Parental Incarceration and the Ties that Bind: Children of Offenders as Collateral Damage

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Abstract

The children of offenders have often been referred to as the “hidden victims of crime,” with parental incarceration shown to have a negative and profound impact on the children. However, despite pressing concerns regarding the welfare of these children, significant gaps exist in our understanding of their well-being, of the way in which certain factors impact their well-being, and of the relationship between the condition of the children’s well-being and their deviant and criminal behaviour. In addition, there is a significant paucity of research addressing the topic of children of incarcerated parents from a Canadian perspective. Therefore, the goal of this study is to address these limitations in the literature and to provide greater insight into the experiences of the children of offenders in Canada. The data for this study is drawn from in-person semi-structured interviews conducted with three groupings of individuals, including: practitioners who had experience with children of incarcerated parents in a professional capacity; the legal guardians of children with an incarcerated parent; and the children of an incarcerated parent. The study includes a sample size of 47 participants in Kingston, Ontario. Based on an index comprised of four key indicators of well-being (emotional, behavioural, academic, and social), analyses of the data indicated that the majority of the children were doing poorly across multiple dimensions. It was further evident that there were some prominent factors that impacted upon the well-being of the children of incarcerated parents, including the children’s quality of care, the stigma surrounding parental incarceration, and available social support networks. Lastly, in investigating the relationship between the condition of the children’s overall well-being and their participation in deviant and criminal behaviour, it is determined that, while overall well-being may provide a partial predictor for these negative outcomes, it is anger and aggression specifically that may in fact be a necessary precondition for the children exhibiting these negative outcomes. My study provides researchers and policymakers with a more comprehensive understanding of children of incarcerated parents than is presently available and will therefore provide valuable insights into the lives and challenges of these children.
Abrégé

On réfère aux enfants de parents criminels comme étant les « victimes cachées du crime » puisque l'incarcération de leurs parents a un impact négatif profond sur eux. Pourtant, malgré les inquiétudes pressantes concernant la qualité de vie de ces enfants, il existe des lacunes sérieuses entre notre compréhension de leur bien-être, la façon dans laquelle certains facteurs peuvent affecter leur bien-être et la relation entre la condition de vie des enfants et leurs comportements déviants et criminels. De plus, il y a un grand manque de recherches axées sur les enfants de parents incarcérés qui offrent une perspective Canadienne. C'est la raison pour laquelle cette étude a comme but d'adressé les lacunes dans la littérature actuelle en permettant un aperçu plus complet des expériences de vie des enfants de parents criminels au Canada. Les données pour cette étude proviennent d'entrevues en personne semi-structuré avec trois groupes d'individus, incluant : des professionnels qui avaient de l'expérience avec des enfants de parents incarcérés ; les tuteurs légaux d'enfants dont un parent est incarcéré ; et les enfants de parents incarcérés. L'étude comprend un échantillon de 47 participants de Kingston, Ontario. Quatre indicateurs ont été utilisés pour évaluer le bien-être (émotionnel, comportemental, académique, et social) et l'analyse des données indique que la majorité des enfants avaient des difficultés à plus qu'un niveau. Il était aussi évident que certains facteurs avaient un impacte plus important sur le bien-être des enfants de parents incarcérés, incluant : la qualité des soins offerts aux enfants, le stigma qui existe envers l'incarcération parental, ainsi que le réseaux de soutien social disponibles. Finalement, en investiguant les relations entre le bien-être des enfants et leur participation dans des comportements déviants and criminels, une détermination peut être faite que malgré les preuves que le bien-être des enfants peut servir pour prédire des comportements négatifs, c'est la colère et l'agressivité de façon plus spécifique qui est nécessaire pour prédire quels enfants seront victimes de conséquences négatives. Mon étude offre aux chercheurs et aux analystes politiques une image plus complète et compréhensive des enfants de parents incarcérés, de leur vie et des obstacles qui les affrontent.
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Chapter One: Introduction

The children of offenders have often been referred to as the “hidden victims of crime,” with the negative impact of parental incarceration on the children found to be profound and pervasive (Carlson & Cervera, 1991; Bloom and Steinhart, 1993). Indeed, the children are contended to be the ones who suffer the greatest consequence when their parents are imprisoned. They have committed no crime and yet they are forced to pay a steep penalty as, all too often, they are required to forfeit much of what is important to them and to their well-being: their homes, their safety, their public status and private self-image, stability, and feelings of comfort and security (Bernstein, 2005; Travis and Waul, 2003).

In examining the effects of parental incarceration on children, the extant literature suggests that these children are fearful about the status of their parent in the criminal justice system, insecure about the future, and often suffer intense feelings of instability (Enos, 2001; Bloom and Steinhart, 1993; Beckerman, 1998). Existing scholarship also maintains that these children may suffer heightened emotions of fear, anxiety, anger, guilt, abandonment, loneliness, despair, and detachment. They may withdraw emotionally from the outside world, exhibit low self-esteem, and experience strong feelings of insecurity (Shaw, 1992; Arditti et al., 2003; Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Lowenstein, 1986; Bloom and Steinhart, 1993). Further, children may begin to act out and engage in disruptive behaviour, experience post-traumatic stress effects, and may display a decline in academic performance (Kampfner, 1995; Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981; Stanton, 1980). These children may also be at an increased risk of intergenerational patterns of offending behaviour, as a strong association between parental imprisonment and the deviant and criminal behaviour of the child has consistently been reported (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Johnston, 1995).

The dissolution of families and the damage caused to the children, along with the subsequent perpetuation of the cycle of crime leading to intergenerational
incarceration, are quite possibly the most pervasive and damaging impact of the current penal structure (Bernstein, 2005; Travis and Waul, 2003). From this, it is clear why the harm that is experienced by children as a result of parental incarceration is commonly referred to as one of the collateral consequences of the current policy of mass incarceration (Bernstein, 2005).

Due to a lack of systematic data collected in Canada, it is difficult to determine exactly how many children have an incarcerated parent or how many children have been affected by the incarceration of a parent in Canada. However, it is a fundamental question and one that may be possible to approximate. By employing the formula postulated by Johnston (1995), Bayes (2007) argued that it is possible to estimate the number of children with an incarcerated parent in Canada. According to his calculations, Bayes places the figure at 173,605 Canadian children. Other estimates place the number of children affected by parental incarceration much higher; as many as 357,604 Canadian children, or 4.6% of the total Canadian population who are 19 years of age or younger, may be impacted by the imprisonment of a parent (Withers and Folsom, 2007).

Despite pressing concerns regarding the children of incarcerated parents, significant gaps exist in our understanding of their well-being, of the way in which certain factors or preconditions impact their well-being, and of the relationship between the condition of children’s well-being and their deviant and criminal behaviour. In addition, relative to the United States and Britain, there is a significant paucity of research addressing the topic of children of incarcerated parents from a Canadian perspective. The goal of this exploratory qualitative study is to address these limitations in the literature and to provide greater insight into the experiences of the children of offenders in Canada.

Formula is based on the incidence of inmates having children and their birth rates in Canada. Bayes (2007) also corrected the formula by Johnston (1995) to provide for the gender differential for those imprisoned in Canadian institutions.
Research Objectives

There are three primary research objectives in this study. First, I will examine the well-being of the children and assess how they are faring as children of offenders. As stated above, the literature indicates that children are negatively impacted by the incarceration of their parent and suffer greatly from the consequences of parental imprisonment (Shaw, 1992; Arditti et al., 2003; Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Lowenstein, 1986; Bloom and Steinhart, 1993; Kampfner, 1995; Stanton, 1980). The issue of the children’s welfare is therefore of great concern, with much of the literature focused on the impact of parental incarceration on the well-being of the children. As such, my initial goal in the study is to first establish the state of the children’s well-being in order to determine whether findings and claims in the extant research are consistent with my observations of the children in my study.

Prior to my investigation into the well-being of the children in my study, however, I required an appropriate mechanism for assessing child well-being. I subsequently determined that, while much of the literature acknowledges the importance of well-being in assessing and understanding the conditions of these children, these assessments have generally been limited in their depth and scope and in terms of providing a comprehensive measurement of overall well-being. On the whole, few researchers have looked at the overall well-being of children of incarcerated parents in a single study; rather, researchers have tended to examine one or several aspects of well-being in each study. As such, a need for a systematic and clearly defined assessment of the overall well-being of children of incarcerated parents was identified. In order to address this gap in the literature, I developed a well-being index that enabled me to evaluate the well-being of the children across multiple dimensions, thereby providing me with a systematic measurement tool that serves as a baseline for assessing the overall well-being of the children.
The well-being index developed for this study was based on my review of the prominent indicators measuring child well-being in the literature, from which it was evident that there are standard and consistent measurements employed in assessing well-being among children. These established measurements are reflected in my well-being index, which is comprised of four indicators of well-being, including: 1) emotional; 2) behavioural; 3) academic; and 4) social (see Figure 1). This well-being index will be employed for much of the analyses in the study.

![Figure 1: Index of Child Well-Being](image)

Although all of these indicators are clearly evident in the literature, for the most part previous studies have not assessed the four key dimensions simultaneously. One of the major goals of my exploratory study is to investigate and assess the overall well-being of children of offenders using the four key dimensions of child well-being. My research will thus expand on the existing literature and provide a deeper understanding of how children of offenders are faring on the whole.

Obtaining a better understanding of the overall well-being of children was crucial to understanding the way in which certain factors or preconditions shape their well-being, which is the next stage of my study. This well-being index thus enabled me to establish a baseline for assessing the extent to which certain factors impact upon the children’s well-being and was a necessary development prior to my examination of the causal factors of interest in the study.
The second research objective in this study, therefore, was a deeper look into key potential factors that impact upon the children’s well-being. These factors were emergent in both the literature and in the data collected in my study. It was evident that there are some prominent factors that are understood to have an impact upon the well-being of the children of incarcerated parents. In particular, there are three specific causal mechanisms that are relevant to the purposes of this study: 1) quality of care; 2) stigma; and 3) social support (see Figure 2). Each of these individual factors has been identified in the literature as areas of significant concern for children of incarcerated parents (Travis and Waul, 2003; Dannerbeck, 2005; Myers et al. 1999; Dallaire, 2007b; Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Arditti et al. 2003; Mazza, 2002; Johnston, 1995; Parke and Clarke-Stewart, 2003; Murray, 2007). Using my well-being index, I will examine each of these three principal factors in order to develop a better understanding of the ways in which they impact the overall well-being of the children of incarcerated parents.

![Figure 2: Child Well-Being and Principal Factors](image)

In general, the literature has, for the most part, inferred or assumed the impact of these factors and has not systematically assessed their effects on the overall well-being of children of incarcerated parents. My research will address this gap in the
research, thereby enabling me to determine whether there are certain factors and preconditions that place the children at greater risk for poor overall well-being.

My third research objective is to explore the deviant and criminal behaviour of the children in this study. There is much concern in the literature regarding the likelihood of children of offenders manifesting these negative outcomes, as research has consistently observed a strong correlation between parental imprisonment and the future deviant and criminal behaviour of children (Bloom and Steinhart, 1993; Johnston, 1995; Kampfner, 1995; Murray, 2007; Murray and Farrington, 2005). Given that children of incarcerated parents are considered to be at a high risk for patterns of intergenerational deviance and criminal behaviour, it is important that this outcome be further investigated. As such, I begin my analysis by assessing the extent to which the children in my study engage in deviant and criminal behaviour. Once the nature and extent of the children’s participation in these behaviours is established, I will then broaden my investigation by examining the relationship between these maladaptive behaviours and the overall well-being of the children. Indeed, I maintain that not only is the children’s poor overall well-being important in and of itself – as it reflects the diminished and negative state of the children across multiple dimensions – it may also be the underlying condition that contributes to an increased likelihood that the children will engage in deviant and criminal activity.  

My final objective in this study is, therefore, to investigate the relationship between the condition of the children’s overall well-being and their participation in deviant and criminal behaviour and assess whether poor overall well-being indeed contributes to the exhibition of these negative outcomes.

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2 It should be noted that, while many deviant and criminal behaviour indicators could readily be incorporated into the behavioural dimension of well-being, for the purposes of my analyses I separated it out in order to determine what factors might impact on such outcomes. As such, care was taken not to include any instances of deviant and/or criminal activity in my assessment of the children’s well-being.
In summary, my study will endeavour to provide empirical answers to several important research questions:

1. What is the state of the well-being for children of incarcerated parents?
2. Are there certain factors or preconditions that place children at greater risk for poor overall well-being?
3. Do the children of incarcerated parents exhibit a pattern of intergenerational deviance and criminal behaviour? If so, are these negative outcomes connected to the condition of their well-being?

**Organization of Chapters**

In Chapter Two, I provide the background and context for each of the three primary research objectives in my study through a review of the literature. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the contributions that prior research has made regarding the well-being of children and will illustrate how these studies helped to guide the development of my index of child well-being. Following this discussion, I will then examine each of the four dimensions of well-being individually and provide an overview of the key findings in the literature with respect to each dimension. Moving to the second objective, I will provide an overview of the research pertaining to the three causal factors of interest and detail the key findings in the literature with respect to each individual factor. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the research regarding the third objective, namely the intergenerational criminal and deviant behaviour of children of offenders.

Chapter Three follows with a discussion of the research methodology that I employ in my study and summarizes my approach to data collection and qualitative analysis. Data for the study is based on comprehensive in-depth interviews conducted with three groups of individuals: 1) the practitioners in the community who work with these children; 2) the legal guardians of the children;
3) and the children themselves. The study was based on a total sample size of 47 participants in the Kingston, Ontario area, consisting of 17 interviews with practitioners, 17 interviews with legal guardians, and 13 interviews with the children of incarcerated parents. My methodological approach enabled me to obtain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the experiences and conditions of children of incarcerated parents. It should be noted, however, that there were many challenges throughout the study that hindered my ability to locate and recruit participants. Due to heightened stigma surrounding an incarceration event, these families were extremely difficult to locate in the community as they generally do not wish to be identified. Their effort to obtain complete invisibility as families of offenders made accessing subjects very difficult and subsequently contributed to a smaller sample size than was originally expected. Further, due to the often transient nature of these families, it was also quite difficult to establish and maintain contact for a period long enough to set up and conduct in-person interviews. The methodological discussion in this chapter sets the stage for the analytical chapters that follow.

The analysis and findings of the study are presented in Chapters Four through Nine. In my first analysis chapter, Chapter Four, I detail the development of my well-being index and present the results of my analysis of child well-being. As will be discussed in greater depth in this chapter, I found that the vast majority of the children in the study were found to score poorly on each of the four indicators, with most found to display an overall poor well-being. Less than 20 percent were found to be doing well overall. These results provide a base upon which I build my subsequent analyses and pave the way for the succeeding analysis chapters.

Chapter Five presents a more in-depth and detailed analysis of one component of the behavioural dimension of my well-being index, namely the anger and aggression of the children in the study. Anger and aggression, an extension of the behavioural dimension, is understood to be a further indicator of the children’s well-being. It has been parsed out from the behavioural indicator and explored in
greater depth for many reasons; first, research has shown that children of incarcerated parents are frequently found to exhibit anger and aggression and, as such, it is an area of much concern. Further, given that its presence in children has been determined to be a strong and consistent predictor of their deviant and criminal behaviour, and the serious concern that children of incarcerated parents may be at an increased risk of intergenerational deviance and criminal behaviour, it is clear that this extension of the behavioural dimension warrants special attention. Hence, in my analysis, anger and aggression are conceptualized as both a measurement of well-being and as a precursor to deviance and criminal behaviour.

In this chapter I provide a comprehensive description of four ways in which the children manifest anger, thus establishing the context regarding the extent of their anger and the manner in which it is displayed. I thereby present measures of anger that are more precise and refined that what has previously been found in the literature. Further, I also examine key factors that may contribute to increasing the likelihood that children of offenders may exhibit anger and aggression, including age, gender, parental instability and parental drug use. Overall, it was observed that the vast majority of the children in the study manifested at least one form of anger, with several also displaying multiple types of anger. In looking deeper, I found that male children between the ages of 13 to 17 years with high levels of parental instability and parental drug use were at significantly greater risk of exhibiting anger and aggression.

There are three principal factors of interest that were emergent in the literature review and in the data collected for my study which are understood to impact upon the well-being of the children of incarcerated parents. The analysis of each of these three individual factors will be presented in Chapter Six – Quality of Care, Chapter Seven – Stigma of Parental Incarceration, and Chapter Eight – Sources of Support.
In Chapter Six, I present my analysis of the first principal factor to be explored in my study, namely the quality of care that the children are receiving. The objective of this chapter was to assess the children’s quality of care and to determine whether it has any relationship to their overall well-being. This analysis was based on three indicators of quality of care: 1) the well-being of the legal guardian; 2) the relationship between the child and the legal guardian; and 3) the level of parental and household instability experienced by the child.

In terms of the well-being of the legal guardian in relation to the overall well-being of the child, I found that the majority of the children in the study were being cared for by legal guardians with a poor well-being; most of these children were also found to have a poor well-being. There were no children being cared for by a legal guardian with poor well-being who were doing well. In contrast, the majority of children being cared for by legal guardians with a more positive well-being were also found to have an improved overall well-being. Thus, it would appear that the well-being of the legal guardian is associated with the subsequent well-being of the child, with the relationship evident for both positive and negative associations. In terms of the overall relationship between the legal guardian and the children, it was found that the majority of the children had relationships with their legal guardian that were determined to be poor; almost all of whom had a negative overall well-being. There were no children in the study with a poor relationship with the legal guardian who was doing well. In contrast, all of the children with a positive well-being had a good relationship with their legal guardians. Third, in examining family and household stability, it was found that children with low instability were doing well overall whereas children with high instability were doing poorly overall. This was found to be true for all measures of instability.

Chapter Seven presents the analysis of the second factor that will be explored, which is the stigma surrounding parental incarceration. Some interesting findings emerged in the analysis. First, it was found that, while the vast majority of the
legal guardians believed that the family was a stigmatized group due to the incarceration of a parent and almost all were fearful of stigma, only a small proportion were identified as having a high fear of stigma. However, in contrast, the majority of the children were found to express a high fear of stigma, indicating that stigma was indeed a major concern for the children, independent of their legal guardians. Additionally, another unexpected finding also emerged in the analysis in terms of the overall well-being of the children in relation to their fear of stigma. More specifically, it was found that more than half of the children with a high fear of stigma were found to be doing well while all of the children with a low fear of stigma were found to be doing poorly overall. It was thus hypothesized that the children with a low fear of stigma may not have been given suitable guidance and support in this area with respect to understanding and managing stigma, which may have subsequently contributed to their reduced well-being. On the other hand, children with stronger reinforcement against stigma may have had more protection and guidance which then contributed to a positive overall well-being.

Interestingly, the presence of stigma was not just found to be an external force imposed upon the children; rather, there was evidence that the children in the study were subjected to stigmatization which emerged from within the family. Indeed, it was observed that some children experienced stigmatization from their legal guardians as they were negatively perceived as being similar to or “like” their incarcerated parent; almost all of the children who were identified as being “like” their incarcerated parent had a poor overall well-being. Lastly, consistent with the research, concealment of the stigma was the primary approach employed by participants in the study. There was evidence that the children modeled the approach of their legal guardians; however, it was also found that even when the legal guardians were willing to share the information about the incarcerated parent with others, some children chose to continue to keep it secret. This suggests that the children were far more conscious of the stigma and were more likely to opt to keep the incarceration of their parent a secret. This finding is in stark contrast to
the research that has identified the fear of stigma to be greater among the caregivers than amongst the children.

Chapter Eight presents the analysis of the third factor included in my study, which are the sources of support available to the children. There were two types of support identified, including: 1) informal; and 2) formal sources of support. My findings suggest that, in terms of the relationship between formal support and overall well-being of the children, it would appear that formal support did not have a particularly strong impact upon the well-being of the children. On the other hand, it was observed that informal support appeared to be strongly related to the overall well-being of the children as children who had independent informal support appeared to be much better off according to the well-being index. Overall, although having neither formal nor informal support was found to have a negative impact on the overall well-being of the children, it would appear that informal support has a greater impact on the overall well-being of the children than formal support.

In Chapter Nine I present my analysis of the deviant and criminal behaviour of the children in my study. I found that the children who engaged in deviant behaviour were at high risk to also engage in criminal behaviour; therefore, it is quite likely that the same underlying condition that renders the children vulnerable to one negative outcome also places them at risk for exhibiting the other negative outcome. In examining the relationship between the children’s overall well-being with their participation in deviant and criminal behaviour, it was found that, while poor overall well-being may increase the likelihood that the child may engage in both deviant and criminal behaviour, it would appear that poor overall well-being in and of itself does not fully explain or predict the children’s participation in these behaviours. Further analysis was therefore required to parse out whether anger and aggression –– an extension of the behavioural dimension of the well-being – is a stronger predictor or precursor in determining the risk of the children manifesting deviant and criminal behaviour, as suggested by the literature. I found
that anger and aggression were in fact present for all cases of deviant and criminal behaviour. Further, I found that no child with a poor overall well-being was found to commit deviant or criminal acts in the absence of anger and aggression. In other words, children with a poor overall well-being but who did not manifest anger did not engage in deviant or criminal behaviour while, in contrast, children with a poor well-being who did manifest anger and aggression did engage in deviance and criminal behaviour. This finding suggests that while overall well-being may provide a partial predictor, it is anger and aggression specifically that may in fact be a necessary precondition for the participation in deviant and criminal behaviour.

In Chapter Ten, I begin by revisiting my research questions and summarizing my key findings, noting the contributions that my study makes to the existing literature. I then discuss the potential limitations of my research and explore directions for future research that can build upon my findings, with a particular emphasis on the role of the culture of the family, followed with a discussion of some implications of my study and closing with some concluding thoughts.

**Research Contributions**

My study will make several important contributions to the existing research on children of incarcerated parents. First, very few studies have gathered data about the children from the children directly; rather, there has been an almost exclusive reliance on adult reporting on the children as a method of collecting data for assessing outcomes (Gabel and Johnston, 1995; Poehlmann, 2005a; Johnston, 1995; Seymour, 1998; Hanlon et al. 2005). This lack of assessment regarding the effects of a parent’s incarceration on the development and well-being of the children based on data collected from the children themselves represents a significant deficiency in the literature (Gabel, 1992b; Mackintosh et al. 2006). It has therefore been contended that a methodological improvement in the research on children of offenders would be to obtain additional perspectives about the
child, and to include the children as one of the informants on their own well-being (Dallaire, 2007b; Wilbur et al. 2007). As such, I have addressed this gap in the research by including direct in-person interviews with the children in my data collection process. Further, the employment of a multi-informant approach in my study also allowed me the opportunity to assess whether there were any differences in the data gathered between the children and their legal guardians, thereby enabling me to further verify the accuracy of the information that was presented in the interviews by both groups and, hence, greatly increase the validity of the data.

In addition, although the research has determined that parental incarceration has a negative impact upon the children, much of the literature on children of offenders is unclear with respect to how well-being is defined or includes only one or several indicators of well-being in a single study. As such, I developed a well-being index in order to provide a systematic approach to assessing how the children are faring across a number of dimensions, all of which tap into their overall welfare and serves as a baseline. Such an assessment has not been conducted in the existing literature in this manner. Further, as the literature has generally tended to infer or assume the impact of the three causal factors of interest in the study on the well-being of the children, my well-being index also enabled me to more effectively assess the impact that these principal factors of interest may have on the children’s overall well-being more comprehensively and provided a more systematic analysis than is presently available. Also, my analysis into the deviant and criminal behaviour of the children provides important support and insight to the existing literature.

Finally, there has been minimal research conducted that focuses specifically on children of offenders in Canada. Rather, most of what is known about the children of incarcerated parents is based on research that has been conducted in the United States and in Britain. Therefore, another goal of this research is to conduct a preliminary assessment of the well-being of children of incarcerated
parents in Canada. By conducting an exploratory analysis that is focused on the children, greater insight into the impact of the Canadian justice system on children may be achieved. Overall, valuable insights will be gained from this research that will be of great benefit not only to the existing literature but also to policymakers.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This exploratory qualitative study has three key research objectives – 1) to assess the state of the children’s well-being through a well-being index that I have developed, with a particular focus on anger and aggression; 2) to determine whether there are certain factors and preconditions that place the children at greater risk for poor overall well-being, as per the well-being index; and 3) to investigate whether the children engage in deviant and/or criminal behaviour, as indicated by the literature, and to assess whether their participation in this maladaptive behaviour is connected to the condition of their well-being. This chapter will provide the background and context for each of these three primary objectives in my study.

As noted in the introduction, given that prior research has established that parental incarceration has a negative and pervasive impact on the children, my initial objective will be to measure the overall well-being of the children in the study and to assess how they are faring as children of offenders. As child well-being is the initial outcome variable in this study, it was therefore important to clearly develop and define “well-being” in order to appropriately test the effects of parental incarceration on the children. As such, at the outset of the study, it was necessary to first investigate how the literature has conceptualized child well-being and to examine prior approaches employed in research before determining the best approach to assessing well-being amongst the children in my study. As I stated earlier, I identified four important dimensions of well-being in the literature – 1) emotional; 2) behavioural; 3) academic; and 4) social. My well-being index is thereby comprised of these four indicators and will be used as a guide in my subsequent examination of both the single dimensions of well-being and the overall well-being of the children.

This chapter will therefore begin with a discussion of the various approaches used in the literature in measuring child well-being and will demonstrate the
contributions of key studies by detailing how they helped to guide the
development of my well-being index. Following this discussion, I will then
examine each of the four dimensions individually and provide an overview of the
key findings in the literature with respect to each dimension. In addition, captured
under the behavioural indicator of my well-being index is the anger and
aggression of the children which, as an extension of the behavioural dimension, is
understood to be a further indicator of the children’s well-being. Therefore, it is in
this section that I will also discuss the role of anger and aggression amongst
children of offenders and review the hypothesized link in the literature between
anger and aggression and deviance and criminal behaviour.

The second goal of my study is to assess the impact that principal factors have on
the well-being of the children, thereby enabling me to determine whether there are
certain factors and preconditions that place the children at greater risk for poor
overall well-being. As previously noted, it was evident that there are some
prominent factors that are understood to have an impact upon the well-being of
the children of incarcerated parents. Three specific causal factors of interest for
this study were therefore identified – 1) quality of care; 2) stigma; and 3) social
support. Using my well-being index, I will be examining these three principal
factors in order to develop a better understanding as to how they may impact upon
the overall well-being of the children of incarcerated parents and to determine
whether these factors place the children at greater risk for poor overall well-being.
Following the discussion of the well-being of children of incarcerated parents, this
chapter will then provide an overview of each of the three principle factors of
interest and will detail the key findings in the research for each individual factor.

My third goal is to broaden my examination by investigating whether the children
in my study are vulnerable to experiencing further negative outcomes as identified
in the literature. More specifically, children of incarcerated parents are believed to
be at risk for engaging in deviant and criminal behaviour. These outcomes have
been well documented in the literature and, as such, I will be also examining
whether these findings are consistent with the children in my study. Therefore, this chapter will conclude with an overview of the key findings regarding the relationship between parental criminality and the children’s own deviance and criminality.

The Well-Being of Children of Incarcerated Parents

As my initial objective is to measure the well-being of the children and assess how they are faring as children of offenders, it is important to first examine how the literature has conceptualized child well-being and the approaches that have been employed by previous researchers. As such, the following discussion will now detail the contributions that prior research has made and will illustrate how these studies helped to guide the development of my index of child well-being.³

In their study examining the relationship between the children of incarcerated mothers and their caregivers, Mackintosh et al. (2006) included a sample of 69 children between the ages of 6 and 12 who attended residential summer camps specifically geared toward children of incarcerated mothers and 25 of their caregivers. The interviews were comprised of several scales geared toward the measurement of the children’s well-being, including: 1) the Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory, which consists of a list of 36 externalizing behaviours that parents typically view as difficult; 2) Child Version of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire, which is designed to ascertain the level of acceptance or rejection that the children experience from their primary caregivers; 3) Youth Self-Report, which measures internalizing and externalizing behaviour in children; and 4) Stress Index, which is a 16-item inventory that measures the number of children’s stressful life events in the past year. Their study provided some indication as to how the children of incarcerated mothers were faring;

³ In Chapter Three (Methodology), I will discuss the specific series of questions posed to the legal guardians and the children that enabled me to gather the appropriate data for analyzing the well-being of the children, as per the well-being index. Chapter Four (Well-being Index) will detail the actual development of the index and present the analysis of the data.
however, their approach was directed more toward relating the child outcomes to the nature of the relationship between the children and their caregivers, rather than investigating the well-being of the children on its own.

The goal of the longitudinal study by Wilbur et al. (2007) was to evaluate whether children of incarcerated fathers were more likely to manifest behavioural symptoms than their equally disadvantaged peers who did not have an incarcerated father. They utilized multiple informants in determining their outcomes of interest in the children, including the children themselves, their primary adult caregivers, and their teachers. The Children’s Depressive Inventory is comprised of subscales consisting of a negative mood score, interpersonal problems score, ineffectiveness score, anhedonia score, and negative esteem score and assesses depressive symptoms in the children and was administered to the children at 9.5 and 11 years. At each age between 6 and 11 years, the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL) was administered to the caregivers in interview format. The CBCL is a 118-item questionnaire asking the participant to rate a child’s behaviour problems and competencies. Lastly, the researchers employed the use of the Teacher Report Form, administered to the children’s teachers, which generates an internalizing and externalizing score and provides an indication as to the children’s behavioural and emotional problems (Wilbur et al. 2007). While the study was concerned with the well-being of the children, their analyses focused solely on examining only the emotional and behavioural problems of the children. It did not provide a holistic account of the children’s well-being across multiple dimensions and offered a more partial perspective on the impact of parental incarceration on the children.

Fritsch and Burkhead (1981) investigated the behavioural reactions of the children to parental incarceration based on the response of 91 male and female inmates reporting on their children. Their data collection was derived from asking open-ended questions that explored whether the children were manifesting any behavioural problems in relation to the incarceration of their parent. The
researchers subsequently grouped the responses into two categories, with one consisting of behaviour reflective of acting-out (including hostile behaviour, use of drugs and alcohol, discipline problems, aggressiveness, and involvement of delinquent activities, etc.) and of behaviour reflective of acting-in (including withdrawal, unwillingness to engage in play, crying a lot, nightmares, etc.). While their study provides a comprehensive assessment as to the behavioural problems of the children, their focus on this single dimension does not provide any insight into other important indicators of the children’s overall well-being. As such, it provides an incomplete picture of the possible outcomes related to parental incarceration.

Overall, it was evident that much of the research has generally only concentrated on isolated indicators of the children’s well-being, neglecting other key dimensions that would provide insight into how the children are faring as a whole. However, there was one study by Lowenstein (1986) that took a more holistic approach to measuring the children’s well-being. Based on data collected from structured personal interviews with 118 Jewish prisoners’ wives whose husbands were incarcerated, Lowenstein (1986) observed the children’s predicaments in three areas – interactional, emotional, and health and behavioural. The “interactional problems” factor was comprised of items that described the difficulties of children in their interpersonal relations at home, school, and with their peers. Examples include inability to relate to peers and other adults and constant confrontations with mother or siblings. The ‘emotional and health’ problems consisted of behavioural items that revealed malfunctioning in the physical and mental health area. Examples include recurring nightmares, sudden fear of the dark and bedwetting. The third factor, “behavioural problems” consisted of a variety of behaviours that are indicative of hostility and of ‘acting out’. Examples include truancy, aggressive behaviour, and association with delinquent peers (Lowenstein, 1986). It was evident that the three indicators of well-being employed by Lowenstein (1986) were consistent with the more general assessments that have been made in the literature regarding the well-being of
children of incarcerated parents. Indeed, the emotional and behavioural challenges of the children have been a principal focus among researchers who have primarily looked at the impact that parental incarceration has on the children specifically in terms of these two dimensions. For example, while multiple authors (Hagen and Myers, 2003; Wilbur et al. 2007; Huebner and Gustafson, 2007; Seymour, 1998; Boswell and Wedge, 2002; Dalley, 2002; Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Sack, 1977; Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza; 2001; Banauch, 1985; Snyder et al. 2001) discuss the emotional and behavioural challenges of the children, these analyses have generally been conducted in isolation of any other indicators of well-being.

Further, in contrast to the majority of the literature on children of incarcerated parents, Lowenstein (1986) also included one dimension in his analysis that has generally been neglected by researchers – the interactional dimension, which provides insight into how the children are doing in terms of their social and interpersonal relationships with others. Although often overlooked in the literature, this dimension is an important element in assessing the well-being of the children. Thus, based on my review of Lowenstein (1986), it was apparent that the three areas of well-being included in the analysis (interactional, emotional, and health and behavioural) provided a strong indication as to how the children were doing across several dimensions.

In order to further explore the matter of children’s well-being, I examined related literature outside the realm of research specific to children of incarcerated parents to help me better identify whether there were any other significant dimensions that have been included by other researchers when assessing child well-being. There were three additional studies in particular that provided much insight into measurements of child well-being, all of which employed similar approaches. The first study in my review tested the effects of non-resident father involvement on child well-being based on the development of five indices. The first index was the
‘Behavioural Problems Index (BPI)’\textsuperscript{4} and measured the incidence of behavioural problems in children based on maternal reports of the children. The second index was ‘Self-Perception Profile for Children – Scholastic Competence’ and was based on a self-report questionnaire of items measuring the child’s perceived competence in the academic skills domain. The third index was ‘Self-Perception Profile for Children – Global Self-Worth’ and was based on a self-report questionnaire measuring the child’s sense of self-worth. The fourth measurement, ‘Peabody Individual Achievement Test – Mathematics’ was a test completed by the children that measured their mathematical ability. The final measurement was the ‘Peabody Individual Achievement Test – Reading Recognition’ and measured the ability of children in oral reading (King, 1994). The second study examined whether children were better off when they remain in two-parent families characterized by marital conflict or whether they were better off when their parents dissolve their marital relationship. The focus again in examining the well-being of the children was on the behavioural response of the children and also included the BPI in measuring the dependent variable of child well-being (Jekielek, 1998).

The third study investigated whether conflict between parents may explain why children in stepfather households were doing worse than children in traditional, two-parent households and no better than children in single mother households. They included eight child outcome variables to test their hypothesis, with all measures based on the reports of the parents. The variables included: two measures of academic achievement (measured with single indicators and based on the relative class rank or grade point average, depending on the age of the child); one measure of behaviour problems at school (comprised by assessing whether the parent was asked to meet with members at the school due to behavioural problems, whether the child has been suspended or expelled or had dropped out of school); four measures reflecting various psychological dimensions of child

\footnote{The BPI incorporates 31 items that measure a variety of child behaviour problems the child may have exhibited in the past three months (King, 1994; Jekielek, 1998).}
welfare (assessed by the frequency in which the child exhibited various behaviours, including externalizing behaviour, internalizing behaviour, sociability, and initiative); and one overall measure of child well-being (Hanson et al. 1996). While these studies also strongly supported the importance of including the emotional and behavioural state of the children when assessing their well-being, they also included one additional dimension that is often overlooked in the literature on children of incarcerated parents – the academic performance of the children. Therefore, in reviewing the findings of these key studies, it was evident that this is also an important dimension that warrants further consideration when assessing the well-being of the children.

In summary, the welfare of children of offenders is an area of much concern in the literature, with several studies focused on the impact that parental incarceration has on the well-being of the children. However, although much of the literature acknowledges the importance of well-being in assessing and understanding the conditions of these children, these assessments have generally been limited in their depth and scope and in terms of providing a comprehensive measurement of overall well-being. As such, a need for a systematic and clearly defined assessment of the well-being of children of incarcerated parents was identified. Based on my review of the prominent indicators measuring child well-being in the literature, it was evident that there are some fairly standard and consistent measurements employed in assessing well-being among children in the research and these are reflected in my study. Although all of these indicators are clearly evident in the literature, most studies do not assess these four key dimensions as comprehensively by including all of them in analyses of well-being in a single study. Hence, my assessment of the well-being of children of incarcerated parents was measured based on the inclusion of four indicators as derived from the literature – 1) Emotional; 2) Behavioural; 3) Academic; and 4) Social.

The first indicator of overall well-being, Emotional, assessed the emotional state of the child and measured the degree to which the child can be characterized as
experiencing emotional difficulties or whether the child was well-adjusted and expressively healthy. The second indicator, Behavioural, assessed the degree to which the child engaged in fighting, displayed aggression, acted out, got into trouble, has been expelled or suspended from school, talked back and refused to listen or follow directions. The third indicator, Academic, was measured by the school performance of the children and assessed whether the children were able to effectively grasp the material and succeed in an academic environment. The fourth and final indicator, Social, was examined based on assessments pertaining to the ability of the child to successfully socialize with peers, teachers, and members of the community, develop friendships, and on the quality of the relationships of the child with family members, such as the legal guardian or siblings.

Through the use of this well-being index, comprised of four individual indicators, I will then be able to first assess the state of the children’s well-being across multiple dimensions, thereby obtaining a comprehensive picture of how the children are faring. In addition, this well-being index enabled me to establish a baseline for assessing the extent to which certain factors impact upon the children’s well-being and was a necessary development prior to my examination of the causal factors. Once my well-being index was developed, I was therefore able to more effectively assess the impact that the three causal factors of interest in the study that will be discussed (quality of care, stigma and social support) had on the overall well-being of the children.

**Emotional Well-Being**

As stated, much of the literature in the field has focused on identifying the emotional consequences associated with the act of losing a parent to prison. Maternal incarceration is understood to lead to children feeling a sense of loss, fear, shame, anger, insecurity and embarrassment (Hagen and Myers, 2003). Research has also identified emotional problems such as depression, anxiety,
sadness, loneliness, guilt and low self-esteem among children of incarcerated parents (Huebner and Gustafson, 2007; Seymour, 1998; Boswell and Wedge, 2002; Dalley, 2002; Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Lowenstein, 1986; Sack, 1977; Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza, 2001). Wilbur et al. (2007) found that the children with incarcerated fathers were more likely to report depressive symptoms than their peers from similar backgrounds without an incarcerated father.

Kampfner (1995) conducted a two-tiered study on the effects of maternal incarceration. In the first stage, the effects on children due to parent-child separation as a result of maternal incarceration were compared to the experiences of children with similar high-risk backgrounds but whose mothers were not incarcerated. Children were matched for age, race, sex, and social class and the data was based on interviews that were conducted with both the control (no incarceration) and the experimental (incarceration) group. Approximately 75 percent of the children interviewed in the experimental group reported experiencing symptoms including depression, difficulty sleeping, trouble concentrating, and flashbacks about the crimes and arrest of the mother.

The second component of the study by Kampfner (1995) was conducted among children of incarcerated mothers and was based on observations of their behaviour during visitation with their mother in prison. In total, observations were completed over a period of six months of 50 children who were participating in a weekend children’s visitation program on Saturdays at one institution. The mothers of participating children were interviewed along with the caregivers in order to explore the behaviour of the children during the arrest and in the home. Approximately three-quarters (75 percent) of the caregivers interviewed reported that the children experienced the symptoms indicated by the children as listed above. Based on the findings of the study, the author concluded that children with mothers in prison are a high-risk population with the children in the study traumatized by the experience of having an incarcerated mother, many even displaying evidence of post-traumatic stress disorder.
**Behavioural Well-being**

The literature has clearly identified behavioural problems to be present in the children of incarcerated parents, including aggression and violence, acting out, discipline problems, and other maladaptive behaviours (Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Banauch, 1985; Snyder et al. 2001; Sack, 1977; Lowenstein, 1986). For example, Fritsch and Burkhead (1981) found parental absence as a result of parental incarceration to be associated with problematic behaviour of the children. Their data was collected and analyzed from 91 questionnaires completed by a random sample of the inmate population; these inmates reported a total of 194 children. The authors contended that the ability of the family to perform the function of attending to the social psychological needs of the children was greatly impaired by the disruption of the family unit through the loss of either parent. Overall, it was found that two-thirds of the respondents reported experiencing a variety of problems with their children since the period of incarceration.

Specifically, inmate fathers reported their children exhibiting behaviour indicative of “acting out”, including displays of hostility, discipline problems, running away, absence from school, and aggression. Inmate mothers, on the other hand, reported behaviour indicative of “acting in”, including withdrawal, regression, emerging fear of school, unwillingness to play, decline in academic performance, episodes of crying, and nightmares (Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981).

In an effort to examine the effects of children living in a ‘temporary’ single parent household as a result of the imprisonment of the father, Lowenstein (1986) conducted structured personal interviews with the wives of 118 Jewish prisoners. It was observed that the most common problems of the children were emotional and health problems, as reflected by recurring nightmares, bed wetting, a sudden fear of the dark, along with the appearance of illnesses, and a decline in the relationship of the child with his/her mother and peers, as reflected by the child displaying anger, continuous confrontations with the mother and/or siblings, and an unwillingness to write or visit the father in prison (Lowenstein, 1986).
Behavioural problems in the children were also found by Wilbur et al. (2007). Their goal was to determine whether children of incarcerated fathers were more likely to report or exhibit behavioural symptoms as compared to their equally disadvantaged peers who did not have an incarcerated father. Their longitudinal analysis included 102 children from urban, low-income households and included multiple informants, including administering a questionnaire to the children as well as their caregivers and teachers. They determined that the children of incarcerated fathers were more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviour, such as fighting or arguments with others, as compared to their peers.

**Anger and Aggression in the Children**

Research indicates that anger and aggressive behaviour is a negative outcome for the children of incarcerated parents (Banauch, 1985; Gabel, 1992a; Lowenstein, 1986; Sack, 1977). The possibility that aggression may emerge in the male children of incarcerated fathers has been identified in some reports as an issue of particular concern (Gabel, 1992a). However, this concern is not limited to only this sub-grouping of children, as evidence suggests that children of both incarcerated fathers and incarcerated mothers may be at risk for an increased likelihood of experiencing anger and aggression (Johnston, 1995; Banauch, 1985; Block and Potthast, 1998). For example, in the study by Banauch (1985) on maternal incarceration, aggressive behaviour in the children was widely reported by their inmate mothers, particularly for the younger children. Lowenstein (1986) also found aggressive behaviour to be one of the negative outcomes for the children of incarcerated fathers. Sack’s (1977) study found that the male children had rather an abrupt onset of aggression and antisocial behavioural problems in the period following the incarceration of their father. Further, Gabel and Johnston (1995) noted that aggression has been found to be the most typical trauma-reactive behaviour observed in children of offenders. Thus, the research suggests that the children of incarcerated parents are highly vulnerable to experiencing anger and aggressive behaviour. However, it is not just the presence or absence
of anger and aggression in the children that is of greatest significance; rather, it is the consequences associated with it that are most important. Anger and aggression do not tend to occur in isolation of other outcomes and there are many serious implications associated with children of incarcerated parents manifesting anger and aggression. For example, anger and aggression in children have been linked to further negative outcomes, such as the participation in deviant and criminal activities.

A strong and consistent relationship between aggression with delinquent and criminal behaviour has been well documented in the literature. In fact, one of the clearest findings in the research is that early aggressive behaviour is predictive of criminal behaviour (Huesmann et al. 2002; Stouthamer-Loeber and Loeber, 1988). The most consistent finding in longitudinal research on children and adolescents is the relationship between early aggressive behaviour in childhood with future delinquency and substance use (Harachi et al. 2006). A known risk factor for adolescent substance abuse is childhood aggression (Fite et al. 2007) and research has found that physical aggression was a predictor of substance use among male children (Piko et al. 2006). Dallaire (2007b) maintained that, while it may be somewhat normative for adolescent children to participate in some risky and delinquent behaviour, children of incarcerated mothers may be at heightened risk for engaging in more types of these behaviours. Indicators of the child’s likelihood of engaging in criminal activity include drug and alcohol use, school dropout, and gang involvement and should be addressed in future research. Future criminal activity was found to be a concern for the inmate mothers who reported that their children manifested aggressive behaviour, as the participants expressed their concern that their children may become involved in criminal activity as they get older if they did not receive the proper guidance (Banauch, 1985).

In their longitudinal analysis of aggressive behaviour among boys and girls during middle childhood, Harachi et al. (2006) found that membership in the highest aggression trajectory groups was predictive of involvement in violent behaviours,
covert delinquency, and substance use in the 9th grade. Their findings indicated that the children who displayed an early trajectory of high aggression levels had a higher likelihood of continuing to engage in these problematic behaviours throughout their life course. Kokko et al. (2006) also found physical violence at age 17 to be predicted solely by earlier physical aggression. Their findings confirm numerous studies that have reported the associations between early aggression and later violence and delinquency (Kokko et al. 2006). In a study investigating the possible relationships between various behavioural problems and sub-traits of aggression in samples of delinquent adolescents (189 participants in a juvenile correctional facility) and control subjects (117 participants from secondary schools), the researchers found that physical and verbal aggression was almost exclusively related to aggressive and delinquent behaviour. They found hostility and anger were significantly correlated with most of the problem behaviours. As well, they established there was a relationship between anger, verbal and physical aggression with aggressive and delinquent behaviour (Ruchkin and Eisemann, 1999). Thus, it is clear that the presence of anger and aggression in children places them at significant risk for engaging in delinquent and criminal behaviours.

Yet, while anger and aggression has been identified in the literature as an issue for children of incarcerated parents (Block and Potthast, 1998; Sack, 1977; Gabel, 1992; Banauch, 1985), these discussions have been more casual in nature, generally lacking any in-depth or systematic analysis. As well, when the presence of anger and aggression has been noted in these children, it is often linked together under broader discussions of overall behavioural or emotional problems and not separated out for a more deeper investigation (i.e. Block and Potthast, 1998; Banauch, 1985). Thus, while the researchers have identified anger and aggression to be an outcome for the children in their studies, they have not further explored how it manifests in the children or what factors may differentiate those who exhibit anger from those that do not with much depth. In order to address this gap in the literature, I will therefore be separating anger and aggression out from
the broader discussion of the behavioural dimension and will be conducting an in-depth analysis of anger and aggression in the children, investigating how their anger and aggression manifested and what further factors may account for its presence (Chapter Five).

**Academic Well-Being**

School-related difficulties have also been linked to parental incarceration (Huebner and Gustafson, 2007; Stanton, 1980). For example, Kampfner (1985) found that poor academic performance was a common problem for all the children of incarcerated mothers in the study, as did Lowenstein (1986). Another study examining 258 adolescents receiving routine health services found that children with a parent who had been to jail or prison were significantly more likely to have been expelled from school (Phillips et al. 2002). Bloom and Steinhart (1993) found that learning/school performance was identified as a problem for the children of incarcerated mothers by both the mothers in prison and by the caregivers of the children. Another study that examined 88 adolescent children of incarcerated addict mothers based on self-reported questionnaire information and selected personality/behavioural assessment inventories found that almost half of the children (45 percent) in the study reported little or no interest in school and 83 percent of the sample reported that they had experienced problems at school, including school failure and disciplinary sanction (Hanlon et al. 2005).

Trice and Brewster (2004) examined the adjustment of 58 children from the ages of 13 to 19 who had incarcerated mothers based on questionnaires administered to their guardians and mothers in prison. The responses on the children with an incarcerated parent were compared to their same-gender best friend, based on data collected by the caregiver of the children with a parent in prison and the mother of the peer child. They found high rates of dropping out of school (36 percent) among the children in their sample compared to the 10 percent drop out rate for their best friend peers. In addition, they found that the adolescents with mothers in
prison were more than four times as likely to be out of school than a sample of their best friends; four times more likely to have been suspended; three times more likely to be significantly absent from school; and nearly four times as likely to be failing classes than the sample of their best friends. Stanton (1980) found that 70 percent of the 166 children included in the study displayed a poor academic performance and half showed classroom behaviour problems (Myers et al. 1999). Poehlmann (2005a) also found that the intellectual outcomes of the 60 children of incarcerated mothers in the study were compromised, consistent with their high risk status. The children demonstrated an elevated rate of sub-average cognitive functioning and cognitive delays.

**Social Well-Being**

Very little research has specifically parsed out the social dimension of children of incarcerated parents in a manner consistent with the assessments made in my analyses. The one study (Lowenstein, 1986) that did include a specific social/interactional component found that the children in about 40 percent of the families in the study experienced interactional difficulties. It is evident that significant investigation into this dimension of well-being has generally been neglected in the literature of children of incarcerated parents. Some research has examined attachment problems in the children of incarcerated parents (Johnston, 1995; Myers et al. 1999), finding that the children may be at heightened risk of forming insecure attachments and lacking appropriate bonding with others. In the first study documenting the children’s representations of attachment relationships during the incarceration of the mother, data was collected from 54 children from the ages of 2.5 to 7.5 years through the use of multiple methods, including interviews, questionnaires, coded videotapes, and standardized assessment, and with multiple informants, including caregivers, mothers, and children. It was determined that 63 percent of the children held representations of insecure relationships with mothers and caregivers. More specifically, two-thirds of the children held representations of attachment relationships characterized by intense
ambivalence, disorganization, violence, or detachment. Secure relationships were more likely when the children lived in a stable caregiving environment, when children responded to the separation from the mother with sadness instead of anger, and when the children were older. The strongest predictor of the children’s representations of relationships with caregivers was the stability of the caregiving situation (Poehlmann, 2005c).

In summary, the existing research has clearly demonstrated that the children of offenders experience significant challenges across multiple dimensions. Indeed, it is clear that the incarceration of a parent has a negative impact on the children’s emotional, behavioural, academic, and social well-being. However, although the literature has identified that the children are vulnerable to each of these individual negative outcomes, how these individual outcomes are related to their overall well-being and to key causal factors identified in the literature is generally lacking. As stated, researchers have tended to consider one or more dimensions of well-being in their analyses as opposed to examining the overall well-being of the children in a single study. Therefore, in order to address this gap, I will be conducting an assessment of children’s well-being that factors in all four of these dimensions of well-being.

**Key Causal Factors Identified in the Literature**

Based on a review of the literature, it was evident that there are some prominent factors that are understood to have an impact upon the well-being of the children. However, in general, the literature has for the most part inferred or assumed the impact of these factors and has not systematically assessed the impact of these factors on the overall well-being of the children of incarcerated parents as defined above. My objective therefore is to address this gap in the research, thereby developing a better understanding as to whether these principal factors do have an impact on the overall well-being of the children. By determining how these factors impact upon the well-being of the children, I will be better able to identify
some of the risk factors that increase their vulnerability to poor outcomes, while also exploring whether these factors may also be promotive\(^5\), thereby associated with positive outcomes.

There are three specific causal factors of interest in this study that were emergent in the literature – 1) quality of care; 2) stigma; and 3) social support. In this dissertation, I will first be examining the conditions of the children in the study with respect to each of these three factors. Upon establishing the state of each individual factor, I will then be assessing the impact that these causal factors have on the overall well-being of the children through the well-being index that I have developed. I will therefore be providing a more systematic analysis of the impact that these causal factors have on the overall well-being of the children in the study than presently available.

**Quality of Care**

The quality of care that the children received was one of the key causal factors that emerged in the literature as an important component of their well-being. Generally speaking, the quality of care that a child of an incarcerated parent receives is primarily discussed in the literature based on factors such as the placement of the child, whether it is a relative or foster care arrangement, the extent to which this placement is disrupted/stable, the ability and willingness of the caregiver to provide adequate care to the child, access to sources of support, and the amount of strain/stress the caregiver experiences (Travis and Waul, 2003; Dallaire (2007b) reviewed positive and negative child outcomes from a developmental perspective as they related to risk, protective and promotive factors. A risk factor was defined as a variable that is positively related to a negative outcome. Researchers have identified several risk factors associated with negative outcomes for children of incarcerated mothers, such as many home and school displacements. Protective factors were defined as variables associated with decreased risk for a negative outcome in high risk, but not in low risk populations. A promotive factor was defined as a variable that is positively related to positive outcomes for all children. Several protective and promotive factors have been identified by researchers, including the presence of social support and stable and continuous caregiving situations (Dallaire, 2007b).
Based on analyses of secondary data collected from 258 adolescents receiving routine mental health service and their parents or caregivers, Philips et al. (2002) found that nearly half of the adolescents had experienced the incarceration of one or both parents. These youths had been exposed to significantly greater risk factors during the course of their life, including parental substance abuse, extreme poverty, residential instability, and abuse or neglect. They were also more likely to have experienced certain stressful and potentially traumatizing events, such as a family crisis, in the six months immediately preceding their entry into the treatment program. Upon entering treatment, it was determined that adolescents who had experienced parental incarceration had substantially higher rates of disruptive behaviour disorders. However, the rate of major depressions was less than half of what was observed among the other children receiving treatment. The authors postulated that this finding may be a reflection of children with incarcerated parents who did not “act out” potentially being less likely to access treatment (Philips et al. 2002). This research indicates that, for children of incarcerated parents, certain factors related to their quality of care, such as parental substance abuse, poverty, and residential instability, is related to their negative behavioural outcomes.

A study investigating family environments and intellectual outcomes in 60 children with an incarcerated mother between the ages of 2 and 7 years using multiple methods (interviews, observations, and standardized assessments) with several informants (caregivers, incarcerated mothers and children) found that the children experienced risks at numerous contextual levels, including socio-demographic factors associated with past and current poverty, parental substance abuse exposure and preterm birth. In addition, their intellectual outcomes were found to be compromised as the children had an elevated rate of sub-average cognitive functioning and cognitive delays. The caregiver risks were associated
with the intellectual outcomes of the children. However, while the cumulative socio-demographic risks of the caregivers (such as single parenting, reliance on public assistance, low income, relatively poor health, and lack of employment) predicted the cognitive development of the children, the quality of the home and family environment was found to mediate this relationship (Poehlmann, 2005a). This study demonstrates that there are aspects of the children’s quality of care that impact upon their intellectual outcomes, with this variable operating as either a risk or as a promotive factor.

Another aspect of quality of care that has received some attention in the literature is that of instability and disruption. A review of the literature suggested that losing a parent to incarceration leads to the child experiencing increased instability and disruption in the home environment, thereby heightening the negative impact of parental incarceration (Travis and Waul, 2003; Dannerbeck, 2005; Myers et al. 1999). Home and school disruptions are argued to place children at risk for academic failure due to the decreased likelihood that the children will develop an attachment or connection to the school, which is an important socializing force in a child’s life. This failure may subsequently place the child at risk for delinquency in later life (Dallaire, 2007b).

Overall, the importance of the home and family environment to the well-being of the children has been firmly established in the literature. However, the concept “quality of care” has generally not been very clearly defined and assessed in the literature with respect to the impact on the well-being of the children of incarcerated parents. I will be addressing this gap in Chapter Six by systematically measuring the children’s quality of care based on several independent variables, as well as assessing the relationship between the quality of care and the overall well-being of the children. Dallaire (2007b) maintained that it is important for future research to consider and assess child outcomes and risks as they relate to promotive factors such as quality and stability of care, and connectedness to family and school (Dallaire, 2007b), while Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) also
suggested that future studies be undertaken that assesses the quality of care received by the children of incarcerated parents. This study endeavoured to address these recommendations by incorporating a measure of quality of care as a principal factor into my analysis.

**Stigma of Parental Incarceration**

Further compounding the impact on the children is the application of stigma that is often associated with incidents of parental incarceration. As such, it has been included as a key factor in this study. It is generally assumed that frequent rejection and exclusion will inevitably result in significantly negative consequences for its targets. Indeed, there is little question as to whether the stigmatized are harmed in multiple ways by the overt and subtle forms of exclusion in which they are exposed (Major and Eccleston, 2005). For example, stigma has been linked to a host of negative outcomes, including poor mental health, physical illness, academic underachievement, infant mortality, low social status, poverty, and reduced access to housing, education and employment (Major and O’Brien, 2005; Murray, 2007).

Erving Goffman’s seminal book (1963) *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* inspired an abundance of research on the nature, sources and consequences of stigma (Link and Phelan, 2001; Condry, 2005). Goffman (1963) made a distinction among three stigmatizing conditions: “blemishes of individual character”, which refers to stigmas that reflect or are assumed to reflect immoral or deviant behaviour, such as the mentally ill and criminals; “abominations of the body”, which refers to stigmas that emerge from physical disfigurement or from physical deviations from what is considered ‘normal’, such as the overweight or facially disfigured; and “tribal stigmas”, which are based on membership, typically inherited, in despised racial, ethnic or religious groups, such as Native Americans and African Americans (Major and Eccleston, 2005; Goffman, 1963). Goffman (1963) also observed that “the individual who is related through the
social structure to a stigmatized individual – a relationship that leads the wider society to treat both individuals in some respects as one” (pg. 30) and thus, the children of incarcerated parents are contended to be vulnerable to experiencing stigma due to their intimate relationship with the parent, thereby “obliged to share some of the discredit of the stigmatized person to whom they are related” (pg. 30). The individual with a courtesy stigma can subsequently make both the stigmatized and the normal uncomfortable as: “by always being ready to carry a burden that is not ‘really’ theirs, they can confront everyone else with too much morality; by treating the stigma as a neutral manner to be looked at in a direct, off-hand way, they open themselves and the stigmatized to misunderstanding by the normals who may read offensiveness into this behaviour” (Goffman, 1963: 31). Thus, this study is concerned with the “blemishes of individual character” as it is the condition that is most representative of the stigma of having a parent in prison. An individual who is, or has been, incarcerated most certainly reflects immoral or deviant behaviour and the children of these offenders are therefore argued to be subject to stigma as a consequence of their familial relationship.

**Stigma and Children of Offenders**

A significant proportion of the existing literature has identified social stigma and/or shame as a crucial issue for children of incarcerated parents (Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Arditti et al. 2003; Travis and Waul, 2003; Mazza, 2002). The potential harm experienced by families is argued to be intensified by the stigma that is generally connected to involvement in the criminal justice system (Arditti et al., 2003). The social stigma of parental incarceration may exacerbate the emotional and psychological challenges that children would naturally experience during a period of separation from a parent. Children that have an incarcerated parent are likely to feel shame and understand that they may be rejected by others because of the actions of their parent (Miller, 2006). Kampfner (1991) reported that children of incarcerated mothers are often subjected to teasing at school, with many suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (Young and Smith, 2000). For
most, the stigma attached to the children who have an incarcerated parent is felt quite deeply in their neighbourhood, among their peers, teachers and other family members. This stigma often results in the children experiencing feelings of shame and low self-esteem (Travis and Waul, 2003). There is concern in the families that if other individuals in the neighbourhood who are aware of the parental incarceration then the children will not be permitted to play with other children. These children learn to either not talk about the removal of the parent from the home or they internalize the social stigma, thereby leading to a reduced sense of self (Mazza, 2002).

It should be noted that studies that have directly examined the incarcerated parents and their children have found that stigma and/or shame is a major theme of concern amongst caregivers but is not observed to be among the concerns of either the incarcerated parent or by the children (Johnston, 1995). One possible explanation for this unexpected observation is that incarceration is becoming increasingly prevalent in the communities in which the families reside and possibly because the families of offenders also have several members who have been arrested and/or incarcerated and therefore the impact of social stigma is significantly reduced (Johnston, 1995). Yet, even for those children who are a part of a neighbourhood of families where incarceration is a more common event, it is argued that, although the intensity of the stigma felt by the children may be less, their unique and immediate needs are not. Generally, schools and communities offer no specific programs to assist these children in coping with losing a parent to a correctional facility (Travis and Waul, 2003).

Compared to other types of parental separation, such as military duty, stigma and demoralization often tend to accompany cases whereby the family unit has been severed as a result of parental criminal activity (Carlson and Cervera, 1991). It has been found that the families of incarcerated women tend to be surrounded by feelings of shame and social isolation and, compared to other forms of involuntary separation from a parent such as military service, children do not receive
sympathy and support from others in response to the incarceration of a parent (Myers et al., 1999). While the involuntary separation from a parent due to reasons such as death or divorce may significantly disrupt the stability of the family unit, a focal concern is also present providing an outlet for the remaining family members to rally together, thereby mitigating the impact of their loss. The involuntary removal of a parent through incarceration generally fails to elicit the same reaction from the family and the outlying community, subsequently leading to additional negative consequences for the family and the children (Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981). Thus, it is argued that there will be differential effects experienced by children when the parent is removed from the family unit depending on the cause of the separation. Therefore, it is necessary that a distinction be made in the literature as to the reason for the departure. A distinction is especially necessary with respect to parental absences that are socially approved from those that are not. Parental incarceration is notable in its unique effects on the family and children as a result of the increased stigma and demoralization that is attached to such circumstances (Lowenstein, 1986; Condry, 2005).

As such, it is likely that the impact of losing of a parent will be heightened by the added social stigma that comes with being the child of an offender, with a subsequent lack of community and other forms of social support offered. The application of stigma and lack of community resources may then potentially exacerbate the emotional and behavioural difficulties that a child would normally experience when separated from a parent, demonstrating that these children do in fact have unique needs that must be properly recognized and understood (Young and Smith, 2000). However, no systematic studies have been conducted that examine whether social stigma mediates the relationship between parental incarceration and the adverse outcomes of children (Murray and Farrington, 2006). My research will be addressing this gap in the literature.
Concealing the Stigma and Keeping Secrets

Perhaps the ultimate approach to attempting to place distance from one’s stigmatized group is to conceal or disguise one’s stigma, thereby “passing” as non-stigmatized (Major and Eccleston, 2005). Goffman (1963) observed that those individuals with a concealable stigma have the option of not telling and can therefore deliberately try to “pass” as “normal”, individuals who are un-stigmatized. In this way, it might be possible to exert some control over the impressions of others (Smart and Wegner, 2000). There are a wide variety of stigmatizing conditions that individuals attempt to conceal, such as mental illness, physical illnesses, addiction, and a multitude of behaviours that may be considered “blemishes of character” (Major and Eccleston, 2005). Goffman (1963) termed individuals whose stigmas are visible as “discredited” while those whose stigmas are invisible are referred to as “discreditable” (Major and Eccleston, 2005; Goffman, 1963). It is argued that the participants in this study would be classified as discreditable, given their ability to hide their stigma and conceal the status of the parent in prison.

It has often been assumed that individuals who have a concealable stigma will escape much of the difficulties and discrimination faced by the visibly stigmatized because they are able to hide their stigma from others. However, there is a psychological cost to concealing a stigma and individuals who have a hidden stigma may also face considerable stressors. Such potential stressors include having to make decisions regarding the disclosure of one’s hidden status, the anxiety connected with the possibility of being identified as a member of the stigmatized group, isolation from others who are similarly stigmatized, and being detached from one’s true self (Pachankis, 2007). Goffman (1963) noted that individuals experienced psychological strain during the process of concealing their stigmatized identity and he provided several examples that illustrated how attempts to pass may result to feelings of isolation, fraud and fear of discovery (Smart and Wegner, 2000). Further, individuals who conceal a stigma may not
suffer only from the fear that their stigma will be discovered but may also fear 
social disapproval for having attempted to conceal it. This approach will likely 
lead to the stigmatized experiencing anxiety during their social reactions with the 
non-stigmatized. Avoiding such discovery will require strong vigilance to avoid 
revealing the secret and failure to disclose important aspects of one’s identity is 
associated with poorer physical health and emotional well-being. In addition, 
concealment also deprives the stigmatized individuals from the benefits of in-
group social support (Major and Eccleston, 2005).

One emerging area in the related literature, that of secrecy research, also suggests 
that possessing a secret, such as a concealable stigma, may result in emotional 
strain. Secrecy is an active process and demands much deliberate behavioural and 
cognitive work. In the presence of those from whom a secret must be kept, one 
must work strategically to ensure that their verbal and non-verbal behaviours do 
not give away the hidden information (Lane and Wegner, 1995). The motivation 
for keeping one’s stigma secret is likely the fear of a negative evaluation and the 
avoidance of potential rejection by others. While keeping shameful secrets may 
enable one to escape this potential evaluation and rejection, it has been found that 
those who keep secrets have a tendency to be more shy, lonely, introverted, and 
socially anxious. By its very nature, secret keeping is shameful and the mere act 
of hiding information about a stigma may result in an individual believing that the 
stigma-related information is shameful simply because it is worthy of being kept 
secret (Pachankis, 2007).

Hagan and Myers (2003) contended that children of incarcerated mothers are a 
group of children that are high risk, not only because they are separated from their 
mothers, but also because these children usually live in poverty and thus, are 
vulnerable to the many risk factors associated with poverty. They maintain that 
children who keep information about the incarceration of their mother and their 
feelings and thoughts about it from others are engaging in secrecy. One key 
motive for keeping such a secret is to avoid the real or perceived social stigma
that may follow such disclosure, and family members may be good judges in determining whether a child would be teased or experience difficulties at school or in the neighbourhood if a negative secret such as a mother being in prison is known by others. Thus, the family may be prudent in protecting the child and the family by insisting upon secrecy in certain settings, such as at school. However, this secrecy may also establish a foundation upon which shame, isolation, and loneliness are developed. The contention was also made that maternal incarceration would likely elicit negative social sanctions from others and that many individuals view incarcerated people as “deviant, flawed or limited” and may perceive of their family members in similar ways. It was also postulated that the greater stigma that children feel is attached to the secret, the more secretive they will be (Hagen and Myers, 2003).

A study by Hagen and Myers (2003) was conducted on the effects of secrecy and social support on the behavioural problems of children who had an incarcerated mother. Their study was based on a sample of 116 children, aged 6 to 13 years of incarcerated women, who attended a recreational summer camp. There were multiple measures employed, including scales that assessed perceived social support, perceived secrecy, perceived stigma, internalizing and externalizing behaviour, and a stress index. It was found that the children in the study were at risk as a consequence of multiple life stressors. Over half of the children reported having experienced four or more stressful life events in the past 12 months.

Interestingly, it was found that the group of children considered to be at greatest risk were the children who reported low levels of support and who also scored low on the secrecy measure. In other words, as indicated by the low social support, these children had no one to talk to but talked freely with others about their mothers’ incarceration, as indicated by the low secrecy. This was an unexpected result and the authors put forth explanations as to why these children do not practice secrecy. They maintain one obvious reason would be that no one tells them to and their low social support may be indicative that there is no one in
their lives that provides them with clear guidance on this matter. Another possibility is that they talk openly about their mothers in an effort to gain attention or sympathy, or may disclose in order to be able to offer an excuse for their disruptive or problematic behaviour. The majority of the children stated that they sometimes kept this information a secret, thereby indicating that the secret could sometimes, but not always, be shared with some people but is not to be shared with everyone. The most significant impact of secrecy was observed most clearly in relation to children who felt low social support in their lives from their peers, teachers, and caregivers. It should be noted that the requirement for secrecy sent the children a message that the incarceration of their mothers was a stigmatized subject, and while the study found that “secrecy required” was significantly related to the level of stigma reported by the children, the secrecy practices were not found to be associated to the children’s sense of stigma. Thus, the findings suggested that children who are being instructed by their caregivers not to disclose about their mothers’ incarceration perceive stigma to be attached, but when they choose how much to say they may ignore that message. Stigma was also positively related to externalizing problems (Hagen and Myers, 2003).

In order to protect their children from stigmatization, many parents report carefully guarding the status of their partner’s incarceration, even going so far as to keep the secret from close family members. Such secrets may serve to further isolate families from access to support structures, weaken familial bonds, and heighten family stress (Huebner and Gustafson, 2007). Acting out of fear and shame that the ‘good crowd’ might find out about the incarceration of their mother, adolescents may avoid interaction with their well-behaved counterparts, gravitating instead to their peers who are higher risk and where the stigma of parental incarceration may be decreased (Myers et al., 1999). Often, children who have an incarcerated mother are not permitted to discuss their traumatic experience. Children who are in such a circumstance will suffer the consequences of the imprisonment of their mother every day as they are subsequently sentenced to a “forced silence” that compounds the isolating effects of their experiences.
Despite the fact that children need to talk about their feelings in order to overcome the effects of traumatic experiences, there is a conspiracy of silence that often exists. These forced silences limit the support that the children can receive as they become fearful of the repercussions if they speak about such forbidden topics (Kampfner, 1995).

There may be very good reasons for imposing a forced silence, such as family employment, welfare payments, child custody and even housing may be jeopardized if others were to become aware of the incarceration of the parent. Thus, it is the social stigma of incarceration that leads to families keeping the information hidden from others. However, it has been found that children with a parent in prison are more likely to display negative reactions to their experience when they are unable to talk about it (Johnston, 1995; Hannon et al. 1984).

Overall, while stigma emerged as a prominent factor for children of incarcerated parents, the literature is generally unclear with respect to how the concept of ‘stigma’ was defined and assessed, therefore the basis for which it was claimed that the children both experienced and suffered from the effects of it is unclear. In order to more fully ascertain the potential impact that the stigma associated with parental incarceration may have on the overall well-being of the children, it is necessary to define this concept more clearly and to test it accordingly. This gap will be addressed in the chapter on stigma (Chapter Seven).

**Social Support**

The third causal factor that emerged through a review of the literature was that of social support. This is an area that has generally been overlooked in the research on children of incarcerated parents. In addition, much of the analysis on social support and the impact on the children has been done more casually, rather than systematically. As such, it is important that a more in-depth analysis be conducted
that further explores the relationship between social support and the well-being of children of incarcerated parents.

Much of the discussion in the literature regarding social support has been geared toward developing, assessing, or improving upon formal support programs (Eddy et al. 2001; Hanlon et al. 2007; Hanlon et al. 2005; Adamson et al. 1998; Snyder et al. 2001; Seymour, 1998) with minimal attention paid toward informal support networks. The literature regarding these formal support programs has included: evaluations of inmate parenting programs (Eddy et al. 2001; Browne, 1989; Loper and Tuerk, 2006); developing a prevention program specifically designed for the children of substance-abusing mothers (Hanlon et al. 2005); programs that facilitate parent-child contact in prison (Block and Potthast, 1998; Snyder et al. 2001); and school-based interventions for students with incarcerated parents (Lopez and Bhat, 2007; Donohue and Siegleman, 1998). This research has generally occurred under the assumption that such formal support programs have a positive impact upon the families and children of incarcerated parents. Rather than operate under a preconceived notion that formal support programs are a significant and effective force in improving the well-being of the children, I will be examining with greater depth whether participation and involvement in formal support programs did in fact have a positive impact upon the well-being of the children in the chapter on social support (Chapter Eight).

It has been contended in the literature that one strong predictor of how well the children are able to adjust to parental incarceration is likely to be the quality of the relationships within their extended family and their informal social networks with non-family members. Particular focus of the discussion is on the social support provided to the primary caregiver of the children, noting that the need for social support is especially relevant when the father is incarcerated and the mother must cope as a single parent. Research has shown that the amount of social support of the mothers and the quality of the relationships she has established with both family and non-family members has a positive impact on her relationship with the
children, as well as on her parenting attitudes and behaviour. In turn, research has also shown that children with parents that receive more social, emotional and physical support are better adjusted than children of parents with a limited social network and minimal support (Parke and Clarke-Stewart, 2003).

A lack of social support for the caregivers of children of incarcerated parents was identified as an area of concern by Arditti et al. (2003), who found that participants experienced social isolation and had little support from others, which contributed to greater emotional stress and parenting strain. The authors therefore contended that the most likely area for intervention involves enhancing the naturally occurring networks of support for these families, under the perspective that by enabling parents to utilize support systems, the level of caregiver stress and social isolation may be reduced, subsequently increasing the quality of parenting (Arditti et al. 2003). This research suggests that social support networks have a significant impact upon the families and children of incarcerated parents. However, much of the existing literature primarily concentrates on the social supports of the legal guardian, with minimal study also specifically examining the social supports of the children of incarcerated parents. I will be addressing this gap by including the social supports of the children themselves into my analysis and assessing how it relates to their well-being (Chapter Eight).

The access that a child has to social support has been identified as a protective factor against the development of internalizing and externalizing problems (Hagan and Myers, 2003). However, the socializing experiences available to many youth (i.e. school clubs, sports, organized activities, etc.) are often inaccessible to children from highly stressed families in poor communities, such as children of incarcerated parents (Myers et al. 1999). Indeed, Murray (2007) argued that prisoners and their families are vulnerable to several kinds of social exclusion. Of particular relevance to this discussion is the loss of material and social capital following imprisonment. The author contends that the social capital of the children is threatened by parental incarceration as the demands on the remaining
caregivers often force them to increase their work hours, experience substantial emotional pressures, and change neighbourhoods so that the children are required to change schools. Overall, it is maintained that parental incarceration may lead to a decrease in the child’s material and social capital at the family, school and community level (Murray, 2007).

It has also been posited that many children with an incarcerated parent receive very minimal support in helping them to process their feelings of grief, loss, anger, anxiety and fear (Reed and Reed, 1997). For example, in examining the effects of maternal incarceration on children, Kampfner (1995) found that many of the children in the experimental group (those affected by parental incarceration) reported having no emotional supports and were unable to identify individuals who could be sources of support or with whom they felt they could talk to about the incarceration of their mother. These findings did not hold true for the children in the control group (those not affected by parental incarceration). Hagan and Myers (2003) also found that the children in their study with low levels of support displayed greater externalizing and internalizing problems than children with high levels of support. These findings indicate that social support is a key factor for the children and requires further in-depth analysis. I will be addressing these gaps in the chapter on social support.

**Intergenerational Deviant and Criminal Behaviour**

Children of incarcerated parents may also be at risk of manifesting further negative outcomes which may have a more pervasive and lasting effect on both the children and their communities. Specifically, children of incarcerated parents are understood to be at increased risk for engaging in both deviant and criminal behaviour. The research pertaining to these outcomes among children of offenders will now be explored in this section.
Research has linked disruption of the parent-child relationship and parental antisocial behaviour to future child delinquency and official contact with the criminal justice system (Huebner and Gustafson, 2007). Parental criminality is understood to predict children’s own criminal behaviour in later life (Murray et al. 2007). One study found that youth who have an incarcerated father were significantly more likely than other youths to be incarcerated themselves, even as adults (Murray and Farrington, 2005). Researchers have suggested that children with parents and other relatives who have involvement in the criminal justice system may be socialized to follow in their paths. In addition, as neighbourhoods and communities are also recognized as being important socializing agents in the lives of children, the growing “prison culture” of some urban neighbourhoods may transmit particular values to children and contribute to intergenerational crime patterns. In communities that are high-risk, examining incarceration-related risks such as parental history of incarceration and parental drug use may be helpful in predicting rates of adult children’s incarceration (Dallaire, 2007a).

Huebner and Gustafson (2007) investigated the long-term effect of maternal incarceration on adult offspring involvement in the criminal justice system. Based on data from the mother child sample of the 1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the results indicated that children of incarcerated mothers were significantly more likely to have involvement with the criminal justice system as adults, even after accounting for maternal separation and other risk factors. In another study examining the concentration of offending in families, investigators analyzed data from the Pittsburgh Youth Study which is a prospective longitudinal survey of three samples of 500 boys first contacted at ages 7, 10, and 13. While arrests of brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, aunts, uncles, grandfathers and grandmothers all predicted the boys delinquency, the most important arrested relative was the father and was found to be the best predictor of the boys delinquency independently of all other arrested relatives. Indeed, 63 percent of boys with convicted fathers were themselves convicted (Farrington et al. 2001; Farrington, 2002).
An additional study conducted a comparative analysis of the differences and similarities in mothers’ and fathers’ reported rates of familial and adult child incarceration and the living situations of minor children in an effort to determine whether children with incarcerated mothers are at an increased risk for their own incarceration. Several key findings were drawn from the analyses. First, incarcerated mothers of adult children reported that their adult children were 2.5 times more likely to be incarcerated than the adult children of fathers and second, adult children of incarcerated mothers who regularly used drugs may be at an especially high risk for incarceration. Thus, children with incarcerated mothers may be at heightened risk of experiencing their own incarceration, particularly for children whose mothers were also habitual drug abusers (Dallaire, 2007a).

Children with a poor well-being may be at risk for engaging in deviance and criminal activity. Indeed, the literature on the whole suggests that several indicators included in my well-being index may increase the risk or likelihood that children will exhibit deviant and criminal behaviour. Generally speaking, studies have found strong relationships between adolescent drug use and criminal behaviour and poor performance in school, emotional dysfunction and relationship problems (Cooper, 1999). Early disruptive and negative child behaviour is observed to be strongly associated with later criminal behaviour (Hollin, 1992), while research has found correlations between child academic performance and delinquency in which poor academic performance is related to the early prevalence and onset of delinquency and its escalation in seriousness and persistence, whereas higher academic performance is associated with desistance from offending (Maguin and Loeber, 1996). The literature also suggests that a greater level of support and social bonds that an individual has access to will decrease the likelihood of that individual engaging in deviance and criminal behaviour. It is generally contended that a lack of social support is implicated in these behaviours as crime and deviance occurs when an individual’s bond to society is weak or broken (Cullen, 1994; Sampson and Laub, 1990). Given that
research has shown that several indicators of my child well-being index have an impact on the risk that the children will exhibit these outcomes, I postulate that my overall well-being index, which captures multiple dimensions, can thereby be used to assess whether well-being as a whole is a condition that may be a precursor to these outcomes. This will be explored in further depth in Chapter Nine.

Overall, given that children of incarcerated parents are considered to be at such an increased risk for patterns of intergenerational criminal behaviour, it is important that this outcome be further investigated. As such, in Chapter Nine I will examine the extent to which the children in my study engage in deviant and criminal behaviour, as well as explore the extent to which overall well-being and, as an extension of the behavioural dimension in particular, anger and aggression, may contribute to an increased likelihood that the children participate in such maladaptive behaviours.

**Conclusion**

The complex nature of relationships between children and their incarcerated parents, combined with the great distances between institutions and many home communities, necessitates creative management on behalf of families, government agencies, and community support systems in order to minimize the harm to children and their families (Travis and Waul, 2003). However, the well-being of prisoners’ children has traditionally not been a crucial component of the current social policy agenda. Further, the strategic plans of social service agencies and corrections departments have neglected to include services and activities that assist inmates in assuming their parenting roles (Hairston, 2003). Families of inmates generally struggle with a wide array of challenges that are heightened by the incarceration of a family member. Therefore, broadening our perspective to include the impact of parental incarceration on families and children brings up a number of issues. In order to develop innovative strategies, we need to
incorporate new policy collaborations and partnerships between corrections
departments and family welfare agencies. In working together, corrections
professionals and local service providers would be able to generate policies and
programs that would greatly improve the possibility for a successful transition
from prison to home, where the implications are great for all involved (Travis and
Waul, 2003). It is contended that so many of the things that we are concerned
about on behalf of children – poverty, single or no-parent families, homelessness,
unemployment, juvenile delinquency – are intensified, if not directly caused by,
parental incarceration. Yet, unlike many of the risks children face, parental
incarceration is the direct result of state action. Such a distinction offers us the
very real possibility that we can make a difference in the lives of these children by
examining and reformulating policy (Bernstein, 2005).

The goal of this exploratory qualitative study is to investigate the experiences and
conditions of children of incarcerated parents and provide greater insight into how
they may have been affected by having a parent go to prison. My study will
endeavour to provide empirical answers to several important research questions,
including:

1. What is the state of the well-being for children of incarcerated parents?
   How are these children faring overall?
2. Are there certain factors or preconditions that place the children at greater
   risk for poor well-being? In particular, does the quality of care that the
   children are receiving affect their overall well-being? Are they subjected
to stigmatization, and if so, does it have an impact on their overall well-
   being? Do the children have access to sources of social support and,
   further, does the presence or absence of these support networks have an
   impact on their overall well-being?
3. Do the children of incarcerated parents exhibit a pattern of
   intergenerational deviance and criminal behaviour? If so, are these
   negative outcomes connected to the condition of their well-being?
By investigating the well-being of the children, examining how key principal factors impact upon on their overall well-being, and exploring the nature and extent of their involvement in deviant and criminal behaviour, my study will provide researchers and policymakers with a more comprehensive understanding of children of incarcerated parents than is presently available and will therefore provide valuable insights into the lives and challenges of children of incarcerated parents.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

The data for this study was drawn from comprehensive in-person interviews that were conducted with three groupings of individuals, including: 1) various individuals with experience with children of incarcerated parents in a professional capacity, subsequently referred throughout as the practitioners; 2) the legal guardians of children with an incarcerated parent; and 3) the children of the parent who has been incarcerated. The study was based on a total sample size of 47 participants in the Kingston area, consisting of 17 interviews with practitioners, 17 interviews with legal guardians, and 13 interviews with the children of incarcerated parents. Further, the legal guardians reported on an additional 17 children that were not directly interviewed, bringing the number of children included in the study to 30.6

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research methodology was employed in this study for various reasons. First, due to a lack of Canadian research that has been conducted in the field, there was very little current knowledge regarding these children. As so little was known, an exploratory approach was taken in order to discover the specific experiences and challenges faced by this vulnerable population. It was also determined that such an approach would uncover more depth of information and provide greater insight into the impact of parental incarceration and the way in which this impact was understood by the participants. In addition, given the lack of accessible data that has been formally collected on the children of incarcerated

6 The responses of both the children and the legal guardians were closely examined and cross-checked to determine whether there were any discrepancies between the interviews with the legal guardians and those with the children. Overall, the responses of both the legal guardians and the children were highly consistent and there were no instances in which I received conflicting or contradictory responses. The only minor discrepancies observed were in the instances where the child and/or legal guardian revealed information to me that was not mentioned by the other. Therefore, as the coding for the child was consistent throughout, the two categories were collapsed and only one score assigned based on the interviews with both the legal guardian and the children.
parents, there was very little possibility of employing secondary research methods. Thus, the decision was made to conduct qualitative interviews, defined as “an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but not a rigid set of questions that must be asked in particular words and in a particular order” (Babbie and Benaquisto, 2002: 322).

A key feature of qualitative interviews is their ability to provide a complete focus on the individual. This approach provides the researcher with an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the participant’s personal perspectives, obtain an in-depth understanding of the personal context in which the research phenomenon are located, and gather highly detailed and informative subject coverage. Additionally, they are also well-suited to research that necessitates an understanding of deeply rooted or delicate phenomena or responses to complex systems, processes or experiences due to the depth of focus and by the opportunity they give the researcher to obtain further clarification and detailed knowledge. Further, qualitative interviews are maintained to be a research approach highly appropriate to collecting data where delicate or complex issues need to be explored at a highly detailed level or in circumstances where it is important to relate different issues to individual personal circumstances and perspectives. When seeking to obtain an understanding of motivations and decisions of an individual or when examining impacts and outcomes, the in-depth and detailed focus of qualitative interviews is also generally advantageous (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). As such, given the delicate and complex nature of the topic and the need to obtain a deep understanding of the impacts and outcomes of parental incarceration on the children, qualitative interviews were determined to be the methodological approach best suited for my study on the children of offenders.

The interviews with the participants were semi-structured and open-ended. Interviews that are semi-structured “involve the implementation of a number of
pre-determined questions and/or special topics” (Berg, 2001: 70). This qualitative method provides participants with greater freedom to express themselves and more control during the interview than what is allowed with more structured approaches. In this methodological approach, the interviewer has a general plan of inquiry but is not confined to a rigid set of questions that need to be asked in a specific way and in a pre-determined order. Such flexibility is one of the special strengths of qualitative interviewing whereby one asks a question, listens carefully to the answer, interprets the meaning, and frames another question to further probe into the previous question or redirect the discussion to another area of inquiry. The role of the researcher is therefore more fluid, providing greater ability to be more responsive during the interview and to better engage the participants (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2002; Berg, 2001; Bernard, 2002).

**Geographical Profile**

The data collected in this study was primarily concentrated in the city of Kingston, Ontario. The highest concentration of penal institutions in Canada is located within the Kingston area and the city includes a significant proportion of families who have relocated to the area in an effort to be closer to the incarcerated parent as well as those who already lived in the community. Based on the relatively small size of the community and the rather large number of correctional institutions in the vicinity, it was determined that Kingston would be a prime location to gain access to children of incarcerated parents and would be more likely to have more organizations devoted to assisting these families. Kingston is located on the north-eastern shore of Lake Ontario, at the mouth of the St. Allisonce River. With a population of 146,838 people, the Kingston CMA is comparable in size to Trois-Rivières, Quebec and Abbotsford, British Columbia. Like all cities, Kingston is comprised of a patchwork of neighbourhoods separated and defined by physical, cultural and economic barriers. Based on figures from the 2001 census, the demographic profile of the Kingston is similar to the rest of
Ontario and Canada on many standard indicators, including age profile, family characteristics, marital status, and income.

**Data Source**

The in-depth interview schedule was developed to gain a greater understanding of the lives and experiences of the children from the point of view of several sources. Three interviewer guides were developed; one for the practitioners, one for the legal guardians, and one for the children. The questions were semi-structured and the sequencing of questions adjustable, allowing for greater flexibility in the discussion (Berg, 2001; Babbie and Benaquisto, 2002).

**Practitioners**

As previously stated, one grouping of interviewees was comprised of various practitioners who have worked with and/or had experience with children of incarcerated parents. The interview schedule for the practitioners first contained a series of questions geared towards attaining biographical information on both the individual, specifically pertaining to their educational/professional background, role in the organization, length of time in the position, and experience with children of incarcerated parents. Regarding the organization, questions were asked about the programs and resources offered by the organization, the population served, the goals and objectives of the organization, and the main sources of funding. The responses to these questions helped provide context into the nature and extent of firsthand experiences that the practitioners had with children of offenders and was an indicator as to how they related to the children in a professional capacity. It also provided an indication regarding the level of services and resources available to the children in the community.

The background questions were followed by a series of questions that explored their professional perspectives on the children of incarcerated parents. These
questions were guided by the previous review of the literature which had identified several themes and issues as being pertinent for children of incarcerated parents. The objective was to ascertain whether the children in the community that the practitioners worked with had experienced similar challenges as identified in the research and to determine whether there were certain factors or conditions that may have an impact, either positive or negative, on the well-being of the children. The practitioners were asked various questions pertaining to the nature of their experiences working with children of incarcerated families, including their perspective of how the incarceration of the parent may impact the child in various ways, including emotionally, behaviourally, socially, and academically; the extent to which stigma is present in the community and the degree to which it affected the families, and the children in particular; the sources of support available to the child and their legal guardians; the quality of care that the children are receiving in their home environment and to identify any specific needs of these children and to discuss what resources should be made available to them in order to help address their specific needs.

The goal was to assess the impact that key factors previously identified in the literature had on the well-being of the children, as conceptualized through the well-being index as previously discussed. The questions asked of the practitioners were thus geared toward developing an enhanced understanding of what factors may affect these children, identifying the specific challenges that the children face as a result of having a parent in prison, and determining what resources and services should be made available to the children and their families in order to better alleviate the impact of having a parent incarcerated.

The contribution that the interviews with the practitioners made to the study was to provide a balanced and independent perspective regarding children of incarcerated parents based on their professional experiences with the children and their families in the community. Their insight helped to draw out some of the key areas of focus and provided an additional source of information. Their extensive
contact with many families of offenders, often over a long period of time during the incarceration period, also enabled them to speak more generally about some of the dominant trends and patterns that they have observed during their professional career.

**Legal Guardians**

The second group of participants was comprised of the legal guardians of the children. For the legal guardians, background questions were asked regarding the age of the children, grade in school, family size and structure, duration and timing of the incarceration event, extent to which the child has moved and/or changed schools, and contact of the child with the incarcerated parent. These biographical questions were asked in order to obtain a description of the variation in the background and situational contexts of each participant and to establish the key independent variables (i.e. age, parental instability, etc.) for the analysis.

The other series of questions included in the interview schedule were geared toward determining the nature and condition of some principal factors that were previously identified in the literature as being key to the experiences of the children. More specifically, questions were asked that assessed the extent to which the child had experienced disruption in their lives as a result of having a parent incarcerated; the impact that having a parent in prison has on the child, as identified through their behaviour, emotional state, social interactions, and academic performance; whether the child has displayed any anger or aggression toward others; the quality of the relationship between the child and the legal guardian, and the child and the incarcerated parent; the level and nature of the contact that the child has with the incarcerated parent; and the degree of fear and/or awareness of social stigma in the community directed toward the families of incarcerated parents. In addition, the emotional state of the legal guardian was also explored in an effort to assess the condition of care that the child receives, as well as sources of support of the legal guardians and the children.
The interviews with the legal guardians provided additional insight into the impact that parental incarceration has on the children from a point of view based on direct, everyday contact that has been acquired as the primary caregiver for the children. The legal guardians were able to offer insight into how the child has been affected by the incarceration of the parent based on their personal relationship and parental role with the children. In order to address the potential data quality issues of interviewing children, the interviews with the legal guardian of the child also provided further detail as to the level of agreement between the child and caregiver as a measure of cross-checking data provided (Amato & Ochiltree, 1987).

**Children of Incarcerated Parents**

It is acknowledged that sole reliance on obtaining information regarding the impact of parental incarceration on the children from both the practitioners and the legal guardians may be somewhat problematic. While several studies have examined negative behaviours and emotional responses, poor academic performance, and stressful life events associated with parental incarceration, few studies have relied on or employed a methodological approach of directly assessing the children themselves (Poehlmann, 2005a). As discussed by Fritsch & Burkhead (1981), one issue that must be recognized is that there is no way to estimate the bias that may be introduced into the data by the selective perception of the respondents and/or selective reporting of child-related problems. In an effort to work towards eliminating this potential for bias or selective reporting, the third clustering of interviews were therefore conducted directly with the children of the incarcerated parents.

The interview guide used for the children was consistent with that of the legal guardians, mirroring the same topics of discussion. The specific questions, however, were specifically tailored toward the children and focused on their
experiences and individual perspectives. Thus, the questions asked of the children included those that ascertained their emotional state, and how they felt about having a parent in prison; whether they had any behavioural difficulties; their academic performance and school behaviour; their social interactions with others; how they understood having a parent in prison to have impacted them; their perception of the relationship they had with their legal guardians and with their incarcerated parent; whether they were aware of any stigma in the community regarding parental incarceration and/or feared being judged by others as a result of having a parent in prison; the quality of their home environment and the care they are receiving and any sources of support available to them.

These interviews provided in-depth knowledge as to the personal experience of having an incarcerated parent and enabled a better understanding of how the children responded to and felt about having a parent in prison through their own perspective and interpretations. Rather than rely on data sources which provide an interpretation of the children through a second-hand source, these interviews provided the children with the opportunity to speak on behalf of themselves and to directly address the challenges and/or concerns they may have faced as a consequence of parental incarceration. In addition, by providing the children with the opportunity to voice their own experiences and to comment on how they perceive themselves to have been impacted by parental incarceration, it allowed for data collection to be obtained directly from the focus of the investigation – the children of incarcerated parents. In addition, the use of multiple sources of information helped me to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how the children have been impacted by the incarceration of a parent and to better assess the state of their well-being. My methodology therefore addressed two key recommendations that were suggested based on the limitations identified in prior research; namely, the lack of data gathered from the children directly with a nearly exclusive reliance on adult reports about children as a means of assessing their outcomes, and the observation that multiple informants are not often utilized (Dallaire, 2007; Wilbur et al. 2007).
Research Design

Similar to the methodological approach employed by Philips et al. (2002), parental incarceration was assessed by asking respondents if the child’s parent had ever served time in prison. Parental incarceration in this study represents a heterogeneous group of experiences, and may refer to a series of short sentences or a longer consistent period of time in prison. In some instances, the children may have a close relationship to the offending parent, while in others the children may have become estranged from them.

Well-Being Measure

As previously stated, as much of the literature on children of incarcerated parents is unclear regarding how the well-being of the children has been defined and measured, a well-being index was developed to operate as an assessment tool for the study. It was adapted from other measures that have been employed in related fields of research, as discussed in Chapter Two. As such, the well-being index was emergent from the literature review and the data collected on child well-being from the qualitative interviews was subsequently guided by the four dimensions of this index, including emotional, behavioural, social and academic. Further details regarding the actual development of the index, along with the analysis of the data, will be discussed in Chapter Four. This section will describe what questions were asked of the legal guardians and the children, which then enabled for an assessment to be made regarding their well-being.

Assessing Emotional Indicator of Child Well-Being

In order to measure the emotional well-being of the children, a series of questions were asked during the interviews that probed into this dimension. Probing is an interview technique that aims to further elicit information from the participants by
having them elaborate, clarify, and continue their responses to the questioning (Bernard, 2002). This is an approach that I employed throughout all of my qualitative interviews with each participant. For example, the legal guardians were asked to discuss how the children were doing in terms of their emotional state and to comment on whether the children were having a difficult time coping with having an incarcerated parents and whether the children were doing well emotionally (i.e. was confident, happy, relaxed) or whether the children were doing poorly emotionally (i.e. was stressed, anxious, depressed). Depending on the responses of the legal guardians, follow up questions were asked that further explored how the children were doing on an emotional level. For example, if a legal guardian commented that a child was emotionally disturbed, I would further probe into the nature of this state and seek evidence to support the legal guardian’s contention that the child was doing poorly (i.e. “What makes you think the child is struggling emotionally?”; “What signs indicate the child is having a hard time emotionally?”), etc.). During the interviews with the children, they were asked to talk about their feelings in general (i.e. “Do you ever get sad? What makes you feel sad?”; “Do you worry a lot? What do you worry about?”), about parental incarceration (i.e. “How do you feel about your parent being in prison?”) and about a number of other factors as identified in the literature (i.e. “How do you feel about moving around so much?”).

The answers to these questions, along with any other statement made by the participant regarding the emotional state of the children throughout the interview, were then identified in the transcripts and coded accordingly. For each individual child, the responses of both the legal guardian and the children were then analyzed. The interviews were first analyzed separately in order to establish whether there were any discrepancies between the data gathered from the two sources and then, upon establishing that there were no disagreements in the data, a determination was made regarding the emotional state of the child.
Assessing Behavioural Indicator of Child Well-Being

In order to measure the behaviour of the children, questions were asked that explored whether the child was engaging in negative and maladaptive behaviour (i.e. talking back, acting out, fighting, etc.) or whether the child was exhibiting positive behaviour (not getting into trouble, no acting out, no fighting, etc.). The legal guardians were asked to comment on how the children behaved (i.e. “Does the child ever get into fights? With who? How often?”; “Does the child act out in school?”; “Does the child get into a lot of arguments? With who? How often?”). The children were also asked to discuss their own behaviour in order to gather the data that would enable for a determination to be made as to how the children were faring on this dimension of the well-being indicator (i.e. “Do you ever get into fights? With who? How often? How come?”; “Do you ever get into trouble? With who? How often? How come?”; “Do you get into a lot of arguments with others?”). An approach consistent with the coding and analysis of the emotional indicator was also employed for this indicator.

Assessing Academic Indicator of Child Well-Being

In assessing the academic indicator of the well-being index, a series of questions were asked that explored the academic performance of the child in school, whether the child was struggling with the material, how the child managed in the school environment. For example, questions such as “How does the child do in school?”; “Does the child have any problems understanding the material?”; “Is the child experiencing any academic difficulties?” were asked in order to collect data for this dimension of well-being. The children were also asked to discuss their experiences at school and to talk about how they were doing in an academic environment. For example, some questions asked included: “How well do you do in school?”; “Do you ever have any trouble with the material?”; “Do you find school to be difficult?”; “Do you understand what you are being taught at
Assessing Social Indicator of Child Well-Being

In examining the fourth and final indicator on the well-being index, a number of questions were asked of both the legal guardians and the children regarding how well the child was faring on an interpersonal level. In order to obtain data on this dimension, questions were geared toward assessing how well the child was able to form and maintain healthy relationships with others. For example, some questions asked included “How would you describe your relationship with the child?”; “Does the child have many friends?”; “How does the child get along with his/her sibling?” The children were also asked to discuss their relationships with others and to speak about how well they are able to get along with other people. For example, some of the questions the children were asked to obtain data on this dimension included: “Do you find it easy to make new friends?”; “Do you have a lot of friends?”; “How do you get along with your legal guardian?”; “How well do you get along with your sibling?” Again, an approach consistent with the coding of the analysis of the previous indicators was employed for this indicator.

Primary Selection Criteria

Given the many challenges in recruiting participants for the study and in accessing children who have been affected by incarceration, the criteria for participation was fairly broad, allowing for the research to encompass the diversity of family situations present in the community. However, there were several requirements for participation in the study. The primary selection criteria for participants included:
Practitioners

- These individuals had to have had significant contact and/or experience with children of incarcerated parents in a professional capacity; and
- This experience could be either previous or current but it had to have occurred no later than in the past ten years.

Legal Guardians

- These individuals must be the legal guardians of the children;
- During the period of incarceration of the parent, they had been the caregiver or had significant contact with the child that would enable them to be informed as to the impact upon the child;
- The individual incarcerated must be either a biological parent or one who has stepped in to fulfill a parental role to the child;
- This individual must have spent time in prison during the period in which they are operating as a parental figure to the child; and
- The incarceration of the parent figure has been significant and has occurred no longer than five years previous.

Children

- Have been affected by parental incarceration;
- The individual incarcerated must be either a biological parent or one who has stepped in to fulfill a parental role to the child;
- This individual must have spent time in prison during the period in which they are operating as a parental figure to the child; and
- The period of incarceration of the parent figure can either be current or have occurred previously, however this prior time period may not exceed more than five years previous.
Sampling

The participants were recruited for the study in a number of ways. Using nonprobability sampling, the practitioners were recruited through a combination of snowball and purposive sampling of organizations that have contact with the children of incarcerated parents.\(^7\) For the practitioners, previous investigation into the services and resources available to this population in the community uncovered several organizations that have contact with children of offenders, and a relationship with many of these organizations was then established. These individuals were therefore recruited for participation through the organization in which they either worked or volunteered, or through the process of referral from other involved individuals in the community.

The legal guardians and the children were primarily recruited through referrals made from the various contacts established in several of the organizations that had contact with these children and with whom the families had established a relationship. In order to protect the privacy of the families and to maintain their full confidentiality, the legal guardians were not contacted directly, nor was any information about them that may potentially allow them to be identified in the community provided in advance of their having provided consent. Rather, the individuals within the organizations made first contact with the legal guardians and inquired as to whether they would be interested in participating in the study. Upon indicating their interest and consent to be contacted directly, a follow-up was conducted with them individually by telephone whereby the goal of the study was described, the requirements of participation, and a brief review of the family circumstances was discussed in order to ensure the family met the selection criteria for participation in the study. If the individual was interested in participating in the study, an interview time was arranged.

\(^7\) Snowball sampling refers to the technique whereby each person contacted will be asked to suggest other individuals and organizations for participation. Purposive sampling refers to a technique in which the units to be observed are selected on the basis of judgment regarding which ones will be the most useful or representative (Babbie & Benaquisto, 2002).
In order to recruit additional families for participation in the study, a general email account was established. However, given the many obstacles for these families to gain access to such a medium, it was recognized that this would not be the preferred manner in which the families would establish contact. As such, a local telephone number was also established that was connected to an answering system that enabled the families to contact me directly during the period of data collection. An advertisement was also placed in the local newspaper, The Kingston Whig Standard, for several weeks with this information. In addition, flyers were developed that provided a brief overview of the study and included the contact information with both the telephone number and the email address (Refer to Appendix A). These flyers were distributed in various organizations, and additional copies were given to the practitioners who were encouraged to hand them out to those that may meet the selection criteria for participation. After receiving permission from the local penitentiaries, flyers were also distributed and placed in the visiting rooms. Overall, only two legal guardians contacted me directly based on the flyers and asked to participate in the study. In return for participation in the study, an honorarium of $20 for each interview was provided to the legal guardians and to the children. The practitioners did not receive any compensation for their participation.

There were approximately five individuals who were referred for participation in the study who were not interviewed. These individuals were not included due to an inability to satisfy the primary selection criteria (i.e. the incarceration event had only lasted a few months and had occurred over five years previously) or because of an inability to arrange an interview that the individual was able or willing to attend (i.e. one individual who consented to an interview and arranged a meeting but did not show up nor did he return any of the follow up phone calls).
Recruitment Challenges

There were many challenges throughout the study that hindered my ability to locate and recruit participants for the study. First, due to heightened stigma surrounding an incarceration event, these families were extremely difficult to locate in the community as they generally do not wish to be identified. In fact, many of these families consciously make a concerted effort to remain hidden and do not willingly reveal their connection to the incarcerated parent to the outside community. This effort to obtain complete invisibility made accessing subjects very difficult and subsequently contributed to a smaller sample size than was originally expected.

Prior to the onset of the data collection, snowball sampling was anticipated to be the primary technique through which other families would be recruited. This was thought to occur due to a shared experience of families impacted by incarceration, the relatively small size of the community, and the apparent clustering of families affected by incarceration in a particular area of Kingston whereby incarceration is recognized as being something of a common occurrence amongst these residents. As such, it was presumed at the outset of the study that there would be a community of legal guardians who were connected and through which there would be a network of families to recruit for the study. However, it is interesting to note that only two other families were recruited through snowball sampling, with only one legal guardian able to refer me to another legal guardian. The remaining families indicated that they were either unaware of any other families affected by parental incarceration or that they did not associate with other families. In addition, many of the families stated that they wanted to keep the incarceration of the parent a secret from others and therefore did not disclose to any other individuals that the family was affected by parental incarceration, thereby decreasing their visibility in the community. The strong desire of the legal guardians not to reveal this information to those in the community was a
reflection of their fear that they, along with the children, would be subjected to experiencing stigma as a consequence.

Further, due to the often transient nature of these families, it was also quite difficult to establish and maintain contact for a period long enough to set up and conduct in person interviews due to changes or disconnections of phone numbers or the household moving to another address that was not made available. For example, an interview was conducted with a mother who was enthusiastic about their involvement and who provided her written consent to interview her two children. After attempting to make contact with the legal guardian again after a short period of less than a few weeks, it was discovered that their telephone number had been disconnected and no further number was provided. Subsequently, an email was sent out to the email address that had been provided at the interview but no response was received. As the participant had been recruited through one of the organizations, I made contact with them in order to obtain her current information but was informed that they had also lost touch with her and no longer had any way to reach her. Thus, despite my many efforts, I was unable to conduct interviews with the two children and was required to remove them from the list of participants.

Additionally, it was often difficult to make both initial and follow up contact with the legal guardians due to their reluctance to answer the telephone without recognizing the telephone number and the individual calling. This disinclination to answer the phone and dependence on tools such as caller id and voicemail to screen out unknown callers may be attributed to previous conflicts and difficulties the families have experienced with individuals such as parole officers, corrections officials, and collections agencies. Due to this predisposition toward suspicion of strangers contacting them by telephone, it was extremely difficult to reach the potential participants in this way. However, as previously indicated, as access to various other manners of contact such as email was not possible by almost all of the families, it was the only available approach that could be employed to
establish contact. For most cases, repeated phone calls and messages were left before an interview could be arranged and conducted.

There were also many challenges experienced during the course of an interview which made the process of data collection rather difficult at times. For example, there were often multiple interruptions throughout many of the interviews with both the legal guardians and the children that often distracted the participants from the discussion and made it challenging to conduct the interview effectively. These interruptions included repeat phone calls, children continually coming into the room to speak with the legal guardian, friends of both the children and legal guardian dropping by for a visit, etc. In order to overcome the impact of the interruptions during the interviews, I would use the time during the disruption to take notes of what we had just been talking about so I would then be able to quickly get the discussion back on track and to help maintain the stream of conversation without losing focus on what was being said prior to the interruption. While the participants could sometimes be distracted by these interruptions, I was able to maintain the flow of the conversation and bring them back to the specific point in the conversation based on the notes that were kept during the disruptions. This led to minimal loss in data collection.

In addition, given the highly sensitive and emotional nature of the subject matter, there were several instances where the participant was unable to continue on due to episodes of breaking down and crying. The interview was then paused until the participant composed themselves and was able to continue. Many of the interviews with the legal guardians were very intense and emotionally wrought. The primary way that I overcame this challenge was by changing the line of questioning to a less emotional subject by asking a few neutral questions upon the participant becoming upset. This change of pace in the discussion and the movement toward questions that were not emotionally charged thereby allowed

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8 In all cases, this occurred only with the legal guardians and was never encountered with either the children or the practitioners.
the participants to regain their composure and re-focus on the interview. In order to ensure that the data was not compromised by an emotional break, notes were taken on the specific discussion that had caused the upset so that once the participant was calm and collected, I was then able to return to the line of questioning and finish the discussion.

Data Collection

The data for this study is based upon the transcribed interviews of 47 interviews, along with analytic memos that included additional observations made about the participants. For the legal guardians, the length of interviews varied between one hour and 3 hours in total, with the majority of interviews lasting approximately one and a half hours. The majority of interviews with the legal guardians were conducted in the respondents’ homes. Out of the 17 participants, 12 were interviewed in their homes, 3 in a private room in the public library, one in a private room in an office, and one in a coffee shop. The participants included: 13 mothers; one father who had previously been incarcerated; one step-mother; one grandmother; and one uncle. In the group of 13 mothers, 10 women were raising the child on their own and could be classified as a single mother; 7 of the women were still involved in a relationship with the parent who was incarcerated at the time of the interview; 6 women were no longer in a relationship with the incarcerated parent (3 of whom were now involved in another relationship). One couple was also included in the sample, specifically the father and step-mother that were in a relationship.

The interviews with the children were conducted in a similar manner as the legal guardians. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 minutes to over an hour and a half, with the majority of interviews approximately an hour in length. The age of the children interviewed ranged from 6 to 22, the majority of which were teenagers, with 11 of the participants between the ages of 11-17. The sample
included 4 girls and 9 boys. Ten children were interviewed in their home, while three children were interviewed in a private room in the local library.

The interviews with the practitioners ranged in length from 30 minutes to over two hours, with the majority of interviews approximately an hour in duration. The interviews occurred in the offices of the organization in which the practitioner was affiliated or in their private home. The participants included: four teachers (retired), one social worker, two employees of the John Howard Society, three employees of the Bridge House, one employee of Better Beginnings, two employees of Youth Diversions, one employee of the Salvation Army, two employees of Canadian Families and Corrections Network, and one employee of Children Visiting Prisons.

Data Management and Analysis

The data that was gathered from the interviews was coded and analyzed using the qualitative software program MAXQDA. This program assisted me in organizing sections of text into categories based on themes which constitute the basis of the findings for this study. The data was broken down into several codes and then reassembled to form categories and themes, with emerging themes and patterns identified through the coding process detailed through memos. The data was organized into thematic themes, all of which corresponded to the research question of the impact of parental incarceration on child well-being.

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct this research was granted by the Research Ethics Board of McGill University. In the interviews with the children and their legal guardians, the subjects were assured of full confidentiality throughout the course of the research project. As such, the names of both the legal guardians and the children
have been changed and no identifying information (such as name of school) has been included in any external written documentation.

In order to obtain informed consent from the participant, a written consent form was given to the participant prior to the interview, providing the individual with the opportunity to review the form and discuss any potential concerns. Prior to the commencement of the interview, it was requested that the participant sign the consent form. Four consent forms were created for this purpose, including one for the practitioners, one for the legal guardians, one for the guardian to sign on behalf of the child subjects, and one simpler version deemed appropriate for children over the age of 13 (Refer to Appendix B). Special care was taken to go over the content of the forms with the children in an effort to make sure that they were aware of what they were signing, due to concerns regarding reading difficulties and in an effort to field any questions they may have had. A script to be read to children 13 years of age and under was also developed (Refer to Appendix C).

A number of steps were taken to reduce or eliminate the threat of harm as a consequence of participation in the study. First, legal guardians were not only required to provide consent for the children, they were directly involved in the research and were also interviewed separately. Second, guidance was also sought from practitioners in the local organizations/agencies that work with such children and a plan was determined in advance regarding what resources in a given area were available to assist a child in anticipation of something unusual occurring, for example a child becoming upset or overly distraught by the interview. If such an incident were to have occurred, the child’s guardian was to be informed, and the available resources made available to the child with the knowledge and consent of his or her legal guardian. Lastly, if any child had appeared to be struggling or having difficulty participating in the study, then the interview was to be discontinued to ensure that no harm was experienced and a follow-up discussion
with the legal guardian was to ensue. Fortunately, no such incidents occurred and there was no need to conduct any follow up action.

**Limitations**

Due to the nature of the research and the difficulties in gaining access to the participants there are some limitations to the study worth noting. As the majority of participants were recruited for the study through contacts established through the various social service organizations in the Kingston area, it is possible that the experiences of these families are not reflective of the families that do not participate in or who access available resources in the community. Rather, the data may provide greater insight into the families that are more connected to the social service network in Kingston than those families that may be even more marginalized. In addition, due to the rather transient nature of the population and the many difficulties experienced early on in locating and accessing potential participants, it was thought necessary to conduct the interviews as soon as the individuals were identified and provided their consent. As such, the majority of interviews were conducted over a six-month period, precluding the possibility of employing a grounded theory approach to the data. Lastly, given my apparent position as an “outsider” coming from a different background, in conjunction with my status as a researcher, it was sometimes difficult to fully connect with participants and I was often conscious of the potential for a power imbalance. Much effort was made to minimize this, and to dress appropriately and change my manner of speaking in order to make the participant feel more comfortable and relaxed during the interview.

**Conclusion**

Overall, my methodological approach enabled me to obtain an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the experiences and challenges of children of incarcerated parents. By employing a multi-informant approach, I was able to gain
a variety of perspectives regarding the impact of parental incarceration as well as assess the differences and similarities of the information collected from the legal guardians and the children, enabling me to cross-check the data for any discrepancies. Further, as very few studies had gathered data from the children of offenders directly, my study offers additional insight into the subject by going straight to the source and including the children in my interviews. As this study was exploratory, the data collected is not contended to be a precise representation of all children of offenders in Canada but suggests what the results of a more extensive study may be. This approach may complement future large-scale surveys by bringing depth and meaning to the data in addition to providing potential avenues of any explanatory research that may be conducted. The data that I collected from the three grouping of participants in my study yielded interesting and significant findings, as will be discussed in the following chapters.
Chapter Four: Index of Child Well-Being

My first goal of the study was to measure the well-being of the children of incarcerated parents and to assess how they are faring. This chapter will therefore be addressing this objective. As child well-being is the outcome variable in the study, clearly defining the concept of “well-being” was necessary in order to appropriately examine the effects of parental incarceration on the children. Based on the review of the prominent indicators assessing child well-being in the literature as previously discussed in Chapter Two, the well-being of children of incarcerated parents in this study is assessed based on four indicators – 1) Emotional; 2) Behavioural; 3) Academic; and 4) Social.

In order to assess how the children are doing on each of the indicators, an index was created. This index is comprised of a numeric scale whereby values have been assigned based upon how well the children are doing in each category. More specifically, a child that is doing well on an indicator has been assigned a score of 1; a child that is considered to be average on an indicator has been assigned a score of 2; and a child that is doing poorly on an indicator has been assigned a score of 3. A score based on the four individual indicators has been assigned for each child, with the total value of each of the four indicators also included, indicating overall well-being. The lowest overall score that can be assigned is 4; the highest overall score that can be assigned is 12. Children who have been assigned an overall low score are those that are doing well across all dimensions, whereas children who have been assigned an overall high score are those that are doing poorly across all dimensions. These four indicators are first analyzed separately followed by a review of the overall well-being of the children.

Emotional Indicator

The first indicator, Emotional, is defined as the emotional and mental state of the children, reflecting the extent to which they are able to cope with daily life as well
as with the challenges of having an incarcerated parent, providing an indication as to the emotional health of the child.

A child who has been assigned a 1 (as in good emotional state) would be a child that is well-adjusted emotionally, able to express their emotions in a healthy and constructive way, and does not appear to be suffering from any emotional distress.

For example, Clare, 10, has a healthier emotional and mental state and does not display any real evidence of emotional problems. Her mother, Heather, provided evidence regarding her emotional state during the interview and her positive attitude towards her incarcerated father.

_The middle one Clare, she's tough, she's kind of you know...yeah okay, I mean she cried, she was upset every now and then she'll ask questions about him and then, but she's just kind of yeah, okay and onwards and upwards._

A child assigned a 2 (as in average emotional state) would be a child who sometimes struggles to deal with the challenges of having an incarcerated parent and with daily life and may display some negative emotional behaviour, such as crying, but is generally able to cope. These children possess an emotional state that is not atypical from other kids.

For example, while Lucas, 6, appears to have a generally healthy emotional state, he does display some anxiety about losing his mother and his incarcerated father and can sometimes be clingy and fearful when separated from either of his parents.

A child assigned a 3 (as in poor emotional state) would be a child who is having serious emotional problems and is unable to cope with daily life and having an incarcerated parent and who displays symptoms of more damaged emotional
behaviour. This would include things such as nightmares, continued crying, and constant displays of lashing out verbally.

For example, Carla discusses the emotional implications that parental incarceration has had on her two children, Theresa, 13, and Jack, 11.

_Carla:_ The last time Brad went back in, it was not good. He was hooked on coke. The kids saw him whacked out on coke. They saw a totally different person and they didn’t like it. They knew why he was like that. They were happy that he went back in because he could get off the pills. He could get straight again and he’d be better. It was better for him and better for them, because then they didn’t feel it was their fault. “Well, we drove him nuts. He went and got high.” And they did. They went through that. They blamed themselves. “Well, if I hadn’t fought with my mom. If I had have not spoken with a bad attitude, he wouldn’t have gone spinny and he wouldn’t have gone drinking or he wouldn’t have gone and done the pills.” The pills had nothing to do with any of us. None of us. They know that. They know it, because I’ve made sure they know it. Because in the beginning they thought, “It was because I was misbehaved. It was because I was yelling. It was because I called my sister an idiot.” It was something they had done. It wasn’t questioning themselves, it was just questions that you could tell, well if I ask it this way, it’ll let me know if it was my fault. You know. They would always use a hypothetical situation to bring it back to see whether or not it was something they had done. I guess I was lucky that I knew how they were….the manipulation way of finding answers, because if I hadn’t clued into that, they would probably still think, “It’s because I’m whining or I asked for too much.”

_Carla:_ They talk to me about murder. Jack one night woke up in the middle of the night screaming his head off and I went tearing upstairs and he’s standing in the middle of the bed and he’s sound asleep. “Jack, what’s wrong?” “I just killed that little girl, Mom. I put my hands around
her throat and choked her right up!” “Jack, wake up!” And he wakes up crying and he knows what he dreamt. “Mom I would never!” Jack wouldn’t step on an ant. “Why would I dream that?” “I don’t know.” But once I get him settled back to bed I think, why did he dream that? What was going through his head before he went to bed? What happened during the day that could have triggered that? You know, that’s your fear is what that is. Sometimes we can come up with the answers and sometimes we can’t.

Both of these children have severe emotional difficulties and are reflective of children with an extremely poor emotional state.

**Emotional Well-Being**

Much of the literature in the field has identified the emotional consequences associated with the act of losing a parent to prison. Maternal incarceration is understood to lead to children feeling a sense of loss, fear, shame, anger, insecurity and embarrassment (Hagen and Myers, 2003). Children of incarcerated fathers have been found to be more likely to report depressive symptoms than were children who did not have an incarcerated father but who had similar backgrounds (Wilbur et al. 2007). Research has also identified emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, guilt and low self-esteem among children of incarcerated parents (Huebner and Gustafson, 2007; Seymour, 1998; Boswell and Wedge, 2002; Dalley, 2002; Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Lowenstein, 1986; Sack, 1977; Sharp and Marcus-Mendoza; 2001). Consistent with the literature, many of these emotional difficulties were also observed in the children in the study.
Scores were assigned for 25 children. Of these, only 5 children (20 percent) were assigned a low score, indicating a positive emotional well-being, and only 1 child (4 percent) was assigned a score of 2, indicating moderate well-being. Thus, less than one-quarter of children were found to have a good emotional well-being. In contrast, three-quarters of the children, namely 19 children out of 25 (76 percent), were found to have a poor emotional well-being.

Overall, it was determined that the vast majority of these children did have serious emotional problems, with 75 percent of males and 78 percent of females scoring extremely poorly on emotional well-being. For this indicator, gender was not found to differentiate outcomes with a similar proportion of male and female children scoring poorly. Interestingly, half of the children who scored well or moderately well came from the same family, suggesting a possible family dynamic which will be further explored in Chapter Ten.

Although the literature has identified many emotional problems experienced by children of incarcerated parents, with the exception of Kampfner (1995) who found 75 percent of the children with an incarcerated parent experienced emotional distress which is consistent with my research, the studies that have specifically examined the emotional state of the children have generally found a smaller proportion of children suffering from emotional problems than was found in my study. In other words, while studies have identified emotional problems to be present in children of incarcerated parents, they appear to emerge on a smaller scale than was observed in my study, whereby the vast majority of children had significant emotional difficulties. For example, Lowenstein (1986) found that in approximately 40 percent of families studied, children experienced emotional problems. This is a significantly smaller proportion of children experiencing emotional difficulties as was found in this study, whereby three-quarters of the

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9 For a complete breakdown of well-being scores assigned to the children in this study, please refer to the table in Appendix D.
children had a poor emotional well-being.\textsuperscript{10} Also, in their study on children of incarcerated parents, Bloom and Steinhart (1993) conducted analyses based on 439 surveys administered to incarcerated mothers of 870 children and on 35 surveys administered to the caretakers of 66 children. The incarcerated mothers reported that only 6.8 percent of the children experienced any health/mental health problems, while the caregivers reported only 3.0 percent of the children experienced any health/mental health problems; a significantly smaller proportion than what was found in my study.\textsuperscript{11}

**Behavioural Indicator**

The second indicator, Behaviour, is assessed based on the actions and behaviour of the child – whether the child acts out or is well-behaved, whether the child engages in fighting and/or displays aggression, and whether the child respects authority and follows the rules.

A child assigned a 1 (as in good behaviour) would be a child who does not act out or get into trouble, a child who listens and follows the rules, does not get into fights with others, and does not talk back to teachers or other authority figures.

For example, Sophie, 22, very rarely got into trouble at either home or school, was always very well-behaved and did not act out at all.

\textsuperscript{10} It is acknowledged that the analysis based on the unit of observation employed by Lowenstein was different than the analysis conducted in my study, namely that the analysis by Lowenstein examined the children based on a familial level whereas my analysis was based on children at the individual level. However, it is maintained that the familial level of analysis by Lowenstein provides a sufficient indicator as to the proportion of children who experienced difficulties and is a suitable frame of reference.

\textsuperscript{11} However, Bloom and Steinhart (1993) observed that the incarcerated mothers tended to understate their children’s problems as compared to the caregivers, as the same questions asked to the sample of caregivers yielded much higher rates of problem identification for the children. As such, it is likely that the responses by the caregivers reflect a more accurate representation of problems among the children.
A child assigned a 2 (as in mostly good behaviour) generally does not get into trouble or act out but will sometimes engaged in inappropriate behaviour, as opposed to children coded a 1 who never engage in any negative behaviour.

For example, Lucas, 6, does not always listen to his mother or to his teachers and gets distracted easily. While his mother, Abigail, provided some evidence in her interview that he was starting to engage in more serious behaviour, he was generally well-behaved and complied with the rules.

Abigail: And he doesn’t listen very good to me. I have to tell him 10 times and by the 10th time I am yelling and he doesn’t like that. “Mom, you don’t have to yell at me!” “Well, if you’d do it the first time! You don’t listen!”

Abigail: And now this year with this teacher, she is constantly telling me about him, that his desk is always in a mess. He’s really slow at putting his clothes on and getting them off. He’s the first one inside. He’s the last one to get into class. He fools around in the bathroom. He goes there for like 20 minutes. So it’s constantly, you know, and interrupting. He’s constantly interrupting. And it hasn’t gotten any better. And she’s like, “I understand that at the beginning of the year it’s quite a change from kindergarten to grade 1. They’ve got to get used to it but by now, he should be used to the routine and everything and it seems to be getting worse.” Like, I don’t know, at first I thought it might be because he misses his other school and his best friend goes to that school and he wants to be there. Then I thought, okay it’s just him. It’s just the way he is. It’s something we have to work on.

Those assigned a 3 (as in primarily negative behaviour) would be children who are continually acting out and getting into trouble, get suspended or expelled from
school, talk back, get into fights with others, and refuse to listen or follow the rules.\textsuperscript{12}

For example, Ethan, 15, has been suspended and/or expelled from several schools, repeatedly gets into fights with others, talks back, and acts out on a daily basis both at home and at school. His mother, Olivia, discusses some of Ethan’s behavioural problems.

\textit{Interviewer: So has Ethan been getting into trouble at school?}

\textit{Olivia: Ethan, straight from the get go he did.}

\textit{Interviewer: What kind of trouble does he get into?}

\textit{Olivia: More outside, he's the kind of kid that if someone starts, if somebody picked up a snowball it would be him and I'll not allow that. All the stupid things, you know being more aggressive, not following the rules, um, out in the yard, it was outside that was more of a problem….but Ethan is the type of kid that if um, well even when I give him those things to squeeze at school, oh forget it, that will be winged across the room. Um, you know it's um you can't win no matter what way you do it, you just have to put in closer boundaries on him. Oh, in grade 7 and 8 he'd just walk right out of the class, it was, our school is right, the backyard goes right out to the park so he'd just walk right out.}

Ethan continually engages in many forms of maladaptive behaviour and is reflective of children with an extremely poor behavioural state.

\textsuperscript{12} It should be noted that no deviant or criminal behaviour by the child, as will be further discussed in Chapter Nine, was included in the coding of poor behaviour. As such, deviance and criminal behaviour were not used as indicators of child well-being.
**Behavioural Well-Being**

The literature has clearly identified behavioural problems to be present in the children of incarcerated parents (Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Banauch, 1985; Snyder et al. 2001; Sack, 1977; Lowenstein, 1986). Thus, consistent with the existing scholarship, this study also found that the majority of children experienced significant behavioural problems.

There were scores assigned for 28 children. Of these, 9 children (32 percent) were assigned a low score, indicating positive well-being while 2 children (7 percent) were assigned a 2, indicating moderate well-being. Thus, out of 28 children, only 11 (less than 40 percent) were found to have a positive well-being. In contrast, 17 children (61 percent) were found to have a poor behavioural well-being.

Overall, it was determined that a significant majority of these children have serious behavioural problems. A strong gender component was observed in the analysis, with the vast majority of the children with behavioural problems male and the female children much better adjusted behaviourally. More specifically, while 70 percent of the female children scored extremely well, 78 percent of the male children scored extremely poorly. Further, all of the children who were behaviourally well adjusted were female, with the exception of two male children from one family where all the children scored extremely well. Additionally, as nearly half of the children who scored extremely poorly were from three families, this suggests there may be a potential family dynamic.  

While the research has indicated that children of incarcerated parents experienced behavioural problems, the extent to which this has been found has been on a significantly smaller scale than what was found in my study, whereby 61 percent of children were found to have a poor behavioural well-being. For example, Lowenstein (1986) observed behavioural problems in the children of only about

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13 This will be explored in further depth in Chapter Ten.
20 percent of families in the study. Another study by Hanlon et al. (2005) found that, while approximately one-third of the children (35 percent) reported that they have been involved in multiple fights, the majority of the children did not report extensive involvement in other delinquent activity. In addition, 31 percent of the children denied having had any involvement in any of the delinquent activities included in the questionnaire; this finding is consistent with my study, which determined that 32 percent of the children had a positive behavioural well-being. Bloom and Steinhart (1993) found that the incarcerated mothers reported that 16 percent of the children experienced any behavioural problems, while the caregivers reported a significantly higher proportion of children experiencing behavioural problems, with positive responses provided for 27.3 percent of the children. Therefore, generally speaking, the children in these studies with behavioural problems appear to have occurred among a significantly lower proportion than the children in my study who were found to manifest behavioural problems.

**Academic Indicator**

The third indicator, Academic, was primarily measured by the children’s academic performance, including how well they grasped the material, whether they were delayed or behind in their learning, abilities and/or grade level, and their overall functioning in a school environment. It was also peripherally assessed by their behaviour and attitude towards school and their teachers.

A child assigned a 1 (as in good academic) would be a child that does well in school, performs at a high level, does not engage in any negative behaviour in school and is generally regarded as a good student.

For example, Sophie, 22, was a very strong student and a high achiever that did well academically. She was very successful in school, was very engaged and
participated in extracurricular activities, such as the student council, and did not get into trouble or act out.

A child assigned as 2 (as in average academic) would be a child whose school performance was generally adequate and who is appropriately progressing up the grade levels, who may sometimes get into trouble but is overall a decent student.

For example, Jacob, 14, had a satisfactory school performance. While he did not always get his work done on time and tended to seek ways to avoid doing the required work, he was capable of doing the work when he put in the effort. He would occasionally get into trouble with his teachers but was generally well-behaved at school.

A child assigned a 3 (as in poor academic) would be a child that is having a great deal of difficulty in school and is not able to perform very well academically, displaying a dismal academic performance. These children were those that were falling behind in the material and were greatly delayed in their ability, and who routinely acted out in school.

For example, Dylan, 17, was in a specialized school for kids who are delayed academically and who have dropped out and/or been expelled from traditional schools. He has continually gotten into trouble at school, repeatedly engaged in fights with other kids, has physically attacked teachers and was often verbally aggressive towards authority figures in the school. He was very far behind in his grade level and had poor math skills and a limited proficiency in literacy. During his interview, Dylan discussed how he was unable to perform basic math problems, such as multiplying and adding, but was able to memorize numbers.

*Interviewer:* And what subject don’t you do well in?
Dylan: Ah, math. I'm no good at like, multiplying, adding and all that stupid stuff. But I can keep like long streams of numbers, like in my head, like forever. Like when I was going to one school I had 8 different people’s locker combinations memorized in my head. And each locker has like four different sets of numbers. And like with most of my cards and shit, like my health card I have that memorized. Like I could say it off the top of my head. Like right now.

Overall, Dylan is an extremely poor student with a very limited academic ability and is reflective of children identified as doing poorly on this dimension.

**Academic Well-Being**

There were scores assigned for 22 children. There were only 4 children (18 percent) who scored low on the index, indicating strong academic well-being. A further 5 children (23 percent) were assigned a 2, indicating moderate academic well-being. Thus, out of 22 children, only 9 (41 percent) were found to have a positive academic well-being. In contrast, 13 children (59 percent) were found to do extremely poorly in school.

Overall, the majority of the children in the study did quite poorly in an academic environment. Although males were found to be somewhat more likely to do poorly in school, the gender difference is not dramatic with 64 percent of males in the study doing poorly academically while 50 percent of the females were also doing poorly in school. In addition, there was no dramatic family dynamic evident.

While research specifically examining the academic experiences of the children of incarcerated parents is rather limited in scope, the literature has generally demonstrated that these children do experience significant challenges and problems in school. School-related difficulties have been linked to parental
incarceration (Huebner and Gustafson, 2007). One study examining 258 adolescents receiving routine health services found that children with a parent who had been to jail or prison was significantly more likely to have been expelled from school (Phillips et al. 2002). Bloom and Steinhart (1993) found that learning/school performance was identified as a problem for the children of incarcerated mothers by both the mothers in prison and by the caregivers of the children. Another study found that almost half of the children (45 percent) reported little or no interest in school and 83 percent of the sample reported that they had experienced problems at school, including school failure and disciplinary sanction (Hanlon et al. 2005).

Trice and Brewster (2004) examined the adjustment of 58 children from the ages of 13 to 19 who had incarcerated mothers based on questionnaires administered to their guardians and mothers in prison. The responses of the children with an incarcerated parent were compared to their same-gender best friend, based on data collected by the caregiver of the children with a parent in prison and the mother of the peer child. They found high rates of dropping out of school (36 percent) among the children in their sample compared to the 10 percent drop out rate for their best friend peers. In addition, they found that the adolescents with mothers in prison were more than four times as likely to be out of school as a sample of their best friends; four times more likely to have been suspended; three times more likely to be significantly absent from school; and nearly four times as likely to be failing classes. Stanton (1980) found that 70 percent of the 166 children included in the study displayed a poor academic performance and half showed classroom behaviour problems (Myers et al. 1999). Poehlmann (2005a) found that the intellectual outcomes of the 60 children of incarcerated mothers in the study were compromised, consistent with their high risk status. The children demonstrated an elevated rate of sub-average cognitive functioning and cognitive delays. Thus, consistent with the literature, it was found that the majority of the children in the study were highly likely to have experienced severe academic challenges.
Social Indicator

The fourth and final indicator, Social, was assessed based on measurements pertaining to the ability of the child to successfully socialize with peers, teachers, and members of the community, develop friendships, and the relationship between the inmate parent, caregiver, and other family members (i.e. siblings).

A child assigned a 1 (good social) would be a child that has formed healthy attachments to others and is capable of developing and maintaining friendships and relationships with others that are positive, including a good relationship with legal guardian and siblings.

For example, Adam, 23, was very social and outgoing and has made lots of friends, was popular in school, enjoyed interacting with others, and has formed healthy relationships with others. He has a long-term girlfriend, with whom he is raising a child, and has formed positive relationships with his mother and his incarcerated father,

A child assigned a 2 (average social) would be a child that generally has all of the above but who sometimes has difficulty in his or her interactions with others and does not always get along well or interact well with others. Nonetheless, these children are generally able to form relatively healthy relationships with others.

For example, Samuel, 16, although he sometimes argues with his mother and sister, generally has positive relationships with them. He has a good relationship with his incarcerated father and has strong ties to his family. However, his mother reported that he has trouble making close friends and has some difficulty interacting with his peer group.

A child assigned a 3 (poor social) would be a child that is unable to or who has not formed healthy attachments and relationships with others, one who has trouble
getting along with others, and who overall does not have a strong social bond to others.

For example, Nathan, 14, has had problems forming healthy relationships with others. He and his mother are often in conflict and have many arguments and do not get along very well much of the time. He has also sought out discussions with his mother that are somewhat inappropriate, such as asking his mother how many men she has slept with, and has some boundary issues. When his girlfriend broke up with him in the eighth grade he responded by falling into a depression and engaging in cutting behaviour. His mother, Paige, provided evidence as to some of the challenges he has had in his relationships with others.

Paige: Oh yeah. Oh, I’ve told Nathan about the abuse because he’s older now and he struggles with relationships. Nathan, you know, having girlfriends and stuff and he was being quite aggressive with the little girl that he was going out with in grade eight so we had to talk about those issues.

Interviewer: What do you mean he was being aggressive?

Paige: Oh, just being very bossy with her and abusive, and telling her what she could wear and what she could do and who she could talk to. I mean, he just doesn’t know how to have a relationship. He’s never seen that. I’ve been single his whole life so he doesn’t know how a man and woman, or woman and woman, or man or man whoever, so he doesn’t know what a relationship is supposed to be, he doesn’t know how to have a relationship. So he was having a little trouble in grade eight with this little girl he was going out with.
Overall, the quality of the social relationships that Nathan has with others is extremely deficient and he is reflective of children who were found to do poorly on this dimension.

**Social Well-Being**

Very little research has specifically parsed out the social dimension of children of incarcerated parents in a manner consistent with the assessments made in this analysis. As such, there is minimal literature available for comparative purposes for this study on this indicator of the well-being scale.

Data was collected for 22 children on this dimension of well-being. Again, it was determined that the majority of the children did poorly on this social indicator. There were only 5 children (23 percent) who were assigned a low score, indicating positive social well-being, while only 2 children (9 percent) were assigned a 2, indicating moderate social well-being. Alternatively, 15 children (68 percent) were found to be doing extremely poorly with respect to their social well-being.

Overall, the majority of the children in the study were found to have a very poor social well-being. There was no significant gender difference noted in the analysis as females were not found to fare much better than males in terms of being poorly off socially, with 62 percent of females and 71 percent of males scoring very poorly on the social well-being indicator.

One study that did include a specific social/interactional component found that the children in about 40 percent of the families in the study experienced interactional difficulties (Lowenstein, 1986). This is a significantly smaller proportion than observed in the children in this study, as 68 percent of the children were found to have a poor social well-being.
Overall Well-Being

The total score reflects the overall well-being of the child and provides an indicator as to how well the child is doing on a variety of dimensions. A child with a low score (4 is the lowest score a child can receive) is generally well-adjusted and represents a high well-being, whereas a child with a high score (12 is the highest score a child can receive) is generally doing quite poorly and is not very well-adjusted, is struggling to cope and has a low overall well-being.

There are complete scores for 22 children. Of that, 9 children were rated as a 12 (41 percent); 3 children were rated as an 11 (14 percent); 2 children were rated as a 10 (9 percent); 1 child rated as a 9 (4 percent); 3 children rated as an 8 (14 percent); 1 child rated as a 5 (4 percent); and 3 children rated as a 4 (14 percent).

Overall, the majority of the children were found to have a poor overall well-being. More specifically, 14 children (64 percent) were assigned a score of 10 or higher, indicating poor well-being across the four dimensions. There were 4 children (18 percent) who received a moderate score, indicating average well-being. In addition, only 4 children (18 percent) were assigned a low score, indicating positive overall well-being. Thus, the majority of the children in the study who had been impacted by parental incarceration were found to be doing extremely poorly overall.

When comparing the most extreme scores, females were found to be generally better adjusted than the males, with 50 percent of the females and 79 percent of males poorly adjusted overall. There was no gender difference observed amongst the small number of children who were well or moderately well-adjusted.
Conclusion

In examining the emotional indicator, it was found that three-quarters of the children had a poor emotional state and only one-quarter of the children were found to be doing well or moderately well in terms of their emotional well-being. No gender effect was observed on this dimension as the males and females scored similarly on the index. While the literature has indicated that emotional problems are present in children of incarcerated parents, this study found it to occur on a much larger scale, with a significantly higher proportion of children doing poorly on the emotional dimension than was observed in the research.

In examining the behavioural dimension of the index, it was found that the majority of children had a very poor behavioural well-being. A strong gender effect was noted, with males displaying more negative behaviour and females better adjusted behaviourally. This suggests that males were more likely to externalize than females. Again, while the literature has indicated that behavioural problems were prevalent for children of incarcerated parents, this study found it to occur on a much larger scale than was observed in the research specifically examining the behaviour of these children.

In terms of the academic well-being, it was found that the majority of children did poorly on this dimension. A moderate gender effect was observed, with most males found to do poorly and half of the females also found to be doing poorly. The findings of academic well-being are generally consistent with the literature, although this is an area that has not been heavily researched for children of incarcerated parents.

In examining the social dimension, it was found that the majority of the children did poorly on this indicator. No significant gender effect was observed in the analysis. There is very little literature that has specifically examined this dimension of well-being among children of incarcerated parents, making it
difficult to draw comparisons to the research. One study that specifically examined the social well-being of the children found it to occur on a smaller scale than was observed in this study.

The vast majority of the children in the study were found to score poorly on each of the four indicators, with most found to display an overall poor well-being. Less than 20 percent were found to be doing well overall. A moderate gender effect was noted as females were found to be generally better adjusted than the males, particularly with respect to the behavioural dimension of the index. However, in examining the children who were found to be doing well or who were moderately well-adjusted, no gender effect was noted.
Chapter Five: Anger and Aggression in the Children

In the previous chapter, the well-being of the children was investigated and the index that was developed to assess the overall well-being of the children was presented in detail. As discussed, this well-being index is comprised of four indicators, one of which is the behavioural dimension of the children’s well-being. Captured under this behavioural indicator is the presence of anger and aggression amongst the children which, as an extension of the behavioural dimension, is understood to be a further indicator of the children’s well-being. I am now going to separate anger and aggression among the children out from the larger analysis and conduct a further analysis specific to this component.

There are several reasons why the anger and aggression of the children is being parsed out from the behavioural indicator and explored in greater depth. Specifically, given that the earlier review of the literature in Chapter Two established that: 1) children of incarcerated parents have been found to frequently exhibit anger and aggression; 2) anger and aggression in children is a strong and consistent predictor of their deviant and criminal behaviour; and 3) intergenerational deviance and criminal behaviour is a significant concern for children of incarcerated parents, it is clear that this extension of the behavioural dimension warrants special attention in my analysis. Hence, in my analysis, anger and aggression is conceptualized as both a measurement of well-being and as a precursor to deviance and criminal behaviour.

As previously discussed in the literature review, although anger and aggression has been identified as a significant problem for children of incarcerated parents, researchers have generally not fully explored how it manifests in these children or investigated what factors may have an impact upon its presence in these children; factors which may not only potentially contribute to the children exhibiting anger and aggression but also provide insight into the children who do not display anger and aggression. Therefore, in order to address this gap, I will now conduct an in-
depth analysis of anger and aggression in the children, investigating the extent to which the children display anger and aggression and the way in which it is manifested by the children. In doing so, I will provide a measure of anger that is more developed and precise than what is currently found in the research on children of incarcerated parents and enable greater insight into the nature of this anger and aggression. After establishing the manner in which the children manifest anger, I then identify key factors that may contribute to its presence in the children and which may differentiate the children who exhibit anger and aggression from those that do not. Thus, the focus of this chapter is on developing a more precise measurement of anger in the children and on exploring the nature of the relationship between the anger of the children and key contributing factors.

As stated, the further significance of anger and aggression in the children of incarcerated parents is connected to its relationship with their deviant and criminal behaviour, whereby the anger and aggression of the children is believed to operate as a precursor or contributor to these negative outcomes. However, it should be noted that this chapter will contain no discussion regarding this aspect; rather, the focus here will be on providing an overview of the nature of anger and aggression in the children of the study, thereby establishing a clear depiction as to the context of the children’s anger and exploring the relationship between key factors and the manifestation of anger in the children. This aspect will instead be explored in Chapter Nine, which is the chapter that contains all discussions pertaining to the deviance and criminal behaviour of the children.

**Overview**

Through the process of coding and analyzing the data, it became evident that many of the children manifested anger, often displayed in a physical form resulting in aggressive behaviour. Four particular ways that anger manifested in the children were identified, including: 1) Physically towards self; 2) Physically towards others; 3) Physically towards property; and 4) Verbally. These four
categories are not considered to be mutually exclusive. Indeed, there was much overlap between the forms of anger as the children in the study often manifested their anger in several different ways, with some displaying only certain forms while others manifested all types. Although there were a few children who only manifested one form of anger, more often than not, children who displayed one form also manifested anger in other forms.

These four types of anger are not presented as a scale or hierarchy; rather, it is a categorization of the separate forms of anger manifested by the children in the study. That said, there was some variation found in the levels of anger expressed by the children. As may be expected, there was evidence that anger manifested through self-harm was the most extreme of the four forms, while anger manifested by verbal expressions was observed to be the least extreme. In addition, all of the children who manifested anger through self-harm also displayed the other three forms of anger. In contrast, verbal expressions of anger did not necessarily always occur in conjunction with physical expressions of anger, occurring in isolation in some cases.

It should be noted that, in contrast to the majority of the children in the study who manifested at least one form of anger (67 percent), there were a few children, both male and female, who did not manifest anger in any of the four forms (33 percent). In talking with some of the children who did not display anger it was observed that, while these children showed evidence of experiencing some feelings of anger, this did not manifest itself into either a verbal or physical expression. Their feelings of anger were varied, but generally directed towards particular individuals, such as the incarcerated parent or the prison guards. The interviews with the children helped to provide support for the findings. For example, Megan, 12, who did not manifest any of the four types of anger, indicated that she did have some feelings of anger towards her father for engaging in the behaviour that caused him to go to prison, such as his acts of violence towards others and his drug abuse. Sophie, 22, who also manifested none of the
forms of anger, indicated she was angry with her father for not being around and for the nature of his crimes (sexual violence against women).

*Interviewer: Do you ever get angry about your father being in prison?*

*Sophie: Yeah, for sure. I didn’t have a father growing up, that’s basically what it comes down to, he wasn’t around because of it, and when he gets out I’m kind of thinking about it more, it’s going to be like “okay, you’ve spent your time there and what has the last 20 years done? You’ve been my father but you haven’t been, you know.”*

*Interviewer: Are you angry at your father?*

*Sophie: Um, yes. Yes, for sure. I mean, for what he has done to be in prison, for what he’s done to other women, for what’s he done to my mother, it’s just who he has been.*

Evelyn’s son Chris, 16, discussed his feelings of anger towards the prison guards during their family visits with their father as he perceived the guards to be treating his family differently on the basis of their skin colour. He also did not display any of the forms of anger.

*Yeah. It makes me angry, yeah. I dunno, it’s like they have to hold it over us, they just focus on us. Like because we’re blacks and that. In the visiting room, the whole thing is they see them (other families) as regular people and see us differently because we are black.*

Thus, while all of the children showed some feelings of anger, not all of the children manifested their anger through either verbal or physical expressions. The vast majority of the children, however, did manifest anger in some manner and
how this anger manifested itself in the children will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

Each of the four forms of anger will now be examined in-depth, followed by a further investigation into what factors may differentiate the children who exhibit anger and aggression versus those that do not, including: age; gender; parental instability; and parental drug use.

**Type 1: Anger – Physically Towards Self (Self-harm)**

This refers to instances whereby the anger of the child was manifested by the child engaging in self-harm, such as by cutting or hitting oneself. Although this was the least common of the four forms of anger, observed in only 5 children out of 27 (18.5 percent) it appears to be the most extreme, as will be discussed in further detail below. Anger manifested by self-harm was identified in 4 male children and in one female child. Both the interviews with the legal guardians and the children provided evidence for this form of anger.

A key finding of the analysis was that all of the children whose anger manifested in self-harm also manifested all of the other forms of anger, indicating that it pervaded across multiple dimensions. As will be shown in the later discussion, while the other forms of anger were found to occur in conjunction with other physical and/or verbal demonstrations of anger, there were also some children who manifested only one form of anger. Given the finding that other forms of anger occurred in isolation, whereas self-harm only occurred paired with all forms of anger, it is evident that self-harm was the most extreme expression of anger due to it greater manifestation.

Emily, 16, discussed her struggle with managing her anger and having to hurt herself in order to prevent herself from attacking and hurting others.
Emily: I got really mad at my dad and my….the voice in my head would not stop and it was telling me to go out there and hit my dad, and I am like, "No!" I had to punch myself in the head to like, stop trying to get that …..to get that stopped talking. And it wouldn’t stop so I used to punch myself and everything and like ….oh, man, it’s like so bad. And like I used to go up on my bed and put my pillow over my face and like I’d fall asleep.

Interviewer: Because you wanted to hit somebody?

Emily: Yeah. So I had to like punch myself because I don’t want to hit anybody. Even I do it at school too. Like people look at me funny but I have to do it or I am going to be hurting somebody.

Nathan, 14, discussed how he engaged in cutting to deal with the emotional distress of a break up with his girlfriend in Grade 8.

Nathan: I’ve been kind of depressed. I don’t know what you call it really. I had a counsellor when I was cutting and stuff.

Interviewer: That was when you and your girlfriend broke up?

Nathan: Yeah.

Interviewer: And you were cutting?

Nathan: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where were you cutting yourself?

Nathan: Here.
Interviewer: On your arms?

Nathan: Yeah.

As stated earlier, in all cases where the child inflicted self-harm upon him or herself, all other forms of anger and aggression were present, suggesting that this was the most extreme manifestation of anger. Thus, although they may be a small group within the sample, their level of anger is high and the consequences for such behaviour quite significant, indicating high emotional disturbance when the child is willing to harm him or herself. What makes some children much more emotionally unbalanced that they would self-harm is unclear from this data.

Type 2: Anger – Physically Toward Others

This refers to instances whereby the anger of the child manifests itself physically in aggression towards others. This form was the most common of the three physical manifestations of anger overall, and particularly among the male children in the study. More specifically, 12 of the 18 male children in the study (67 percent) manifested anger through harm towards others. In contrast, only 2 out of the 9 female children (22 percent) manifested anger in this form. Of the 14 children whose anger manifested in this form, 13 of them also displayed other forms of anger, suggesting that it was pervasive across multiple dimensions.

Interviews with the legal guardians about the children provided support for the findings. For example, James, an ex-convict, talks about his son David, 4, who displays a significant degree of physical aggression towards others; his young age makes this particularly notable.

He has the major anger inside where he doesn't understand why or we don't know how to actually control it yet uh, so far we haven't taken him to different places to maybe make him change that way but I don't know. Uh,
some days he'll beat up all the kids in class or he'll like punch the teacher and stuff like that.

Paige, discussed her son Nathan, 14, who often engages in physical confrontations with others.

*Interviewer: Does Nathan ever get in a fight with others?*

*Paige: Oh yeah, yeah, very easily. Yeah, you just look at him the wrong way. He loves to fight. Yeah, that’s scary but that’s part of the reason we’re doing the counselling and the Respirdol. We do a lot of talking, you know what he’s going to do if this happens and what could you do and it takes more of a man to walk away. But yeah, at the drop of a hat poof, he’s ready to fight.*

Interviews with the children also provided insight into their physical manifestation of anger towards others. Both of the examples below were drawn from two teenaged children who displayed extreme physical aggression toward other individuals.

*Dylan, 17 –*

*Anything like…..even my, like fights that weren’t even supposed to be mine, I’d go in and fight with them. Like my buddy was getting beat up a lot and I was like “Yo, if you are going to beat somebody up, you are going to fight me” kind of thing and he punched me in the face once and he knocked my tooth out and I hit him, like right there in the jaw and like, I hit him so hard that I like made the friggin’ skin all in here, go purple and shit because I hit him so hard with my hand.*
Ah, one time me and my buddy we were on the floor and like wrestling around, or whatever, and like he went to like push me off him, and he just like swiped across my throat or whatever, and it made me snap. I was just like “don’t you ever grab my fucking throat again! You little bitch” and I like held him down. So I thought he was like trying to choke me out. I grabbed his face and neck with my hand to stop him and I didn’t want to let go, my hand hurt after I let go of his face, I was squeezing him so hard that when I let go I couldn’t even open my hand.

Like I used to get in fights and all that stuff and I used to punch out everybody at my school.

Emily, 16, –

Emily: So like, I have not been at school, because I don’t want to fight. Because if I fight, I won’t stop. Yeah. Like no, I won’t like stop hitting them. ‘Cause that is just me, like when I was younger I used to like, flush people’s heads down the toilet and like flush it…when this girl had really long, long hair, they had to cut it. Yeah, I almost killed them I guess, I don’t know.

Interviewer: How do you feel about that now?

Emily: Ah, I still talk to the girl. I said, sorry and all that stuff. She’s like, "it’s okay". And then I told her the whole story about like how I am always angry and all that stuff and she was like, “well I forgive you like, I made you mad.” Yeah, she said something about my dad, so.

Interviewer: What did she say about your dad?

Emily: Oh, ‘cause my dad was in jail then, and she was like “oh, your dad’s in jail and he’s not going to be coming out and he’s a piece of shit”
and all this stuff. So I grabbed her and put her head in the toilet. After I beat her up first.

Given the finding that this was the most common of the three physical manifestations of anger and aggression and that the children who manifested it in this form were also highly likely to manifest it in multiple other forms denotes the significance of this type.

**Type 3: Anger – Physically Toward Property**

This refers to instances where the child manifests anger in a physical way against objects or things, engaging in physical acts against property. This was observed in 10 of the male children (56 percent) and 2 of the female children (22 percent). There were no children who manifested anger physically against property that did not also manifest other forms of anger, suggesting that it was pervasive across multiple dimensions.

The interviews from the legal guardians provided evidence of this form of anger. For example, Heather, talking about her son Thomas, 17 –

*There’s a definite time when he doesn’t handle anger well. There’s definite, a couple weeks ago, well there’s a hole in our wall, yeah there’s a hole in the bottom part of our wall (front foyer) around by the door where this girl he was interested in um, I still don’t know what happened at school but anyway he came home and he was really mad and he walked in the door and punched the wall and kicked the wall and that was kind of ‘okay, you need, you need to calm down, you need to deal with this’.*

Ellen, talking about the reaction of her son Ryan, age 4, following the incarceration of her partner –
I noticed after Alex was gone that Ryan was pretty aggressive again. I mean I would come here to play with him and he wouldn’t….he didn’t play. He would take toys. He would throw them. He would just pick things up and just whip them. He’d come up to me and pinch me and laugh. So there wasn’t any good playing that he was doing. There wasn’t any good playing that he was doing. It was kind of really aggressive.

Interviews with the children also provided evidence as to manifestations of anger against property.

Charlie, age 14, –

Interviewer: What did you do?

Charlie: I went in, banged the wall and punched the wall.

Interviewer: So you hit things when you are mad?

Charlie: Yeah.

Dylan, age 17, –

Interviewer: Do you smash things a lot?

Dylan: Ah, yeah, actually I do. Every time I get angry I punch a hole in something. I can’t do it here because it isn’t my house. But if it was, and I was angry, there would be holes like everywhere.

Interviewer: When you hit something, does it make you feel better?

Dylan: Yeah. A lot better.
Again, the finding that all children who manifested anger physically in this manner also manifested anger and aggression in other ways provides a strong indication of the significance of this type.

**Type 4: Anger - Verbally**

The fourth non-physical manner through which anger was manifested by the children was verbally, referring to instances in which the child displays their anger orally. This was a common manifestation of anger amongst the children, with verbal expressions of anger observed for 14 of the 18 male children (78 percent) and for 3 of the 9 female children (33 percent). In contrast to the three types of physical manifestations of anger discussed above, there were some children who manifested anger verbally that did not engage in any other forms. This was observed among the younger children, those under the age of six years. As such, verbal manifestations appear to be the least extreme form of anger with some children engaging only in this form; the same cannot be said for the physical manifestations of anger, particularly that of self-harm. For example, there was only one child who engaged in one physical form of anger who did not also manifest other forms. All of the other children displayed at least one other form of anger, with many of them manifesting several forms.

The interviews with the legal guardians provide evidence for the findings on verbal manifestations of anger. For example, Carla, talking about the verbal aggression of her daughter Theresa, age 13 –

*Interviewer: How does your daughter lash out?*

*Carla: More verbally. I wear the brunt of it, her frustration, which to a point, I will wear it because that’s mom’s job. I’m the sounding board for everything. I’ve always been and chances are, even with a partner by my*
side fulltime, I would never allow them to step into that role. I’m a very dominant mother. I’m very protective of my children. When Theresa lashes out verbally, I hear everything, “Well, it’s all your fault that any of this is happening and what did you do to piss him off?” or “You know what mom? If you hadn’t put us in this situation and hooked up with a con in the first place….It’s your fault.” Things like that.

Lily, talking about her son Dylan, age 17 –

Some days he would talk about his dad and he calls him every name in the book but then he’ll get talking to people and he’ll ‘well my dad’s an asshole, my dad’s this, my dad’s that’. I’m thinking ‘if you think your dad’s an asshole, then why do you brag about him being a junkie, brag about him being in jail or what he’s done?’ Like those things don’t make sense to me on the one hand to say you hate somebody, you wish he was dead, blah, blah, blah and then in a way I think he still does. I don’t know.

Interviews with the children also provided evidence of verbal manifestations of anger. For example, Nathan, age 14, discussed a verbal confrontation with his teacher.

Nathan: Well, my teacher’s a bitch.

Interviewer: Why is she a bitch?

Nathan: She just like never leaves me alone, if I talk….Like everyone else talks in there. But if I talk, she’ll be right on me and be like, “Well, why are you talking?” But like everyone else is talking.

Interviewer: She gives you a hard time?
Nathan: Yeah. One day I was like, “Piss off and leave me alone.”

Interviewer: You said that to her?

Nathan: Yeah. And she left me alone.

Whether anger manifested in other forms varied for the physical expressions of anger. There were instances in which a child manifested physical anger of one of the three types but did not display other physical forms of anger. However, for nearly all the children, if they manifested anger physically they also manifested it verbally. This was true for all but one child.

**Differentiating Factors**

While the above discussion provides the context for the manner and extent to which the children in the study exhibit anger and aggression, I will now turn to examining four key factors that were identified as contributing to an increased likelihood that some children will display anger and aggression in an effort to differentiate the children who exhibit this behaviour from those that do not display anger and aggression.

**Age**

By and large, the children in the study who manifested anger to the greatest extent were children between the ages of 13 to 17; this was particularly true for the male children. More specifically, all of the children who manifested anger through self-harming behaviour were within this age range, as were: 11 out of 14 (79 percent) children who manifested anger toward others; 10 out of 12 children (83 percent) who manifested anger towards property; and 11 out of 17 children (65 percent) who manifested anger verbally. Overall, out of the 15 children who fell in this age
ranger, only 3 children (25 percent) did not manifest any of the four forms of anger.

Johnston (1995) examined the differential impact that parental incarceration has on children with respect to the particular period of child development based on the specific age of the child. She found that for children between the ages of 2 to 6, the separation from the parent may result in the child acting out and engaging in forms of aggression. Consistent with this, all 5 of the children between the ages of 2 to 6 manifested some form of anger, with verbal expressions the most common form for the younger children.

For children who were school-aged, Johnston (1995) found that between the ages of 7 to 10, the most typical trauma-reactive behaviour observed in children of offenders is that of aggression, along with hyper-vigilance to states of anxiety, and difficulties concentrating. Many of these behaviours subsequently have been found to lead to challenges in school in terms of both academic performance and in disciplinary problems (Johnston, 1995). In terms of the children in this study between the ages of 7 to 10, the female child in this age range manifested no forms of anger. However, it should be noted that this child was being raised by a step-father and had had little contact with her biological father.

For the age range of 11 to 14 years, Johnston (1995) found that for children at this stage of development many children of offenders will organize their behaviour into patterns of coping that are ultimately maladaptive and some may reject any limitations that may be placed on their behaviour as a response to parental activities that led to trauma of incarceration. In terms of the children in this study, 6 out 10 (60 percent) displayed at least two types of anger, with 4 of these 6 children displaying three or more types. There were 4 children (40 percent) in this age range who did not display any anger.
In late adolescence, those aged 15 to 18 years, Johnston (1995) maintains that the children of offenders have typically experienced a lifetime of disruptions as a result of the criminal activities of their parent and subsequent arrest and incarceration. Johnston (1995) notes that older children are more likely they are to have experienced greater disruption and parental instability as their parents have continually been incarcerated, released back into the community, and then incarcerated again. The impact of this parental instability is considered to have a negative impact on the child and may result in subsequent negative and maladaptive behaviour among children in this age range. This contention was consistent with the findings of the study as 18 of the children had parents who were recycling in and out of the criminal justice system. Eight of those children fell between the ages of 15 to 18, with 7 of the children (86 percent) manifesting at least one form of anger.

**Gender**

Research has found that boys and girls exhibit anger differently and respond in different ways to the incarceration of a parent. Extant research has shown that males are more likely to engage in violent behaviours than are females (Dannerbeck, 2005) while research specifically on children of incarcerated parents has identified male children as being more likely to receive higher ratings of aggressive behaviour (Sack et al. 1977 as cited in Gabel 1992a; Gabel and Schindledecker, 1993; Hungerford, 1993 as cited in Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999). Consistent with this determination with respect to gender, this study has also found that male children were more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviour and display anger and aggression across multiple forms in contrast to the female children in the study who generally did not manifest anger or engage in aggressive behaviour but rather, displayed evidence of internalizing behaviour.

Indeed, the manifestation of anger was observed to be a gendered phenomenon for the children in this study, with a majority of males displaying at least one form of
anger and the majority of females displaying no forms of anger. More specifically, out of the 18 male children in the study, 15 (83 percent) manifested anger. In contrast, almost all of the children who did not display anger were female; out of the 9 children who did not manifest any anger, 6 (67 percent) were female. Thus, out of the one-third of children who did not manifest any forms of anger, two-thirds of them were female, demonstrating a substantial gender effect.

While the male children were more likely to externalize their behaviour and emotions through the high proportion that manifested anger and aggression, there was some evidence that the majority of female children who did not manifest any of the forms of anger internalized instead. Specifically, 4 out of the 6 children (67 percent) who did not manifest anger showed evidence of high emotional distress and had difficulty coping. Interviews with the legal guardians provided support for this observation.

For example, Hannah discussed the emotional difficulties of her daughter Megan, 12, who was described as a constant worrier, always anxious and stressed, and who tended to regress in her behaviour. During the interview with Hannah, signs of Megan’s regressed behaviour were observed first-hand as she told her mother she was too sick to go to school and spent the day lying on the couch with a blanket, watching cartoons while sucking on her thumb. Megan’s internalizing behaviour contrasted the externalizing behaviour and manifestation of anger as present in her brother.

Another example of internalizing behaviour was described by Samantha in discussing her daughter Grace, 21. Grace was too emotionally vulnerable to participate in the interview but her mother gave much insight into her emotional state, providing evidence of internalized behaviour.

Samantha: Grace would cry at the drop of a pin. That is even on her report card, like in kindergarten, she’d cry at the drop of a pin. But then
she is still like that now.... So we are kind of sharing this car amongst the three of us right now. And she phoned me this morning to say that she probably would be staying at work, so whoever had the car might have to come and pick her up. And then she started crying!

Interviewer: Why do you think that she is so emotional?

Samantha: I don’t know. She has always been emotional. Always been really emotional even like as a kid. As an adult, it’s gotten better but ah, she also...I don’t know.

Sophie, 22, also displayed signs of internalized behaviour in contrast to her brother’s externalized behaviour. Her mother Olivia discussed her extreme anxiety and inability to cope:

Oh, she crashed. She would talk on the cell phone and when exams came up I would be talking to her right to the door, “You can do this, do your breathing” you know doing all the and she still couldn't “Mom, I can't, I can't”. She had extreme functional anxiety.

Sophie also provided some insight into her own emotional state during the interview as she discussed her co-dependent relationship with her mother and how she didn’t deal emotionally with her father’s incarceration until she was much older, instead keeping it inside until she had a breakdown.

Interviewer: How do you think your father being in prison has affected you emotionally?

Sophie: Um, hmm, probably um closed me off a bit more, that was probably the way that I dealt with it, uh but yeah more...I think I act tougher than I am, not that I act tough, but I think I’m stronger than I
...but I still believe that I’m sure that um, statistically I could be (glue) sniffing somewhere so I’m pretty proud of being here at least. At least I’m here, I guess but it makes it hard, I guess (breaking down into tears).

Overall, it was evident that gender had a significant effect on the manifestation of anger amongst the children in the study, with the males displaying more forms of anger while the females displayed fewer instances of manifestations of anger.

**Parental Instability**

A relationship was observed between the manifestation of anger and parental instability, namely the variable identifying whether the parent has been serving an extended and consistent sentence (i.e. straight 10 year plus sentence) or whether the parent has been in and out of prison, thereby indicating high instability in the child’s life. This is a theme that does not appear to be prevalent in the literature on children of offenders and has not been previously identified as such. It was found that parental instability appears to play a major role in understanding manifestations of anger in this study.

There were 4 families in the study where the parent has been incarcerated for an extended period of time. Interestingly, the majority of the children (78 percent) in these families displayed no manifestations of anger. Of those children with long-term incarcerated parents who did manifest anger, it was observed only in the male children; their female siblings manifested no anger.

The majority of the parents in the study were not long-term offenders; rather, there was a preponderance of parents who were continually recycling in and out of prison. Overall, there were 12 families that had high parental instability. Of the 18 children from these families, 16 children (89 percent) manifested anger in at least one of the four forms. The 2 children with parental instability who did not
manifest anger were both female children; both of whom had male siblings who did manifest anger.

Based on these observations, it is therefore contended that this chronic instability and repeated presence and absence of the parent in the life of the child may be a strongly contributing factor in the manifestation of anger and aggression in the children.

**Parental Drug Use**

While acknowledging that parental drug use and parental incarceration are often closely interrelated, with drug abuse often contributing to subsequent incarceration events, it was also observed that the children who had parents who were drug users were also more likely to display at least one form of anger. This is a theme that does not appear to be prevalent in the literature on children of offenders and has not previously been identified as such.

Specifically, drug use was reported for 13 incarcerated parents. Out of the 20 children from these families, 17 of them (85 percent) were found to manifest at least one type of anger. The 3 children (15 percent) with parental drug use who did not manifest any anger were all female, suggesting a gendered component. There were 7 children with no parental drug use; 6 of these children (86 percent) manifested no anger and aggression. Thus, based on the above observations it is evident that parental drug use is connected to manifestations of anger in the children.

**Conclusion**

Research has indicated that a child who is aggressive exhibits behaviours that are likely to continue into adulthood without intervention. Thus, examining children who manifest anger and aggressive behaviour is of particular concern.
Overall, it is clear that the majority of the children in the study manifested at least one form of anger, with several also displaying multiple types of anger. The most extreme manifestation of anger was found amongst those children who engaged in self-harming behaviour, while the least extreme was the verbal manifestations of anger.

In terms of the age of the children, it was found that children between the ages of 13 to 17 were particularly likely to manifest anger in at least one form. This was consistent with research that identified older children as being more vulnerable to the impact of parental incarceration due to their greater exposure to parental instability (Johnston, 1995).

Research has indicated that children of incarcerated parents exhibit internalizing behaviour, such as anxiety, withdrawal, depression, shame and guilt, and externalizing behaviour, such as anger, aggression and hostility towards caregivers and siblings. The evidence as to whether male children are more negatively affected than female children by the incarceration of a parent is unclear. It is likely that both males and females are adversely affected by the incarceration of a parent; however, the modes through which the children express their reactions may differ depending on the gender of the child. Male children are more likely to display externalizing behaviour while female children are more likely to display internalizing problems, although the sets of problems many co-occur for some children and be evident in children of both genders (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003). Consistent with the research, a significant gender effect was found, whereby the majority of the male children displayed externalizing behaviour, manifesting at least one form of anger in contrast to the majority of the female children who manifested no forms of anger, particularly with respect to the physical expressions, but who displayed internalizing behaviour.

Children of incarcerated parents may be at risk for poor outcomes due to an array of contextual, sociodemographic, and background factors, such as poverty and
In conclusion, this chapter has presented measures of anger that are more precise and refined than what has previously been found in the literature on children of incarcerated parents. It has further provided a clear description as to the four forms in which the children manifested anger, thereby providing context regarding the extent of their anger and the manner in which it is displayed. Additionally, it identified key factors that may contribute to increasing the likelihood that children of offenders may exhibit anger and aggression. Overall, it was found that male children between the ages of 13 to 17 years with high levels of parental instability and parental drug use are at significantly greater risk of exhibiting anger and aggression.
Chapter Six: Quality of Care

The second goal of this study is to assess the impact that three principal factors have on the well-being of the children to determine whether there are certain conditions that place the children at greater risk for experiencing poor outcomes. The first factor that will be examined is the quality of care that the children are receiving. This chapter reviews the analysis of the quality of care that the children have received in their family and home environment and investigates whether there is any relationship to their overall well-being, as per the well-being index. The analysis was based on three indicators of quality of care: 1) the well-being of the legal guardian; 2) the relationship between the child and the legal guardian; and 3) the level of parental instability and household instability experienced by the child.

Legal Guardian Well-Being

As discussed in the literature review, the caregivers of children of incarcerated parents are highly vulnerable to experiencing emotional strain and parenting challenges, with many of these caregivers found to report high levels of parenting stress (Mackintosh et al. 2006; Arditti et al. 2003). This research has further indicated that, even for children being raised in stable home environments, the caregiver’s ability to provide responsive and nurturing care may be compromised when problems such as elevated depressive symptoms are present in the caregiver (Poehlmann, 2005a). Additionally, there is evidence that the ability of the children to successfully adjust to the imprisonment of a parent is related to the level of

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14 Based on the degree to which discipline is imposed and enforced for the negative behaviour of the child, the extent to which the child and legal guardian communicate openly about the incarcerated parent, and the level of conflict between the child and legal guardian.

15 Based on whether the parent has been incarcerated for an extended and consistent period of time or whether the parent has continually been recycling in and out of prison and whether the legal guardian and the incarcerated parent has consistently remained in a relationship throughout the life course of the child.

16 Based on whether the family has relocated cities in order to be closer to the incarcerated parent; whether the child has frequently changed schools; and whether the family has frequently moved homes.
familial and personal resources that their caregiver has available (Lowenstein, 1986). The research therefore demonstrates the importance of examining the emotional and mental state of the legal guardians in the study. Thus, it is contended that the well-being of the legal guardian will provide insight into the quality of care provided for the children and to their overall well-being.

The well-being of the legal guardians was assessed based on an analysis of the data collected during their interviews, including both the verbal statements made by the legal guardians and the observations made with respect to their demeanour and behaviour. The well-being of the legal guardians was measured based on coding of this data whereby the participants were situated into one of three categories: those with a positive well-being; those with an average well-being; and those with a poor well-being. The well-being of the legal guardians was subsequently related to the well-being of the children, as per the well-being measure of the children as presented in Chapter Four.

Consistent with research that has identified the stress and strain placed on the caregivers of children of incarcerated parents (Poehlmann, 2005c; Mackintosh, 2006; Hungerford, 1993), the well-being of all 17 of the legal guardians in the study was also found to be generally rather poor, although there was some variation as to the extent to which the legal guardians were having emotional troubles. None of the legal guardians were found to be doing very well or were considered to be entirely emotionally stable and healthy; all of them were struggling emotionally to a certain extent, although it was observed that several of them were doing especially poorly. Specifically, it was observed that there were 10 legal guardians with an extremely poor well-being.

Overall, the majority of the children in the study were being cared for by legal guardians with a poor well-being; most of these children were also found to have a poor well-being. There were no children being cared for by a legal guardian with poor well-being who were doing well. In contrast, the majority of the
children being cared for by legal guardians with a more positive well-being were also found to have an improved well-being. Thus, it would appear that the well-being of the legal guardian is associated with the subsequent well-being of the child, with the relationship evident for both positive and negative associations.

**Practitioners**

The practitioners provided some insight into the general well-being of the legal guardians as they discussed their personal experiences with the caregivers of children with incarcerated parents. They discussed how many of these individuals were having difficulties coping, were emotionally fragile, were overwhelmed, anxious, fatigued, and worn out due to the many challenges associated with raising a child of an incarcerated parent, such as poverty and single parenting. For example, one practitioner (#6) talked about how the legal guardians struggle to cope with the demands of single parenting and are often stressed and overwhelmed.

> When you are dealing with somebody inside, and you’ve got to call or you can’t get a hold of them or he’s had to hang up, or you know there has been a fight, you’ve heard it on the news and you know that there is a lockdown, I don’t know where my loved one is in the middle of that scenario, and no one is going to tell you. You know, then it is going to create anxiety and stress in you, which is going to impact your children. It’s inevitable. And sometimes these families are not as together enough to say, you know what “Mummy is really upset right now because there has been a lockdown at KP and I don’t know where Daddy is in that lockdown” or “I heard that there was a big fight, and I don’t know what that is about” and “Mummy’s having a hard time right now, and you are still being a good boy or good girl, I’m just having a really hard time”. Instead what happens is “Don’t do that! Stop this!” you know and “Do you have to keep asking me that again and again!” or “Can’t you just go
"watch TV!", or you know, "Everybody go to bed!", you know because they are stressed because of the demand. And maybe some of the language isn’t always appropriate and gentle and loving and caring. You know it might be harsh and swearing and that kind of thing because they are stretched. And I am not saying that this is what all these families are like all the time but I think that when we are stressed we do things that we would not do otherwise. And sometimes our tolerance and our patience level is not where it is going to be. I think that some of these people can have amazing tolerance and patience. And I have seen beautiful parenting happen on the inside. And again I think that some of them are very well-intended and good parents, and I think that sometimes there is just more on the plate than what can be dealt with. I don’t think it is about who they are, I think it is about all the they have going on.

Another practitioner (#12) discussed how having a legal guardian who is stressed and overwhelmed may mean that they are not able to provide the children with an outlet or sufficient support to help them cope.

So there is not really anywhere for these kids to kind of have an outlet. I mean, they come home and mom is stressed out because of you know, money and not having a place to live, and you know their phone is being cut off and you know, nobody is supporting them, the families have all left them, their friends have all left them, there is not really a forum there either for them.

Overall, the practitioners provided much insight into the challenges faced by the legal guardians in raising a child with an incarcerated parent.
**Analysis – Children and Legal Guardians**

The well-being of the majority of the legal guardians was rather unfavourable, with 10 legal guardians out of 17 in the study (59 percent) found to have a very poor overall well-being. These individuals were struggling with feelings of being overwhelmed, depression, stress, anxiety, and were having difficulty coping. Several legal guardians also manifested signs of emotional distress through crying and breaking down during the course of the interview.

The interviews with these legal guardians provided evidence of their poor emotional and mental state. For example, Rachel was doing very poorly emotionally and was suffering from depression. During several points in the interview, she was observed to be incoherent, often slurring her words, and displayed evidence of having difficulty speaking and answering questions. She claimed the medication she was on for her depression was responsible and indicated that it was a natural state of being for her.

*Oh, because right now I am on some medications that I don’t think is working. I’m still depressed, I’m still crying. But it is keeping me awake, to my limit. Like right now I’m drowsy, I get drowsy but if I take my two pills then it will all be okay. To be awake. But the depression, no.*

During the interview with Emily, 16, one of the children in the home being cared for by Rachel, she also made reference to her step-mother often spending all day in bed, rarely leaving the house, providing evidence of a complete withdrawal of her legal guardian. Rachel discussed how she responded when her husband, James, went to jail the last time, demonstrating that her ability to provide adequate care for Emily and the younger children was greatly diminished.

*But I cried that Friday until Saturday afternoon. And then I put myself into a depression. I sleep seven days a week, I might get up for an hour. But it*
wasn’t fair for Emily because she was looking after them all. So I went to a shrink and said I need help and got the meds.

Another example of a legal guardian with a poor well-being was Olivia, a mother of two. She was especially emotionally disturbed and had a very fragile mental state. Several times during the interview she broke down crying, and indicated that she was struggling with the guilt of having and raising her children with an incarcerated father, especially given the nature of his crimes. She blamed herself and worried constantly about the potential impact it could have on her children, especially her son. Overall, a sense of feeling completely overwhelmed, isolated, stressed and having extreme difficulty coping characterizes her emotional state.

The interview with Olivia provided insight into her fragile emotional and mental state.

Everywhere to get the help it takes way more energy than what I do emotionally, what I physically have.

I kind of always wanted kind of counselling for support that um so that I wouldn’t feel responsible (breaking down) and hoping. That’s something I kind of push on my children but anyway.

When I was really crashing emotionally bad a few years ago and I was talking to somebody about it and they said you can get compensation and it's been so hard to try and see myself as a victim.

Hannah, a mother of two, was also having trouble coping and had a very poor mental state. She was stressed, overwhelemed, and suffered from anxiety and depression.
Yeah. I’m not happy any more. I’m always sad and I always seem depressed and you know, I don’t do what I used to do.

I show stress. I have anxiety because I worry about them and I feel like I’m failing as a mom, but what I in turn do is like kind of…they’re feeding off my anxieties. They’re seeing what it’s doing to me and they’re kind of feeding off that. So I got to take part of the blame for that. I worry so much and then they see the worry, so they worry and I don’t hide things well. So they pick up on everything. “Are you okay Mom? Are you alright Mom? It’s okay to cry mom.” It almost sometimes feels like they’re the parent and you know, like, you know so and you have to love them more.

These 10 legal guardians with a poor well-being were responsible for caring for 15 children. Of these 15 children, 4 of the children in this grouping were not assigned well-being scores due to their young age. Therefore, out of the 11 children with legal guardians who had a poor well-being, 10 of them (91 percent) scored a 10 or higher on the well-being scale, indicating poor overall well-being. No children with a legal guardian who had a poor well-being scored positively on the well-being scale. This indicates that children who are in households where the legal guardian has a poor well-being do not manifest a healthy and positive well-being.

The remaining 7 legal guardians (41 percent) all displayed either an average or good well-being. Although these individuals were found to have a more positive well-being than the other legal guardians, there were still signs of emotional distress or difficulty coping, indications of isolation, and lack of support networks. However, they appeared to have more internal resources or capabilities that helped them to manage more effectively and were doing relatively better than the other caregivers in the study.
For example, Charlotte, a mother of two, was experiencing some challenges in caring for the children on her own and in trying to support her husband in prison. She often felt stressed but also spoke very optimistically about her situation and had a positive attitude.

*Charlotte:* You have to take care of the financial burden, you got to take care of making sure that they are all taken care of and rent, and food and it’s stress. It’s a great burden on somebody. Like it’s stressful on me. It’s a good stress. But it still gets you down. Because then you are so tired, you are so like, doing everything by yourself, and when everything...when something else comes up with my daughter I’ve got to do, or surgeries or my kids have been through a couple...I have to do it myself. You know? And I don’t know, it’s hard.

*Interviewer:* Was there anything that helped you to cope when you were struggling with the children?

*Charlotte:* I guess just to think that I can do it, I am strong. You know? Um, part of me, I have a very strong will, and part of me, just it takes a while for it to come. But I mean, like I say, if I did not have people, I don’t know, if I could.....I could do it, but I don’t know. Right now, it’s people to fall on and feeling that I know if I get stressed, I can talk to anybody. I can get you know, if I got a problem, you know, I just talk and see how it goes. You know. Um, I am still going to have ups and downs when I am at home with my kids. It’s just...I do every day you know? With different problems that are going on. And but I don’t know, um, just got to be I guess, support is the main number one thing. If you don’t have support, then you don’t have anything.

Evelyn, a mother of three children, spoke about feeling isolated and lonely but was also very positive and had a good attitude. She also struggled with supporting
her husband in prison and in raising her children alone but was very strong and focused on caring for her children.

It is hard. Because I’m always the strongest one. Everybody comes to me and tell me their problems, but I don’t want to be strong anymore, but I gotta keep on being strong. It’s draining and I just try to stay positive.

Because again, the support system I put in place for my children, and that is so important now and days. At the beginning, it was hard, yes. It was very, very hard. But you have to say, “Okay. I have fallen on the ground. How am I gonna get up? Do I call someone to help me? Do I wait until my legs are healed? Do I lean against the wall and try to get up? What am I supposed to do?” and you’ve got to put those choices and move things in place. If it takes you 25 years to stand up, then you will as long as you believe in yourself, you will stand up. And if you feel you need to, you go through doors and doors and if they all close on you, it’s up to you again. What are you gonna do? And my doors have been closed on me, I can’t even, it’s really hard though.

Evelyn also spoke about her experiences with other women who had a partner in prison and how she felt that she has had a more difficult time due to her skin colour but that she was better able to cope than other women.

They see me as a strong person and only can learn from me. But they have to change the whole environment for me to come. Because I would give them my mechanism, coping mechanism to survive, because my challenge is much 10 times harder then theirs and I’m smiling every day. Because even though they have men in jobs, but hey, you’re easier to get a job, then I am. Even though we’re both poor, you know, we’re both women, we’re both poor, we both have the incarceration, but I have
another stigma on top of me again and that is challenging alone, even if I never had anyone in there.

These 7 legal guardians with a higher well-being were responsible for caring for 12 children. Of these 12 children, 11 were assigned a well-being score. Of these 11 children, the majority (7 children; 64 percent) scored low or moderate scores on the well-being index, indicating positive well-being, with the remaining children found to have a poor overall well-being. Therefore, this finding suggests that children in households where the well-being of the legal guardian was higher also tended to display higher well-being.

As stated previously, there were no children with a positive well-being who had a legal guardian that had a poor well-being; all of the children with a low to moderate score had legal guardians that were also doing relatively well. This indicates that the well-being of the legal guardian is positively related to the well-being of the child.

**Relationship of the Child and Legal Guardian**

The relationship between the child and the legal guardian is argued to be a key element in understanding the quality of care of the children; a contention that has been supported by research which has determined that the relationship between the child and their primary guardian is of much significance to the children (Mackintosh, 2006; Poehlmann, 2005c). While it is generally assumed that stability in the care the child is receiving has a positive impact on the well-being of the child, an implicit qualification of such an assumption is that the care the child is receiving is of a high quality. Thus, it is not sufficient to simply examine whether the care the child is receiving is stable. Rather, it is argued that the relationship between the child and the caregiver has implications for the development and outcome of the child and should be an included variable (Dallaire, 2007b).
Research has shown that children of incarcerated parents may have troubled relationships with their caregivers. For example, in the first study documenting the children’s representations of attachment relationships during the incarceration of the mother, data was collected from 54 children from the ages of 2.5 to 7.5 years through multiple methods, including interviews, questionnaires, coded videotapes, and standardized assessment, and with multiple informants, including caregivers, mothers, and children. It was determined that 63 percent of the children held representations of insecure relationships with mothers and caregivers. More specifically, two-thirds of the children held representations of attachment relationships characterized by intense ambivalence, disorganization, violence, or detachment. Secure relationships were more likely when the children lived in a stable caregiving environment, when children responded to the separation from the mother with sadness instead of anger, and when the children were older. The strongest predictor of the children’s representations of relationships with caregivers was the stability of the caregiving situation (Poehlmann, 2005c).

Another study, based on a sample of 69 children from the ages of 6 to 12 years with currently incarcerated mothers who attended a recreational summer camp and 25 of their caregivers, determined that the stresses felt by the caregivers impacted upon the level of acceptance felt by the children. Children who felt more warmth and acceptance from the caregivers reported that they had fewer behavioural problems. In contrast, the less warmth and acceptance the children felt from the caregiver, the worse their behaviour. The greater the stress on the caregiver, the less accepting the caregiver was of the child (Mackintosh, 2006). Both of these studies demonstrate the importance of the relationship between the children and their legal guardians and highlight the key role that it plays in the life of children with incarcerated parents.
The factors included in the analysis of the relationship between the children and their legal guardians provide an indicator as to the overall parenting of the child. Studies have shown that unresponsive parenting precipitates psychological problems during childhood and signifies subsequent adversity throughout the life course (Evans et al. 2008). Research has also determined that the risk of later delinquent behaviours can be connected from early in a child’s life to certain parent attributes. These attributes include parenting practices such as discipline and level of supervision, as well as traits of the parent that affects their ability to parent, such as substance abuse or mental illness. Parenting style is maintained to be a function of the structure, support and supervision that children are provided by their parents. Parenting that is effective mediates against the trauma of disruptions and transitions for children who lack coping resources, while ineffectual parenting practices promote impulsive, antisocial behaviour (Dannerbeck, 2005). As such, it is argued that the way in which the child parented by the legal guardian is a key factor in determining the overall well-being of the child.

In this analysis, there are a number of factors that determine whether the relationship is positive or negative, including: 1) the degree to which discipline is imposed and enforced for the negative behaviour of the child; 2) the extent to which the child and legal guardian communicate openly about the incarcerated parent; and 3) the level of conflict between the child and legal guardian. All of these factors are contended to provide insight into whether the general nature of the child’s relationship with the legal guardian is a positive or a negative one. Each factor will then be examined individually in relation to the well-being index of the children. This review will be followed by a discussion of the overall relationship between the legal guardian and the child, as determined by the previous analysis of each of these three factors.
Discipline

It was found that over half of the children did not have any discipline imposed upon them; the majority of these children were found to have a poor overall well-being. There were no children with a positive well-being in households that had no discipline. All the children with a positive well-being had legal guardians who imposed discipline. While some of the children with discipline in the home were still found to have a poor well-being, half of these children were found to have had punishments enforced that were especially harsh and strict.

Practitioners

The practitioners provided some insight into their personal experiences and perspectives regarding the amount of discipline in the homes of families of offenders, often recognizing that the substantial amount of challenges that the legal guardians faced in raising children with an incarcerated parent on their own precluded their ability to successfully impose and enforce discipline in the home. For example, one practitioner (#7) stated her view that discipline was simply not a priority for the legal guardians, due to the vast array of other challenges that they were facing.

Interviewer: Did you think that there was a big disconnect from their home life to school?

Practitioner: I think so in a lot of cases. You know, there were rules that they abided by at school and that I think a lot of times at home there was not a lot of discipline. But as I say, I attributed that to you know, I don’t know what kind of emotional state these mothers were in. You know, how taxing everything was for them.
Interviewer: And you saw signs that it might have been pretty taxing for them.

Practitioner: Yeah, I think that you know, most women were in an emotional state of...you know, away from family, away from friends, coping with you know, usually two or three children in a new environment.

Another practitioner (#15) gave an example of one family that he is involved with where the child is getting into a great deal of trouble but where there was a lack of discipline on behalf of his mother, the legal guardian.

Interviewer: His mother is enabling him to act out and get into trouble?

Practitioner: Yeah. So if he is not at school, the school calls and “Where is he?” "Oh, he is not feeling well today” or you know, “He’s got things that he has to do; Well, he can’t do them because of this", while meanwhile he’s sitting on the couch watching TV or something.

Interviewer: Why do you think that she does that?

Practitioner: Guilt. You know, "You don’t have a dad. I’m being both parents and I’ll do whatever I can to keep you happy". I think that a lot of it is guilt.

Interviewer: Do you think that the legal guardians have feelings of guilt?

Practitioner: Yeah. Yeah I think that they have a lot of guilt. I am going to guess at this but, from my experience I think that a lot of the guilt comes from, you know, "I’m really sorry this person happens to be your parent. I should never have done that to you". Yeah, "They gave me you and they are not here for you and this is what they think of us", and I think that
there is also a bit of fear as well - "I don’t want you to grow up to be like that. So you know, if I can keep you happy, you won’t do that".

Overall, the practitioners provided much insight into the challenges and difficulties associated with the legal guardians imposing and maintaining discipline in the home.

**Analysis – Children and Legal Guardians**

Over half of the children were in households where there was no evidence that discipline was imposed and/or that any repercussions were enforced upon the children for their negative behaviour. Out of 27 children, 14 children (52 percent) had no discipline or punishment imposed upon them for their actions or behaviour. Generally, these children were permitted to engage in negative behaviour without significant consequence and minimal effort was made on behalf of the legal guardians to enforce firm rules or to establish particular limitations upon the children.

For example, Doug stated that he was never very successful when trying to discipline his nephew Colin, 16. Doug’s manner was very nonchalant and he did not react to any of Colin’s negative behaviour, claiming that it was normal and acceptable teenage behaviour. This was also witnessed firsthand when Colin came home during Doug’s interview and responded by throwing a fit, slamming things and yelling obscenities. Doug responded by shrugging his shoulders and stating that it was normal for Colin to behave in such a way.

*Interviewer: Do you discipline Colin?*

*Doug: I try but it doesn’t work.*
Interviewer: Why not?

Doug: I always give in (laughs). He’ll just sit here and irritate you until you have to give in. We’re way different so we get along.

Lily, another legal guardian allowed her son Dylan, 17, to use drugs in her home and enforced no rules or discipline. Her perspective was that her guilt over having a child whose father was a drug addict who was repeatedly incarcerated led her to overcompensate and spoil her son by allowing him to do anything he wanted.

Well you have to be mom and dad and make up for it and you feel kind of guilty so what better to make a kid happy then give them absolutely everything they want and give them no rules right? You don’t think about that when they’re growing up until shit starts happening and then it's kind of late.

He’s never had any authority to deal with. Like I said, I never taught him. I never made him do anything. By the time I started to try to make him do something he was like 10 years old or 11 or 12. I don’t know how old he was but I started trying to make him earn things and trying to do things.

No offense to the children out here, I don’t want them out here. I don’t want them because with the parents a lot of them are young like I was and doing the same thing and not giving a shit and letting the kids run loose like I did with Dylan.

Lily also discussed her response to Dylan doing drugs.

Interviewer: So drugs are a problem for Dylan?
Lily: Yes and I’m Miss Mommy. When he first started doing drugs I tried to be against it and he was hiding it so I became Miss Mom that said “Okay well, as long as it’s in the house and I know what he’s doing, it’s okay”. That was a dumb move.

Interviewer: Why?

Lily: Because it went from it being okay once in a while to him just assuming that it was okay all of the time. Then it became this big drug fest in the house and he had everybody coming in and sitting there and getting high and it was whoa. You know like I, no, I think it’s a mistake to do that. But fighting him, he was just going everywhere else and doing it so at least when he was in the house I knew what he was doing. You can’t do that with him. You can’t allow him a little bit because you can’t.

Of the 14 children who did not have any discipline or punishment imposed upon them, 9 children were assigned well-being scores. Thus, out of the 9 children without discipline in the home, 8 (89 percent) were assigned scores of 11 and higher, indicating poor overall well-being. Therefore, the majority of the children who lacked discipline from the legal guardian were doing poorly.

There were 13 children who had discipline and punishment imposed upon them by the legal guardian for their negative behaviour. Of the 13 children, 6 (46 percent) scored a 10 or higher, indicating poor overall well-being. All of the children with a positive overall well-being had legal guardians who imposed discipline. There were no children with a positive well-being that had legal guardians who did not impose discipline upon them. Thus, while discipline appears to be a necessary factor for well-being, the presence of discipline did not produce positive well-being in the children in all cases. This will be examined in further detail below.
Samantha discussed how she followed her son to school to ensure that he did not skip any of his classes; a response she found to be an effective deterrent to his negative behaviour.

*I said to Adam, “Well, you skip school and I’ll follow you to school. You start falling behind in your classes and I will follow you just like I did in public school.”* And sure enough, *he had to test me on that, he got caught skipping so I went to school. I went to auto shop class in the morning and I went to all his classes. And the teachers just thought it was hilarious! Of course they were teasing him and everything.… ”yeah, you have to bring your mom to school with you! You got caught skipping!”* And to my knowledge he did not do it again. He did not get caught at it.

That almost half of the children who were subject to discipline in the home were found to be doing poorly was an unexpected finding. However, that is not to say that all the discipline and punishment inflicted upon the child was appropriate and/or positive. Indeed, further analysis revealed three instances where the punishment by the legal guardian was especially strict. All 3 of the children were assigned a score of 12, indicating poor well-being; these 3 children represent half of the children with discipline that was found to be doing poorly.

For example, during the interview with Hannah, she talked about how she forced her 12 year old son to spend the night in jail when he was caught shoplifting in order to teach him a lesson.

*Hannah: And at one point, Jason was in jail. He got caught shoplifting at one of the cell phone stores and he was 12 at the time and the police were just going to bring him home and I told the store to charge him because he’d been stealing, shoplifting early. I kind of wanted to nip it in the bud so I asked the police officer if he could spend the night in jail. They weren’t for it but I pushed because I was trying to do the tough love thing.*
He spent the night in jail and I said I wasn’t going to bail him out for a week but I ended up having to go up for bail hearing the next day. But I wanted to give him a taste of what its like to be handcuffed, brought into a holding cell, no pillow, no blanket, no nothing. “This is what your dad goes through so if you want to be like your dad, then get used to this. If you don’t want to be like your dad, then take what you learned from that one time in jail and you know, remember that fear.” So that was a year and a half ago.

Interviewer: Did it work?

Hannah: Oh he’s scared. Yeah, like he was held like any other prisoner and then he was brought to the jail. The courtroom booked him. And of course this fight in the courtroom broke out and he was pretty scared.

Interviewer: You wanted to teach him a lesson about his father?

Hannah: These are your choices. You can go down that path or you can go down, you know, get a good education or you can spend many a night sitting there in that holding cell wondering if you’re going to get bail. Because I made sure that they told him that I wasn’t bailing him out. So he could get the “Oh my God, what am I going to do feeling. My mommy’s not going to bail me out. I gotta go to jail for how long?” I was hoping that that would be a hard lesson for him.

Interviewer: And do you think it was?

Hannah: He hasn’t shoplifted since. You know, he’s pretty scared to go to jail.

I thought “okay, now you’re caught”. Because I kept praying, ‘please let him get caught.’ That is a terrible thing to wish but you know, um, he did
get caught and I just said, “don’t bring him home, treat him like a normal criminal”. The officer, he seen my side and they did it.

Interviewer: So the officer agreed with you to do that?

Hannah: Some did and Jason called me that night, because he’s allowed one phone call and I told the officer, “No, I’m not talking to him.” You know, he did crime and that means he can’t talk to me. That was a blow to him too. Big blow.

Interviewer: How did he handle that?

Hannah: Apparently he cried. It was hard on him but he learned. I just hope it stays with him.

Interestingly, although Hannah attributed this harsh discipline to be an effective tool for her son, Jason, 13, was still found to score quite high on the well-being scale, indicating his poor overall well-being. Jason manifested significant levels of anger and routinely engaged in maladaptive behaviours, such as fighting and acting out. He had difficulty interacting effectively with his peers and also experienced many challenges in an academic setting, as he struggled with the material and was often in trouble at school.

Another mother, Kate, used a similar form of punishment on her son when he got caught shoplifting and after an altercation broke out in the home she called the police and charged her son. She also threatened that if he were to break curfew or get into any more trouble that she will immediately contact the police and inform them of his behaviour.

I just try to leave it but I think Jacob understands now that I’m not going to be the pushover that I used to be. He knows now that when I phoned
the police that night that I put my foot down and now I’m very stern with him sort of thing.

Again, Kate believed that her harsh approach was an effective strategy for her son Jacob, age 14. However, he scored quite high on the well-being measure, indicating that he was doing poorly. Jacob manifested significant anger levels and also engaged in several maladaptive behaviours, such as fighting and acting out. He had difficulty interacting effectively with his peers and had trouble in an academic setting.

Therefore, based on the above analysis, it was found that the majority of the children without discipline had a very negative well-being. All the children with a positive well-being had discipline imposed upon them by the legal guardians; there were no children with a positive well-being in households without discipline. While there were some children doing poorly in households with discipline, half of these children had particularly harsh and strict punishments inflicted upon them, indicating that it may not have had a positive impact on their well-being.

**Communication Regarding Incarcerated Parent**

The importance of emotionally open communication in caregiving relationships has been highlighted in the attachment literature (Poehlmann, 2005c; Mazza, 2002). It is posited that the child’s trust in the caregiver is affirmed when the child is told about difficult situations in an honest, sensitive, and developmentally appropriate manner. Alternatively, mental health problems may emerge when information is hidden from the children, distorted in a way that contradicts the experience of the child, or includes details that frighten the child (Poehlmann, 2005a). Thus, communication between the child and the legal guardian regarding the incarcerated parent is therefore contended to be an important aspect of their relationship. It should be noted that a lack of communication may not necessarily
be due to the exclusion of the subject by the legal guardian as there were instances in which the child did not seek to talk about the incarcerated parent with the legal guardian. Indeed, Mazza (2002) notes that many children have learned not to speak about the incarceration of a father or have internalized the social stigma associated with parental incarceration, subsequently refusing to discuss the incarcerated parent. Regardless of the cause of the lack of communication regarding the incarceration of the parent, it is argued to provide an indicator as to whether the child has a safe outlet with the legal guardian for expressing their feelings and talking about their worries and concerns.

Most of the children did not discuss the incarcerated parent with their legal guardians; the majority of these children were found to be doing poorly. Half of the children who did discuss the incarcerated parent were also found to have a poor well-being, however, further in-depth analysis revealed that the nature and amount of detail included in these discussions, such as regarding the criminal behaviour of the parent, were extensive and often disparaging, thereby potentially contributing to a negative impact on the child.

**Practitioners**

The notion that open communication regarding the incarcerated parent was important for the children was strongly supported by the practitioners. The need for children to have the opportunity to safely verbalize and express themselves and their feelings regarding their parent in prison to their primary caregiver was identified as a positive way to help children cope with the loss of their parent to a correctional institute. For example, one practitioner (#6), when asked what would help children to cope with having an incarcerated parent, responded:

*I think reading. Books are a useful tool. Talking about it. Verbalization. And some kids are not ready to talk. So I think um, playing it out with puppets, playing it out with sand play. Playing it out with drawing and art.*
Um, openness to asking questions. You know, to answering them in as brief a way as possible. Saying to the child sometimes you know, “Dad made a mistake, he’s done something that he’s getting a big time out for. He can’t, you know, he’s not going to be home for a long time. The way we are going to get to know dad right now is through this”, you know. And um, if well, “What did he do”? “Well, he took things he should not have taken, or he you know, was driving a car that maybe the way he shouldn’t, or hurt somebody in a way that you should not hurt people”. You know, in language that children are going to understand. And can relate to, instead of you know, not sensationalizing it or dramatizing it, but in a way that is going to be useful to the child.

Overall, the practitioners clearly identified the importance for open communication between the legal guardians and the children regarding the incarcerated parent.

**Analysis – Children and Legal Guardians**

It was found that 16 out of 24 children (67 percent) did not discuss the incarcerated parent or any aspects related to their legal guardian. Of these 16 children, 10 of them (63 percent) scored a 10 or higher, indicating overall poor well-being. Therefore, the majority of the children who did not discuss the incarcerated parent with the legal guardian were found to have an overall poor well-being.

Out of 24 children, only 8 children (33 percent) did communicate with their legal guardian regarding their incarcerated parent. Contrary to expectations that open communication between the child and the legal guardians would result in an improved well-being of the children, half of these children also scored a 10 or higher, indicating poor overall well-being. As such, further detailed analyses were conducted for the children who did communicate with their legal guardians about
their incarcerated parent but who were still found to be doing poorly. In further examining the nature of the conversations between the legal guardians and the children, it was revealed that simply discussing the incarcerated parent may not necessarily have had a positive an impact on the child. Rather, it is important to take the nature and content of the communication into account. This was found to be particularly true when the child was given detailed information regarding the nature of the crimes of the parent and/or the relationship between the legal guardian and the incarcerated parent that was overly graphic and negative, such as in cases of domestic abuse. Thus, consistent with the postulation that children may learn to associate incarceration and stigma not only through the perceptions of society at large but also from behaviours and statements made within their own families, such as a reluctance to discuss the incarceration or derogatory comments made regarding the incarcerated parent (Dannerbeck, 2005), it was found that communication with the child regarding the incarcerated parent that was negative or disparaging may have a detrimental impact on the child.

For example, Lily talked about how she told her son Dylan, 17, everything about her past relationship with his father and detailed the stories of abuse that she experienced from him. However, prior to this conversation with her son, she did not tell him anything about his father when he was growing up, offering no explanations when he would go back to prison, choosing to avoid the subject instead.

*We talked a lot when he was older but there was probably some stuff I shouldn’t have told him but I get so sick and tired of hearing from him. He was angry at his dad but then he’d talk about him like he was some sort of friggin’ saint. Like it was just I got tired of it. I got tired of hearing how his father was a saint and I was such a mean rotten person and thought, “Do you want to know why we moved so much, do you want to know why we’ve moved?” He’d go “There’s 12 different places that I’ve lived, I went to this place to school”. “Do you want to know why?”*
and I told him why. Like, I’m sorry your father beat the crap out of me, we ran and yes why did I go back to him, I don’t know I was caught in that stupid trap, but I did. And my brother has got a picture and my one friend’s got a picture when I was in the hospital. He beat the snot out of me when I was eight months pregnant. I never charged him. My mother didn’t realize what was happening and I got out of the hospital and I was staying at my mom’s and my mom’s friend got out of jail and didn’t realize what was all happening. She drove me to my mother-in-laws place and he was there and nobody really knew the extent of what was going on I guess, I don’t know. My brother did. My friend did but like I could not stand by and watch him talk about him like he was some sort of saint. I’m sorry, but he beat the snot out of me... you wouldn’t even have been here if I hadn’t have went to the hospital. While he was pounding me the only thing that stopped him from pounding me is that I said “oh my God, the baby” and he took me to the hospital. He waited outside the room and did the husband thing. So Dylan knows now but still blames me for moving. He knows why we did but it doesn’t matter.

Another mother, Paige, talked about how she told her son about his father’s temper and past physical abuse that she experienced from him.

Paige: Oh, I’ve told Nathan about the abuse because he’s older now and he struggles with relationships. I told him about his dad and about our relationship because he asked me and I’m not going to lie. His dad was very abusive and he was very powerful. He was very strong at that time. Well there was the night that everything came to a head and I’d had basically enough and kicked him out finally, finally. It was a really bad, scary night. So Nathan needed to know about that.

Interviewer: How did Nathan respond to that?
Paige: He didn’t really say anything. He probably internalized it. Like it’s probably in there, I don’t really know. He just didn’t really say a whole lot, you know, ‘that’s too bad’ and that was about it. Yeah, he didn’t really say any more. I said, “look at your father, look at where he is right now. He is 42 years old. He has got absolutely nothing to say, he can’t work. He looks like he’s about 80 years old. Do you want to go down that road?” “Oh no, no, no.”

Overall, it was found that the majority of the children in the study did not discuss the incarcerated parent with their legal guardians, with most of these children manifesting a poor overall well-being. This suggests that, regardless of the reason for the lack of communication, children who do not have an open outlet for discussing their feelings about their incarcerated parent with their legal guardian may be negatively impacted. In instances where the discussion about the incarcerated parent was not especially constructive, such communication may not have had a positive impact on the child. On the other hand, children who had positive discussions with their legal guardian about the incarcerated parent were found to be doing well. Thus, it would appear that it is not just the communication about the incarcerated parent itself that is key, but rather, the nature of the conversations and the way in which such details and information are presented to the child.

**Conflict Between Child and Legal Guardian**

Over half of the children had conflict with their legal guardians; almost all of these children were found to have a poor overall well-being. All of the children who were doing relatively well in the study were found to have minimal conflict in the home with the legal guardian.

Out of the 23 children included in the analysis, 13 of them (56 percent) had conflict with their legal guardians. Conflict was defined as multiple instances
whereby the legal guardians and the children engaged in arguments and disagreements that were highly confrontational and combative and where the legal guardian and the children were generally unable to get along with each other, resulting in a major breakdown in their relationship.

For example, Carla talked about her relationship with her daughter Theresa, 13, and the ongoing battles that they face.

Carla: I love her to death, but I don’t like her most days. We don’t bake. We don’t talk about boys. We don’t do the makeup thing. Try and go shopping together…She wants to look at everything and say, “I’d really like that.” And me, it’s like, “You can’t have everything you want.” I’m very hard on Theresa. I expect so much from her and she just does not…..I don’t get it. My expectations are too high in some areas, and I got to remember, she’s my daughter, not my friend. She’s only 13. So it’s patience and neither one of us has it. Maybe some day, we’ll be able to bake a cake or you know, even to go have a coffee. We can’t go to Tim Horton’s to have lunch together and have a conversation. It would be quiet. Maybe someday. She’s asked me, “Are we friends mom?” “Nope.” And she got bent right out of shape, because other kids, their moms go and they get their hair done and they go to lunch or they go window shopping. I can’t do those things with her. I don’t have the patience with her. She drives me nuts. And when she said, “How come we’re not friends?” “Because I’m your mother. Maybe some day I’ll be your friend Theresa, but that will be when you move out, when you’re doing your own thing and you’re coming home telling me what you’ve done, not how do I do it. But right now, no we’re not friends. I don’t even like you.” And I tell her, “I love you with all my heart, but I don’t like you right now.”

Interviewer: What does she say when you say that?
Carla: “Isn’t that a nice way for a mother to talk to her child. You’re not normal. Mothers tell their kids how much they’d love to be with them and how much they’re loved and I appreciate you. You don’t appreciate me.” “Yes I do, when you do the dishes after being told only 5 times instead of 10. I appreciate that.” “Well that’s not me. That’s the things I do for you.” She just turns it around.

Lily also described conflicts she has had with her son Dylan, 17, whom she has repeatedly kicked out of the home.

Well, when he comes here and stays for supper or whatever, he basically pops in has supper, stays five minutes and leaves. I don’t care but as far as respect for me, no. He called me the other night, wanted me to get my brother’s phone number for him and I said ‘I’m watching a show right now, look it up in the phone book’. ‘Okay, well I’ll look it up’. Then he called me back and he goes ‘can you get me the phone number?’ I said ‘I’m watching a show right now’. He goes, ‘Jesus Christ, God damn, get me the phone number!’ I said ‘excuse me?’ and he goes ‘what the fuck?’ and click. I looked at him and I said thank you for reminding me why you’re not here and this is great having a phone I can hang up because I would not do what he wanted at that point and he got pissed off. So as far as his respect, he wanted money for drugs. He’s trying to sell something. Well I’m not going to jump up in the middle of my show and get a number to try and sell something so he can get money to get high. Like that’s not going to happen, that part no.

Of the 13 children who had conflict with their legal guardians, 12 of them (92 percent) scored a 10 or higher, indicating poor overall well-being; one child scored a 9. All of the children who scored low to moderate on the well-being scale were found to have minimal conflict with their legal guardians. This suggests that
a high level of conflict in the home environment between the child and the primary caregiver may have a negative impact on the child.

**Overall Relationship of Legal Guardian with Child**

The overall relationship between the legal guardians and the children were determined based upon a review of the above factors, including: the enforcement of discipline, level of open communication between the child and legal guardian regarding the incarcerated parent, and the level of conflict between the legal guardian and the child.

The majority of the children and legal guardians had relationships that were determined to be poor; almost all of the children in these homes had a negative well-being. There was no child who had a poor relationship with the legal guardian who was doing well.

There were 10 legal guardians identified as having an especially poor relationship with the child. These 10 legal guardians were responsible for caring for 16 children. Of these 16 children, well-being scores were not assigned for 4 of the children due to their young age. Therefore, of the 12 children who were found to have a poor relationship with their legal guardians, 11 of the children (91 percent) scored a 10 or higher, indicating overall poor well-being.

There were no children in the study who had a good relationship with their legal guardian that scored high on the well-being scale; all of the children with low scores, indicating positive well-being, had good relationships with their legal guardians. As such, it is clear that having an unhealthy and difficult relationship with the primary caregiver is strongly associated with the child’s overall poor well-being, while having a positive and healthy relationship with the primary caregiver is strongly associated with an overall good well-being of the children. While it is difficult to determine the direction of this relationship, it is evident that
this is one factor in the quality of care that the children received that has a significant impact on the well-being of the children.

**Family and Household Instability**

Similar to research that has contended that family instability is a critical aspect of the quality of the home environment and a distinct context for development (Ackerman et al. 1999) and that the socialization processes during child development can be disrupted by abrupt changes and multiple transitions (Amato, 1993; Dannerbeck, 2005), this study postulates that instability in the family and in the home environment is an important indicator of quality of care for the children of incarcerated parents. As such, this section examines the extent to which the child is in a home that is characterized by family and/or household stability. Family instability will be assessed by a review of two factors, including: 1) the prison sentence of the incarcerated parent; namely whether the parent has been incarcerated for an extended and consistent period of time or whether the parent has continually been recycling in and out; and 2) whether the legal guardian and the incarcerated parent have consistently remained in a relationship throughout the life course of the child. Household instability will be measured by three factors, including: 1) whether the family has relocated cities in order to be closer to the incarcerated parent; 2) whether the child has frequently changed schools; and 3) whether the family has frequently moved homes.

Instability and disruption have been identified in the literature as a risk factor for children, particularly for those with an incarcerated parent. These children may be exposed to the insecurity of economic strain, to the instability of disruptions in their home environment as a parent moves in and out of their homes, and as the home itself changes unpredictably. Parental incarceration is understood to indirectly affect a child’s development through the disruptions experienced by the child from losing a parent to prison and to the instability that is associated with parental incarceration (Dannerbeck, 2005). Further, disruptions have been
identified to be a significant factor related to parental incarceration and juvenile delinquency. Such disruptions may be found to be physical, such as through changes in the child’s residence and/or schools; emotional, such as through extreme mood changes from the adults in the child’s life; and social, such as when individuals move in and out of the home. The child is more likely to exhibit negative behavioural outcomes with more frequent and severe disruptions in their lives (Dannerbeck, 2005; Hanlon et al. 2007).

Family instability has been examined in relation to the problem behaviours of children from economically disadvantaged families. The researchers conceptualized family instability as an aggregate of several kinds of events that described an unpredictable and chronically chaotic family environment. Indicators of family instability included residential mobility, the number of intimate adult relationships involving the primary caregiver, the number of families with whom the child has lived, serious childhood illness, and other recent stressful life events, such as death of a relative. Based on a sample of 169 children, family instability was assessed when the children were 5 and 7 years of age. The findings of the study were consistent with other research that indicated that family instability may challenge the children’s sense of emotional security in the family and feelings of control over their immediate environment (Ackerman et al. 1999). Due to the heightened vulnerability of adolescents who are impacted by instability and disruption associated with the imprisonment of a parent, these children are contended to be particularly in need of preventative interventions (Hanlon et al. 2007).

Practitioners

Instability and disruption was also identified by the practitioners as a significant challenge for children of incarcerated parents, with the general consensus that these children were at greater risk of experiencing instability as a consequence of having a parent in prison. For example, one practitioner (#6) indicated that the
environment in which the child is being raised may account for some of the other negative affects that might be observed in the children.

However, I also think that sometimes we need to look at what is the social environment that this child is having to live with. And maybe some of the reaction we are seeing isn’t a learning disability or there is not a specific problem, it’s more about the emotional stresses that this child has. And if those could be alleviated and structure consistency and continuity and explanations and that kind of thing could be given to these children in a constructive way, that is useful to their growing, then we might not have as many, you know, of these other things, that are going on there. Because sometimes if they have a parent incarcerated they have been moved several places, they have not had the good foundation in terms of where they are going to be living all the time.

Another practitioner (#15) spoke about the impact that such disruption had on the two particular children he had contact with in his organization.

I think that there is also with one particular kid, there is a lot of anxiety because ah, Dad is frequently in and out. So you know they just never know just how long Dad is going to be around and when Dad does come around, how long is he going to be staying.

Um, the other one, the young man, um, his Dad is kind of in and out, and um, I think you know, there is fear. I think that there is a lot of fear that both Mom and him have, whenever Dad is out, because his anxiety level goes through the roof. Um, there is no consistency with him at all. There is no follow through at all when, when you know, Dad is getting close to being released and Dad’s at home.
From the perspective of the practitioners, instability and disruption in the home and family was considered to be one of the major consequences of parental incarceration.

**Family Instability**

The majority of children had incarcerated parents who were continually recycling in and out of prison; almost all of these children were doing poorly. In contrast, the majority of the children with parents in prison over an extended period of time were found to be doing well. In terms of the family unit, there were only a small proportion of families that were still together; the children in these families were found to be doing well. Most of the children in families that were fragmented were found to be doing poorly.

In examining whether the parent has been incarcerated for a long-term consistent period of time or has been continually in and out of prison during the child’s life, it was found that, 18 out of 27 children (67 percent) had parents who were continually in and out of prison; 13 of whom were assigned well-being scores. Out of these 13 children, 12 of them (92 percent) scored a 10 or higher, indicating overall poor well-being. The exception was a female child who was being raised by a step-father who has had minimal contact with her repeatedly incarcerated biological father.

In contrast, out of the 9 children with parents who have been consistently incarcerated for a long-term period, only 2 (22 percent) scored a 10 or higher, indicating overall poor well-being. The remaining 7 children (78 percent) all scored low to moderate scores, indicating positive well-being.

In examining the status of the family unit, considering whether the legal guardian and the incarcerated parent have remained in a consistent relationship, it was
found that, out of 14 families, there were only 4 families that were still a complete unit. Out of the 7 children from these families who were assigned well-being scores, 6 of them (86 percent) scored low to moderate on the well-being scale, indicating a positive well-being; one male child scored a 10. Thus, the majority of children from a family that has remained a complete unit were found to generally be doing well.

Of the 15 children assigned well-being scores from the 13 families that had not maintained the family unit, 13 (87 percent) had scores of 10 or above, indicating poor well-being. The majority of children from a fragmented family unit were generally doing poorly.

Therefore, it would appear that family stability may be a contributing factor in the well-being of the child, with greater family stability playing a part in a child’s more positive well-being and greater instability of the family contributing to a child’s lower well-being.

**Household Instability**

It was determined that, on its own, relocation does not have a significant impact on the well-being of the children. Children with low instability in terms of changing schools and homes were found to be doing well. However, the majority of children who had changed schools and homes frequently were found to be doing poorly, suggesting that such instability contributes to a negative outcome in the well-being of the children.

Out of the 17 families included in the study, 5 had relocated to Kingston or changed towns in the nearby vicinity in order to be closer to the incarcerated parent. However, both of the children from these families also had parents who were no longer together.

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17 There were two families excluded due to the fact that the legal guardians were a relative, as opposed to a parent, and therefore did not have a romantic relationship with the incarcerated parent. However, both of the children from these families also had parents who were no longer together.
parent. There were 11 children in these families; of these, 7 (64 percent) received low to moderate well-being scores, indicating generally positive well-being. Although there were 5 families that had relocated, 2 of the families with 4 children had since broken up with the incarcerated father and legal guardian separating; 3 out of 4 of these children received a score of 10 or higher, indicating poor overall well-being. Thus, many of the children who had relocated that received a high score indicating poor well-being were no longer part of a stable family unit. As such, it would appear, then that relocation in and of itself is not necessarily a contributing factor to poor well-being. This finding is consistent with research that has argued that the development of competent coping processes are impeded by chronically stressful environments. As such, children who are experiencing persistently high family instability may manifest higher levels of problem behaviours than children experiencing high family instability at only one point in time (Ackerman et al. 1999).

In considering the frequency with which the children have changed schools, it was found that 19 out of the 24 children included in the analysis had changed schools at least once. However, the majority of these children (13) have only changed schools once or twice; often initially when the family relocated to the city or when they had to change schools due to a grade change, such as a child transitioning to high school. There were 7 children who had changed schools with much greater frequency; 6 of whom scored at least a 10 or higher on the well-being scale.

In terms of changing homes, 22 children out of 24 had moved homes at least once. However, similar to the change in schools, the majority of these children (15 out of 22; 68 percent) had only moved once or twice; often initially when the family relocated to the city. There were 7 children who had moved homes with much greater frequency; all of whom scored at least a 10 or higher on the well-being scale. This is consistent with research contending that frequent residential moves may disrupt friendships and established relationships with schools and teachers.
and may combine with other events to create a general sense of a chaotic and uncertain home environment (Ackerman et al. 1999).

The interviews with the children provided some insight into the difficulties the children experienced in moving. For example, Charlie, 14, talked about the difficulty he had in making new friends because of the constant moving of the family.

Charlie: Cause like, I go to different schools so you like don’t know how to and all that.

Interviewer: Have you moved around a lot?


Interviewer: How much?

Charlie: Like in the neighbourhood where I used to live, we used to move and then two months later we’d have to move again. So we were always doing that. Since I’ve lived with my step-dad, we’ve only moved once with him. With him, and then again.

Interviewer: Why would you have to move every two months?

Charlie: Uh, uh it’s weird, we would uh they would actually forget to pay, my mom and my dad, they would forget to pay the hydro and the water and all that and uh, then it’d go off and they wouldn’t have enough money to put it on again and so the hydro would go down all the time.

Interviewer: Did you find it hard to move all the time?
Charlie: Yeah.

Interviewer: Was it always every two months?

Charlie: No, not really, once it was a year, we also stay a couple of years and then we’d move.

Charlie also talked about how the moves prevented him from actively participating in programs or sports.

Charlie: Yeah, I like playing hockey, I was gonna play hockey this year but I couldn’t because they didn’t call me back this year cause I moved during the summer and I didn’t get to play.

Interviewer: How did you feel about that?

Charlie: Upset.

Jason, 13, also talked about the difficulties he had with moving and maintaining friendships.

Interviewer: Did you have to move around a lot?

Jason: Yeah.

Interviewer: You did?

Jason: A lot.

Interviewer: How was that?
Jason: It sucks because you meet like all your new friends and then you move and then…..but luckily for me, like I’d always move away from that friend, but somehow we’d always find each other again.

Interviewer: You got to stay in touch with your friends?

Jason: No, we just never …..like, we’d move away from each other, and then we’d never see each other for like a couple of years and then we’d move …..he’d move back near me or something ……so yeah.

Interviewer: It was hard though to move around that much?

Jason: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: How come you had to move around so much?

Jason: I don’t know, cause my dad would get mixed in with the wrong crowd and then he’d get on their bad side and then he’d be afraid so we’d move somewhere else and then he’d keep on doing it so I don’t know why, but that is just what I think.

Dylan, 17, also moved frequently while growing up, partly due to the violent and tumultuous relationship between his mother and father in which they would get back together, the father would be sent back to jail for either assaulting the mother or another drug-related offense, Dylan and his mother would move to another residence until the father was released from prison, subsequently continuing the cycle. His mother Lily reported that in one year they moved 12 times. Dylan has been bouncing around from place to place for most of his teenage years. At the time of the interview, his mother had kicked him out of the house again and he was living with a friend.
Interviewer: So you moved around a lot then too as well?

Dylan: I’ve lived in like …if we count this like as my next home, it’s like 28 homes or something like that.

Interviewer: And is that including shelters too?

Dylan: Ah, no, that’s not including shelters, that’s actual homes.

Generally speaking, it would appear that children who had a significant amount of household instability tended to display poor overall well-being. On the other hand, children with less household instability tended to do better and have a higher overall well-being.

Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to assess the quality of care the children in the study were receiving and to determine whether there is any relationship to their overall well-being. This analysis was based on three indicators of quality of care: 1) the well-being of the legal guardian; 2) the relationship between the child and the legal guardian, assessed based on a number of aspects; and 3) the level of parental and household instability experienced by the child.

First, with respect to the well-being of the legal guardians, it was found that the majority of the children were being cared for by legal guardians with a poor well-being; most of these children were also found to have a poor well-being. There were no children in the study being cared for by a legal guardian with a poor well-being that were doing well. In contrast, the majority of the children being cared for by legal guardians with a more positive well-being were also found to have a relatively positive well-being. This clearly indicates that the well-being of the legal guardian is positively related to the well-being of the child.
Second, the relationship between the legal guardian and the children was measured based on a number of factors: 1) the degree to which discipline is imposed and enforced for the negative behaviour of the child; 2) the extent to which the child and legal guardian communicate openly about the incarcerated parent; and 3) the level of conflict between the child and legal guardian.

In terms of discipline, it was found that over half of the children did not have any discipline imposed upon them. It was determined that the majority of the children without discipline had a very negative well-being. In contrast, all the children with a positive well-being had discipline imposed upon them by the legal guardians. Indeed, there were no children with a positive well-being in households without discipline. While there were some children doing poorly in households with discipline, half of these children had particularly harsh and strict punishments inflicted upon them, indicating that it may not have had a positive impact on their well-being.

In terms of communication between the legal guardian and the children regarding the incarcerated parent, it was found that the majority of the children in the study did not discuss the incarcerated parent with their legal guardians, with most of these children manifesting a poor overall well-being. This finding indicates that, regardless of the reason for the lack of communication, children with an open outlet for discussing their feelings and thoughts about their incarcerated parent with their primary caregiver may be negatively impacted. Interestingly, half of the children who did discuss the incarcerated parent with their legal guardians were also found to have a poor well-being. More detailed analysis of the data determined that the nature of these conversations were not particularly constructive nor where they positive, which likely contributed to negative impact on the child. As such, it is posited that it is not just whether there is communication about the incarcerated parent between the legal guardian and the children that is important, rather it is the nature of these discussion and the
manner in which details and information about the incarcerated parent is presented to the child that makes a difference.

In terms of the level of conflict between the children and the legal guardian, it was found that over half of the children in the study had conflict with their legal guardians, almost all of whom were found to have a poor overall well-being. In contrast, all of the children who were doing relatively well were found to have minimal conflict with the legal guardian in the home. This indicates that a high level of conflict in the home environment between the child and the primary caregiver may have a negative impact on the child.

In terms of the overall relationship between the legal guardian and the children, it was found that the majority of the children had relationships with their legal guardians that were determined to be poor, almost all of whom had a negative well-being. There were no children in the study with a poor relationship with the legal guardian who were doing well. In contrast, all of the children with a positive well-being had a good relationship with their legal guardians. As such, it is clear that having an unhealthy and difficult relationship with the primary caregiver is strongly associated with the child’s overall poor well-being, while having a positive and healthy relationship with the primary caregiver is strongly associated to an overall good well-being of the children.

Third, in examining family and household stability, it was found that children with low instability were doing well overall whereas children with high instability were doing poorly overall. This was found to be true for all measures of instability.

Family instability was assessed by: 1) the prison sentence of the incarcerated parent, namely whether the parent had been incarcerated for an extended and consistent period of time or whether the parent had continually been recycling in and out of prison; and 2) whether the legal guardian and the incarcerated parent
have consistently remained in a relationship throughout the life course of the child. With respect to the prison sentence of the parent, the majority of children had incarcerated parents who were continually recycling in and out of prison; almost all of these children were doing poorly. In contrast, the majority of the children with parents in prison over an extended period of time were found to be doing well. In terms of the family unit, there was only a small proportion of families that were still together; the children in these families were found to be doing well. Most of the children in families that were fragmented were found to be doing poorly.

Household instability was measured by three factors: 1) whether the family had relocated cities in order to be closer to the incarcerated parent; 2) whether the child had frequently changed schools; and 3) whether the family had frequently moved homes. It was found that relocation, on its own, does not have a negative impact on the well-being of the children. However, the majority of children who had changed schools and homes frequently were found to be doing poorly, suggesting that such instability contributes to a negative outcome in the well-being of the children.

Overall, it was found that the quality of care that the child received did have a significant impact upon their overall well-being across all three indicators, suggesting that the quality of care that the children receive is an important component to their well-being. Therefore, a poor quality of care was found to increase the likelihood that the child would experience a poor outcome.
Chapter Seven: The Stigma of Parental Incarceration

The second factor that will be examined pertains to the stigma surrounding parental incarceration. This chapter reviews the analysis of the data on stigma and provides insight into the extent to which the stigma surrounding parental incarceration has an impact upon the families of offenders, particularly on the children. While a significant proportion of the literature on children of incarcerated parents discusses stigma and identifies it as a major issue of concern, very little research has systematically broken it down and thoroughly examined the nature of stigma and the impact that it has on the well-being of children of offenders. Much of the discussion in the literature on stigma is therefore based on assumptions and preconceived notions of its impact that have not been empirically assessed. This section thereby attempts to address this gap in the research and provide a more comprehensive analysis of stigma on the children and the legal guardians affected by parental incarceration.

The discussion begins with an analysis into the level of fear that the legal guardians and the children had of stigma, followed by a deeper look into an apparent denial of stigma by the children in the study. The degree to which the participants had experienced an actual encounter with stigma from sources outside of the family is then investigated and related to the previous discussion of the level of fear of stigma. This discussion is followed by an examination of the children in the study that have been identified by their legal guardians as being “like” their incarcerated parent, stigmatized by the negative association to their parent; the well-being of the children is also explored in relation to this factor. The response to the stigma of parental incarceration by the legal guardians and the children is then investigated, with a particular focus on the strategy of concealment. The chapter then contains an overview of some of the community characteristics that were identified by all of the participants in the study.
Fear of Stigma

With the exception of one individual, all of the legal guardians reported that they believed that there was a stigma associated with parental incarceration. Thus, 16 out of 17 legal guardians strongly believed that both they and the children are subjected to experiencing stigma and had a fear of stigma. However, believing in the presence of stigma did not necessarily translate into one having a strong fear of stigma. Indeed, not all of the legal guardians were affected to the same extent by their fear of stigma and there was variation in the degree to which participants reported that they were worried about its presence. As such, the level of fear was separated into two categories – 1) a low fear of stigma; and 2) a high fear of stigma. The legal guardians identified as having a low fear were those who expressed concern that the family, particularly the children, would experience judgment and/or be treated negatively by others as a consequence of the parent being incarcerated. However, although they did have some fear, it was not a major concern for these individuals and they were not as troubled by the possibility of stigmatization. On the other hand, the legal guardians identified as having a high fear of stigma were those that were strongly affected by their fear and displayed much greater worry and concern that their children would be subjected to experiencing stigma. Coding for the children was conducted in a similar manner.

Based on the review of the literature which identified stigma as being a major theme of concern for children of offenders (Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Travis and Waul, 2003; Mazza, 2002; Kampfner, 1991), it was anticipated that stigma would be a significant issue for the participants in the study and the fear of stigma would be quite high. However, contrary to expectations, the majority of legal guardians were coded as having a low fear of stigma, with 11 out of 16 (69 percent) identified as having a low level of fear. For these individuals, although they believed that they and their children were subjected to stigma, they were much less impacted by the presence of stigma and did not display an inordinately high level of concern. For example, when asked whether she worried that
someone may say something negative to her children about her partner being in jail, Carla responded by saying “I worried about it, but I felt confident that the kids knew it was never really their issue.” Overall, while these individuals were aware and believed that both they and their children were likely to be stigmatized, it was not found to be a pressing issue for them.

While only a small proportion of the legal guardians were identified as having a high fear of stigma, with only 5 out of 16 (31 percent), it was observed to be a significant problem that greatly impacted upon their lives and their relationships with others. These individuals were highly affected by their fear of stigma and it was a considerable force in their lives. Their heightened fear of stigma was pervasive and lead to much social isolation for these individuals. For example, Evelyn, a mother of three, was extremely paranoid and fearful that someone in the community would find out about her husband being in prison. She had only told a few people, including within her own family, and was highly guarded and careful in her interactions with others. She initially refused to write the names of her children on the consent form for the study and, when told that it was required for the children to be able to participate in the study, she requested the use of false names to be used on the forms as she was worried about the existence of written evidence that would potentially connect her family to an incarcerated parent. She also would not permit their real names to be used during the interview, instead requiring fake names to be used. Evelyn was also afraid of taking the bus with her children to visit their father in prison as she was fearful that someone might recognize them and discover that the father was incarcerated. It should be noted that her children displayed a similar attitude and approach and were highly guarded and secretive about their father, and were observed to be extremely uncomfortable and almost hostile during the interview when asked about their father.

Another example was Abigail, who was very fearful of stigma and was extremely worried about her son being judged because his father was in prison. She stated
that she was convinced her son would be labelled as being like his father and that he would be perceived negatively as a result of having a father in prison. She also lied to her parents about him, asking her son, 6, to also keep it secret that his father was back in prison. “I hate when he goes to jail and then they find out about it too because they don’t like him at all and then I have to tell them he went to jail again. This last time, I told my dad that we broke up.”

In the analysis of the children it was found that, in contrast to the legal guardians, the majority of the children had high fear with 8 out of 13 children (62 percent) identified as having a strong fear of stigma. Alternatively, 4 children (31 percent) were identified as having a low fear and one child (7 percent) was reported to have no fear of stigma. All of the children being cared for by legal guardians who were coded as having a high fear of stigma also had a high fear of stigma. This finding suggested that there was transference of a fear of stigma from the legal guardian to the children.

In examining the children’s fear of stigma with respect to their overall well-being, an interesting finding emerged. Out of the 7 children with high fear of stigma who were assigned well-being scores, more than half were found to score low to moderate on the index, indicating positive well-being. On the other hand, of the 5 children who had no or low fear of stigma, all were assigned high scores indicating poor overall well-being. This was an unanticipated observation as it was expected that, due to the burden of stigmatizing as previously discussed, children with a high fear of stigma would be more likely to manifest a poor well-being whereas children with a low fear of stigma were expected to manifest a positive well-being.

Hagen and Myers (2003) found in their study on the effects of secrecy and social support on the behaviour of children of incarcerated parents that the children at

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18 It should be noted that the discussion in this section on fear of stigma will only include those children who have been interviewed directly.
highest risk were the children who reported low levels of social support and who also scored low on the secrecy measure – children who had no one close to them that they could talk to but who freely talked to anyone about the incarceration of their mothers. Their postulation in accounting for this unanticipated finding was that talking openly with anyone about the whereabouts of their mother was a less adaptive approach than being careful in whom to share the information with. The authors provided several possible explanations as to why the children did not practice secrecy, with the primary hypothesis that it was likely no one told the children to keep it secret as their low social support was an indication that they may have not had anyone who could provide them with guidance on this matter. In relating the findings from Hagen and Myers (2003) back to the study at hand, it is posited that it may be possible that the children did not know to have a fear of stigma because they also did not have suitable guidance and support in this area. Providing children with stronger reinforcement and guidance against stigma may subsequently have contributed to a positive impact on their well-being whereas a lack of guidance and protection against potential stigma may have contributed to a negative impact on their well-being. Indeed, all of the children with high fear had legal guardians who also had high fear whereas all of the children with low fear also had legal guardians with low fear.

In further examining the mechanism by which the children learned that there was something negative associated with having a parent in prison, several instances were noted whereby the children were observed to be guided by the legal guardian into developing an awareness of stigma. For example, Ethan, 15, talked about how his mother told him to not to say that his father was in prison and discussed how his mother had been affected by stigma and related it to his own fears of losing friends that he then developed.

*Interviewer: When you were growing up, would you tell other kids that your dad was in jail?*
Ethan: Um, no.

Interviewer: Did you worry about other kids finding out your dad was in jail?

Ethan: I did but I didn’t understand why I was. All I knew is that my mom said not to and that I knew something was wrong but I just heard her saying that.

Interviewer: But you worry about people finding out what your dad did?

Ethan: Yeah.

Interviewer: What do you think would happen if anyone found out?

Ethan: What I was mainly thinking is like, are people going to judge me? You know, like on what he did and everything cause it like happened to my mom – she mentioned it to a couple, she told a couple people she thought were her friends and everything and they ended up not taking to her after she told them. And if I tell one person, they’ll tell everybody and then I probably wouldn’t have much friends.

Although the available data does not allow one to make conclusive statements regarding the transference of stigma from the legal guardians to the children or with respect to the mechanisms through which the children develop a fear of stigma, the evidence does suggest that the children in the study learned to fear stigma from an early age through the actions and behaviours of their legal guardians.
Denial of Fear of Stigma by the Children

There were several instances noted whereby the children reported having no fear of stigma, stating that they did not worry about others judging them or treating them negatively because they have a parent in prison, but where their words and/or their actions belied a deeper truth, one in which they were in fact worried and fearful about the stigma surrounding parental incarceration. This denial of a fear of stigma was an interesting finding and suggests that, while these children are fearful of the stigma associated with having a parent in prison, they do not want to accept or acknowledge its presence in their lives. This finding also demonstrates that conducting survey research on children in this field of research would not draw out an entirely accurate depiction of the attitudes of the children toward stigma and would be an insufficient method to employ in measuring attitudes toward stigma.

In total, there were 10 children out of 13 (77 percent) who reported that they were not afraid of stigma but, due to the apparent contradictions in their words and/or actions, were still coded as having a fear of stigma. Of these children, 8 of them had high fear and two of them had low fear of stigma.

An example is Ethan, 15. He stated that he did not think he would be subjected to stigma or that he would be treated negatively because of his father being in prison. However, Ethan’s concern that he will be ‘labelled’ by going to jail for his recent crimes and seen as a criminal, like his father, suggests an awareness of the societal attitudes towards offenders and displays his strong desire not to be perceived in the same manner. Although Ethan stated that he does not worry about stigma, his fear of others finding out about his father’s crimes and keeping it secret indicated that he does in actuality fear the stigma associated with parental incarceration.

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19 Again, this section on the denial of fear of stigma by the children refers only to the children who have been directly interviewed.
Ethan: I wouldn’t care if I had to go back to jail; it’s just the charges that I’d be known as for doing. I don’t mind the jail time or anything; it’s just having the name of being arrested and everything, that’s what bothers me worst.

Interviewer: The label of you as...

Ethan: A criminal.

Another example was found in the three children of Evelyn. While they denied that they feared the stigma associated with parental incarceration, their intense reluctance to talk about it and keeping the incarceration of the father secret from everyone else in their lives indicated that they are clearly very afraid of the stigma. All three of the children were coded as being high fear and displayed much anxiety over being identified as the children of an incarcerated offender. Charlie, 14, also contradicted himself in the discussion of stigma. Although he stated that he doesn’t worry about being judged because of his father, he also reported that he does not tell others that his father has been in prison as he is afraid they might make fun of him because of it. Thus, while his words indicate that he has no fear of stigma, his actions indicated otherwise.

**Actual Stigma**

This section examines whether any of the participants in the study had experienced any actual tangible encounters with stigma. The intent of this section of the analysis was to identify whether there were any disparities between the fear one has of stigma and real stigma that one has experienced. In other words, assessing whether the level of fear one has towards stigma is based on its concrete actuality. It should be noted that in some cases the respondents stated that they had experienced actual stigma but their description of the experience or how the
actual stigma was perceived to have manifested indicated that they had not truly experienced an actual stigma event; rather, they perceived an interaction that way due to their strong belief that the family was vulnerable to stigma. Much of it was based on their own personal interpretation of a stigma event that was not quite as transparent or as clearly related to stigma and was more perception-based. For example, although Charlotte reported positively that she had experienced stigma, her discussion of particular situations suggested that she perceived certain encounters to be a reflection of stigma but, in actuality, such interactions lacked any actual evidence that she was being stigmatized. More specifically, she stated that she had been subjected to stigma because “they look at you when you have a loved one incarcerated, they think that you are just as bad as the other one. You are just as bad as your husband. Because he is inside, you must be just the same as him”; however, there is no evidence to support her claim regarding actual stigma and it appears to be more of a reflection of a belief in or fear of stigma. Thus, although several individuals perceived themselves to have experienced an actual stigma event, they were coded as experiencing no actual stigma in the analysis unless the encounter was clearly evident to be a consequence of stigma specifically related to parental incarceration.

Interestingly, the level of fear that one had did not necessarily correlate to whether one had actually experienced stigma. Although most believed in the presence of stigma and in the certainty of being judged for having a parent in prison, the majority of participants had not experienced any direct encounters with stigma. This was found to be the case for both the legal guardians and the children. In terms of the legal guardians, less than one-quarter (4 out of 17; 24 percent) were found to have experienced an actual stigma encounter. The remaining 76 percent

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20 In the discussion on actual experiences with stigma, the data for the children includes both those who were interviewed directly as well as data based on some children who were not interviewed but where the legal guardian provided data. Generally, no difference between the reporting of the children and that of their legal guardians was observed during the discussions of actual instances of stigma. As such, the reporting of the parents is contended to be an accurate reflection of the experiences of the children.
of the legal guardians were not found to have experienced any stigma directly. Similar results were found for the children, with three-quarters found to have experienced no actual stigma and only one-quarter of the children in the study having experienced any actual encounters with stigma associated with parental incarceration. However, although only a minority of children had experienced actual stigma, being subjected to actual stigma is likely to have a detrimental impact on the children and is therefore considered to be significant.

The nature of the experiences of the children who had been subjected to stigma was explored in further detail. A distinction was made during the analysis between incidents of stigma and two categories were constructed, namely 1) low actual stigma; and 2) high actual stigma. Low actual stigma refers to instances where there was evidence that the child had experienced some stigma but in which the actual event was on a smaller scale. High actual stigma refers to instances where the stigma experience was severe and where the actual occurrence was a direct consequence of the incarceration of the parent. In other words, the presence of stigma was strongly evident and was the source of the negative interactions with others.

Of the children who had experienced actual stigma, half of the children experienced low actual stigma while the other half experienced high actual stigma. In terms of actual stigma and the overall well-being of the children, it was found that all of the children who had experienced an actual stigma event were also found to manifest a very poor well-being. This indicates that experiencing real stigmatization may have a negative impact on the overall well-being of the children. A strong gender effect was also noted in the analysis; all those who were subjected to low actual stigma were female and all those subjected to high actual stigma were male. This suggests that the male children may be more vulnerable to experiencing encounters with stigma that are more negative and more pervasive.
For example, Kate reported that her son Jacob, 14, had experienced stigma due to the incarceration of his father. Kate and Jacob had kept the identity of his biological father a secret, choosing to let everyone believe that his non-offending step-father was his biological parent. Upon the discovery that his biological father was an individual who was in and out of prison, Kate discussed how Jacob had been rejected by other children.

Kate: Jacob had phoned, I remember Jacob phoning asking if he could go over to a kid’s house. The kid said “No, there’s a birthday party that we have to go to” or something like that. We drove by a half hour later and the kid was out front playing.

Interviewer: This was right after he found out about Jacob’s biological father?

Kate: Yeah, the family. So to me they didn’t want Jacob over there for that reason.

Another male child, Dylan, 17, reported that he had experienced stigma as a result of his father being incarcerated. He talked about how he has been labelled as being similar to his father, with the people around him believing that he is going to end up just like his father.

Interviewer: Do you think people judged you negatively because your father was in prison?

Dylan: Yeah, everybody like that I know said that I am going to be exactly like my fucking dad.

Interviewer: Who said that?
Dylan: Everybody. Everybody.

Interviewer: Do you think people believe that you won’t end up like your father?

Dylan: No.

Interviewer: Other than your mom, who else would say to you that you are just like your dad?

Dylan: Everybody. Like any kind of family member. Like anybody. Like when I do something wrong, they’d be like “You are going to be just like him!”

Overall, it would appear that a minority of the children have experienced actual stigma encounters pertaining to parental incarceration. However, as it was observed that all of the children who had experienced an actual stigma event also manifested a poor overall well-being, this indicates that the well-being of the children may be negatively impacted by the children experiencing actual stigmatization.

**Children Identified as Being “Like” their Incarcerated Parent**

It was found that the children in the study were not only vulnerable to stigmatization from those outside their family unit, but that it could also manifest through their legal guardians. Indeed, it was apparent that several children were subjected to being negatively associated with their incarcerated parent by their legal guardians. As such, while the above section examined whether children experienced any actual stigma encounters with outside sources, this section focuses on the children who are identified as being similar to their incarcerated parent by their legal guardians.
Mazza (2002) contended that children may be labelled “problem children” with the “sins” of the incarcerated father passed down to the children, thereby creating a self-fulfilling dynamic as the children begin to view themselves as difficult and may be willing to accept the negative label as a consequence of this perception. He contends that if the children are associated with the incarcerated father or if they are similar to their father in any way, family members may perceive that child as being just like their father. Given that their fathers are incarcerated and therefore understood to be “bad”, the children subsequently accept the negative label, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy in which the children engage in maladaptive behaviour that may ultimately lead them down the same path as their incarcerated parents (Mazza, 2002). The extent to which the child is perceived by the legal guardian to be like the incarcerated parent is considered to be evidence of the child being subjected to stigma by the legal guardian. Similar to the contention by Mazza (2002), it was found that several children were burdened with the notion that they were similar to, or behaved in a manner consistent with the negative behaviour of the incarcerated parent by the legal guardian; a perspective argued to have a detrimental impact on the well-being of the child. Specifically, over half of the children in the study were identified as being like their incarcerated parent; almost all of these children were found to have a poor overall well-being.

**Practitioners**

The notion that the children were similar to their incarcerated parent was a theme that also emerged through the interviews with the practitioners. They provided support for the supposition that the children were often identified as having the potential to end up following the same path and were at a greater risk for delinquency because they have a parent in prison. For example, one practitioner (#9) responded to the question whether the legal guardians tended to worry about the child following in the parent’s footsteps, by stating:
I think that a lot of them know the research. I mean they might not have read the research but they have seen it. So, I think that yeah, there is that worry. I think that they start to worry, yeah, when there is that glorification of Dad inside, and once you start hitting the 13, 14, 15, they start to get concerned, sure it worries them quite a bit, as to where their child is going.

One practitioner (#3) indicated that it was also a major concern with the individuals she had contact with through her organization.

Interviewer: Do you think that there is concern that the child is going to follow in the footsteps of the parent in prison?

Practitioner: Yes.

Interviewer: It is?

Practitioner: Yeah, we ah, in one of our groups ah, we always do a little go around, and my go around question is always something you know....yes. And so "If you named the best gift you ever received what would it be?" Or if...or whatever. So one of the questions I was ah, if you had been ..."If you could persuade your child um, to take on any one profession what would you want them to be or not to be?" Almost every person said, “Well, I don’t want them to be a criminal like his father” or I don’t, and these are small time, not necessarily spending time in prison criminals, ah, but they said, “No I don’t want him to be a criminal, I don’t want him to end up in jail, I don’t want him to whatever” and um, even though they said, “Even though his dad did, or even though I did, or even though whatever, they said, I don't want him to do that.”
Another practitioner (#11) stated that such notions of the child becoming like their parent is reinforced by society, where there is the general attitude that the children must be like their incarcerated parent.

Practitioner: Because the school system is not seeing it, um, the kids get a lot of the backlash. They get most of it you know? “Your dad is in prison, so you must be bad too”.

Interviewer: You think that is the attitude?

Practitioner: Yes.

Interviewer: That is by the school?

Practitioner: I think that it is the um, from their peers, or just the society in general. You know, how far does the bad apple drop from the tree? You know? And that’s I think just the way society is, comes across.

Another practitioner (#15), who deals with children who have had trouble with the law and are being diverted out of the criminal justice system, discussed the attitude of the children about becoming like their incarcerated parent.

Interviewer: Do you find that the kids that you deal with have a concern that they are going to end up like their father or their parent?

Practitioner: Um, they say that they don’t ever want to. Yeah, sitting across from them. So my first response to them, is “Then why am I here?” I don’t think that they ever want to emulate their parents, and yet, they are making the same choices that their parents made. Which they are now doing to themselves. I don’t think cognitively they want to do it, and yet they are still making the same choices.
Interviewer: So do you think it’s a concern for them?

Practitioner: Um, I don’t think that they would ever tell you that but I think, yeah, there it definitely you know, weighs on their mind and "As a result of Dad being in prison, am I not going to get the same kind of breaks as everyone else? I am going to be seen differently. And I am going to be judged and criticized and how am I going to cope with that?" Yeah, I think that there is definitely a concern with that.

Another practitioner (#14) also commented on the concerns of the children that they may end like their incarcerated parent.

Interviewer: Do you think these kids have any concern or thought that they may follow in the footsteps of their parent in prison?

Practitioner: Yeah, yeah. I’ve heard that a lot from kids where they’ve said either "I will not" or "I’m afraid I will”. You know that’s sort of categorical, "I’ll never be like him", but I also hear that from alcoholic’s kids, "I’ll never drink because I don’t want to be like them". Then all of a sudden they’re 17 or 18 and they’re following the pattern.

The interviews provided a strong indication that the children were vulnerable to being perceived by their legal guardians as being like their incarcerated parent and were often identified as being at risk for engaging in similar negative behaviour by their caregivers.

**Analysis – Children and Legal Guardians**

There were 13 out of 25 children (52 percent) who had legal guardians that expressed their view that the child was very similar to the incarcerated parent and
who had concerns that the child would go down a similar path, also ending up in prison. All but one of these children were male. Of the 12 children who were assigned well-being scores, 11 of them scored a 10 or higher on the well-being scale, indicating poor overall well-being for the vast majority of the children who were identified as being like their incarcerated parent.

Interviews with the legal guardians provided evidence for their perceptions and attitudes towards the child in their care. For example, Carla talked about how she felt her two children had a good chance of staying out of prison, which has been a major concern of hers in raising them.

I feel, compared to even 5 years ago, I feel my children have such a high, high chance. I’m gonna say 80-85% chance that neither one of them will be incarcerated. At the age of 20, I’m going to save my money and invest my money that by the age of 20, neither one of them will have to say, “Yes, I have a record.”

Heather commented on the similarity in her son’s behaviour with that of his incarcerated father, despite the fact that he has not been a strong presence in the life of her son Thomas. Fear that her son will end up like his father has been a major concern for her and she sees much potential that he will follow the same path.

Heather: It's rather ironic because, and I’ve actually been talking to him, there's a lot of his behaviour that was his biological father’s that, and I mean, it's amazing. Sometimes I kind of sit back and go okay, he's not been a part of your life, he's not been an influence, you've not spent any major time around him and it really has hit me the idea of biological influence on behaviour as opposed to, as opposed to the environment one because there's things that Thomas does that I just have to go 'oh man'.
Interviewer: Like what?

Heather: Well one of the major things with his father was he could not make a decision, he would avoid things, he would delay things, he would put them off, he would not show up for them forcing everybody else to make the decision for him. Well, he (father) grew up inside a prison, you're not allowed to make decisions in there so that is all he knew. It drove me absolutely bonkers. Thomas, in a lot of ways, is the same way and I don't, like I don't know if it was just his kind of his behaviour before and then when he was in prison it just kind of reiterated it or whatever but...or different mannerisms that Thomas makes or different looks and it's like gasp – that's your father! So it's been, it's just been really amazing at times and as Thomas gets older and kind of you see more of it kind of as they get older so.

Interviewer: Do you ever worry about Thomas going down the path of his father?

Heather: All the time. Yep. All the time. This self-destruct mode that he gets into and how he keeps everything in is a lot like him. So yeah, I mean, with his father he was in the wrong place at the wrong time, well obviously he was living on the streets with people who were doing drugs and prostitutes and so the lifestyle kind of contributed to him being where he was when things happened. Um, so yeah and there's times I mean, where I do worry about Thomas putting himself right in the same boat.

Abigail also worried that her six year old son was going to take after his father and expressed much concern that he was going to go down the same path.
Abigail: I’ve already noticed that he is starting to take things. But I think that all kids go through that, but still it worries me because I feel like ‘Oh no!’

Interviewer: What sort of things has he taken?

Abigail: Well, one time we were at the store and he walked out with a toy in his coat. And he said that he forgot it there. How can you forget? The other day he came home with a football that wasn’t his. And I said, “that’s not yours” and he said it was and I said, “No it’s not. I don’t recall buying you that.” And he said, “Well nobody else claimed it.” And I said, “It doesn’t matter. It’s not yours. You’ve got to take it back.” And so he did. And then there was an incident where my neighbour there had called me because of a wallet missing. Her son told her that Lucas had stolen it from one of their mutual friends. Now what he told me was that the little boy forgot it on the bus and he picked it up and the kid ran past him home before he had a chance to give it to him and then he went over to the other kids to play and forgot about it and forgot to give it back. I don’t know if it’s all true or not, but I’ve given him the benefit of the doubt for that one and just little things.

Interviewer: Do you worry about this because of Max?

Abigail: Yeah. I’ve told him stuff like, “do you want to go to jail like your father?”

Interviewer: How does he react when you ask him that?

Abigail: He says “No!”

Interviewer: But you worry that he might follow –
Abigail: Definitely! And then I think – don’t worry about it. Kids go through that.

Hannah also spoke about her son behaving much like his father and imitating his behaviour; something that has been a serious concern for her.

Hannah: There’s just a whole lot of mixed emotions and then I have my son, who swears that he will never, ever be like his dad. He swears to it and yet I find that I see things in him that my ex-husband would do.

Interviewer: Like what?

Hannah: Like “What do you do with your money, Mom?” “Who’s on the phone?” “What are you doin’?” “Are you ok?” Trying to take up the role model of being, and its like, “None of you business where I go with my money. You still got a roof over your head.” Stuff like that. And he resents when I say that “those are things that your father would say and I don’t like you saying them. I’m the mom and you just don’t do that”. And at one point, Jason was in jail.

Interviewer: Do you think there is the potential that Jason will end up going that way?

Hannah: It could be a potential. Yeah.

Interviewer: Is it something you worry about?

Hannah: All the time.

Interviewer: Do you tell him you worry about that?
Hannah: Yes.

Interviewer: What about him makes you worry that he might go down that path?

Hannah: Because he is so much like his father sometimes that it scares me. And then, yet I see me in him, like, like I’m pretty passive, pretty forgiving. I don’t hold a grudge. I don’t think I’ve ever held a grudge. I just don’t get mad at people that easy and I see that in him as well. So that’s why I say it could go one way or another so if he could find some balance in there somewhere. That’s what I’m hoping. Because I do. I really worry about him all the time.

Interviewer: He doesn’t like authority?

Hannah: No. That is his biggest problem. And that was his dad’s biggest problem. And that’s where their traits are the same.

Paige also spoke about the similarities between her son and his incarcerated father and expressed her fear that he was going to end up like his father.

Interviewer: Is Nathan a lot like his father?

Paige: Oh, cloned. I’ve cloned and didn’t even mean to. He is his father right from the snoring to the sleeping habits to the way he looks at me out of the corner of his eye. When we ride in the car, his dad and I, because Stan never had a license and I always drove, and this is it, the whole time. Didn’t talk, didn’t look at you, comatose. Nathan, now when he’s older, when he was a kid he screamed constantly. Nathan will get in the car and we’ll drive all the way to Hamilton and back, two-and-a-half hours, and he won’t say one word.
Oh yeah, the way holds his fork, he’s even got a birthmark on his penis the same as his father’s, yeah that’s scary. It’s scary for me and I’ve told Nathan that. I said “Number one, you have a lot of strikes against you. You’re a wonderful child, you can do anything you want to in the world but your father has an addiction behaviour. He’s addicted to anything there is to be addicted to. You know you’re a boy with ADHD and that’s another strike against you”. Genetic wise, being a teenager, you know with all your –– so Nathan has a lot of strikes against him. Like it’s going to be really hard for him and I have to keep him out of trouble, out of jail.

Interviewer: You think so?

Paige: Oh yeah, yeah. So yeah, I’m very worried.

Thus, several of the legal guardians had the perspective that the child was very similar in nature to the incarcerated parent and the fear that the child would eventually end up just like the incarcerated parent was very prevalent. The children who were identified as being like their incarcerated parent were doing very poorly; although it is unclear from the data the extent to which being compared to their incarcerated parent negatively contributed to their well-being, it is likely that such associations have had a detrimental impact upon the child.

Responses to Stigma

There are various ways that members of stigmatized groups respond to rejection and exclusion identified in the literature. One way in which the stigmatized may respond is to seek to enhance their desirability to the non-stigmatized, such as to attempting to eliminate one’s stigmatizing condition. Examples of behavioural attempts by the stigmatized to eliminate a stigma would include things such as going to therapy to overcome mental illness and addictions or obtaining an
education to overcome poverty (Major and Eccleston, 2005). Goffman noted that “the tendency for a stigma to spread from the stigmatized individual to his close connections provides a reason why such relations tend either to be avoided or to be terminated, where existing” (Goffman, 1963: 30). In examining whether the participants in the study employed this approach to their association with stigma, it was evident that some legal guardians did respond in such a way, subsequently dissolving their personal relationship with the incarcerated parent. However, this was demonstrated by a smaller proportion of participants, with 5 legal guardians ending their intimate relationship with the incarcerated parent and a remaining 8 continuing the relationship. However, it is interesting to note that only 3 of the 8 (38 percent) legal guardians who maintained an intimate relationship were open to others about the incarceration status of their partner, thereby suggesting that they too did not want to risk being exposed to the contagion of stigmatization by others and were seeking to enhance their desirability.

A second approach taken by members of stigmatized groups to enhance their desirability is by distancing themselves from their own stigmatized group. For example, they may attempt to set themselves apart from the group by their behaviour in an effort to communicate that “I am not like them” (Major and Eccleston, 2005: 73). This was also observed in the majority of the legal guardians as they distanced themselves from other families of the incarcerated and generally did not partake in developing relationships with others affected by parental incarceration. For example, Evelyn talked about how she did not want to get involved with a program for families dealing with incarceration because she did not want her family associated with other inmate families.

*Interviewer: And you don’t want to associate with other women who are in a similar situation to you?*
Evelyn: No, no. So I’m isolated because I know that I step back in life and say, “Okay, who am I living here for? Him, me or the kids?” And I want to set an example for my children, because we all have to go.

Interviewer: You don’t want your children to associate with other inmate families either?

Evelyn: No.

The perspective at the onset of the study was that there would be a community formed of family members who were experiencing parental incarceration and that there would be relationships established amongst the children and legal guardians with others in a similar situation. However, on the contrary, the vast majority generally had very limited experience with other families, with only 2 out of 17 (12 percent) of the legal guardians able to provide a reference of other legal guardians who were eligible to participate in the study and the remaining participants having no contact or association with other families affected by incarceration. This finding suggests that these individuals actively seek to set themselves apart from others in the stigmatized group and have no desire to form relationships with others in similar situations.

**Concealing a Stigma**

As previously discussed in the literature review, the third and perhaps greatest attempt to distance oneself from the stigmatized group is to conceal the stigma. Concealment is only an option for those whose stigmas are invisible, or at least not readily apparent. The most common reasons for keeping aspects of identity secret are fear of social disapproval and rejection. In addition, concealing a stigma not only allows an individual to avoid social disapproval, but may also serve to maintain important social relationships that might be threatened if the stigma was known (Major and Eccleston, 2005). It is also likely that individuals with a concealable stigma respond by choosing to completely avoiding situations in
which they may be rejected. The research indicates that avoidance of others is a common strategy employed to circumvent the negative cognitive and affective consequences of concealing a stigma. However, this may also prevent the individual from attaining the necessary social support and the research has determined that support is an important component in the lives of stigmatized individuals. In hiding the stigma from others, the individual thereby loses out on the opportunities to receive essential social support and, in fact, many individuals who have a concealable stigma may live without such support (Pachankis, 2007). Thus, so while they may be spared from social rejection, they will likely suffer other costs that may subsequently affect their well-being, including social support from similar others (Dovidio et al. 2000).

Individuals who have a concealable stigma face several challenges in deciding whether, when, how, and to whom to disclose their stigma. In contrast to those with a visible stigma, individuals with a concealable stigma must deal with disclosure decisions on a regular, on going basis. In every new situation, the individual must determine who knows of their stigma, who may suspect their stigma, and who has no suspicions regarding the stigma. Such ambiguity in social situations, in conjunction with the threat of potential discovery, makes the possession of a concealable stigma a rather difficult predicament (Pachankis, 2007). Individuals will often conceal their stigma from some while disclosing their stigmatized status to others who they feel relatively confident will not exclude them as a result (Major & Eccleston, 2005). In the study, consistent with the research, it was found that all of the legal guardians and the children were generally very selective in who they told and continually made judgments as to who needed to know and how much information to parse out. This is consistent with research by Hagen and Myers (2003) who found that majority of the children in their study responded that they sometimes could share the secret of the incarceration of the mother with some people but not everybody, and not always. Thus, they found that most of the children were selective in their choice of who they confided in, a characteristic that may be the most adaptive for the children.
Heather, a mother of three, discussed her reluctance to tell other people about the incarceration of the children’s father before she felt confident they would not judge her or her children.

*Interviewer:* Did you ever talk to friends?

*Heather:* Uh, a few friends but I mean they knew me well enough that there wasn’t going to be any kind of judgment as the fact that you know, I mean here I’d had two kids with you know, an ex-con and you know there was, just that judgment that also comes with the single parenting and then with, you put the prison stuff into it and it's like, yeah, okay you know. So yeah I was very careful as to who I told.

*Interviewer:* You have to know them well enough to know that they wouldn't judge?

*Heather:* Yeah, or that they were past, that they judged me for who I was, not choices I’d made in my life or who I was involved with.

*Interviewer:* And if you thought you would be judged?

*Heather:* No, I wouldn’t say it because was why bother? If you're going to judge me over that type of information than you're not somebody that I want to confide that sort of information to in the first place unless I absolutely have to then.

Nicole, a grandmother raising her grandson while his mother is in and out of jail:

*Interviewer:* Does the school know about his mom?
Nicole: I don’t think they know to just what extent.

Interviewer: But they know that she’s been in and out of jail?

Nicole: That she’s trouble? Yeah, oh yeah.

Interviewer: And you talked to them about that?

Nicole: I give them as little information about that as I need. They only really need just to know that there is a problem. I’m not opening up all that to them. If it was Pathways and a counsellor, yeah, but I’m not telling them.

Concealment was the response of the vast majority of the legal guardians, with only 5 out of 17 (29 percent) found to be open about the incarceration of the parent; one of whom did so only because she was required to inform others about the incarcerated father in order to protect her son as he was the victim. On the other hand, 12 of the 17 (71 percent) legal guardians kept the incarceration of the parent a secret to the best of their abilities and would not discuss it with others, choosing instead to conceal.

Similar to the legal guardians, the majority of the children also concealed the stigma, with 19 children out of 25 (76 percent) keeping the incarceration of the parent a secret and less than one-quarter of the children willing to tell others. Hagen and Myers (2003) maintained that it is important for children to work through and process the thoughts and feelings surrounding parental incarceration, such as shame and embarrassment, because a failure to do so may result in the child experiencing greater distress, depressive symptoms, and behavioural problems. They note that some children do not communicate with others regarding the incarceration of a parent, responding instead by keeping their feelings to themselves. However, they state that there is no prior research that can
provide an indication of how often this occurs or how it affects the child. Based on the findings of this study, it would appear that keeping it secret may likely be the most common approach to managing stigma among the children of incarcerated parents.

With respect to being open about the parental incarceration, there was some evidence that the children modeled the approach of their legal guardians as all of children who were open about the incarceration of the parent also had legal guardians who were open about it. This indicates that when the legal guardians were willing to share the information and did not attempt to conceal it from others, the children similarly felt able to do so. This was also found to be true for the children who had legal guardians who kept it secret as the majority of the children also followed suit and concealed it from others.

In contrast to Johnston (1995) who identified the caregiver’s fear of stigma to be greater than that of the children, for whom it was not found to be a major theme of concern, there was evidence that the children in this study were more likely to conceal the status of their incarcerated parent than were the legal guardians. Out of the 19 children who kept it secret, there were 5 children with legal guardians who did not keep the incarceration of the parent secret but where the children preferred instead to conceal it. There were 10 children with legal guardians coded as not keeping it secret and half of these children subsequently concealed it. This suggests that even though some legal guardians were far more open to telling others and did not make an effort to hide it, the children were found to be more conscious of the stigma, taking an active effort to keep it a secret from others out of fear of being judged or treated negatively because of the incarceration of their parent. Further, there were no legal guardians that kept it secret who had children who did not also keep it secret. In other words, all the legal guardians who kept it secret also had children who kept it secret, suggesting that the children were more likely to keep the incarceration status of the parent a secret, regardless of whether the legal guardian chose to conceal it.
Community Characteristics

The city of Kingston was selected as the location for the study due to the high proportion of correctional institutions in the community. Johnston (1995) suggested that the relative lack of concern for stigma of parental incarceration by the children found in research may be a reflection of the prevalence of incarceration in the community, subsequently reducing the social stigma surrounding incarceration. Kingston is arguably a community in which incarceration is generally a more normative and widespread trend than may be observed in other Canadian communities, particularly in certain neighbourhoods. As such, based on the findings from Johnston (1995), the expectation was that stigma would not be as serious a concern amongst the families impacted upon incarceration. This was found to be evident amongst the legal guardians in the study as the majority displayed a low level of fear of stigma. However, a contradiction was also found among the children in the study as the majority of the children displayed a high level of fear in contrast to the legal guardians. Thus it would appear that, contrary to expectations, although the children in the study were being raised in a community in which incarceration is a more common phenomenon, there was strong evidence that stigma was still a serious concern among the children, even if it was not as significant a concern for the legal guardians.

Conclusion

The role and impact of stigma on the families of offenders, particularly the children, was examined in this chapter. Some interesting findings emerged in the analysis of the fear of stigma of the participants in the study. First, it was found that, while the vast majority of the legal guardians believed that the family was a stigmatized group due to the incarceration of a parent, only a small proportion were identified as having a high fear of stigma. However, in contrast, the majority of the children were found to express a high fear of stigma, indicating that stigma
is indeed a major factor for the children. Additionally, an unexpected finding also emerged in the analysis in terms of the overall well-being of the children in relation to their fear of stigma. More specifically, it was found that more than half of the children with a high fear of stigma were found to be doing well while all of the children with a low fear of stigma were found to be doing poorly overall. It is hypothesized that a lack of guidance and support provided to the children with respect to managing stigma may contribute to their reduced well-being.

In examining whether there were any disparities between the fear of stigma that one has experienced and any actual encounters with stigma, it was found that the level of fear did not necessarily correlate to whether an actual stigma event has been experienced. In addition, the majority of both the legal guardians and the children had never experienced any actual stigma encounters. All of the children who had experienced an actual stigma encounter were found to have a poor overall well-being. Half of the children with an actual stigma encounter experienced low severity events while the other half had experienced high severity stigma events. A gender effect was noted whereby all the children who experienced a high stigma event were male while all of the children who experienced a low stigma event were female, suggesting that the male children may be more vulnerable to more negative encounters with stigma.

The children in the study were also found to be likely to experience stigmatization from their legal guardians as they were negatively associated as being similar to their incarcerated parent. Indeed, over half of the children were clearly identified as being like their incarcerated parents and the belief that they would also be at risk to end up in prison was also vocalized by their legal guardians. In terms of their well-being, it was found that almost all of the children who were identified as being similar to their incarcerated parent were found to have a poor overall well-being.
Consistent with the research, it was found that concealment of the stigma was the primary approach employed by both the legal guardians and the children in the study. Based on the findings of this study, it would appear that keeping it secret may likely be the most common approach to managing stigma among the children of incarcerated parents. There was also evidence that the children modeled the approach of their legal guardians. However, it was also found that even when the legal guardians were willing to share the information about the incarcerated parent with others, there were some children who did not follow this approach, choosing to keep it a secret from others instead. This suggests that even though the legal guardians were more open to sharing the information, the children were far more conscious of the stigma and were more likely to opt to keep the incarceration of their parent a secret out of a fear of being judged negatively because of it. This finding is in contrast to the research that has identified the fear of stigma to be greater among caregivers than amongst the children.

Additionally, the role that community characteristics may play for children of incarcerated parents was examined. Although research has indicated that a fear of stigma will be reduced in communities that have a higher prevalence of incarceration, this was a trend that was only observed among the legal guardians. In contrast, the children displayed a high level of fear of stigma, suggesting that it was a key factor for them regardless of the fact that it was not as significant a concern for their legal guardians.
Chapter Eight: Sources of Social Support

The third factor that will be examined is the sources of support that are available to the children. Analysis was conducted examining the impact on the children of the support their legal guardians received and the support they received themselves. There were two types of support identified that the families in the study may or may not have access to, namely: 1) informal; and 2) formal sources of support. Both types of social support are argued to provide one with emotional support, a sense of belonging and contribute to a positive overall well-being. Both types are used as a proxy measure for isolation. Informal support is defined as the networks and close relationships by which one derives social support and is comprised of family, friends, and other relationships that are not formally organized or structured. Examples include close relationships with family and friends. Formal support systems refer to organizations, such as non-profit agencies, that provide formalized and organized assistance. Examples include involvement with organizations such as the John Howard Society, the Salvation Army, and the Boys and Girls Club.

This chapter will first examine whether the children had formal and/or informal support and explore the relationship between the two forms of support in connection to their overall well-being, as per the well-being index. Whether the legal guardians also had either form of support will also be examined in relation to the children. The perceived impact that the children’s participation in formal support programs had on the children will then be assessed based on data derived from interviews with the legal guardians. Lastly, the identification of social support needs of the children is then considered, based on data gathered from interviews with the legal guardians and the practitioners.
Formal and Informal Support

Individuals are argued to be able to cope better when they are embedded in a strong social network of people who are willing and able to provide support. Social support has been found to be positively related to self-esteem, academic performance, and emotional well-being of children. On the other hand, a lack of social support is associated with aggressive behaviour, depression and academic difficulties in children. In addition, a lack of social support may impede the ability of children to learn skills that are critical to effective social interactions (Hagen and Myers, 2003). It has been suggested that many children with an incarcerated parent receive minimal support in helping them to process their feelings of grief, loss, anger, anxiety and fear (Reed and Reed, 1997). The findings of this study were highly consistent with these assessments. It was clear that very few of the legal guardians and the children in the study had sufficient support mechanisms. As will be demonstrated in the discussion below, not only did many participants lack either formal or informal support, the vast majority of them also did not have a combination of support networks, thereby lacking any form of support.

There were a number of programs and organizations in the Kingston community that the children in the study were involved with, such as: a tutoring program, counselling, drop-in centres, youth diversion programs, anger management classes, play centres, youth groups, church groups, prison visitation programs, etc. Some of these organizations offered more formal, structured programs, such as a weekly tutoring program, while others provided activities that were more casual or short-term, such as a drop-in center where the children could interact and play with other children. Generally speaking, the children would be involved in a program or with an organization once or twice a week for a few hours at a time.21

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21 There were a broad range of organizations and programs that the children were involved with and there was significant variation in the extent to which these children were engaged with and participated in community programs. Some children were consistently involved in a particular program or with an organization for an extended period of time while others would participate for shorter intervals or on an intermittent or irregular basis. As such, the specific involvement of each
In analyzing the data, it was observed that just over half of the legal guardians were found to have some formal support networks (9 out of 17 or 53 percent). There were 15 children out of 24 (63 percent) children who were observed to have some formal support networks. Thus, the majority of the legal guardians and the children were found to have some level of formal support. Generally speaking, children tended to have formal support when their legal guardians also had formal support. More specifically, 7 out of the 9 legal guardians with formal support also had children with formal support.

In terms of informal support, a small minority of both the legal guardians and the children in the study had informal social support. Less than one-quarter of legal guardians were found to have informal support networks (4 out of 17; 24 percent). Similar to the legal guardians, less than one-quarter of the children were also found to have informal support with only 6 out of 25 children (24 percent) identified to have this form of social support. Informal support of the legal guardians did not necessarily predict the informal support of the children as only half of the children with legal guardians with informal support were found to have informal support themselves. In addition, half of the children with informal support had legal guardians who did not have their own informal support. Thus, for the children in the study, development of their informal support networks occurred independently of their caregivers.

The interviews with the legal guardians and the children provided evidence as to the absence of informal support for most of the children. Difficulties of the children in making and maintaining friendships were noted in interviews with many of the legal guardians, with several discussing the isolation of the children and their lack of developed relationships that would provide them with social

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22 It should be noted that participation in some of these formal supports was based on the children being mandated to participate in programs due to criminal justice proceedings.
support. For example, Carla discussed how her son, Jack, 11, and daughter Theresa, 13, have not made any friends and did not have anyone in their lives that they can depend upon to provide them with support.

*Interviewer: Does Jack have a lot of friends?*

*Carla: No. He doesn’t have a lot of friends. Because of the behaviour thing, parents have a tendency, or because he was a bully when he was verbally abusive. Then if he really got wound up, he’d take a poke at them. So kids just backed off. Or he can be a control freak. So he got to the point where I wouldn’t allow him to go to other people’s houses or out with a group of friends, because I’d only get a phone call, “You know, Jack’s out of line….blah, blah, blah”. He got to the point where he’s quite content on his own.*

*Interviewer: And Theresa doesn’t have anybody either?*

*Carla: She’s not had a lot.*

Many of the children also talked about their own difficulties in making friends and their struggles in interacting with their peers. These children have had a hard time relating to other children and developing relationships with others. For example, Emily, 16 talked about how hard it was for her to make friends.

*No, I don’t make new friends. It’s really hard. Like I am really nice and everything, but that’s my hardest thing in life, making friends for me.*

Charlie, 14, also talked about his difficulties in developing friendships as a result of the chronic moving and instability of his family with his father continually cycling in and out of prison.
Interviewer: Do you find it easy to make friends?

Charlie: No.

Interviewer: How come?

Charlie: Cause like, I go to different schools so you like don’t know how to and all that.

In addition, very few children and legal guardians had both sources of support. More specifically, only 3 legal guardians out of 17 (18 percent) were found to have both formal and informal support. There were only 6 children out of 24 (25 percent) that also had both forms of social support. Thus, less than a quarter of the legal guardians and the children in the study had significant forms of social support networks.

Further examination of the data indicated that neither age nor gender was observed to be a determining factor in whether a child had either formal or informal support. In terms of gender, there were 9 females and 15 males included in the analysis. Of the 9 female children in the study, 5 had formal support (56 percent) and only 3 (33 percent) had informal; of the males, 10 out of 15 (67 percent) had formal support while only 3 out of 15 (20 percent) had informal support. Slightly more male children had formal supports as compared to the female children. However, as previously discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, as the male children in the study were more likely to manifest maladaptive behaviours than the female children, their higher participation in formal supports is therefore considered to be a reflection of this earlier finding.23

23 Several of the programs that the children were involved in were mandatory due to the child’s involvement in the criminal justice system.
Sources of Support and Child Well-Being

In terms of the relationship between formal support and overall well-being of the children, it would appear that formal support did not have a particularly strong impact upon the well-being of the children. More specifically, out of the 15 children with formal support, less than half of the children (6 children; 40 percent) were found to have low to moderate scores indicating positive well-being while 8 of them still had poor outcomes. Thus, less than half of the children with formal supports were found to be doing well indicating that whether the children had formal support did not play a significant role in their overall well-being.

On the other hand, it was observed that informal support appeared to be strongly related to the well-being of the children as children who had independent informal support appeared to be much better off according to the well-being indicator. All but one child who had extremely good or moderately good scores on the overall well-being index had informal social support. The exception was a child that fell right in the middle on well-being (score of 8). In contrast, all of the children with high scores, indicating poor overall well-being, were found to have no informal support. This indicates that a lack of informal support may be a contributing factor in reduced well-being of the children. As such, it was evident that many of the children in the study were highly socially isolated, lacking any of the benefits derived from the establishment of strong relationships with others that provide one with a sense of belonging and support.

Overall, although having neither formal nor informal support had a negative impact on the well-being of the children, it would appear that informal support had a greater impact on the overall well-being of the children than formal support. Specifically, it was found that for the 15 children who scored a 9 or higher (thereby indicating poor well-being), all 15 had no informal support. In contrast, all 6 children who scored in the low or moderate range had informal support. It is therefore hypothesized that sources of informal support have a greater impact on
the well-being of the children as compared to formal sources of support, and that a lack of informal support may contribute to a poorer outcome for the child.

It was also noted that a legal guardian’s informal support does not translate to the overall well-being of the child. Therefore, informal social support seems to be the key to overall positive well-being in children of incarcerated offenders, independent of the support obtained by their legal guardians. However, there was some evidence that the formal support of their legal guardian had an impact on the children’s well-being. More specifically, all but one of the children with good total well-being scores had legal guardians who had access to formal support, while all but one legal guardian who had no formal support had children with poor total scores. As previously discussed in Chapter Six, research has found that the ability of the children to successfully adjust to the imprisonment of their fathers was related to the level of familial and personal resources the mother had available, with mothers having a higher coping ability when they had more of these resources, which in turn helped to facilitate the adjustment of the children (Lowenstein, 1986). This suggests that the finding that the majority of the legal guardians lacked their own formal and informal social support networks would lead to a decrease in the adjustment of the children and may help to contribute to their poor well-being.

**Impact of Social Support Programs**

The legal guardians were asked to discuss the involvement of the children in programs and activities in the community and to assess their perception of the impact it has had on the children. This section refers therefore to the sources of formal support of the children and measures the perceived impact it had on them, based on interviews with the legal guardians and the children. Although many of the children were involved in formal programs in the community, the perceived impact was not necessarily always considered to be especially beneficial in
helping the children cope with the issues and challenges associated with parental incarceration.

The legal guardians addressed many of the issues associated with the programs their children participated in and talked about some of the challenges that came with the child’s involvement. Many of the children were involved in activities that were geared specifically for children of incarcerated parents; however, many of these programs did not seek to directly address the impact of parental incarceration on the children. Rather, the objective of many of these programs was to address other aspects, such as providing the children with academic tutoring, or improving contact and visitation between the children and their incarcerated parents. The legal guardians did not identify this as any kind of limitation but rather, appreciated the diversity of services made available which allowed them greater flexibility in involving their children in the programs they deemed most appropriate and necessary for the well-being of the children. For example, legal guardians who were primarily concerned with the education and school experiences of the children enrolled the children in activities and programs that were academically-based while other legal guardians seeking to strengthen the bond between the child and the incarcerated parent would seek out opportunities to improve the relationship and increase contact through organizations that facilitated families in this manner.

Generally speaking, programs that were less structured and formalized, such as the Boys and Girls Club (a drop off centre where children play and interact with other children), camps, playgroups and other similar programs, were perceived by the legal guardians to be fairly positive for the children. Many of the legal guardians acknowledged that it was a good opportunity for them to get a break from the caregiving responsibilities of looking after the children and allowed the children to burn off some energy. However, the more formal and structured programs, such as tutoring or being paired with a Big Brother, were also perceived to be useful for the children, although many of the legal guardians
discussed the drawbacks of participation in such formalized programs for the children.

Many of the limitations discussed were those that could not easily be addressed by the non-profit organizations and these limitations were also acknowledged by the practitioners as significant challenges that cannot be easily reconciled as they are primarily a reflection of the nature of poorly funded programs and organizations dependent on volunteers and other external support. In other words, given the nature of the formal support programs and their foundation in non-profit organizations dependent on funding and volunteers that can cannot be guaranteed from year to year, there were many limitations to the programs being offered in the community that are unable to be sufficiently addressed. For example, several legal guardians talked about the children becoming attached to a Big Brother, tutor, or mentor, etc. who would subsequently move away or would no longer volunteer with the program, leaving the child to experience feelings of abandonment and hurt from the loss of another prominent figure in their life. For children who have already experienced the loss of a parent to a correctional facility, a loss that is in many cases continual for the children as their parent continues to cycle in and out of prison, having another individual who has become important to them also leave them can have devastating effects on these children as they are particularly vulnerable to losing people they have developed an attachment toward.

For example, Carla, talked about the impact that losing a tutor had on her daughter Theresa, 13 years.

_The first tutor she had was for 2 years. They were like big brother and big sister type thing. The tutor left – no words, no warning, no goodbye, no “it’s not your fault.” Almost crushed Theresa._
Heather also discussed how losing his mentor negatively impacted her son Thomas, age 17 and made it more difficult for him to bond to his next mentor.

Thomas, he had it for 2 years and the first, his first mentor, they got along fantastically, they got along really great and then he got, he went away to university and then, the next one that came in, they just didn’t click, things didn’t go well.

Paige also talked about how difficult it has been to have someone continually and constantly involved in her son’s life, age 14.

Interviewer: Do you feel there have been enough resources to support you and Nathan?

Paige: Well no, because I really wish he would have had a Big Brother all these years. He had a few and I hired, like he would get a handicapped benefit because of his ADHD so I get $150 a month to pay for parent relief because I’m a single mom and don’t get a break. So I have done in the past and I do every once in a while, I have a couple of young guys, actually I had one guy, the son of a lady I work with and then he left and then I got his brother. For a few years he would come once a week and pick him up and go get ice cream or go to a movie or sit at home and play video games or just whatever Nathan wanted to do. That was really nice and plus it gave me a break. I could just go out or my girlfriend and I would go out for supper or I’d just go and walk around Chapters or I’d just go do nothing or whatever. But it’s really hard to find someone now because he’s at a funny age and then he gets somebody and then they go away to college and then he misses them. So I do have that money but it’s really hard finding somebody. I’ve done that in the past but I really wish he could have had like a constant, like a Big Brother or some kind of a – maybe this Youth Diversion will be able to find someone for him because
he’s had them in the past but then they’ve gone to college or university and he loses track of them. So that’s kind of a loss for him again. He’ll say you know “I really miss so and so”, he’ll say, or “I really miss…”, you know, so it’s kind of double-sided. Whatever that saying is, it’s a good thing but then it can’t be.

Another concern brought up in the interviews with the legal guardians was the fear of stigma and their anxiety that participating in certain programs would place them at risk for subsequently being identified in the community as having a parent in prison. This concern was particularly salient for those who were keeping the incarceration of the parent a secret from others and who feared being found out. For example, Evelyn talked about her worries of being identified in the community by getting involved in a program specifically geared towards families with a loved one in prison.

_Evelyn: Yeah, I went to the Bridge House. The Bridge House is okay but the funny thing, one of my employer is on the Board there._

_Interviewer: So you don’t want to go?_

_Evelyn: No._

Interviews with the practitioners supported the finding that the families were often reluctant to get involved in community programs or access local services due to the stigma surrounding parental incarceration. For example, one practitioner (#9) discussed how families would only access resources that either they or someone they knew were familiar with and which they felt they could trust.

_Well, they would not approach traditional forms of service for fear of what they would have to divulge. So if you know, once they knew somebody that had already had taken advantage of say, services of John Howard or_
Better Beginnings or something else in the community they would take advantage of that, based on you know, “what is their track record with people in my situation?” But they would not necessarily go to um, you know a youth group or something that is totally foreign to their immediate forms of support. Um, some would. I don’t mean to stereotype them and say all didn’t, but a lot you know, when I asked them what other things are you taking advantage of within the community, their answer was often “not very much”. Yeah.

The legal guardians also talked about their perceived ineffectiveness of certain programs, such as counselling, that did not appear to sufficiently address the significant problems of the children. For example, Heather talked about her son’s, 17 years, involvement in a life skills program which has not been found to have had an effective impact on his problematic behaviour.

So we did use Youth Diversion, it's a local group. Um, and um he's done, oh god, the rebound program there that teaches life skills, he's done that 3 times. Loves doing it – doesn't apply it – but he loves doing the program.

Hannah, a mother of two children aged 12 and 13 years, perceived there to be no significant impact on her children of any of the programs her children have been involved in.

Interviewer: Do you find those other programs beneficial? Have you noticed a difference in the kids?

Hannah: No, it doesn’t help. Not really, to be honest.

Another mother, Lily, talked about her 17 year old son’s involvement in a number of counselling programs which have had little impact on his delinquent behaviour.
Lily: He went to the anger management for eight weeks and he did very well, got out, lasted for a little bit.

We’d been involved with Pathways (counselling) since he was three years old.

Interviewer: Has it helped?

Lily: No. We went through everything with him.

Other issues identified by the legal guardians were difficulties in gaining access to programs, such long waiting lists to be paired up with a Big Brother, and a lack of experience and training of the volunteers and others involved with the children to sufficiently deal with the multitude of issues and challenges of the children. A lack of funding for sufficient programs to help families dealing with the incarceration of a parent was also identified by many legal guardians. Many legal guardians who did not involve the children in activities or programs were able to identify many programs in the community that were available to them, if they so chose.

Overall, despite some of the limitations identified by the legal guardians, they were extremely grateful for any additional support available to them in the community. High praise was given for the programs provided for their families and for the individuals responsible in running, managing, and supporting and these services. However, despite the positive response of the legal guardians and the value attached to such programs and organizations, it should be noted that the findings of the study indicated that such participation in programs and activities do not appear to significantly increase the well-being of the children. Indeed, as previously discussed, less than half of children with formal supports were found to be doing well. This suggests that the formal supports of the children, while greatly appreciated and supported by the families, are only part of a strategy to positively impact upon their well-being. Based on the data from this study, it is
clear that such initiatives must also intentionally seek to nurture the informal support system of the children in order to fully address their need for social support.

**Identification of Social Support Needs for the Children**

The practitioners and the legal guardians were queried about what support they felt would be beneficial to help the children cope with having an incarcerated parent. Formal supports were most commonly identified by the participants, although the perceived benefits derived from participation was primarily geared toward the development of informal support. Thus, while the focus may be on establishing formal supports for the children, the participants identified the need for greater informal support mechanisms to be developed and provided to the children.

**Legal Guardians**

Many of the legal guardians identified types of programs that they felt would benefit the children and that they believed would have a positive impact on their well-being that were similar to the suggestions made by the practitioners. However, much of the discussions with the legal guardians were fairly abstract and based on generalized ideas as to what they felt the children needed; very few were able to directly identify specific programs or needs. Despite this, they were able to offer general insight into what they believed the children needed and what they thought would help them. Overall, simply having an individual that could spend time with the children and offer them with guidance and support was perceived to be fundamental in helping to fill the large absence that having a parent incarcerated has left in the child’s life. Legal guardians with male children specifically focused on the loss of a male figure caused by the incarceration and discussed how it had negatively impacted the children. Programs that would help to address this gap and lack of male role model were therefore presented by
several legal guardians as crucial in helping the children to deal with parental incarceration.

Interestingly, although most of the legal guardians identified the need for formal support programs, the benefits that they perceived to emerge from the involvement of the children in such activities primarily revolved around the subsequent development of informal support mechanisms. In other words, while a legal guardian may have stated that involvement with an academic tutoring program would benefit the children, it was not necessarily the skills or abilities derived from the tutoring that were noted, but rather the ability of the child to develop and nurture a relationship with another person who thereby provided them with support and encouragement. This was found to be the case for the vast majority of the legal guardians who articulated the need for formal support programs; the few that did not make such claims were generally those who did not perceive there to be a lack of formal support available or who did not view them as an important resource for the children.

For example, Carla discussed the importance of the children developing support networks which would provide opportunities for gathering information and enabling the children to develop relationships with others.

*Interviewer: Are there any programs or resources that you think might help?*

*Carla: I think more along the lines of the Big Brother/Big Sister kinda program. You know, giving kids another outlet, especially the kids that don’t have two parents. You know, like really target the kids are coming from one parent families and I think, I would have to say, more options for the parents, like whether it be support. In terms of support, I mean an information circle where you can either go and talk or the networking you
can find out from other people about these agencies that aren’t publicly advertised or are so hard to get into.

Beth also discussed the type of support she considered to be important for her daughter, Ava, age 5.

Interviewer: What sort of support do you think that your oldest daughter needs?

Beth: I don’t know if there’s like, they just need, like maybe like somebody to talk to. Like, she tells me a lot of stuff but I think that she hides a lot of stuff too. I think that like when she sees that I’m emotional so she doesn’t want to put more things on me I think, but I don’t really think, like all in all she’s a happy kid and she does her thing and whatever, I don’t know if she would like let it out more to somebody else you know.

So I think if she had somebody that could be more consistent that is not in the school setting that it would be good for her because like it’s the support of her who is not me, and as much as she tells me stuff, I think it would be better for her to just have somebody to be able to talk to who is not her mother.

Interviewer: Somebody else that she can talk to?

Beth: Yes.

Overall, providing opportunities for the children to develop another outlet that they can depend upon to give them support and supply them with a safe place to share their emotions and express their feelings were frequently identified by the legal guardians as being helpful to the children and enabling them to better cope with having an incarcerated parent.
Practitioners

Many of the practitioners discussed the challenges of the families in getting involved in community programs and their difficulties in accessing resources for the children. Children with incarcerated parents were perceived to be a vulnerable group of children requiring additional supports in the community. However, issues related to poverty, lack of transportation, fear and suspicion of formal organizations due to their contact with correctional facilities, and stigma were noted as barriers to involvement and participation of the legal guardians and the children in community programs and activities. For example, one practitioner (#9) discussed the needs of the children with incarcerated parents and the difficulties of the families to access services available in the community.

Practitioner: And these kids just don’t have other supports because they are going from social services, to ah, the jail, back home and they do this circle all the time and they are not doing well. And to have someone have exclusive attention, I don’t care what it is, whether it is playing volleyball or just going to the movies or whatever, these kids are crying out for extra attention. And often you know, um, we stuck to academics but I had to create a form that said, you know, if you choose to engage in activities that are outside the program, then that is the responsibility of a parent. Because what was happening was parents are saying “Oh so and so is just great with my child and now I have them take him to the movies and can I have them roller-skating with them?” They need what every kid needs, the only difference is they are not accessing it. So anybody that is willing to do one-to-one, would be great. Academics, nutrition, um, tutoring, the mentoring, um, those are three main ones that I can think of.

Interviewer: So the children don’t have a lot of social support?
Practitioner: Ah, I don’t sense so. I don’t sense so. Um, I mean every family is different. Some of them connect very well to community resources, but the vast majority just don’t have it. And um, some of them are just very, very appropriately guarded about you know, just not connecting with too much because ah, for fear of what they do have to divulge. And um, a lot is transportation issues. I mean, if you are, if um, most of the service provision is in this end, and you live in this end, that means you have to get from point A to point B. You know? And ah, you know the entire budget that you have to take advantage of say, swimming lessons could be taken up in transportation alone. You know? So, so, they are very limited in that way.

Again, similar to the legal guardians, while the practitioners identified the need and importance of formalized supports to be established and maintained for the children, the perceived benefits that the children would derive from such programs primarily pertained to developing informal support mechanisms. Thus, while the need for formal supports was cited as being important for the children, the benefits derived by such programs were based on developing informal supports. Many of the practitioners touched on the lack of informal support networks of the families, particularly for the children, and identified this as a key need to be further developed for the children. It was clear that the practitioners recognized the negative impact that not having access to informal support had on the children and understood that it was important for the children to have in order to improve their well-being. For example, one practitioner (#12) discussed the lack of outlets for the children to express themselves and the need to develop supports that would provide this.

Interviewer: When you say that nobody really wants to hear the child talk about their feelings, do you mean the parents or...?
Practitioner: Um, no, like outside sources. Like I mean, when a child who has a parent that is incarcerated goes to like, to school or something like that, you know, nobody wants there...wants to sit there and talk about incarceration, or anything like that. I mean, if anything, they demean them because of that. Or they label them because of that. Like they say, “Oh, your father is incarcerated so you must be bad too or whatever”. So there is not really anywhere for these kids to kind of have an outlet. I mean, they come home and mom is stressed out because of you know, money and not having a place to live, and you know their phone is being cut off and you know, nobody is supporting them, the families have all left them, their friends have all left them, there is not really a forum there either for them. So something like that would be very valuable I think.

Another practitioner (#3) shared a similar sentiment, discussing the need for informal support to be developed.

Um, I think that um, from talking or having support of other people who are in the same ah, place is beneficial regardless of what you are going through. I think that you know, we seek out somebody that we don’t feel like we are the only person who has this or whatever. So I really think that support groups for moms and for children um, who are dealing with this, is important.

The recommendations of the practitioners were somewhat varied, with some emphasizing the need to focus on supporting the relationship between the children and their incarcerated parents, others focusing on the need for parenting programs for both the incarcerated parent and the caregiver to be made available, some citing the need for better financial supports to be established for the families, and others concentrating on the need for improved focus on literacy and education for the children.
Despite the range of recommendations presented by the practitioners, there were some common themes evident in the analysis of the data that emerged through many of the interviews with the practitioners. These generally pertained to providing the children with informal supports to better help the children to cope with the pressures and challenges associated with having a parent in prison. Frequent suggestions presented by the practitioners included: developing programs that would provide the children with an outlet or opportunity to express themselves, possibly through art, drama, or play; providing the children with programs that were physical and fun for the children, such as sports or the Boys and Girls club, that would stimulate them and keep them active while also helping them to develop social skills and learn to interact appropriately with others as well as teach them discipline, order and organization; and the need for counselling and other forums to help the children deal with anger and aggression and other emotions that they are experiencing.

**Conclusion**

Children and adults who are embedded in an effective social network of people who are willing and able to offer support are contended to fare better. In addition, social support has been found to be positively related to self-esteem, school performance, and emotional well-being. On the other hand, a lack of social support is associated with adjustment problems, aggressive behaviour, depression, and school problems. Further, a lack of social support may impede the ability of children in developing skills that are critical to social interactions (Hagen and Myers, 2003). Based on their analysis of 116 children of incarcerated mothers attending a summer camp, Hagen and Myers (2003) found that children who had low levels of support were more likely to exhibit externalizing and internalizing problems. Social support was found to help to reduce the children’s problems. The analysis of the data in this study provides support for these findings as it was clear that children who lacked adequate social support networks were more likely to be less well-adjusted and to have a lower well-being than did the children with
greater support systems. Overall, although having neither formal nor informal support had a negative impact on the well-being of the children, it would appear that informal support had a greater impact on the overall well-being of the children than formal support. It is therefore hypothesized that sources of informal support have a greater impact on the well-being of the children as compared to formal sources of support, and that a lack of informal support may contribute to a poorer outcome for the child.

Boswell and Wedge (2002) contended that formal support services need to become much more integrated with families and their informal support groups throughout the entire period of incarceration. The incarcerated parents, caregivers, and the children are all different developmental stages and have specific support needs. If these needs are satisfied, it is posited that it will make a significant difference between continuous and stable versus broken and disjointed relationships. The author maintains that prison family support programs can better enable families and the individual children within them to manage the isolation and shame, to make sense of the actions and criminal activity of the incarcerated parent, and to make positive choices about their own behaviour. For example, Boswell and Wedge (2002) state that the goal for an adolescent would be to enable them to find ways to interact more comfortably with younger children, their peers, and with adults in discussing the incarcerated parent. In this approach, the formal support system intentionally nurtures the informal support system of the children.

The data in this study supports these assertions. It was determined that, while formal support played a role in improving the well-being of the children and did provide some benefit to the children, informal support has the greatest impact upon the well-being of the children. Therefore, the recommendation is made that there is a need for an integrated model of both formal and informal support to be actively employed in programs and services made available to the children of incarcerated parents in the community. In addition, as many of the children did
not routinely visit with their incarcerated parent in the correctional facilities, such programs that are not prison-based but which are community- and/or school-based are also recommended.
Chapter Nine: Deviance and Criminal Behaviour of the Children

My third research objective is to explore the deviant and criminal behaviour of the children in my study. One of the strongest predictors of an adult criminal career is childhood delinquency, thereby making childhood offending a major concern (Cooper, 1999). Further, as discussed in Chapter Two, studies suggest that parental criminality is a strong predictor of children’s own criminal behaviour with researchers consistently observing a strong correlation between parental imprisonment and later criminal and deviant behaviour among the children (Huebner and Gustafson, 2007; Murray et al. 2007; Murray and Farrington, 2005).

As research has indicated that parental incarceration is a unique risk mechanism for children with the negative effects leading well into adulthood and often translating into deviance and criminal activity (Huebner and Gustafson, 2007), my goal now is to investigate the relationship between the condition of the children’s overall well-being and their participation in deviant and criminal behaviour and assess whether poor overall well-being indeed contributes to the exhibition of these negative outcomes. However, in order to do so, I will need to first take a closer look at the incidence of such maladaptive behaviour amongst the children in my study.

In this chapter, I will therefore first determine the degree to which the children in my study engage in deviance and/or criminal behaviour. Second, as discussed in Chapter Two, studies have found correlations between adolescent drug use and criminal behaviour and poor performance in school, emotional dysfunction and relationship problems (Cooper, 1999). As the literature suggests that several indicators of poor well-being may be a factor in increasing the risk of the children exhibiting these outcomes (Maguin and Loeber, 1996; Hollin, 1992; Sampson and Laub, 1990), I postulate that my overall well-being index, which captures multiple dimensions, can thereby be used to assess whether well-being as a whole is a condition that may be a precursor to these outcomes. Indeed, while the overall
well-being of the children of incarcerated parents is of great importance in and of itself, it may also be a crucial factor contributing to the children’s subsequent deviant and criminal behaviour. This relationship will be explored in this chapter as I assess whether poor overall well-being contributes to an increased likelihood of deviant and criminal behaviour. Lastly, as also discussed in Chapter Two, research has clearly found a strong relationship between the anger and aggression of children and their delinquent and criminal behaviour (Huesmann et al. 2002; Stouthamer-Loeber and Loeber, 1988; Harachi et al. 2006; Piko et al. 2006). As such, anger and aggression – understood to be an extension of the behavioural dimension of my well-being index – has been parsed out and analyzed in greater depth in Chapter Five, in part, due to its established role in the literature as a precursor to criminal and deviant behaviour. In the final section of this chapter I will thus examine the strength of the relationship between the anger and aggression of the children in this study and their deviant and criminal behaviour.

The Deviant Behaviour of the Children

For the purposes of this study, deviance has been conceptualized as the use of drugs and/or alcohol. In total, 18 children in the study were ‘eligible’ to engage in this form of deviant activity.24 Of these 18 children, 7 (39 percent) engaged in substance use. All of the children who engaged in deviance were male, ranging in age from 13 to 17.

Interviews with both the children and their legal guardians provided insight into the children’s use of drugs and/or alcohol. It was noted that, for some, there was an absence of a strong parental/legal guardian role in attempting to stop them from engaging in this behaviour; rather, it was observed that the general response of the parents/legal guardians was often a passive acceptance of the behaviour.

24 Refers to the number of children in the study who are 13 years of age or older. This cut-off age was arbitrarily chosen as it denotes the start of adolescence.
and, in one case, the active encouragement of the child to engage in this behaviour.

Ethan, age 15, talked about his need to use drugs on a daily basis in order to help him to function. His mother, Olivia, often interjects in this discussion, indicating both her knowledge of his drug activities as well as her seeming acceptance of his ongoing usage.

*Interviewer:* Do you do a lot of drugs?

*Ethan:* Just now. Just marijuana. I… for some reason I can’t cope without it. Like I’ll start to, like, it just gets me angry if I don’t have it for like, I don’t know, more than 6 or 7 hours, if I haven’t had it then I start to get really fidgety or something.

*Interviewer:* So you have to smoke pot several times a day?

*Ethan:* Yeah.

*Olivia:* You’ve come down an awful lot from what you have been.

*Ethan:* Still though, I am weird if I don’t have it.

*Olivia:* Now you can go, you average maybe only a gram and a half a day, maybe more. You average more on a weekend and when there’s other people around.

*Ethan:* I used to do it a lot more.
Olivia: You’ve come down a fair bit and that’s because of your bail charges. Um, that’s one of the factors and also the fact that I don’t like you doing this.

Ethan: I did try to quit but I can’t for some reason. I don’t know, I just get like really hyped up because it like sort of calms me down and keep my thinking abilities like average slower so I don’t think as much cause like I don’t get angry as much. There’s nothing to get really angry about, like if anything happens to me while I’m on that, it doesn’t get me pissed.

Nathan, age 14, has also engaged in drug use, resulting in an official sanction from the school.

Nathan: I’ve been suspended for doing drugs.

Interviewer: On school property?

Nathan: Yeah. Yeah. Well I almost died one time.

Interviewer: What happened?

Nathan: I bought a pipe from my friend and then his brother did a bunch with bad drugs in it. And I was just planning on doing weed. Everyone tries it. And then we get it, but we didn’t clean it. And it still had the Ecstasy and everything in it. So then I got all that ‘cause I did the first puff and then I was feeling fine for like the first hour and then boom it hit me. I started feeling sleepy. My stomach really hurt and then I plain was just like, and I was green. People were telling me I was green. Then someone gave me a drink of water and I threw up like 4 times and then I turned back white and then I was a bit better. I was so scared. I thought I was going to die. It was pretty scary. I got suspended for 5 days for that.
Dylan, age 17, has engaged in heavy drug use for many years and it has been a significant part of his life. Dylan’s father is a drug addict who has been incarcerated repeatedly throughout Dylan’s life, primarily for drug trafficking and other drug-related crimes. Recently, Dylan had been living with his father (until his father was again incarcerated, at which point Dylan was left temporarily homeless) and had become very heavily involved in drug use due to the ready supply of drugs made available to him by his father. Dylan discussed how his father was the one who had introduced him to drugs, starting when he was approximately 12 years old.

*Dylan:* Um, he gave me like, coke and crystal and stuff.

*Interviewer:* When you were 12?

*Dylan:* Well, the crystal and shit, that actually was more like 14, 15. But yeah, like stuff like that.

*Interviewer:* That is what he was giving you when you were 14?

*Dylan:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* So what did he give you when you were 12 years old?

*Dylan:* He gave me like, the first time I ever smoked weed and everything, he gave me a bunch of….well, there was a little bit of coke in there kind of thing, it was mixed.

*Interviewer:* Does your father encourage you to do drugs?
Dylan: Yeah, definitely. Like, he doesn’t care. Like everybody he knows does the same thing he does. So nobody really cares.

Interviewer: And when you were living with your dad, you got into some pretty hardcore drugs, like coke and meth?

Dylan: Yeah. I, like I did meth once when I was with him and like when I did it I was up three and half days, off just this little bit that I did. So I dunno, it was a bit hard on the brain.

Overall, it was found that, while the sample size of the children in the study who actively engaged in this form of deviance may be small due to the exploratory nature of this study, this maladaptive behaviour may have considerable negative consequences for the children. For example, as studies have generally found a positive association between the abuse of alcohol and drugs and subsequent criminal behaviour (Dawkins, 1997), the children’s substance use may significantly increase their risk of criminal behaviour and possible future incarceration. As such, it is contended that further investigation into the deviance of the children in the study was warranted.

The Criminal Behaviour of the Children

For the purposes of this study, criminal behaviour\(^{25}\) has been conceptualized as the participation in illegal and delinquent activity, often (but not necessarily) resulting in the child having contact with the police and/or with the criminal justice system.\(^{26}\) In total, the number of children in the study ‘eligible’\(^{27}\) to engage in criminal behaviour was 18; of these, there were 8 children (44 percent)

\(^{25}\) It should be noted that the indicators used to categorize children as engaging in forms of physical aggression (e.g. fighting) were not considered, for purposes of my analysis, indicators of criminal behaviour.

\(^{26}\) The conceptualization of criminal behaviour does not include the children’s use of drugs and/or alcohol.

\(^{27}\) Refers to the number of children in the study over the age of 13 years of age. This cut-off age was arbitrarily chosen as it denotes the start of adolescence.
in the study who engaged in this maladaptive behaviour. Of these 8 children, one was female, 7 were male, and their ages ranged from 13 to 17. Many of them had engaged in a range of criminal behaviours. For the most part, the children who engaged in criminal activities had been caught at one point and had contact with the police, the criminal justice system, or both. However, not all had been formally charged with a crime.

Interviews with the children and their legal guardians provided some insight into the type of criminal behaviour in which they had engaged.28 For example, Jacob, 14, discussed his criminal activities. As a consequence of this behaviour, he has been criminally charged and held in jail. At the time of the interview, the charges were pending and he was in the process of going through the criminal justice system.

*Interviewer:* What are the charges?

*Jacob:* Ah, assault and theft.

*Jacob:* I just wasn’t like, I just wasn’t being good anymore. Like just two weeks before that happened, was when I was breaking into cars.

*Interviewer:* Did you get caught breaking into cars by the cops?

*Jacob:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* And then how long after that did you go shoplifting?

*Jacob:* Two or three weeks.

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28 It should be noted that, in order to protect the identity of the children and their legal guardians, the discussion regarding the specifics of the children’s criminal behaviour is limited due to concerns that they may easily identified if these details are presented in full.
Interviewer: Did it scare you when the cops picked you up and brought you home?

Jacob: No. I was pretty mad then.

Interviewer: Was that the first time you had ever been picked up by the cops?

Jacob: Yeah.

Interviewer: And what did you think about that?

Jacob: That I wasn’t going to do it again.

Interviewer: And then a few weeks after that you got caught shoplifting?

Jacob: Yeah.

Ethan, 15, had also committed several crimes and regularly engaged in shoplifting and theft. He has also had criminal charges placed against him. His mother discussed the charges, which were pending at the time of the interview.

Ethan has um, the night before his 15th birthday he was caught, he was charged for armed robbery and possession of a dangerous weapon, I think are what the charges are.

Further examples of the types of criminal behaviour that the children in the study had engaged in include break and enter, robbery, shoplifting, theft, and drug dealing. Again, while the sample size of the children who engaged in this form of maladaptive behaviour may be small due to the exploratory nature of this study,
the nature of this behaviour and the likelihood that it will lead to formal charges and/or incarceration renders this outcome practically significant and of considerable importance. Thus, further examination into the criminal behaviour of the children in the study is warranted.

**Deviance and Criminal Behaviour of the Children**

There appears to be a strong relationship between the deviant behaviour of the children and their criminal behaviour. Specifically, of the 8 children who had engaged in criminal activity, 7 of them had also engaged in drug and/or alcohol use; the one child who did not was female. As such, it would appear that the children who engage in deviant behaviour are at high risk to also engage in criminal behaviour. Therefore, it is quite likely that the same underlying condition that renders the children vulnerable to one negative outcome also places them at risk for exhibiting the other negative outcome. This will be examined further in the next section.

**Children’s Overall Well-Being**

In Chapter Four, it was determined that the vast majority of the children in the study were found to be doing very poorly. Not only is the children’s poor overall well-being important in and of itself – as it reflects the diminished and negative state of the children across multiple dimensions – it is also contended that it may be the underlying condition that contributes to an increased likelihood that the children will engage in deviant and criminal activity. My objective now is to investigate the relationship between the children’s overall well-being and their participation in deviant and criminal behaviour to assess whether poor overall well-being does in fact contribute to the children exhibiting these negative outcomes.
Deviance and the Children’s Overall Well-Being

In examining the relationship between overall well-being and the child’s participation in deviant activity, it was found that children with a positive overall well-being did not engage in either drug and/or alcohol use. More specifically, there were 8 children who were assigned a moderate to low score on the well-being index, indicating positive overall well-being. None of these children engaged in substance use. In contrast, all of the children who engaged in deviant behaviour had a poor overall well-being, with all 7 of the children identified as deviant assigned high scores indicating poor overall well-being. Thus, none of the children with a positive overall well-being score were coded as deviant, while all of the children who were coded as deviant had a poor overall well-being. This finding indicates that children with poor overall well-being are at a much greater risk of engaging in this deviant behaviour than children whose well-being is more positive.

Interestingly, however, it was also observed that half (7) of the children with poor overall well-being (14) did not engage in this deviant behaviour. Thus, while poor overall well-being may increase the likelihood that the child may engage in deviant behaviour, it would appear that poor overall well-being in and of itself does not fully explain or predict the children’s deviant behaviour. Further analysis is therefore required to parse out whether anger and aggression – an extension of the behavioural dimension of the well-being – is a stronger predictor or precursor in determining the risk of the children manifesting deviant behaviour as suggested by the literature.

Criminal Behaviour and the Children’s Overall Well-Being

Similar to the findings in the above discussion, it was also observed that no child with a positive overall well-being had engaged in criminal behaviour. On the other hand, all of the children who had engaged in criminal activities were found
to have a poor overall well-being. More specifically, none of the 8 children with moderate to low scores on the well-being index, which indicates positive overall well-being, had engaged in criminal behaviour or had any involvement with the criminal justice system. In contrast, all 8 of the children who were identified as having engaged in criminal behaviour were assigned high scores on the well-being index, which indicates poor overall well-being. This finding suggests that children with a poor overall well-being are at greater risk for engaging in criminal behaviour than children with a positive well-being.

Again, consistent with the above analysis of well-being and deviance, it was also observed that, of the 15 children with poor overall well-being, 6 (40 percent) of the children with poor overall well-being did not engage in criminal behaviour. Thus, it would again appear that poor well-being on its own does not provide a complete explanation for the children’s criminality. Further analysis is therefore required to determine whether the presence of anger and aggression is a stronger or more precise predictor or precursor in determining likelihood of criminal behaviour.

**Children’s Anger and Deviant and Criminal Behaviour**

The anger and aggression of the children was explored in Chapter Five. By establishing the extent to which this anger is present in the children and the way in which their anger is manifested, I thereby provided a more developed and refined measure of anger and aggression in the children than what is presently available in the literature on children of incarcerated parents. This prior analysis therefore now enables me to further examine these more developed measures of anger and aggression in relation to the children’s deviant and criminal behaviour. In Chapter Five, it was revealed that the vast majority of the children in the study manifested at least one form of anger, with several also displaying multiple types of anger and aggression. In this section, I explore the relationship between the children’s anger and their deviant and criminal behaviour in further detail and
assess whether the positive presence of anger in the children is indeed correlated with these negative outcomes, as indicated by the review of the literature.

As the research indicates that anger and aggression may be a precursor or precondition to criminal and deviant behaviour, I will now specifically analyze the relationship between anger and aggression and the children’s crime and deviance to assess whether this particular dimension or aspect of well-being is a much stronger predictor of crime and deviance. I previously identified four particular ways that the children manifested anger and aggression, including: 1) Physically towards self; 2) Physically towards others; 3) Physically towards property; and 4) Verbally. These four forms of anger will now be examined in relation to the children’s deviant and criminal behaviour. Results of the analysis are presented below.

**Type 1: Anger – Physically Towards Self (Self-harm)**

Of the 5 children who manifested anger through self-harm, 4 had also engaged in substance use. As only 7 of the 27 children in the study used drugs and/or alcohol, it was noteworthy that more than half of these children also engaged in self-harming behaviour. In addition, of the 8 children in the study who had come into contact with the police or had been in conflict with the law, 5 had also engaged in self-harm. This finding indicates that all children who exhibited self-harm also participated in criminal behaviour and the vast majority engaged in deviance. Thus, the action of engaging in self-harm appeared to be an indicator of high disturbance for these children.

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29 Please refer to Chapter Five for a more in-depth review of anger and aggression in the children.
30 For an overview of anger and aggression in the children and their deviant and criminal behaviour, please refer to the table in Appendix E.
Type 2: Anger – Physically Towards Others

Similar to what was observed for manifestations of anger through self-harm, the children’s deviant and criminal behaviour was also found to be strongly associated with expressions of physical anger toward others. Indeed, all 7 of the children in this study who had engaged in substance use, and all 8 of the children who engaged in criminal behaviour, had also manifested anger through physical harm to others. This finding suggests that children who act out and display physical aggression toward others are at an especially high risk for drug use and criminal involvement. Positive responses in this category may therefore be indicative of a substantially greater vulnerability to these forms of behaviour.

Type 3: Anger – Physically Towards Property

In terms of the children’s deviant and criminal behaviour and manifestations of anger physically towards property, it was again found that all of the children who engaged in substance use and criminal behaviour manifested anger in this form. This observation suggests that the children in the study who exhibited physical anger toward objects are at high risk of drug use and criminal involvement.

Type 4: Anger – Verbally

In examining the deviant and criminal behaviour of the children in relation to their verbal expressions of anger, the results indicated that all of the children who engaged in both substance use and criminal behaviour also manifested this form of anger. This suggests that children in the study who manifested verbal expressions of anger were at risk for drug use and criminal involvement.

Overall, with the exception of one female child who did not engage in substance use but who did engage in criminal behaviour, it was found that all of the children
who manifested both deviant and criminal behaviour had high\textsuperscript{31} levels of anger and aggression. In contrast, none of the children with low\textsuperscript{32} levels of anger had any involvement with either substance use or criminal activities. Thus, anger and aggression were present for all cases of deviant and criminal behaviour. Further, no child with a poor overall well-being was found to commit deviant or criminal acts in the absence of anger and aggression. In other words, children with a poor overall well-being but who did not manifest anger were not found to engage in deviance or criminal behaviour. In contrast, children with a poor well-being who did manifest anger and aggression were found to engage in deviance and criminal behaviour. This finding suggests that while well-being may provide a partial predictor, anger and aggression may in fact be a necessary precondition for the participation in deviant and criminal behaviour.

**Conclusion**

Based on the analyses of the children in this study, it is clear that the children of incarcerated parents are at high risk for both substance abuse problems and future criminal involvement. This finding provides something of a contradiction to the work of Johnston (1995), which suggests that drug use among children of offenders is not as great a problem or concern as the findings of the present study suggest. These findings are also contradictory to research by Hanlon et al. (2005), which found that the vast majority of the 88 adolescent children of incarcerated addict mothers were neither particularly deviant nor maladjusted, and all but a very small number had successfully avoided the adoption of substance use and criminal lifestyles. With close to half of the children in my study actively engaged in deviant and/or criminal behaviour, their participation in such behaviour places them at great risk of becoming incarcerated themselves, subsequently perpetuating the cycle of intergenerational criminality. As such, it is necessary to take a closer look at the prevalence of such behaviour as well as

\textsuperscript{31}A high level of anger was determined based on the child exhibiting three or more forms of anger.

\textsuperscript{32}A low level of anger was determined based on the child exhibiting two or less forms of anger, with verbal manifestations of anger as one of the two forms of anger present.
assess whether there are certain conditions that may operate as a predictor or precursor which may then be used to better identify which children are at greatest risk for exhibiting such behaviour.

In summary, it was observed that poor overall well-being in and of itself did not fully explain the children’s deviant and criminal behaviour as poor overall well-being did not necessarily translate into the child displaying these negative outcomes. Hence, it was apparent that overall well-being is not a clear or precise predictor of child deviant and criminal behaviour and that deeper analysis was therefore required. Given that the literature has clearly established that anger and aggression is often a precursor for crime and deviance, I then examined the more specific relationship between the anger and aggression of the children and their deviant and criminal behaviour. Interestingly, while no children with a poor overall well-being were found to commit crime and deviance in the absence of anger, anger and aggression were present for all cases of crime and deviance. In other words, children with a poor overall well-being but no anger issues do not engage in crime or deviance, while children with both poor well-being and anger do exhibit these outcomes. Thus, it would appear that anger and aggression operate as something of an intervening or mediating factor and are likely a necessary condition for the child committing criminal and deviant acts. As such, it is clear that the presence of anger and aggression in children places them at significant risk for engaging in delinquent and criminal behaviours, supporting claims made in the literature that risk factors for adolescent substance use and criminal delinquency are childhood anger and aggression.
Chapter Ten: Conclusion

Overview of the Study

The children of offenders have often been referred to in the literature as the “hidden victims of crime” with the negative effects of parental incarceration found to be both profound and enduring for the children left behind (Carlson & Cervera, 1991; Bloom and Steinhart, 1993). Indeed, despite informed estimates placing the number of Canadian children who are impacted by the incarceration of a parent in the hundreds of thousands (Bayes, 2007; Withers and Folson, 2007), these children remain largely invisible. There is no clear understanding as to how Canadian children of offenders are faring and what factors may increase their risk of experiencing poor outcomes.

The goal of this exploratory qualitative study was to investigate the experiences and conditions of children of incarcerated parents and to provide greater insight into how they may have been affected by having a parent go to prison. Despite pressing concerns regarding the children of incarcerated parents (e.g. Bloom and Steinhart, 1993; Kampfner, 1995; Johnston, 1995; Travis and Waul, 2003), significant gaps exist in our understanding of their well-being, of the way in which certain factors or preconditions impact their well-being, and of the relationship between the condition of children’s well-being and their deviant and criminal behaviour. Further, relative to the United States and England, there is a significant lack of research addressing the topic of children of incarcerated parents from a Canadian perspective. The overall objective of this exploratory qualitative study, therefore, was to address these limitations in the literature and to provide greater insight into the experiences of the children of offenders in Canada.

In this final chapter, I begin by revisiting my research questions and summarizing my key findings, noting the contributions that my study makes to the existing literature. I then discuss the potential limitations of my research and explore
directions for future research that can build upon my findings, with a particular emphasis on the role of the culture of the family, and closing with a discussion of the potential implications of my study and some concluding thoughts.

**Summary of Key Findings**

My study endeavoured to provide empirical answers to several important research questions that addressed gaps identified in the current literature. The findings with respect to the key research questions are summarized in the following discussion.

1) What is the state of the well-being for children of incarcerated parents? How are these children faring overall?

The issue of the welfare of children of incarceration was clearly found to be of great concern, with much of the literature focused on the impact of parental incarceration on the well-being of the children. Given that prior research has established that parental incarceration has a negative and pervasive impact on the children (e.g. Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Lowenstein, 1986; Bloom and Steinhart, 1993; Kampfner, 1995; Huebner and Gustafson, 2007), my initial objective was to measure the overall well-being of the children in the study and to determine whether the findings from existing the research were consistent with the children in my sample.

As child well-being was the initial outcome variable in this study, it was important to clearly develop and define the concept of “well-being” in order to appropriately test the effects of parental incarceration on the children. As such, at the outset of the study, it was necessary to first investigate how the literature has conceptualized child well-being and to examine prior approaches employed in research before determining the best approach to assessing well-being amongst the children in my study. Based on my review of the literature, I identified four important dimensions of well-being: 1) emotional; 2) behavioural; 3) academic;
and 4) social. These four indicators comprise my well-being index, which was then used to guide my subsequent examination of both the single dimensions of well-being and the overall well-being of the children.

Analysis of the data indicated that the vast majority of the children were doing poorly across multiple dimensions. Overall, the vast majority of the children in the study were found to score poorly on each of the four indicators, with most found to display an overall poor well-being. Less than 20 percent were found to be doing “well” overall. In looking more specifically at each of the individual dimensions, it was found that three-quarters of the children had a poor emotional state and only one-quarter of the children were found to be doing well or moderately well in terms of their emotional well-being. In examining the behavioural dimension of the index, it was found that the majority of children had a very poor behavioural well-being. Consistent findings were also observed with respect to both the academic and social dimensions, with the majority of the children found to be doing poorly across each dimension. On the whole, the children in this study were found to have a very poor well-being, based on both the individual indicators and the overall index. While the literature had indicated that difficulties in all dimensions were experienced by children of incarcerated parents, this study found poor well-being to be evident on a much larger scale, with a significantly higher proportion of children doing poorly on each dimension than was generally observed in the research (Bloom and Steinhart, 2003; Lowenstein, 1986; Hanlon et al. 2005).

Captured under the behavioural indicator is the presence of anger and aggression which, as an extension of the behavioural dimension, is understood to be a further indicator of the children’s well-being. As previously discussed, although anger and aggression have been identified as a significant problem for children of incarcerated parents (Banauch, 1985; Gabel, 1992a; Lowenstein, 1986; Sack, 1977; Johnston, 1995; Block and Potthast, 1998), researchers have generally not fully explored how these manifest in these children or investigated factors that
may lead to aggression in these children; factors which may not only potentially contribute to the children exhibiting anger and aggression, but also provide insight into the children who do not display anger and aggression. Therefore, in order to address this gap, I conducted an in-depth analysis of anger and aggression in the children, investigating the extent to which the children display anger and aggression and the ways in which these are manifested. In doing so, I presented a measure of anger that is more developed and precise than is currently found in the research on children of incarcerated parents and enables greater insight into the nature of this anger and aggression. Overall, it was observed that the vast majority of the children in the study manifested at least one form of anger, with several also displaying multiple types of anger. In looking deeper, I found that male children between the ages of 13 to 17 years with high levels of parental instability and parental drug use were found to exhibit significant levels of anger and aggression.

In conclusion, obtaining a better understanding of the overall well-being of children was crucial to understanding the way in which certain factors or preconditions shape their well-being, which is the next stage of my study. This well-being index enabled me to establish a baseline for assessing the extent to which certain factors impact upon the children’s well-being and was a necessary development prior to my examination of the causal factors of interest in the study, which brings us to the next research question addressed in my study.

2) Are there certain factors or preconditions that place the children at greater risk for poor well-being?

My second research objective was to take a deeper look into key causal factors that were emergent in both the literature and in the data collected for my study. It was evident that there were some prominent factors understood to have an impact upon the well-being of the children of incarcerated parents. In general, the literature has, for the most part, implied or assumed the impact of these factors.
and has not systematically assessed their effects on the overall well-being of children of incarcerated parents. My research addressed this gap in the research, thereby enabling me to determine whether there are certain factors and preconditions that placed the children at greater risk for poor overall well-being. By determining how these conditions shape the overall well-being of the children, I was better able to identify some of the risk factors that may increase their vulnerability to poor outcomes, while also exploring whether these factors may also be associated with positive outcomes. As such, I am providing a more systematic and comprehensive analysis of the impact that these causal factors have on the overall well-being of the children in the study than is currently present in the literature.

In order to answer the overarching research question above, I identified three specific causal mechanisms as particularly relevant for the purposes of my study: a) quality of care; b) stigma; and c) social support. Using my well-being index, I examined each of these three principal factors in order to develop a better understanding of the way in which they impacted the overall well-being of the children of incarcerated parents. Each of these three factors, and the key research findings, will now be discussed in turn.

a) Does the quality of care that the children are receiving affect their overall well-being?

My analysis was based on three indicators of quality of care drawn from a review of the literature: 1) the well-being of the legal guardian; 2) the relationship between the child and the legal guardian; and 3) the level of parental instability and household instability experienced by the child. First, with respect to the well-being of the legal guardians, my findings clearly indicated that the well-being of the legal guardian was positively related to the well-being of the child. That is, children who had legal guardians who were doing well were also found to be doing well, while children with legal guardians who were doing poorly were also
found to be faring poorly. In terms of the overall relationship between the legal guardian and the children, it was found that the majority of the children had poor relationships with their legal guardians and, those with poor child-guardian relationships, also had a negative well-being. Not a single child with a poor relationship with the legal guardian was identified as doing well. In contrast, all of the children with a good relationship with their legal guardians also had a positive well-being. As such, it is clear that guardian/children relationships are strongly associated with overall child well-being, whereby negative relationships predict poorer well-being among the children of offenders. Lastly, in examining family and household stability, it was found that children with low instability were doing well overall, whereas children with high instability were doing poorly overall. This was found to be true for all measures of instability, suggesting that instability in both the family and household contributes to a negative outcome in the well-being of the children.

Overall, a poor quality of care was found to significantly increase the likelihood that the child would experience a poor outcome. This finding suggests that the quality of care that the child receives is, in fact, an important component to their well-being and children that receive poor quality of care are at greater risk for poor emotional, behavioural, social, and academic well-being.

b) Are the children subjected to stigmatization, and if so, does it have an impact on their overall well-being?

Among the participants in my study, some interesting findings emerged related to the fear of stigmatization. First, it was found that, while the vast majority of the legal guardians believed that the family was a stigmatized group due to the incarceration of a parent, only a small proportion was identified as having a high fear of stigma. In contrast, the majority of the children were found to express a high fear of stigma, indicating that stigma was a major concern for the children, independent of their legal guardians. Additionally, an unexpected finding also
emerged in the analysis in terms of the overall well-being of the children in relation to their fear of stigma. More specifically, it was found that more than half of the children with a high fear of stigma were found to be doing well while all of the children with a low fear of stigma were found to be doing poorly overall. It was subsequently hypothesized that a lack of guidance and support provided to the children with respect to managing stigma may contribute to their reduced well-being. In examining whether there were any disparities between the fear of stigma and actual encounters with stigma, it was found that the level of fear did not depend on whether an actual stigma event had been experienced. In addition, the majority of both legal guardians and children had never experienced any actual stigma encounters. Nonetheless, all of the children who had experienced an actual stigma encounter were found to have a poor overall well-being.

Interestingly, it was observed that the presence of stigma was imposed on the children by forces both within and outside of the family unit. Indeed, over half of the children in the study were clearly identified by their legal guardians as being “like” their incarcerated parents and the belief that they would subsequently be at increased risk to end up in prison was also vocalized. In terms of their well-being, it was found that almost all of the children who were identified as being similar to their incarcerated parent were found to have a poor overall well-being. While it is unclear from the data the extent to which being compared to their incarcerated parent contributed to their poor well-being, it is highly likely that such associations had a detrimental impact upon the child.

Consistent with the literature that has identified concealment of the stigma to be part of the strategy management (Major and Eccleston, 2005; Smart and Wegner, 2000; Hagan and Myers, 2003; Kampfner, 1995), it was found that concealment of the stigma was the primary approach employed by both the legal guardians and the children in the study. Based on the findings of this study, it would appear that keeping it a secret may likely be the most common approach to managing stigma among the children of incarcerated parents. There was also evidence that the
children modeled the approach of their legal guardians. Yet, even when the legal guardians were willing to share information about the incarcerated parent with others, some children nevertheless chose to keep it a secret from others, suggesting that the children were far more conscious of the stigma and were thus more likely to keep the incarceration of their parent a secret for fear of being judged negatively as result. These findings are in contrast to existing research (Johnston, 1995) that has found the fear of stigma to be greater among caregivers than amongst the children of offenders.

c) Do the children have access to sources of social support and, further, does the presence or absence of these support networks have an impact on their overall well-being?

Two types of support were identified in this study, which families may or may not have access to, including: 1) formal and 2) informal sources. In terms of the relationship between formal support and overall well-being of the children, it would appear that formal support did not have a particularly strong impact upon the well-being of the children, as less than half of the children with formal supports were found to be doing well overall. On the other hand, it was observed that informal support appeared to be strongly related to the well-being of the children, as children who had independent informal support appeared to be much better off according to the well-being indicator. This suggests that a lack of informal support may be a contributing factor in a reduced well-being of the children. It was evident that many of the children in the study were socially isolated and lacking many of the benefits associated with having strong relationships with others, including a sense of belonging and social support.

Although having neither formal nor informal supports had a negative impact on the well-being of the children in the study, it is nevertheless concluded that sources of informal support have a greater impact on the well-being of the
children as compared to formal sources of support, and that a lack of informal support may contribute to a poorer outcome for the child.

3) Do the children of incarcerated parents exhibit a pattern of intergenerational deviance and criminal behaviour? If so, are these negative outcomes connected to the condition of their well-being?

My third research objective was to explore the deviant and criminal behaviour of the children in my study. There is much concern in the literature regarding the likelihood of children of offenders manifesting these negative outcomes, as research has consistently observed a strong correlation between parental imprisonment and the future deviant and criminal behaviour of children (Bloom and Steinhart, 1993; Johnston, 1995; Kampfner, 1995; Murray, 2007; Murray and Farrington, 2005).

In my analysis, I found that 39 percent of the children in the study engaged in deviant behaviour and 44 percent engaged in criminal behaviour. I further observed that the same children who engaged in deviant behaviour were also at risk to engage in criminal behaviour, suggesting that the same underlying condition that renders the children vulnerable to one negative outcome also places them at risk for exhibiting the other negative outcome.

In order to answer the second part of this research question, I broadened my investigation by examining the relationship between these maladaptive behaviours and the overall well-being of the children. Operating under the notion that not only is the children’s poor overall well-being important in and of itself, as it reflects the diminished and negative state of the children across multiple dimensions, it was hypothesized that poor well-being may be the underlying

33 It is contended that, while the sample size of the children in the study who actively engaged in these maladaptive activities may be small due to the exploratory nature of this study, the nature of this behaviour and the likelihood that it will lead to formal charges and/or incarceration renders this outcome practically significant and of considerable importance.
condition that contributes to an increased likelihood of the children engaging in deviant and criminal activity. My final objective in this study was, therefore, to investigate the relationship between the condition of the children’s overall well-being and their participation in deviant and criminal behaviour.

On the surface, the analysis indicated that children with poor overall well-being were at a much greater risk of engaging in both deviant and criminal behaviour than children whose well-being was more positive. It was further observed, however, that since about half of the children with poor well-being did not engage in either deviant or criminal behaviour, poor overall well-being in and of itself did not fully explain the children’s deviant and criminal behaviour, as poor overall well-being did not necessarily translate into the child displaying these negative outcomes. Hence, it was apparent that overall well-being was not a clear or precise predictor of child deviant and criminal behaviour and that deeper analysis was therefore required.

Given that the literature has clearly established that anger and aggression is often a precursor for crime and deviance (Huesmann et al. 2002; Stouthamer-Loeber and Loeber, 1988), I then examined the more specific relationship between the anger and aggression of the children and their deviant and criminal behaviour. Interestingly, no children with a poor overall well-being were found to commit crime and deviance in the absence of anger, while anger and aggression was present for all cases of crime and deviance. In other words, children with a poor overall well-being but no anger issues and no expression of aggression did not engage in crime or deviance, while children with both poor well-being and displays of anger and aggression did exhibit these outcomes. Thus, it would appear that anger and aggression operate as an intervening or mediating factor and are a necessary condition for the child committing criminal and deviant acts. As such, it is clear that the presence of anger and aggression in children places them at significant risk for engaging in delinquent and criminal behaviours, supporting claims made in the literature that risk factors for adolescent substance use and
criminal delinquency are childhood anger and aggression (Fite et al. 2007; Piko et al. 2006; Harachi et al. 2006). Overall, my findings suggest that while overall child well-being may provide a partial predictor for these maladaptive behaviours, anger and aggression in the children may in fact be a necessary precondition for their participation in deviant and criminal behaviour.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the difficulties in gaining access to the participants, there are some limitations to the study worth noting and which suggest possible avenues for future research. There are several limitations that are inherent in qualitative research that must be considered when interpreting these findings. One of the limitations of the study was a relatively small sample size due to the challenges that were confronted with respect to the recruitment of participants as discussed in further detail in Chapter Three. Additionally, as the number of children that could participate in the study was dependent on permission granted by their legal guardians, the original sample size was further reduced by legal guardians who did not provide their consent for the children to directly be a part of the study. This short-coming is common to research of this type and it is recognized that the relatively small sample size may limit both the generalizability of the findings and the flexibility of the analysis. However, the sample size is both a strength as well as a limitation. While more participants may have provided greater breadth in the findings, a smaller number of participants allowed for greater depth of exploration. It is suggested that future analyses be conducted that include a larger sample size which may further reveal the collateral effects of parental incarceration.

There may also be the matter of a potential selection bias as the participants were required to volunteer to be a part of the study. As the majority of participants were recruited for the study through contacts established through the various social service organizations in the Kingston community, it is possible that the
experiences of these families are not reflective of the families that do not participate in or who do not access available resources in the community. Rather, the data may provide greater insight into the families that are more connected to the social service network in Kingston than those families that may be even more marginalized. However, this potential bias is difficult to overcome without the use of a random sampling methodology as employed in quantitative research.

In addition, due to the rather transient nature of the population and the many difficulties experienced early on in locating and accessing potential participants, it was thought necessary to conduct the interviews as soon as the individuals were identified and provided their consent. As such, the majority of interviews were conducted over a six-month period, precluding the possibility of employing a grounded theory approach to the data. Also, given my apparent position as an “outsider” coming from a different background, in conjunction with my status as a researcher, it was sometimes difficult to fully connect with participants and I was often conscious of the potential for a power imbalance.

An important step for future research on Canadian children of offenders would be a study that includes a comparative group with children who are separated from their parents for a reason other than incarceration. As one of the challenges with research seeking to examine the effects on parental incarceration on children is the difficulty in disentangling the causal effects of the incarceration event from the potential effects of other pre-existing disadvantage (Murray, 2007; Travis and Waul, 2003; Dallaire, 2007a), including comparison reports of the well-being of children from similar backgrounds whose parents are not incarcerated would also prove informative. Comparative research would allow further investigation into whether children of incarcerated parents fare worse than their peers who have not experienced parental incarceration and perhaps even identify additional risk factors unique to the incarceration event, thereby supplementing the findings from my research.
Additionally, there is a need for longitudinal follow-up investigations that would enable researchers to further explore the well-being of children of incarcerated parents (Dallaire, 2007b; Murray, 2007). Continuing to examine measures of child well-being that have been collected from the same children and legal guardians during multiple stages of the incarceration event, thereby taking advantage of the fact that the same children and backgrounds are involved, would thus provide for a more comprehensive analysis of change to be assessed over time and in response to different points of the experience (Hagan and Dinovitzer, 1999).

**Culture of Families**

Although there are not enough families in the study to enable a rigorous analysis regarding the culture of families, after speaking at length and in-depth with each of the families, it appeared that the culture of the family may play a role in the overall well-being of children who have been impacted by parental incarceration. There were some unique families in which a number of factors found to be salient in the analyses were not evident for these children. For example, with respect to gender and anger, there were two male children in one family who did not manifest any anger and two families whereby the female children did manifest severe anger – these cases contrasted the gender effect noted in the analysis in Chapter Five. Thus, although the sample size is limited, the culture of the family was identified as a general emergent factor which warrants further examination in future studies.

The findings from this exploratory study suggest that the culture of the family seems to be prominent at the extremes. At the one end of the spectrum, there were a few families where all of the children scored low to moderate on the well-being scale, indicating that all of the children in these families had a positive overall well-being. These children were generally understood to be the exception as they were all doing relatively well in comparison to the vast majority of the children in the study, who were doing rather poorly overall. In considering what
differentiated these families from the others in the study, a number of key factors were identified. To begin with, these children were receiving a positive quality of care, had no exposure to a criminogenic environment (such as parental drug use), experienced minimal disruption and instability in terms of both the household and the incarceration of the parent, and had a legal guardian who had a positive well-being. These children had a good relationship with their legal guardians and close sibling relationships. As well, the children continued to be very connected to their incarcerated parent and a strong family relationship had been maintained. All of these children also had both formal and informal support, and were very involved in extra-curricular activities, such as sports or church groups.

At the other end, there were children from families that scored high on the well-being scale, indicating that all of the children in these families had a very poor overall well-being. In speculating about what factors might have differentiated these families from the children at the other extreme, a number of contrasting factors were identified. First, these children were receiving a very poor quality of care, were exposed to a criminogenic environment that ranged from domestic abuse to drug and alcohol abuse and experienced significant disruption and instability in both the home and in terms of their incarcerated parent who was continually cycling in and out of the correctional system. These children also had legal guardians who were doing poorly and it was observed that there were also high levels of conflict and a poor relationship between the children and their legal guardians; the overall family connection was weak. These children also lacked informal support and had only moderate formal support.

Overall, in taking into account the role that the culture of the family may play in the well-being of the children, it would appear that these factors may be particularly salient. However, given the exploratory nature of this study, we can

34 It should be noted that while other children may have had some of these factors, there were no other children/families that had all of them present.
only speculate as to the extent to which possible family dynamics may contribute to having either a positive or negative effect on the state of the children’s well-being. Nonetheless, given the general themes that were emergent in the analysis, it is clear that there is a need for future research to be conducted that further parses out the relationship between the culture of the family and the well-being of the children of incarcerated parents.

**Implications and Concluding Remarks**

The complex challenges resulting from the incarceration of a parent and the general lack of awareness of many law enforcement and social service organizations have regarding the issues and difficulties that the children face suggests there is a pressing need for coordinated system-wide strategies to be designed and implemented that would better target these children and address their needs more effectively (Reed and Reed, 1997). The results of my study have clear implications for practitioners in various domains, such as teachers, social workers, and other professionals involved with social service agencies. It is highly important that, when coming into contact with a child who is experiencing the incarceration of a parent, there be an awareness of the additional challenges and risks that these vulnerable children face in order to be better able to serve and respond to their unique needs.

This study takes an important step toward closing the gaps which exist in the current research concerning the well-being of children of incarcerated parents. First of all, my findings offer a more precise understanding of how the children are faring and show that the vast majority of the children were doing poorly across multiple dimensions. This study suggests that, rather than address one dimension in isolation of the others, there is a need to implement interventions and resources that target multiple aspects of the children’s well-being to best address their overall needs. In order to better support the children and their families in the community, and given the strong findings in my study that clearly
demonstrated that the presence of informal support has a positive impact on the children’s well-being, it is recommended that a coordinated inter-agency approach to working with these children be developed by which the relevant organizations in the community come together to establish a collaborative and comprehensive strategy that addresses the multitude of challenges faced by the children and which targets their emotional, behavioural, academic and social needs through various programs and resources.

My study also determined that specific preconditions had an impact upon the children’s well-being. I was further able to demonstrate that there are specific factors that serve to have a negative impact on the well-being of the children. By obtaining a better understanding of these preconditions and the way in which they impact upon the well-being of the children of incarcerated parents, we can work towards providing more effective resources that would better support and target these vulnerable aspects. For example, a very clear connection was observed between the quality of care that the children were receiving and their overall well-being. In particular, I found the link between the legal guardian and the well-being of the children to be especially salient. As my findings demonstrated that the well-being of the legal guardian was closely tied to the well-being of the children, it is also suggested that more resources and programs be directed toward helping the legal guardians to better cope with the challenges and struggles they face in caring for children of incarcerated parents. If greater support can be provided and directed toward improving the well-being of the legal guardians and in strengthening their relationship with the children in their care, it will most likely serve to have a positive impact on the well-being of the children.

My analysis also demonstrated that children who lacked adequate social support networks were more likely to be less well-adjusted and to have a lower well-being than did the children with greater support systems. As informal support was observed to have a greater impact on the overall well-being of the children than formal support, it was determined that there is a need for an integrated model of
both formal and informal support to be actively employed in programs and services made available to the children of incarcerated parents in the community. In this approach, the formal support system would seek to intentionally nurture and foster the informal support systems of the children, thereby increasing the likelihood that the support being offered would have a more direct and positive impact on the well-being of the children. Overall, there is a need for greater programs and policy which would help to mitigate some of the isolation and stigmatization that the children may experience (Huebner and Gustafson, 2007). For example, given my findings with respect to the stigma surrounding parental incarceration, it is also clear that there is a need for social policies to be developed which aim to reduce the stigma that surrounds contact with the criminal justice system for the families. One suggestion is the implementation of a “strengths-based” approach which could combat stigma by focusing on reparation and, rather than concentrating on the deficits of an individual, highlights the positive contributions one can make. In Sweden, where family-friendly prison policies have been combined in conjunction with a welfare-oriented juvenile justice system and extensive social support systems along with sympathetic attitudes toward crime and punishment, the children have been found to be impacted less by parental incarceration than in the United Kingdom (Murray, 2007). In addition, as many of the children with a poor overall well-being in my study were also found to be subjected to stigmatization from within the family, it is recommended that more focus be placed on communicating and generating awareness as to the potential damage such action may cause to the children.

Lastly, my results indicated that there were certain children of offenders who were more likely to engage in deviant and criminal behaviour. Specifically, while children with a poor overall well-being were found to be vulnerable to engaging in these negative outcomes, more significantly, it was further determined that it was the children who exhibited significant levels of anger and aggression who were most likely to engage in both forms of maladaptive behaviour. As such, in order to break the cycle of intergenerational criminality and deviance, it is crucial
that this group of children be targeted for prevention with greater resources and support directed toward identifying this group of children and diverting them from this potential path.

Families and children of offenders generally struggle with a host of challenges that often become exacerbated with the incarceration of the parent. In working together, correctional professionals, local service providers and practitioners could help to develop policies and programs currently lacking in the community that may substantially decrease the likelihood that the children of offenders will exhibit negative outcomes (Travis and Waul, 2003). Greater understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by Canadian children of incarcerated parents will help us to better target a vulnerable population that is largely ignored by both the correctional system and by many social service organizations.
References


Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Why should I participate?

We want to hear from families who have children currently incarcerated. We are conducting a study on children of incarcerated parents and are looking for people who would like to participate and share their stories. Researchers at McGill University are conducting this study.

What’s involved?

One hour and will be kept strictly confidential. There will be $20 compensation given for each interview.

Who can participate?

Any adult who currently has a parent in prison.

Who do I contact?

You can contact Julie by phone at 613-530-1688, or by email: julie@project4u@gmail.com.

Contact Julie by email for more information about these children often neglected. We want to learn more about these children and their needs.

What is Offenders?

Children of incarcerated parents.

Parental Incarceration and the Ties that Bind
Appendix B: Consent Forms

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM: PRACTITIONER
MC GILL UNIVERSITY

Title of Research: Children of Offenders: Parental Incarceration and the Ties that Bind

Researchers: Lucia Benaquisto, Associate Professor, Sociology
Julie Coulthard, Ph.D. Candidate, Sociology

Contact Information: Lucia Benaquisto Tel.: 514-398-6852
coulthard@mcgill.ca
Julie Coulthard Tel.: 613-233-4290
coulthard@mcgill.ca

Purpose of the research:
The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that parental incarceration has on children. This analysis will be done through an investigation into which services are made available, the nature of these resources, and what prominent problems, if any, professionals in the field have encountered as specific to children of offenders that are in need of attention. These issues will be explored through interviews conducted with select individuals who have an involvement with the children.

What is involved in participating:
Your participation will consist of a tape-recorded interview that will be approximately one hour in duration. The questions will concern your experiences in the field, your perception of the impact that the incarceration of a parent has on children, and the identification of the needs of these children. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to answer any questions or terminate your consent to the interview at any time. No one outside the research team will be given access to the interview transcripts.

This segment of the study is an examination of the response of Canadian social services to the children of incarcerated parents. We would like to use the names of some participants in the study affiliated with various organizations and institutions that work with these children and their families. However, this is not required. You may choose to remain anonymous when information from this study is disseminated. Anything you say will only be attributed to you with your permission; otherwise the information will be reported in a manner that prevents direct association with you. The data will be coded and stored in such a way that it will be impossible to identify the material directly with any individual or organization. If you do allow us to use your name, any sensitive material will be treated confidentially. All requests will be respected.

Consent:
I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

I agree to be tape-recorded _____ Yes _____ No

You may use my name/organization in reported findings: _____ Yes _____ No

Signature: ____________________ Researcher's Signature: ____________________

Name: ____________________ Date: ____________________
RESEARCH CONSENT FORM: LEGAL GUARDIAN
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Title of Research: Children of Offenders: Parental Incarceration and the Ties that Bind

Researchers: Lucia Benuquisto, Associate Professor, Sociology
Julie Coulthard, Ph.D. Candidate, Sociology

Contact Information: Lucia Benuquisto Tel: 514-398-6852
d: Julie Coulthard Tel: 613-233-4290 e-mail: julie.coulthard@mail.mcgill.ca

Purpose of research: The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that parental incarceration has on children. This analysis will be done through an investigation into the specific needs of these children. Their feelings and experiences, including any problems or challenges that they have faced will be explored. These issues will be examined through interviews conducted with the children and with individuals that have current guardianship of the children.

What is involved in participating: Your participation will consist of a tape-recorded interview that will be approximately one hour in duration. The questions asked will concern your experiences with the child(ren) in your care, your perception of the impact that the incarceration of the parent has had, and the identification of the needs of these children. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to answer any questions or terminate your consent to the interview at any time. No one outside the research team will be given access to the interview transcripts.

To protect the privacy of the family and the child(ren), any information that may be identifying will be removed. You and your family will not be identified in any written or oral presentations and all material discussed will be treated with full confidentiality. The data will be coded and stored in such a way that it will be impossible to identify the material directly with any individual. Please note that a decision not to participate in the study will have no impact at all on the services or programs available to your family or to the child(ren), and access to such resources will not be contingent on, or affected in any way by, your participation in this research. You will be given $20 as compensation for your participation in this research.

Consent:

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

I agree to be tape-recorded _____ Yes _____ No

Signature: ___________________________ Researcher's Signature: ___________________________

Name: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________
RESEARCH CONSENT FORM: LEGAL GUARDIAN FOR CHILDREN
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Title of Research: Children of Offenders: Parental Incarceration and the Ties that Bind

Researchers: Lucia Benacquisto, Associate Professor, Sociology
Julie Couilty, Ph.D. Candidate, Sociology

Contact Information: Lucia Benacquisto  Tel: 514-398-6852
Julie Couilty  Tel: 613-233-4290  e-mail: julie.coulthard@mail.mcgill.ca

Purpose of research:
The purpose of this study is to examine the impact that parental incarceration has on children. This analysis will be done through an investigation into the specific needs of these children. Their feelings and experiences, including any problems or challenges they have faced, will be explored. These issues will be examined through interviews conducted with the children and with individuals that have current guardianship of the children.

What is involved in participating:
The participation of the child in your care will consist of a tape-recorded interview that will be approximately one hour in duration. The questions asked will concern the experiences and feelings that the child in your care has about having a parent in prison and issues that may have emerged as a result, as well as questions about school, home, friends and activities. The child’s participation is completely voluntary and s/he may refuse to answer any questions or stop the interview at any time. No one outside of the research team will have access to the interview transcripts.

To protect the privacy of the family and the child, any information that may be identifying will be removed. Neither you nor the child will be identified in any written or oral presentations and all material discussed will be treated with full confidentiality. The data will be coded and stored in such a way that it will be impossible to identify the material directly with any individual. Please note that a decision on behalf of the child not to participate in the study will have no impact at all on the services or programs available to the child or to your family, and access to such resources will not be contingent on, or affected in any way by, the participation of the child in this research.

All of this information will be made clear to the child in your care prior to the start of the interview. If the child is under the age of 14 years, the above information will be presented to the child orally. If the child is 14 years or older, a separate written consent form will be presented to him or her. The child will be encouraged to ask questions or to bring up any concerns s/he may have. Children 14 or older will be given $20 as compensation for participation in this research. For children under 14, their $20 compensation will be given to their legal guardian.

Consent:

I have read the above information and I, as legal guardian, agree to allow the child in my care to participate in this study.

I agree to have the interview be tape-recorded  Yes  No

The name of the child is: __________________________

Signature: __________________________  Researcher’s Signature: __________________________

Name: __________________________  Date: __________________________
RESEARCH CONSENT FORM: CHILDREN OVER 13 YEARS OLD
MCGILL UNIVERSITY

Title of Research: Children of Offenders: Parental Incarceration and the Ties that Bind

Researchers: Lucia Benaquisto, Associate Professor, Sociology
Julie Coulthard, Ph.D. Candidate, Sociology

Contact information: Lucia Benaquisto  Tel: 514-398-6852
Julie Coulthard  Tel: 613-233-4290  e-mail: julie.coulthard@mail.mcgill.ca

Purpose of research:
The purpose of this study is to look at the possible effects that having a parent in prison might have on children. This research is about the experiences, feelings, and potential needs of children with a parent in prison. These types of issues will be explored through interviews with the children of incarcerated parents.

What is involved in participating:
Your participation will consist of a tape-recorded interview that will take about one hour. The questions will concern your experiences and your feelings about having a parent in prison. We also want to talk to you about things like school, home, friends and activities. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to refuse to answer any question or stop the interview at any time. No one outside the research team will be given access to the interview transcripts. No one will be able to identify you when we write about or report on this research. Everything you say here will be kept confidential. To protect your privacy and that of your family, anything that will identify you will be taken out of the transcripts.

Deciding not to participate in the study will have no impact at all on the services or programs that are available to you and you do not need to participate in this study in order to stay involved in any programs. Participation will not help your parent in prison. You will be given $20 as compensation for your participation in this research.

Consent:
I agree to be tape-recorded  ____ Yes  ____ No

____ I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

Signature: __________________________  Researcher's Signature: __________________________

Name: __________________________  Date: __________________________
Appendix C: Consent Script for Children

Hi. I’m working with another person doing some research. We are from McGill University. What we are doing today is talking to children who are living without their moms or dads because they went to jail/prison. We want to ask you about some of the changes you might have had to go through because of this and about some of your feelings and experiences (things that have happened). We also want to talk to you about things like school, home, friends and play activities. If, at any time, you don’t understand a question, just stop me and ask me to explain. Also, if at any time you need to take a break let me know and we can stop for a few minutes.

We asked your (fill in with name/relatin of legal guardian, e.g. mom/dad/Grandma) if it was OK to ask you if you wanted to talk with us and she/he said yes. But, I want you to know that you don’t have to talk with me if you don’t want to. It’s completely up to you. If there’s anything I ask you that you don’t want to answer, that’s fine. If you want to stop talking with me at anytime, that’s fine too. Nothing bad will happen to you or your family if you don’t want to do this.

Nobody but the research team and me will hear or see these interviews. Whenever we write or talk about this study, no one will be able to identify you. I’m going to tape our talk, if that’s OK with you, but our conversation will be confidential.

Do you have any questions that you’d like me to answer?
## Appendix D: Table of Child Well-being Scores

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### Appendix E: Table of Children’s Anger and Aggression and Deviant and Criminal Behaviour

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**Legend**

- **Self** = harm to self
- **Others** = harm to persons
- **Property** = harm to property
- **Verbal** = verbal expression of anger and aggression
- **Overall** = all 4 forms combined; ‘high’ refers to those manifesting three or more forms
- **Well-being** = low score indicates positive well-being; high score represents poor well-being
- **Deviance** = engaged in deviant behaviour (alcohol and/or drug use)
- **Crime** = engaged in criminal behaviour (participation in illegal and delinquent activity)

Note: Y = Yes