cost. Two interviewees said they had to pay the person's bills whilst they were on remand and one woman was having to pay more for insurance as a result of her friend and previous flatmate being in prison.

*I have had to pay and send in clothes too. It was £50 for tracksuit and then £50 for his trainers. The postage for that was £17, I had to send in towels and bedding too, second class is £15.*

- Joanne, 50s, on Universal Credit, supporting son serving his first short sentence 157 miles away

A few interviewees spoke about the cost of supporting the person in court. One woman said this cost her £40 a month, and another, £25 each time in travel alone. In one case, they also missed work or used annual leave so they could attend. The frustration was that sometimes the case wasn't heard on the day. In one extreme case, one woman had had a warrant out for her arrest, as she was unable to attend court as a witness because she could not get someone to look after the children, after being summoned only twelve hours beforehand.

*I couldn't believe it. I have four children to look after. He said he would put me in jail. I was fuming 'I will bring you up the stairs.' Put me down there I thought I might get peace for the night.*

- Becky, 40s, four children, on sick benefits off work, supporting partner serving his first short sentence in a prison 23 miles away

#### **4.6 The 'total' cost of remand**

For the 29 interviewees who reported costs relating to remand, these ranged from £5 a month, for a woman who sent letters to her ex-partner, to £868 by one wife, who had visited her husband every day, spending money on snacks, drinks and paying into his personal account. The average cost per month spent by interviewees to support the person in prison was around £300 - more than half of their income.

Several (6) reported that they were or had spent all of their income on supporting the person on remand. Remand was viewed as an especially stressful time across the group for many reasons. Interviewees noted the lack of certainty about how long people would be in there, and a few said that they paid the rent and bills for the person to keep things 'ticking over' whilst they were in prison. Most people had rent paid through their housing benefit, but one woman said she had got into debt to make the payment, using her credit cards every month to make the costs. Apart from those who had been supporting someone for a very long time, generally interviewees felt the pressure or obligation to visit as much as possible, which in the case of remand can be as much as six days a week. People on remand are not provided with work, so they have no way of earning money to buy basic toiletries or from the shop (Long et al., 2021). For many women interviewed, supporting someone on

remand was a new and terrifying experience, and it often took quite a lot of time to get information and to know how to do the basic things, such as getting money to the person.

*He then went to Barlinnie on remand. It was a lot of money. I was spending £10 to get up there every day. I just did it because I wanted to see him... I was working two jobs at the time. I was going to a visit, going to one care job and then another. I never slept. I did that before Covid hit. I did that for a year! It was touch and go. It was 50% that was going on the prison at that point. Remand was the most expensive time as I was up every day. I was still working so it was tiring.*

- Fiona, 30s, working, supporting partner serving his second short sentence and is in a prison 45 miles away

## **5. Cost of Sentence: Time and Money**

The following section presents the findings reported on the cost of the sentence drawing on accounts from 44 interviewees, to understand the impact financially and in terms of how they used their time.

### **5.1 Time Served**

Most interviewees (44) had supported or were supporting someone serving a sentence. Two said they were supporting someone serving a life sentence, and another ‘many’ over the years. The other 41 could give a more exact time, with the longest length reported 30 years over two sentences, and the shortest was three months. The average length of sentence across the group was 6 years.

### **5.2 Distances Travelled**

The longest recent distance people travelled to support someone in prison was 560 miles, while the shortest was 2 miles. The average distance travelled from across the 44 interviewees was 106 miles. The average distance ever travelled to support the person whilst they had been sentenced was 121 miles per person.

### **5.3 Frequency and Cost of Travel**

Of the 44 interviewees, five did not go to the prison because of the distances and costs involved. One woman, as will be discussed below, relied now only on contact through home leaves. Most people travelled at least twice a month.

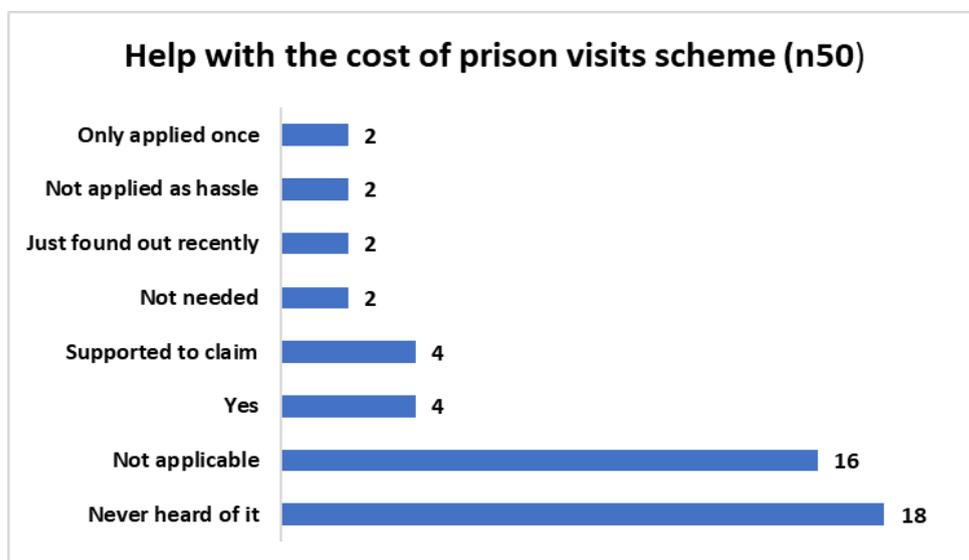
Four interviewees were supported by SACRO’s travel service to make the journey, which also dealt with the paperwork, therefore the individual did not have to cover any costs. Of the 35 interviewees who had to pay for travel, the lowest cost per month reported was £10 and the highest £393. The average cost of travel was £77 per month. One partner travelled a 240-mile round trip with her daughter by bus, sometimes having to pay for a train, and stayed overnight in a hotel. She reported having fibromyalgia, anxiety and depression and was exhausted by it all. She also was only able to claim back around the quarter of the costs for the only hotel in the area from the UK Government’s Help with Prison Visits Scheme.

One other woman also had to stay overnight and pay for a friend to help her to make the journey, because of her disabilities. She was very grateful that video calls were now possible.

Of the 39 interviewees who visited prison, the shortest length of time taken to travel was a half hour, and the longest was two days. On average, people spent 6 hours travelling a round-trip to visit the person in prison, therefore the total time taken was around 7 hours, including the visit.

#### 5.4 Financial Support for Travel

Of the 50 adult interviewees, only four made regular claims to get money back towards their travel expenses from the 'Help with prison visits scheme'. Two said that it was a minimal amount received, as it only covered around a quarter of their costs. A summary of responses to support for travel is provided:



As can be seen, many interviewees (18) had not heard of their right to claim, and two had looked into this, were entitled but felt it was too much hassle to set up. People usually learned about the Scheme through contact with an organisation and felt that they should be informed about this at their first visit. A common complaint from those who do claim back expenses is that the system is not easy, requires digital literacy, and that because it is based on claiming back, it means people have to wait on a refund.

*I claim back my train fare but nothing else. I only get three a month. I found out about the claiming back as I got friendly with one of the girls that goes up. I was told about it a few years ago. It was only when I met Families Outside they helped me. It has only been the past year...I think it could be easier. You have to ask them to give you a form, get it stamped, then write all your details, they go to your account, then get the picture of it and put in online, it is pure rigmarole. You then have to wait five days for the money in your account.*

- Molly, 20s, on Universal Credit, supporting partner serving a life sentence in prison 60 miles away

## 5.5 Payment into a Personal Account

Most interviewees (41) paid money into their family member's personal account in prison. The least amount paid in each month reported was £20, and the most was £200, but this sometimes included payment to other accounts too. On average, people paid £88 per month into the account.

## 5.6 Other costs

Of the 39 who visited prison, several (7) said they did not spend any money at the café or at the vending machines when they visited. Of the others, the least amount spent each month was £10, and the most was £160. The latter woman had a baby and three kids and visited the prison ten times a month, including bonding visits, so the cost of buying snacks and drinks at the visits for everyone mounted up. In addition, when she was breastfeeding, she had to break the three-hour journey to breastfeed in ASDA and felt obliged to buy something at the café to do this. She described all the costs as 'stressful' and was living month to month by maxing out her credit card and borrowing money from her sister. The average amount spent at the café for prison visits was £36 per month.

Three-quarters of interviewees (38) reported having other costs such as clothes and the cost of posting these in during the pandemic as well as the cost of letters. Some women said their partner or son would get bullied if they did not have expensive trainers. One woman had to buy her partner a blood pressure monitor because of his health. It was common for people to spend about £5 a month on stamps and £5 - £10 a month on 'Email a prisoner'. One woman also paid for the delivery and cost of newspapers.

*I send my son a lot of emails. I know he gets it. That costs me 45p for every email sent and if I want to send a picture of the dog, and I can attach that, that is another 25p, for a reply sheet, it is 25p. So it is £10 a month.*

- Mary, 50s, retired on private pension, supporting son currently on remand, who has had many remands and one previous sentence, currently 30 miles away

The highest total 'other' costs reported were £720 by a woman who had rented her tenancy with her friend who was now in prison, and as a result she had to cover the cost of the rent and bills alone. The lowest cost reported was £5 a month. The average 'other' costs paid were £82.

## 5.7 Home Leaves

One woman saw her partner now only through 'home leaves', one week every month. They had two children together, and she was about to have another. Living on benefits and trying to afford the cost of travel to the prison as well as the practicalities of taking toddlers on public transport was almost impossible. Her partner, however, was not granted permission

to have home leaves at her residence because the social work department would not authorise it to that area, and instead he had to stay with his mother, which was a 45-minute bus journey away. She had to take the children's clothes, food and toys there over the week and described it as 'living out of bags' and feeling like they were moving house. She had already been using food banks regularly and was already struggling. Every month to try to ensure there was money for food, activities for them to do as a family during that week, she 'kept back' £240 from the £700 she received every month. As she did not know the local area, she asked social work to give her information about free clubs the children could attend to keep the costs down. She admitted that over the past two months, she had used an overdraft to manage the extra costs, and her partner was granted only £40 for his home leave that week - just enough to cover basic travel and not much else. More recently, she took the decision to remove her internet and TV package and had a smart meter installed because she was so worried about the cost of gas and electricity. The week before the interview, her washing machine had broken down and her kitchen flooded. Through support from Families Outside, she was able to get help from the Scottish Welfare Fund, which she hadn't known about.

*The internet cost was too much. I stopped paying for it because I couldn't afford it. The Council tax went up. I told them 'I either pay you or feed my kids.'...I had been paying TV, landline and it was £70 a month but then it went to £80. I asked if I could cancel, and they said I would have to pay a fee. The bill and fee to get it disconnected. I left it and it is saying overdue and overdue. It is so stressful... Every time I am paid, now I need to do this, this and this to get things sorted. My midwife and scan appointments, I write it out, about how much I owe, so that is how the overdraft was a good help. At the time it is a good help but then you know you have to pay that, and I have daily charges.*

- Jessica, 30s, on Universal Credit, supporting partner serving a long-term sentence

One other woman who was supporting someone serving a life sentence had just been told that home leaves would soon be possible. She did not feel informed about the support available and, although looking forward to having the person home, was worried about the costs.

## **5.8 Total Costs**

Two women explained that their family member had never progressed beyond remand. Four women were the ex-partners and no longer paid money to support the person in prison. In the other 44 cases, the least amount reported was £5, from a couple of ex-partners who posted in letters from the children. The highest figure was £810 because of the cost of rent and bills. The median total cost was £180 per month, amounting to £2,160 a year. In total, taking the amount of time people had supported someone for and the average cost per year reported by individuals, each person spent on average almost £13,000 across the years of providing support.

Interviewees were also asked how much they were spending now, and in terms of percentage of income to support the person serving a sentence, the lowest reported figure was 2% and the highest 100%, with the median spending half of their income. Five women

were spending all their money supporting the person in prison and were in debt on an ongoing basis, managing through loans and/or credit cards. One was a student and didn't earn any money. In these cases, the women's lives had come to revolve around prison visits and putting any money they had into providing support. They also spoke about staying at home so they did not miss phone calls.

Those who reported spending more than 60% of their income providing support to their partner/husband were women who had three or more children and were spending a lot of time and money, making bonding visits as well as trying to keep the family afloat financially. One woman in this group had four children and was also the main carer for her dad, who was terminally ill with cancer. She had pushed herself so hard to meet the needs of everyone else that she had to give up work and was skipping meals so she could afford food for the children.

*I am just constantly running around after people and then the carers for my dad. I don't get a minute to myself...Every day runs into one. I am on Universal Credit. I try to put things aside and fill the car up. So some weeks I sit with nothing. I have had to rely on food banks. I just buy the Slimfast shakes, so I only eat one meal a day. It is for costs. It is for the kids. I am actually gaining weight, I think it is the stress. I have put on four stone since I had my baby. I have a really bad back. It could be stress. I have slipped disks. I can't do it all and I am having to rely on the kids...I have had to get crisis loans, community care grants. I got that funding from Families Outside. I have credit card bills coming out of my eyes.*

- Lisa, 30s, four children, supporting partner serving first long sentence in prison 37 miles away

Those spending less had been providing what could be defined as 'long-term support', with the person either serving a long sentence or they had had many sentences. In these situations, the women described how in the beginning they had provided intensive support, but as time progressed and the sentences continued, they had come to a point where they no longer gave as much as they had in the past, in time or money.

## **5.9 Impact on Time**

As well as the costs of prison, interviewees were asked about how it impacted on their use of time. Almost all said they provided a couple of days a week of support through calls and visits, and two women said that they gave all of their time, because they now were the kinship carers for two children. One woman described herself as a 'private secretary' to her son, sourcing information and sending it on by way of post or through 'Email a prisoner.' Another mother, now retired, said she spent three days a week calling the prison and liaising with staff to ensure her son had his medication and was getting involved in different programmes she had heard of.

*We registered my home number, the landline, so it doesn't take up so much. If I am out and about though I need to get back. We are trying to keep it cheap. I do have to ask when it will be he is phoning. It changes all the time. It is supposed to be 2pm or 8am but that changes. Where is the structure? My life is severely restricted. I am busy all the time. My friends all*

*retired at the same time. Everything goes round about my son. If he says it is 2pm, you don't want to miss that call.*

- Mary, 50s, retired on private pension, supporting son on remand, who has had many remands and one previous sentence, currently 30 miles away

Interviewees who had supported someone for a long time viewed prison as part of their routine. For those who had supported someone for less time and were more aware of how they spent their time before, they noted how their lives had become restricted or were 'on hold', as they had to wait on calls or use time they would have otherwise have spent out as a family, with friends, studying or even just being out on their own - time they no longer had.

*It ruins their (the children's) routine. I have no time for nothing. I am not getting a minute.*

- Denise, 40s, three children, Universal Credit, supporting partner serving first short sentence 12 miles away

As Danielle, aged 11, noted:

*Before, on a Sunday I would be out with my friends or just chilling on sofa. I have had to say no to friends so I can be here for the call, or leave my friends early to come home. I kind of feel like it would be good if I was able to have the call at 8 when I am in. I would like the call to be later.*

- Danielle, aged 11, father serving a short sentence 130 miles away, has not seen him in two years

## **6. Impact of the Pandemic**

This section reports on the impact of the pandemic, drawing on findings from all interviewees.

### **6.1 Increase in imprisonment**

A couple of interviewees said their partner was eligible for release into the community with an electronic tag, but as social work departments were not able to provide Community Payback Orders (CPOs) as an option during this time they were sent to prison. Cases had also been put back because of the pressure on courts or social work, so the person was on remand for longer.

*This is his first sentence, it was driving offences, so it was for 6 months. It is 3 months tomorrow since. I wasn't even at court with him because we didn't expect it. He had a good*

*job, he had access to his kids, in recovery, he got told he would get the tag, he would be eligible, but because of lockdown, there is not a lot of CPO going.*

- Zoe, 30s, student bursary, supporting partner serving first short sentence in prison 161 miles away

## 6.2 Lack of Contact

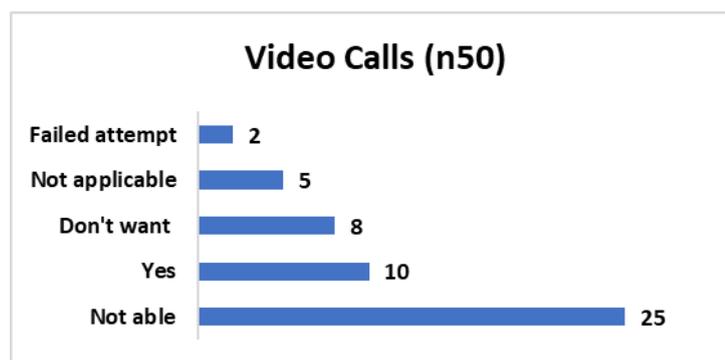
The main impact of the pandemic on families was the lack of contact and the stress caused as a result. Generally, interviewees described visits not happening for months, and when they did happen, they could be cancelled at the last minute because of Covid outbreaks in the prison. Most people felt that the information given over this time was poor, and it was the uncertainty, not knowing how the person was doing that caused significant concern. One other woman said that her son wasn't taking visits anymore because he was worried about getting Covid. One woman said she had posted in letters during the pandemic that the person had never received.

*They stopped the visits. Then they started them, and then they stopped them and started them. I didn't do the online thing as there was no talk about it... I felt pressure to put things on the canteen. It was hard not being able to see them. The free phone minutes were helpful. He phones every day.*

- Louise, 50s, Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment, supporting son serving first short sentence 55 miles away

## 6.3 Video Calls and Prison Phones

The summary of responses to whether the families used video calls was as follows



Ten interviewees said their video calls had been set up quite quickly, with a couple saying they had these three times a week and most once a week, and they appreciated being able to see the person. However, four also explained that they did not like them, as there were issues with the connection, and for one woman, with a toddler it was very hard, as they could not get them to sit still, which interfered with the connection. An older woman struggled with the technology and was only able to get the video calls set up with support from her neighbour and SACRO. She said she did not like seeing her son through this

medium at all. Another woman had been supported by the prison Visitor Centre to access the appropriate technology, internet access and to get it set up. Despite such issues, all wanted this to remain an option for families to keep up their relationships.

As can be seen, most interviewees were not able to get the video calls set up. Common reasons for this were that they did not have the 'right' technology as their phone was not modern enough, they did not have the identification, they struggled to understand how to set it up or did not have the internet. A more recent finding is that people who had previously been able to afford the internet were now having to cancel this to afford basics such as food. Two women had tried to set up the video calls, but these had failed.

*There was an error constantly...I then got an email on the morning that the call was cancelled. The reasons given are very wide ranging. One of the reasons was 'Resident not available' – where is he? He is not in a hotel. It makes no sense to me.*

- Mary, 50s, retired on private pension, supporting son currently on remand, who has had many remands and one previous sentence, currently 30 miles away

For eight women the video calls had not happened, mainly because the person in prison did not want to do them. In three extreme cases, the mother and children had not had any contact for two years apart from phone calls. One family was unable to set up the video calls because they did not have a phone suitable, and the other two did not have the appropriate identification. They felt that the requirement for identification was unnecessary, particularly as they were not physically in the establishment, and therefore the risk of anything happening was practically non-existent.

Interviewees appreciated that the person in prison had 310 free minutes on their prison mobile phone allocated each month, which meant families could have better and more frequent contact. One woman described how, over this time, her husband called his children every morning before they went to school, and this brought them closer together. However, one wife said that her husband had refused to take up his phone because of the hassle he had seen others experience from other prisoners as a result, and one partner said that the person in prison had only recently received his phone, and therefore had been without this for months.

#### **6.4 Posting in clothes**

A significant cost reported during the pandemic was the posting in of clothes, which ranged from £10 to £27 each time, and interviewees could not understand why this was regarded as a safer option than handing in clothes. Many reported clothes not being given to the person in prison because of claims that there were drugs on them. All interviewees said this was impossible with clothes often not taken out of the original packaging. Two women, one of whom is a scientist, reported they had successfully challenged these claims but observed that not everyone would feel comfortable to do this. All were frustrated with the prison system for effectively insinuating they had been taking drugs or involved in drugs in some way when they were not.

## 6.5 Impact on Cost

Three women had only been providing support throughout the pandemic and therefore could not comment if costs had increased or decreased. For the other 47, two said the costs were up, and the remaining number were split between those who said the costs were down (23) and there had been no difference (22). In one case where the costs had increased, the person paid more into the personal account in prison over this time, and in another, the person had been transferred to a prison further away, so the costs of travel had increased. The main reason for costs decreasing is that people were not able to visit; during these times, contact was mainly by phone. When visits did happen, in some establishments, people were given a pack with snacks in it at the visit as the canteen was closed which helped them to reduce costs.

## 7. Supporting people on release: Time and Money

This section reports on the findings from 16 interviewees who were supporting or had supported someone who had been released from prison within the past year.

### 7.1 Cost and Responsibility: Lack of Support

The costs reported per month supporting the person who had been released ranged from £30 to £1000, the average cost being £300. It was notable that all interviewees felt they were left very much on their own to support the person. In cases where there was social work involvement, all felt they needed more support.

For two women, even the journey home fell to the partner or wife. A case study provides more detail below. The other woman, who lived almost four hours away, said she would be travelling down the evening before, staying in a hotel and going to meet her partner. She wouldn't get breakfast that morning in the hotel but would take a snack to make sure she could afford to get him lunch on the way back. The total cost of her helping him to make the journey home was £100 - a quarter of her monthly budget.

#### Case Study: Justina

Justina's partner had been moved to a different establishment much further away a month before his release and was released with a travel warrant but no information. It was left to her to try and get him home. He managed a call to Justina before he left, and she arranged a taxi for him to the bus station. However, the payment did not go through, and the taxi driver dropped him off in the middle of town. In his desperation, he went to the police station to ask for help. They were able to connect him again to his wife through use of their phone, arranged another taxi and paid for up front, so this time the taxi took him to the bus station. He got the bus to the nearest city to where he lived, and his wife, understanding how difficult this all was for her husband, met him there and then travelled with him on the next two buses they had to take to get home. She was very concerned he would not be home in time to meet the license conditions for his release. This journey alone cost Justina £30. Although her husband had been provided with a travel warrant, he

had had no money for food and had not eaten all day until he met her late in the afternoon. Since he has been out over the past month, all of the costs have fallen to her, which she has found very difficult.

The first two months were the most stressful and costly for families supporting someone on release from prison, as it was during this time the person was often without any money until their benefit claims were set up. A couple of women who had sons and one woman who had a daughter in and out of prison reported how, when they were released, they moved into accommodation that did not have basics such as a kettle, television or curtains, leaving the family to pay for these. They could not understand how each time when the person was sent to prison, their flat was cleared and all of their belongings dumped, so replacing these goods always fell on the family. They were not aware of the Scottish Welfare Fund.

In a couple of cases, the person had taken up a job on release from prison because of the financial situation, even though the interviewee observed that they were not really 'ready' to do so. Although, legally, claims can be set up for the person leaving prison so that a gap in receipt of benefits does not exist, no one reported this happening. It was also raised that families wanted the person to feel welcome and that, even though this was a highly pressured time, they spent more than they normally would to make it special. In cases where the son or daughter had a substance misuse issue, the parent reported having to keep two households afloat. A few felt their son or daughter was now institutionalised.

*She rings me up and says she has no electricity, food. You are just supporting her all the time. You help her, it is never coming back to you. It is a struggle all the time.*

- Alison, 60s, pension, kinship carer and supporting daughter in prison serving another short sentence 35 miles away

The only man interviewed in the study said he knew if his friend moved back to the area she had lived in before, she would be taking drugs again and work as a prostitute to earn money. Instead, he picked her up, and she stayed with him and, over the past year, had got her life back on track by connecting with a local service set up for women from all walks of life, providing emotional and practical support. He said over the first couple of months until her benefits were set up, he spent around £600 a month to get her clothes, food and to pay for the extra heating in the house. He explained he would normally have the heating off during the day, but as she was in the house, it had to be on. One woman was taking two weeks annual leave to help her son get his flat in order. Another woman was supporting her son after returning from the Young Offender Institution, which was a significant drain on already pressured resources. She reflected also on the reality of the challenges he has experienced to get into work. One other woman had her son released with an electronic tag, explaining that she had to convert the dining room into a bedroom for this to be possible, which was an added cost.

## 7.2 Rehabilitation

Interviewees also felt that supporting their family member to make social work appointments as part of their conditions or to maintain their methadone script fell to them. One woman reported that the local chemists no longer prescribe methadone, so the cost of the journey to get the medication had become even more.

*I had to take him to the appointments. I would say I was keeping him going... I don't sleep with the worry...I was doing without to make things happen. Not eating. Sitting with nothing because he would need gas and electricity...I do all the calls for him. Every day I take him to a chemist.*

- Alanna, 50s, working, supporting son who has had many short sentences and is currently in a prison 60 miles away

## 8. 'Coping' with the Costs

This section presents findings based on how interviewees coped with the costs and losses as a result of supporting someone who was or had been in prison, which could be summed up by 'being careful' with their money and constantly monitoring a pressured budget. Much of what is described could be termed 'silent suffering', with the women being the main source of support and, in doing so, limiting their own everyday life.

### 8.1 Food Poverty

One of the most striking findings from this research is the extent to which individuals reported food poverty and, in some extreme cases, even starvation. Ten women said that they regularly used food banks. Some said that they did not use food banks because of the lack of choice and it being mainly tinned goods. Mothers of dependent children in particular reported skipping meals. A mother interviewed in winter reported that she had not had a hot meal in three days to make sure her two children did not do without. The impact on the physical and mental health of the women as a result of not being able to eat properly was clear: women had lost weight, were losing their hair, had anaemia and felt 'ground down' by it all. It was also notable that many of the women said their own mothers were their main sources of support, that they noticed they were struggling and were trying to do all they could to help discreetly. Many spoke about shopping around, freezing food and making meals that they knew were cost-effective.

*Two-thirds of my money is going on the visits. That doesn't include me giving me my daughter the lunch money too. I have skipped loads of meals. I used to be a size 12 and now I am a 6. My face is all drawn in. My iron is low. I was not eating or sleeping. Some days I would miss completely to make sure the kids were eating. Sometimes I would take a bit of toast and that would be me full. The Doctor said I was so stressed and they gave me iron tablets.*

- Carol, 30s, on Universal Credit, has three children and supporting husband who is serving his first long sentence 40 miles away

Women covered up the situation, dismissing it or explaining it away as being on a diet or a because of anxiety rather than not being able to afford food. They also said those closest to them knew the truth. This was not spoken about but rather conveyed by their actions, often with their own mothers taking in groceries to help out. In many ways, this example shows that retaining dignity and 'keeping up appearances' means the truth of these women's lives remains unknown. It was also notable that it was only when the interview had really progressed and women had built some trust with the interviewer that they revealed the reality, safe in the anonymity offered by the researcher.

## **8.2 Fuel Poverty**

The other main sacrifice the women made was heating their homes, and the rising costs were a cause for concern. Interviewees reflected that they were in the house more than ever as a consequence of imprisonment, as they had no money to afford to socialise and some reported also having to stay in for phone calls, so not being able to put the heating on was an issue. One interviewee noted that the system they had was not the most efficient, and others said they had a meter and were aware that this made them more expensive, but they also felt they had more control about how to spend their money. As well as not putting the heating on, or only heating one room, some reported using hot water bottles or spending time at family or friends' houses, so they did not have to have the heating on at home during these times. Some were in debt, had borrowed money from family, and some had got the Winter Hardship Fund through support from Families Outside or the prison Visitors' Centres and were extremely grateful for the difference this made. Dickie's original research found that borrowing from family impacted adversely on relationships. The main issue that people reported is that their family members were struggling themselves, and as one woman said, 'it was like robbing Peter to pay Paul', highlighting the intergenerational poverty families experienced.

*I have a wee heater in my room... The rest of the house is going damp... I have a lot of health issues. I always borrow of family.*

- Louise, 50s, on Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) supporting son serving his first short sentence 55 miles away

## **8.3 Clothes, shoes and material goods**

Almost all said they had stopped buying clothes or shoes for themselves, even when they really needed it, and shopped around for items for the children. Some had only been able to buy a winter coat through funding from sources such as Families Outside. One mother observed how her child no longer asked for the same number of things at Christmas. One woman also spoke about not being able to afford to make necessary changes to the house, such as fitting a new carpet or get repairs done.

*I have a hole in my trainers. I keep saying I need to get new clothes and I keep putting it off as I don't have the money. Providing for the kids come before me. My partner in prison keeps saying go and get for yourself. He has no clue. He doesn't know the cost of living.*

- Eileen, 30s, on Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment (PIP), four children, supporting partner serving long-term sentence 120 miles away

#### **8.4 Permanent Lockdown**

All interviewees described not going out anymore and having stopped socialising because of the cost and felt very isolated as a result, recognising that they were leading a diminished lifestyle. Some said that the times of prison visits also meant there was less time for the family to be out together having fun, like they used to. A fifth of parents (6), openly said they could not afford for the children to go to clubs they had attended before. The concept of 'family time' as it had existed before had now ended. Activities that cost money, such as going to the cinema, having days out or going on holidays were not possible. One woman said that, as a result of all the restrictions, her children had started to get involved in trouble and the police had even been called, adding to her already stressful situation. Four had to give up their cars, which sometimes meant that they ended up paying more to deal with everyday things, such as getting the shopping home, and for those in rural areas, getting around was especially challenging.

*They used to go to football but that had to stop because we couldn't afford it. So they were £10 a week we had to give up. They were really upset about it, like why couldn't they afford to go? £5 is a lot of money when you haven't got it.*

- Angela, 40s, two children, on Universal Credit, supporting partner serving his first sentence 19 miles away

Danielle, aged 11, also noticed the change in her life, saying:

*I had to quit swimming, dancing and gymnastics. Before when I lived in the area before we could afford it. The costs are more where we live now.*

- Danielle, aged 11, father serving a short sentence 130 miles away, has not seen him in two years

#### **8.5 Lack of 'free' or 'me' time**

The kinship carers and mothers noted that they didn't have any 'free time' to themselves anymore because all of the childcare was their responsibility:

*I have never had a day off or a night to myself. Social work apparently is looking at respite, but the wheels move very slowly... He has special needs, during the pandemic I was climbing the walls.*

- Alison, 60s, pension, kinship carer and supporting daughter in prison serving another short sentence 35 miles away

## 8.6 Loss of Connections and Isolation

A striking finding is that more than half of interviewees (27) had lost connections with family and/or friends through supporting the person in prison. These connections had either disagreed with the offence and cut ties, or the woman was not able to afford socialising, or the times to meet clashed with visit times or calls, or they were too ashamed to keep the connections up, so they were lost. Even a husband and wife, who had each other, said they felt very isolated. One woman who had to move home reflected on the loss of connections for her children. Some people kept the connections to some extent but did not tell them the truth of what was going on, so the relationships were not as strong, and the women purposely kept their distance in case the truth came out.

*Your own family don't want to know. Eventually things fall away with the social networks. For extended family my networks have shrunk. I don't talk to friends about it. It is uncomfortable – you just say he is away. I have friends now who have no association with me about him. They don't want to know. I have a brother who is telling me not to associate with it. I think it makes people feel uncomfortable that it could happen to them.*

- Lorna, 50s, working, supported son for many years who has served remands and short sentences, often 280 miles away, currently out of prison

## 8.8 Debt

Several women (7) had debts or had taken out loans and most relied on family for financial support:

*I have taken out loans. I have a £200 loan from UC. I am paying that back every week.*

- Susan, 50s, Universal Credit, supporting son serving his first sentence in a prison 5 miles away

# 9. The Impact of 'Coping' on Individuals

The following section provides some of the insights about the impact reported by individuals and families of 'coping' financially.

## 9.1 Resilience

Across the group, participants showed great resilience, managing by making money stretch as far as they could, shopping around, surviving on the basics (if even that) and getting on

with things as best they could. There was also a narrative around this, that they felt there was no other choice but to do this - to not give up. A few also said that their faith helped them through. For many interviewees, through participation in the research they had come to understand the losses and costs related to prison and were shocked, unable to believe how they had coped or managed.

## 9.2 Impact on Mental and Physical Health

Almost all interviewees recognised that their mental health had been adversely affected, in some cases seriously, by the toll of supporting the person in prison and the losses they also had to manage where that person had been the main support. Some women spoke openly about suffering from anxiety and depression as a result. One woman said that she had been in recovery for many years and that the stress of this whole situation, had she been without good support, would have made it very likely that she would have turned to taking drugs again. A few said they were desperate, felt exhausted by it all and weren't sure they could cope or continue as they were anymore. They had lost hope. They were considering seeking help from mental health services and also stopping their contact with the person in prison.

Many women were aware also of the impact the stress had on their physical health, with losing or gaining weight reported, as well as getting frequent headaches, losing sleep, feeling exhausted and developing conditions such as fibromyalgia. One woman with a disability and wheelchair-bound noted how the lift in the prison didn't always work, and she was forced to have to use her legs. Another woman said that, after the prison visit, it takes her two days to recover.

*I can't keep doing this. All the stress around us all the time. I have all the responsibility. It is wearing me down. My health is down to this stress... It has affected my mental and physical health. I lay in bed for seven months. It was just prior to Covid. I just lay in bed. I was suicidal. I had no motivation, I didn't wash much. I didn't eat much. I don't know, I had coped so well. I just fell apart...I feel my strength is starting to go. I am feeling the stress of all of it.*

- Alison, 60s, pension, kinship carer and supporting daughter in prison serving another short sentence 35 miles away

## 10. Sources of Support

This section reports on the sources of support reported, and for many, these connections appeared only to be accessible when the person was in prison. It is also worth noting that this research recruited participants through organisations such as Families Outside and the prison Visitors' Centres.

### 10.1 No one to help

Although not a positive finding, this research was able to connect to people who felt they didn't have any support and made them aware of what is available. Specifically, three women and one man said they had no one to help:

*I have no one. I am the strength of everyone else.*

- Susan, 50s, Universal Credit, supporting son serving his first sentence in a prison 5 miles away

Three women also said their only 'support' was their partner who was in prison. Five of this group of seven said they were not in touch with any services or had only recently started to ask for help.

## **10.2 Summary of Sources of Support**

Across the other 43 interviewees, more than half (27) reported family as being their main source of support, more than half (27) also Families Outside and a third (14) the prison Visitor Centres. Other organisations were also named by a fifth (8).

### **10.3 Family**

More than half (27) reported family as the main source of support, with most (21) saying this was their mother, sister, aunt, daughter or another female. Six others reported other family members, namely husbands, fathers and in-laws. As already stated, interviewees felt that their mother 'knew' the extent of the financial impact and how much they were struggling but never spoke openly about it, instead providing discreet support. Some also observed their own families were struggling already.

*My daughter's situation is just as bad, we are both borrowing of each other, getting loans. We are both in debt because of this.*

- Louise, 50s, on Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) supporting son serving his first short sentence 55 miles away

### **10.4 Families Outside**

As can be seen, Families Outside was an invaluable source of support for many interviewed and was often reached through the national helpline, or people were made aware of them by the prison Visitor Centre, social workers and to a lesser extent the school their child attended. The organisation provided a range of support from basic information to families about visit times, what they are entitled to, what is available in the local area, to more intensive and crisis support, such as sourcing food parcels, digital devices, or providing families more long-term emotional support. In these cases, they were viewed as a much-needed person to speak openly to, to break the silence (which should not be underestimated), providing practical and emotional support. They also had given some children specific emotional support, to understand the situation better, engage in activities in the local community and to feel listened to. The resources they have developed for children and

families are high quality and easily accessible, and staff are experienced and trained in this area.

*Families Outside have been a great support. They have been telling me how prison works. They have helped me to answer questions to my daughter. They take her out once a month on a trip to go bowling. They also got money for me at Christmas time, so we were able to have a really good Christmas that year. That was a massive support as Dad wasn't there to help with the stuff.*

- Laura, 30s, Universal Credit, 2 children, no longer supporting abusive ex-partner who is serving short sentence

### **10.5 Prison Visitor Centres**

The (independently-run) prison Visitor Centres emerged as a key source of information, providing practical and emotional support, helping families to feel more comfortable at visits and making people aware of and supporting them to access what they are entitled to, linking them in with support in the community. Direct support was also given in some cases, such as hosting a homework club, providing food parcels, support during Christmas to get children presents and even in one case the family was able to get a holiday arranged.

*When he first went to prison, she was really helpful. She has guided me in the lots of things. She told me about claiming back and the bus tickets. She was in touch with us right away. She got me signed in and she showed me where the office was. When I first went up myself that was the first time and she told me. She was able to get me a holiday in June, Barnardo's. We are looking forward to it.*

- Olivia, Universal Credit, 2 children, supporting ex-partner in prison 14 miles away

### **10.6 Other Services: SACRO, Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (SFAD), Includem and Community Connectors**

Four interviewees used SACRO's personalised travel service, run by volunteers, so that people who struggle to make the visits are provided with a door-to-door travel service. In all four cases, they said that without this support, they would not be able to make the visits. One woman and her two children had not seen their father for two years. It is also not just the transport, but having someone there so they feel supported, which also makes the difference.

*I think SACRO has been the best help. The drivers are nice and they are helpful. It is no problem to get there and back. I don't depend on people. My family don't talk about it. I carry it myself. I don't speak openly about my son... My main worry was, I couldn't walk for 4.5 months. I wasn't sure if I could see him again. I am so appreciative to SACRO.*

- Rose, 60s, Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment, supporting son serving first long-term sentence 30 miles away, reliant on SACRO's travel service

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (SFAD) was also praised by a woman who had completed the Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT), and through this had learned techniques to look after herself. One woman, who had a son who had been in and out of prison, felt that the best support she had was from Includem, and she continued to keep in contact with them and receive support. Another woman was being supported by Community Connectors in Glasgow to help older people connect to services in their community, and it was through them that she had heard about Families Outside.

## **10.7 Peer Support**

A few (3) women were involved in peer support. In two cases, this was through a Facebook group and online meetings provided through Loved Ones of Prisoners (LOOP) in Scotland, and in another case, it was a group in the community run by Children 1<sup>st</sup>. All three really valued the opportunity to meet others going through similar experiences, removing the shame and stigma they often felt, which highlights the value of this type of provision and power of lived experience. Families Outside has also set up peer support groups in areas such as Dundee, Glasgow and Aberdeen.

*I wish I had known about Children's First earlier. I go to a group and we sit and talk about how he is getting on and other people who are in this situation. You are human, you are not the only one going through this.*

- Denise, 40s, three children, Universal Credit, supporting partner serving first short sentence 12 miles away

The one young person interviewed was also engaging in a peer group of young people her own age set up by Families Outside. She said:

*It makes me feel like I am not alone. I am not the only one with a parent in prison. I have made a lot of friends through that and even have a best friend.*

- Danielle, aged 11, father serving a short sentence 130 miles away, has not seen him in two years

## **11. Ideas for Development and Suggestions for Change**

Families were asked what they felt could be developed or what could be changed that would help to reduce the costs and make their lives easier. The following are the key themes that emerged.

### **11.1 Provide More Accessible Information**

More than half of interviewees (27) said they wanted better, clearer and more accessible information right at the start of their family member's time in prison, that is not generic but

specific to the establishment, to be given to the family ideally at Court so they know what they can do, what they are entitled to and how to access it. A few said that even finding out where the person had been sent had been a struggle. Many said they found information, such as about how to pay into the person's prison account, through their family member in prison, and setting up the online system had been left to them to find out on their own. Some had not heard of the prison Visitors' Centre or had only begun to engage with services many years into the process. Other interviewees were extremely grateful for the support given by the prison Visitors' Centre and Families Outside, and they wanted this connection to happen as early as possible. Family Contact Officers (FCOs) in the prisons were also viewed as a good point of contact for a few interviewees, but some also said they took a long time to respond to calls and that there were not enough FCOs considering the amount of families that would like to use this service.

*I have had to fight for the information. The first time he was in, I phoned two SPS staff, they never ever would help you. You could never get them on the phone. Now there is only one lady and she is there in the office one hour a day a week. I left so many messages. She got back to me a week later.*

- Mary, 50s, retired on private pension, supporting son currently on remand, who has had many remands and one previous sentence, currently 30 miles away

## **11.2 Remove Stigma**

A few families incurred significant financial costs moving home to escape stigma and victimisation. Interviewees felt that one of the most important steps that needed to be made in society is to reduce the stigma families affected by imprisonment feel, and to do this through education. They felt, for example, that this study could be used as a way to help the public understand the challenges faced and lived reality for families. One woman also reported that post from the prison has a stamp on it showing it is from prison, and she wanted this to end.

*I think the Scottish Government have to do work to educate people. The stigma must be addressed by the Scottish Government, at a higher level, because otherwise societal attitudes won't change. If they put it out there and gave people food for thought. No one wants to talk about it. They don't want to put it on the agenda. That has to change. I emailed every MSP during Covid and was ignored. My health took such a dip...They pay lip service but then they don't do anything. We live in the shadows. Scottish Government keep us there, by not speaking about it.*

- Sophie, 60s, on benefits after having to give up work, supporting son serving his first long sentence 17 miles away

## **11.3 Cut Costs**

Many people felt that toiletries and clothes for people in prison should be free and that the cost of basics, phone calls and the canteen should be reduced. Families felt strongly that the

requirement that clothing should be posted in needed to end and that 'Email a prisoner' and sending in electronic payments should be free. Some women said their son or partner was being bullied because of the trainers in particular they wore, which put pressure on families to spend as much as they could at the expense of other things. It was felt that this needed to end by for example by having a full standard uniform provided.

*The price in that prison, £1.80 for a bottle of coke, 90p for a bar of chocolate, £1 a packet of crisps, a bottle of water £1.20. It used to be coffee at 40p. Half the time you put money in the machine and you don't get it or get it back. I think I lost £9. You can't use your bank card anymore. You don't get change either.*

- Jill, 50s, Universal Credit, supporting partner 2 miles away

#### **11.4 Keep people local to where they live**

Most interviewees (25) felt that when a sentence is given, the person should be put in their local prison. Also, it was pointed out that for people in prison who have conditions to fulfil and certain courses they need to do, it should not be the case that they have to move to a prison further away to do this. Families, who had been to the same prison for many years and built connections with staff, did not like when the person moved, as they struggled to make visits and lost the connections they had made. They felt there should be more creative ways in which people are supported to get the help they need and family connections not sacrificed for conditions to be met.

*I would like for my dad not to be in prison. It would be good if he was nearer.*

- Danielle, aged 11, father serving a short sentence 130 miles away, has not seen him in two years

*I am worried about him going to the open estate, why do they have to go there? Can they not get the leave from HMP Kilmarnock? He is five minutes away from his house. He is going to have to go from Dundee to here. I told him I will not be visiting. I went once before and it is too long of a drive. I am getting older.*

- Pauline, 60s, made redundant and supporting son who has spent more than 20 years in prison serving long sentences, currently in local prison 10 miles away

#### **11.5 Provide more financial support for families**

Many praised initiatives such as the Winter Hardship Fund which provided support for families but hoped there could be more regular funding available on an ongoing basis. Ideas raised were that families could get their travel for visits paid for in advance, rather than having to claim back, and also vouchers for the canteen to be available if for example people are on benefits or low wages.

## 11.6 Review Travel and Travel Claiming System

Some participants raised that getting public transport directly to the prison was not possible. For example, for people visiting HMP & YOI Polmont, it was noted that there are rarely taxis at the train station, and visits had to be cut short to make time for the walk to get back in time for the train. It was also raised that sometimes there are cheaper options for travel, so instead of a return ticket it can be cheaper to buy an 'explorer' option. These examples highlight how reliance on public transport, and if people do not have data on their phones for directions, could mean the visits themselves as well as being costly and time consuming were also stressful.

*I would invite the powers that be to take a bus up to Low Moss and to see how accessible it is. Greenock in particular, it involves me taking a train to Glasgow Queen Street and then Glasgow Central to Greenock, so it takes 2 hours each way. Fuck that. Doing a full shift to then do that. You are tired already. Then when you get in there, there is a lot of waiting about. If the screws are late at getting you down to the visit you don't get the time back.*

- Abbey, 40s, universal credit and working part-time, supports ex-partner through phone calls with his daughter, does not visit, he is currently 26 miles away

18 people, and at least four of which based on their interviews would be entitled, had not heard of the support they could get towards the costs of travel. The current system for claiming back travel was felt to be too complex, not accessible for people who struggle with digital literacy, and because it is a system which is about claiming the cost of travel back, effectively it means families struggling are in arrears. It was also raised by interviewees that sometimes they had submitted all their receipts but only had some of the claim refunded, with no reason why this was the case. Interviewees did not seem to be aware that they could appeal these decisions.

## 11.7 Increase Prison Wages

A few interviewees (5) felt that the person in prison should be getting paid more for the work they are doing. If this were the case, the family would have less of a burden to take on. People in prison on remand should also have improved access to work opportunities and therefore prison wages.

## 11.8 Reduce rates of imprisonment

A few interviewees (5) could not understand why the person had been sent to prison. They said their partner or son was in prison for his first offence despite social work having recommended an electronic tag. They highlighted how the impact on the family was great, and in their view, unnecessary. Scotland needs to reduce its rates of imprisonment, indicating the importance of engaging with and educating the judiciary about the impact of prison, as well as wider society. It was also reflected by interviewees that the level of support for people serving short-term sentences and throughcare is minimal, so often the problems that have led to people going to prison in the first place are what they return to when they get out, highlighting the need for wider structural change.

*I think if people are not a threat to society, he did a stupid thing, the social work said he should get a tag for three years, 7-7, he could have been out at his work and come home and be a dad and be a husband. The person inside gets it easy, it is us outside who are doing the time. They have no debts to worry about. They have no rent. They don't need to worry about where to get fed... He is not a threat to society, he should be out.*

- Becky, 40s, four children, on sick benefits off work, supporting partner serving his first short sentence in a prison 23 miles away

## **11.9 Support for Release**

The lack of support for people on release was clear. The Scottish Prison Service used to provide a transitional (throughcare) support service, and it would appear this is very much needed. *Regulation 32 of the Universal Credit Personal Independent Payment, Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment Support Allowance (Claims and Payments) Regulations 2013* allows for people leaving prison to make a claim for Universal Credit in advance of their release. However, at the time of writing, the legislation has not been enabled. Families suggested that providing people with a bus pass at least and linking them in with appropriate support before they leave prison would greatly benefit the individual and, in turn, the family.

## **11.10 Make Visits Family Friendly**

While not directly related to costs, families raised a few other issues worth addressing. Considering all the time and effort families make to get to the visits, many said visits are often not the full length of time, because people are not brought up from their halls on time. They were described as noisy, and many felt disrespected by the prison officers. Family visits were not always at times that suited the schedule or children's routines. Overall, the feeling was that visits could and should be more family-friendly, with young people able to do activities with their parent. A few also said that they only found out about family visits after a few months and that this should be information imparted to families as soon as the person is sent to prison. One woman reported that in HMP Kilmarnock, families can have the option of having a family photo taken at the visit, which they said helped them to 'make memories.'

*I feel like they don't understand what families are having to put up. There is no sympathy at all... They think we are all carrying drugs. I am terrified going in. I am shaking. It is traumatising. I used to break down and greet. I don't want the boys to see that. Christmas eve it was just me and then a young lassie with a baby. The baby was three weeks old. We were in the big playroom and the women officers were nicer. But then there is one that is a cheeky bitch. I think the officers should have respect... The way they speak to them. 'Get into your seat now. You are lucky you even have a visit.'*

- Sharon, 60s, supporting son currently on remand 20 miles away, and has 'lots of remands' before, seeking kinship care of his two son

## 12. Conclusion

This research is the first study since Dickie (2012) focusing on the financial impact of imprisonment on families. Families affected by prison are from the most disadvantaged areas, and those interviewed, apart from two exceptions, were either on benefits or in low-paid work. The background research described poverty as a political choice (Alston, 2018), and after ten years of austerity, cuts to services, a pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis, more families are experiencing destitution than ever. A recent report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Save the Children (2022) describes the ‘toxic brew’ parents are facing, worrying about putting food on the table, paying bills and the impact this has on mental health. Parenting Across Scotland (2022) reported that nearly half of families in Scotland found it hard to manage even before the cost-of-living increases, and organisations have called for benefits to increase in line with inflation and for the Scottish Government’s Child Payment, which has become a crucial lifeline, also to be increased.

Thinking about the type of society we want, the Minimum Income Standard (MIS) highlights that having a life and dignity is about more than just food, shelter and clothes, but also about being able to access opportunities and choices, to feel included and able to participate in society (Davis et al., 2021). This means that families in the UK should all be fed, clothed, warm and able to afford activities such as going to the cinema or going on a holiday. In this study, all participants reported a ‘diminished’ lifestyle as a consequence of supporting someone in prison and the financial pressures that ensue. All participants reported a reduction in social activities and an increase in isolation, with some likening this to ‘permanent lockdown’. Around a fifth of parents reported that they could no longer afford to pay for their children to attend clubs and activities, highlighting the generational disadvantages created by imprisonment.

An estimated 27,000 children in Scotland are affected by a parent’s imprisonment - more than those affected by divorce. This research is a window into the harsh reality that it is women who bear the burden (Jardine, 2019), and families already living in poverty that are affected by imprisonment, who feel stigmatised, ‘in the shadows’, and deal with this by suffering silently. These women are the main support for partners and sons, and the sense of obligation was described as a ‘momentous task.’ Many have complex lives, with issues reported around mental and physical health, disabilities, trauma, abuse, substance misuse and caring responsibilities. Thirty of these women had children, and three grandmothers had become kinship carers because of the imprisonment of their sons or daughters.

Two groups were identified in this study. The first group had been ‘stable’, as their partner or son contributed around £890 a month to the household before going to prison, and as a result of this loss, experienced on average a reduction of half of their income. People in the second group had always struggled, and the costs of prison meant they were barely on the edge of coping at all. Only five earned the Minimum Income Standard and had around £1200 to spend a month after paying rent. For the other 46, after paying rent and after tax, people were living on around £500 a month.

Remand was shown to be an especially difficult and costly time because of the uncertainty and sense of duty felt to visit the person in prison as much as possible, and at least once a

week, with several making the journey six times a week. Some were also spending money to keep two households running and paying bills. On average, including the visit, it took people 6 hours each time, with half travelling to a prison that was not local to them. Most were reliant on the cheapest and least efficient form of public transport, the bus. The cost of travel was £70 a month, and drinks and snacks at the visit costing £60; other costs included clothes (£55) and payment into the personal prison account (£100), so the total cost of remand on average was around £300 a month - more than half of peoples' income.

It was notable that for those who had supported someone over a longer period into a sentence, the frequency of visiting decreased, and generally people visited at least twice a month, and a few had to stay overnight, so great were the distances travelled. The longest distance reported was 560 miles. On average it took people 7 hours per visit and costed £77 a month, £36 was spent at the café, £88 put into the personal account and 'other' costs mounted to £75. Across the group, it cost £180 a month to support someone in prison, so around a third of their income.

As highlighted in other research, the pandemic meant a loss of contact with families, which was a source of stress (Minson, 2021; Armstrong et al., 2020). A couple of interviewees spent more over this time because the person had been transferred further away, and another felt pressure to add more money to the person's account. The rest of the group was split between those who said the costs stayed the same, as the visits were not greatly affected, and those who said the costs dropped because they could not visit. Many highlighted the cost of posting in clothes as being significant. Only a fifth (10) were able to set up video calls, with the lack of appropriate technology and being unable to afford Government identification as the main barriers. Families really welcomed the 310 free minutes allocated each month to their family member's prison mobile phones and wanted this to continue.

Interviewees felt that when the person was released, particularly those on short sentences, meant they were left on their own and, as described by Liebling et al. (2019), there was a 'tragic dropping off' of support from services. This study provides a unique window into the costs to families, which averaged around £300 per month, with the first two months when the person was out the most costly, as they did not have their benefits claim set up yet and were effectively starting over again. Sons and daughters in prison had often had their flat cleared by the Council and their property dumped, so replacing this all fell to mothers, who were already struggling. Families also wanted this to be a special time, so they felt pressure to spend more on activities they couldn't afford. Supporting people to appointments, often part of their conditions for their release, again fell on families.

To say people 'coped' with costs is to underplay the reality of the hardships. Essentially, mothers skipped meals to make sure their children were eating, they did not heat their homes or heated only one room, stopped buying clothes and shoes, and did not go out. Only a few reported getting into debt and instead relied on family members, who were also struggling, for discreet support. Families were so frightened of being in debt in some cases, they had even opted to have an electric meter installed, even though it was the most expensive option for heating.

The impact on individuals of these financial costs and losses was that they felt their life was on hold, diminished and had a deep adverse effect on their mental and physical health. These women described carrying this burden silently, pretending their weight loss was the result of a diet, a choice, rather than because they could not afford to eat; they told friends they were too busy to go out, rather than that they couldn't afford it or were too ashamed to meet with others. Connections and support can help mediate against the effects of poverty (Treanor, 2020), but many had lost relationships, felt isolated and to those closest, they did not openly reveal the extent of their problems. A few said they had begun to lose hope and were seeking support for their mental health, and a couple had come to the conclusion that it was time they stopped contact with the person in prison.

Several interviewees felt they had no support in their lives. However, for most, other family members, organisations like Families Outside, prison Visitors' Centres and local services they engaged with, emerged as important help, often providing much needed practical, emotional and financial support. Some also said that their own families were struggling too and they did not want this to be another burden on them. Although peer support was only mentioned by a few interviewees, it was clear that having the opportunity to speak openly with other families going through similar situations was really valued.

In terms of what families wanted to see for the future, the most common answer was better and clearer information, ideally as soon as the person is at court, so families know what they can do, what they are entitled to and how to access it. They wanted the stigma families feel to end through public education. They wanted the costs to families to be cut, with prisoners' toiletries, clothes, shoes, 'Email a prisoner' and payment into accounts to be free, for the canteen to be cheaper and people placed in the prison closest to where they live. Ideally, it was felt that society should be keeping the person out of prison by using community punishment or electronic tag. Interviewees wanted financial support to be available throughout the year, not just at Christmas, for families struggling, and the travel system and scheme for claiming to be reviewed and improved. A few suggested that people in prison should be paid a better wage. Families also wanted visits to be more family-friendly. Finally, support for people on release from prison appears to be little to none, which needs to change.

The vocabulary used around families in poverty, such as facing a 'toxic brew' of issues, or 'at the sharp end', is actually not extreme enough for families in poverty who are also having to take on the loss and costs of prison, whereby this 'brew' is not just 'toxic' but near fatal; they are being squeezed to the point of being crushed. This research highlights the role of prison in creating, sustaining and deepening poverty amongst children and families (Barkas et al., 2020; Jardine, 2019). Women described how they had given up hope and could not cope, and their sense of obligation to others and support from organisations appeared to be the only things keeping them together. They showed tremendous resilience but also fragility and felt punished. They have carried this burden and these costs silently for too long; it is time their voices are heard.

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