

LOCKED OUT
Families of the Incarcerated

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Institute of Family Therapy – Malta
Fondazzjoni Mid-Dlam Għad-Dawl
PRISMS
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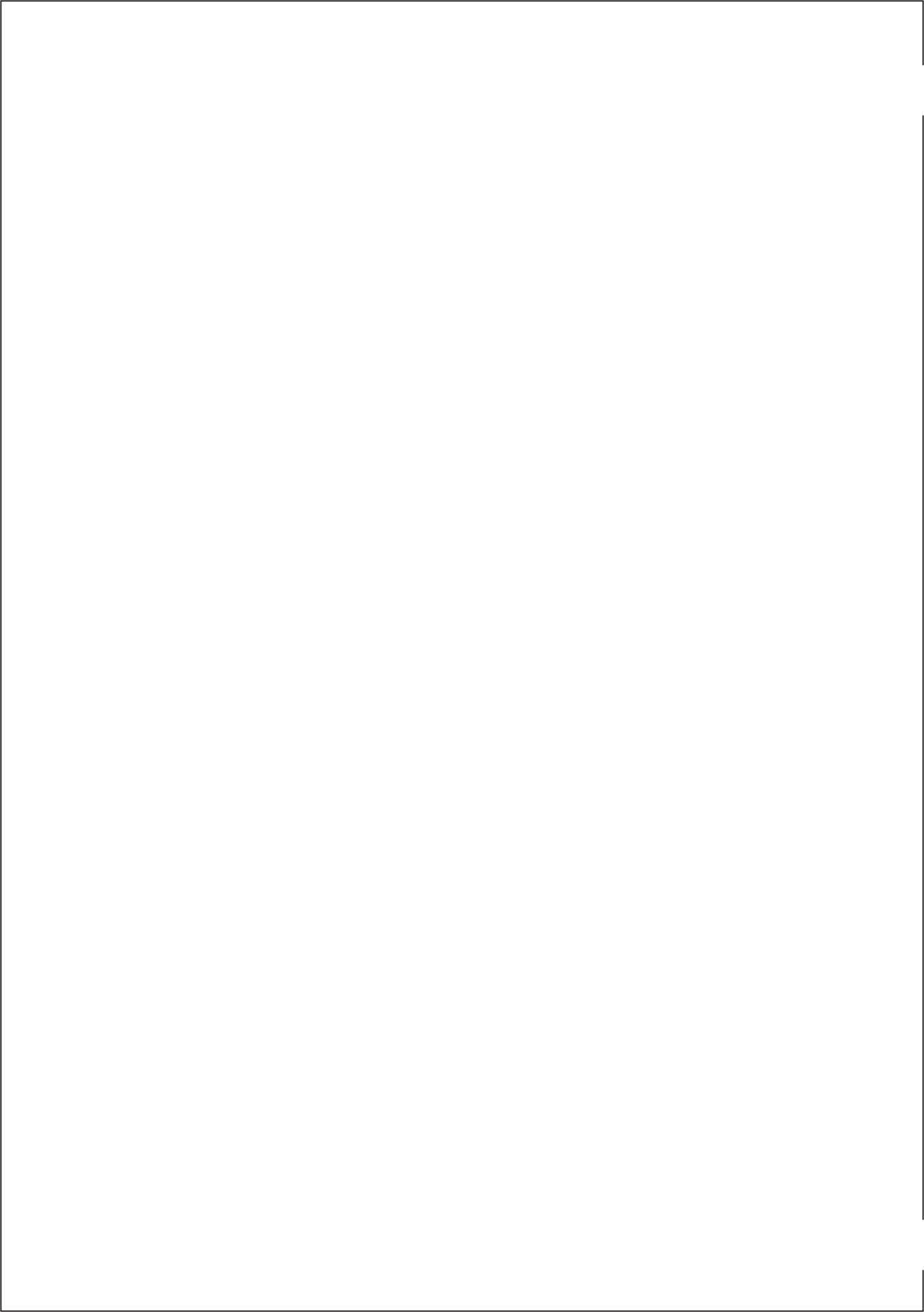
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H.E. Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca
President of the Republic of Malta*



“Niġġieled maż-żmien nahseb qiegħda, nimla l-ġurnata, biex il-ġurnata tghaddi. Nghid qtajt ohra, qtajna ohra, anka hu kif ...jghidli qtajna ohra.”

“I think I’m fighting time, trying to occupy my day, so the day passes by. I tell myself another day’s done, another one in, even he says ... he tells me another day’s done”.

“Ahna nixtiequ nghidulha l-verità. Ghax jekk ma tghidilix int, se tismagħa minghand in-nies. Allura jiena ma rridx, anki qabel ma, kif tkun żghira, qabel ma tidhol l-iskola, ha nghidilha li missiera... hi ha tkun taf li missierha mhux qiegħed hawn, ghax kif tidhol l-iskola, in-nies ilsienhom hażin, jien naf ghax kont ġa rabbejt tifla sewda.”

“We would like to tell her the truth. Because if you don’t tell her yourself outsiders will. So I don’t want this, even before she... when she’s little, even before she starts attending school, I will tell her that her father... she will know her father is not around, because when she starts school, people are spiteful, I know because I’ve already raised a girl of colour.”

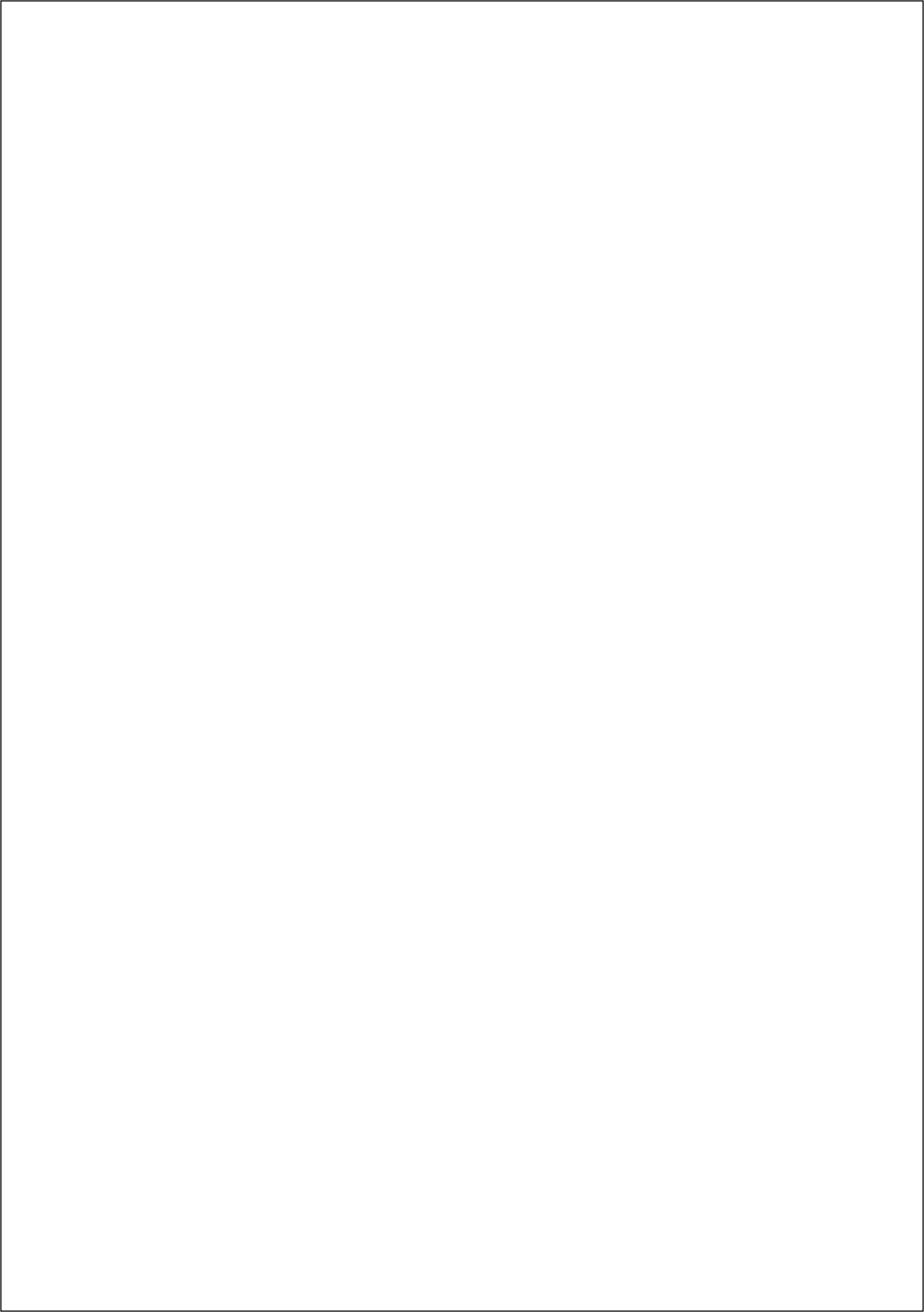
“Għaddew sittax-il sena...Kemm kelli żmien meta daħal missieri l-habs. Kelli jiġifieri qisu sittax-il sena meta tlift lil missieri u sittax-il sena tikkumbatti wahdek. Fhimt?... tipprova tghin lilu, tghin lil ommok ... Fhimt? F’sittax-il sena kemm għamilt. Niġġieled wahdi fhimt? Forsi mhux ghax qatt ma ġejt bżonn in-nies imma dejjem mhux ha mmur. Isma m’iniex dak it-tip li ha nghid għandi bżonn hekk u għandi bżonn hekk. Fhimt? Triq toqghod attenta minn hafna nies, anke ma min titkellem. Ghax inti imbagħad, dik hi jkollok tikber malajr u hafna drabi dawn l-affarijiet jghallmuk. Fhimt?”

“Sixteen years have passed. As old as I was when my father went to prison. So I was sixteen when I lost my father and I’ve been battling on my own for sixteen years. Do you understand? ... you try to help him, help your mother, you understand? I did a lot in sixteen years. Fighting by myself you understand? Maybe not because I never needed outside help but I never wanted to go. I’m not the type to say I need this and I need that. Do you understand? You need to be wary of a lot of people, even whom you talk to. Because then you, you need to grow up quickly and very often these events teach you stuff. Do you understand?”

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FOREWORD

H.E. MARIE-LOUISE COLEIRO PRECA
PRESIDENT OF MALTA

I wholeheartedly welcome the publication being launched today titled: **LOCKED OUT: The Families of the Incarcerated**. It is a publication that touches directly the lives of a vulnerable community that is often forgotten and almost always goes unnoticed.

We speak with concern regarding prisoners, but very often their families and loved ones suffer in silence and alone. Indeed, families and children of prisoners are often the unseen victims of crime, carrying the social, emotional and financial burden of their loved one's crime. The study has proven what was generally assumed; namely that families and children are more likely to suffer mental health problems, stigma, social exclusion and poverty.

I hope that this research, a first of its kind in Malta, will serve to give the families of prisoners a voice.

I am pleased to note that the research presented in the publication has been produced through a grant from the Fund for Voluntary Organisations of the Malta Community Chest Fund Foundation. The Fund aims to promote Social Justice within the voluntary sector, assist the voluntary sector in its work on behalf of the most vulnerable, and encourage collaboration among voluntary organisations.

I commend Fondazzjoni Mid-Dlam għad-Dawl for their insight in divulging into the real problems encountered by children of prisoners, and for commissioning this study to elicit the truth. I hope that the data presented will serve as an eye-opener to all those concerned with the wellbeing of families and children of prisoners. May this scientific research, be a first step towards opening opportunities for inclusion for families and children of prisoners, and making it possible for them to live full, satisfying lives.

FONDAZZJONI MID-DLAM GHAD-DAWL

Very early on in our work with prison inmates we realised that one could not and should not separate the plight of the inmates themselves from that of their families. This was when in Malta it was still thought that trying to help prisoners was just a waste of time and energy.

Meeting whole families coming and going to prison for visits convinced us otherwise and so we made these families part of our client group. Unfortunately many of these families were too embarrassed or burdened too much by the situation they were in that they retreated into themselves and surrounded themselves by invisible walls.

Joining the UK organisation Action for Prisoners' Families showed us that most problems facing families of prisoners were in many ways similar albeit in different countries.

Our association with this and other organisations in other countries was beneficial to us in that we could tap into their many years of research and experience. But Malta is Malta and some of the situations of these families were unique and deserved being researched separately.

Although over the years we conducted many meetings with prisoners' families, public conferences and even surveys with the inmates themselves we still felt that a full blown professional research exercise was still needed to really identify what was really going on in these families, what were they dreading and hoping for.

We took the opportunity and joining forces with Prisms applied for grants from the Malta Community Chest Fund proposing such a study. When approached Dr Charles Azzopardi accepted immediately to take on this challenge.

The rest you will find in the pages of the book.

All this would not have happened but for the incessant help of Her Excellency Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca, President of Malta, our partners PRISMS, my colleagues at Mid-Dlam ghad-Dawl, the Institute of Family Therapists (IFT) Malta and those prisoners' families who accepted to take part in this study.

George Busuttil
Chairperson

PRISMS

Although forming part of the same platform; the Platform for Human Rights Organisations in Malta (PHROM) it never actually crossed our mind that PRISMS and the Foundation mid-Dlam għad-Dawl could actually collaborate. We were proved wrong!

Talking on what we focus and what our aims are, both organisations realised that we both work hard to provide our target groups the possibility to create a better future and to help them realise their full potential. Thus, keeping our focus in mind we came together and devised this project.

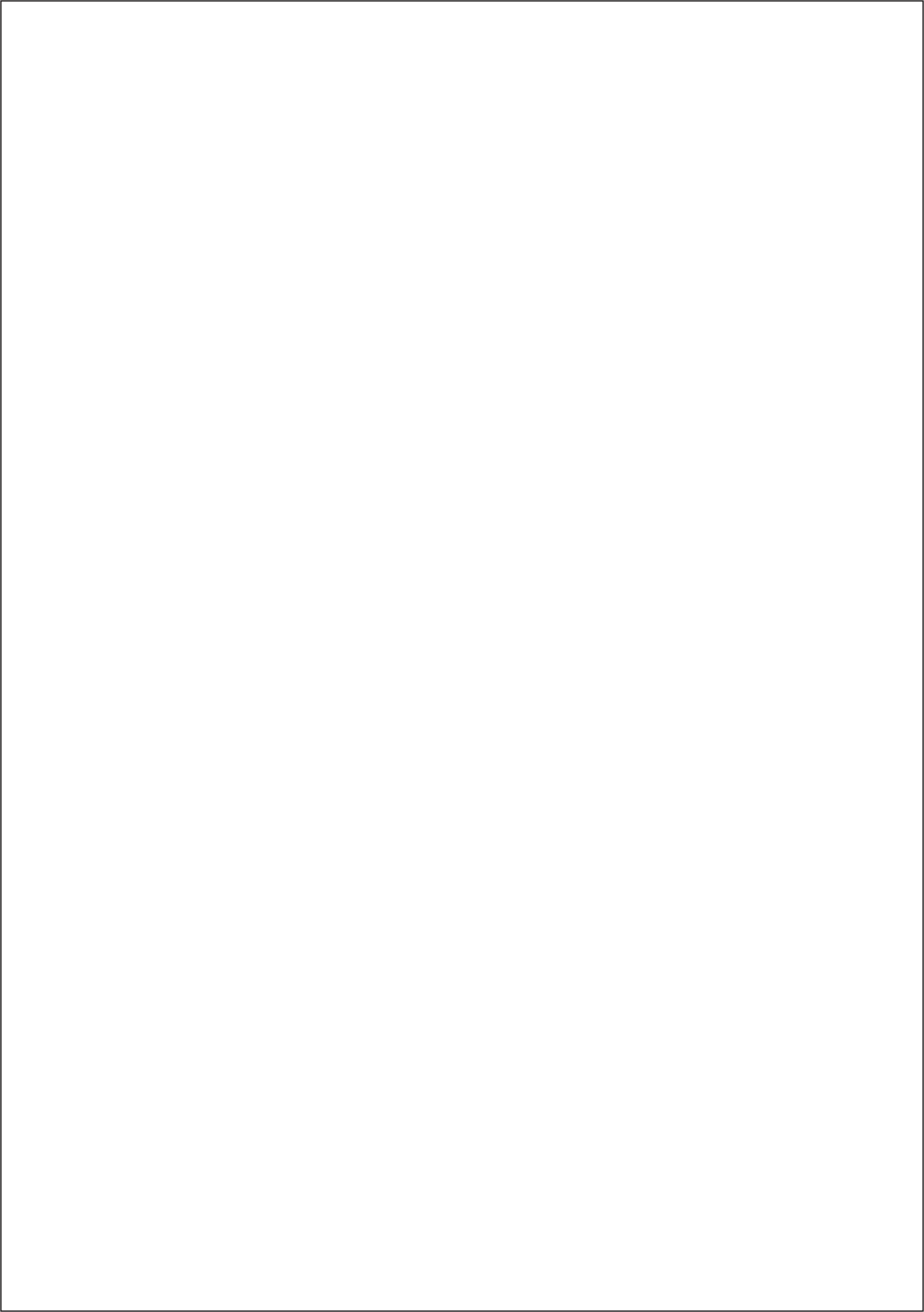
‘Locked Out’ is a research which will shed some light on the impact of incarceration of a member of the family has on the other family members. Prisms who as NGO work with young people coming from different backgrounds including young people who have a close relative in prison, knows that there are no studies which tries to understand the impact and repercussions which an incarceration has on the family members which are left ‘locked out’ to deal with the situation.

Through this study professionals, support agencies and the general public will have the opportunity to understand better the situation and also be in a better position to assess the needs of these family. Through this better understanding all stakeholders will be able to address those needs identified through a tailor made support service which will assist those ‘Locked Out’.

Prisms will use the outcomes from this research to continue to work towards providing good quality service to young people who are coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. Prisms also believe that youth work as a method of intervention is ideal in these cases since it prevents young people from being marginalised from their communities. Through a youth work approach young people who are coming from these difficult situations will be empowered to remain active within society.

Prisms will also be working with other stakeholders to design and implement projects which will target young people who are members of families who have a loved one in prison. Prisms will strive to offer opportunities to these youngsters in order to perceive life in a positive way and also further develop their abilities and remain with a positive outlook towards their future.

Marie Claire Testa
Coordinator



ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to understand the life experience of prisoners' families. It intended to explore the impact of incarceration on families from their idiosyncratic perspective and the perspective of others around them, including the prisoners themselves, volunteers working with prisoners, and prison wardens.

Twenty families were interviewed with variations including parents of prisoners, children of prisoners, wives and partners of prisoners, and siblings of prisoners. Four focus groups were carried out with male inmates, female inmates, prison wardens and volunteers. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyse data and extract themes commensurate to the experiences of participants. Some demographic data was also collected to contextualise qualitative data. A Systemic stance was taken to connect themes and organise the complex data into a coherent narrative. The results form the basis for recommendations in support of shaping policy and practice to meet the needs of these vulnerable families.

The analysis of data yielded two levels of themes. At one level families of the incarcerated emerge as a vulnerable group. Families and children of prisoners are often the unseen victims of crime. While having done nothing wrong, they carry the social, psychological and financial costs of their intimate relative's crime. Many don't receive any professional services to help them cope with their experience. This study supports research that consistently shows that families and children with an imprisoned intimate relative are more vulnerable to social exclusion and poverty.

On a second level emerges a punishment-based policy that, together with the paucity of services provided to families and children combines to impoverish, disadvantage, and exclude children and their families further. While undoubtedly the aim of the authorities in the field remains that of rehabilitation and that of improving the quality of life of families of the incarcerated, it is clear that the efforts exerted are entangled in an Ironic Process whereby attempted solutions further work to the detriment of families and children, leaving them locked out from an inaccessible system. This ironic process also hints at a weakened correctional system with all those within it feeling helpless victims of circumstances. Reforms in this sector are desperately needed for the benefit of all.

INTRODUCTION

The history of prisons dates back to the birth of modern civilization in the 3rd millennium BC. Historians point out that in Europe prisons have existed as separate institutions for more than 400 years and their aim remains that of detaining and removing personal freedoms of incarcerated people, deterring and reducing recidivism. The idea of imprisonment itself is based on the concept of punishment and it was only recently that the idea of rehabilitation emerged in Western society. In line with the new narratives questioning punishment in general as a method of teaching or deterring, it was unavoidable that the ideas behind imprisonment become also questioned.

The human rights movements presented various considerations over the years questioning the function of imprisonment. In the last decades experts, policy makers and many others have discussed the effects of imprisonment and even questioned its function. Quite recently the detrimental impact of imprisonment, not only on individuals but on children, families, communities, and economies are also being taken into account when considering the need for prison reforms. As of October 2016 CCF (Corradino Correctional Facility) population totals 555 people of which 515 men and 40 women¹. This means that a total of 555 families are facing daily living with an incarcerated family member. This paper aims to provide a richer understanding of what some of these families face throughout this difficult and complex experience.

This research takes a systemic position and considers the relational phenomenology between children, families, incarcerated men and women, prison staff, and voluntary services embedded within a current social context, rendering prison ineffective in curbing crime, reducing recidivism, and teaching lessons to people.

¹Data provided by the Director of Corradino Correctional Facilities on the 20th October 2016

1 LITERATURE CONSIDERATIONS

INCARCERATION AS EXPERIENCED BY THE FAMILY

Sexton (2016) describes incarceration as ‘a family affair’ with its consequences reaching far beyond the incarcerated individual, and stretching pervasively to his or her partner, children and significant others. Although a prison sentence can be tenuously described as one of society’s sanctions to curb offending behaviour, incarceration is also related to the development of social and behavioural problems for family members of incarcerated adults. Incarceration can contribute to a wide variety of difficulties including financial hardships, an increase in the incidence of mental health issues and a destabilization of couples and families, especially when the incarcerated person is a parent or head of household with dependent others (Roberts et al, 2013). Still one cannot maintain that these problematics are necessarily solely a direct result of penal confinement.

Back in 1965 Pauline Morris, in a seminal study of more than 500 wives of prison inmates in the U.K. attempted to capture the complexity of the family’s experience prior and during the incarceration period. She noted that the families’ distress may be a result of criminal behaviour and numerous troubles prior to confinement. Morris added that confinement might not be experienced as a crisis for all families. In some cases it may come as a relief to families, when for example a violent partner is removed (Shaw, 1992). Although each family’s scenario is unique Kjellstrand and Eddy (2011) reiterate that for the vast majority of families, incarceration is often a continuation or exacerbation of an already challenging situation in lives that are often marked by poverty, unstable home life, substance abuse difficulties, and mental health problems.

It seems that over the decades, the challenges faced by the families of incarcerated adults remain unchanged. Sexton (2016; p. 62) posits that “the focus should be more on the relational context around the individual rather than the individuals themselves”. He adds that the relational and interpersonal impact of incarceration on intimate as well as parent–child relationships demands careful attention.

Although this research is primarily concerned with the family’s experience during the incarceration period of a loved one, it needs to be said that episodes such as that of the actual arrest prior to incarceration, merit attention in their own right. For example Roberts et al. (2013) tell us how children who have actually witnessed the arrest of a parent or family member are subject to greater behavioural and emotional challenges than children who were not present for this traumatic event. Similarly a careful consideration of the re-entry process and the adjustment required by all the members involved is equally important.

EFFECTS OF PARENT IMPRISONMENT ON CHILDREN

A discussion around the experience of families with an incarcerated significant

other, definitely needs to give special attention to the children of incarcerated adults. A publication by the Children of Prisoners Europe in 2014 refers to children of prisoners as “forgotten children” referring to this group as vulnerable and having special needs by virtue of their status. On any given day there are an estimated 800,000 children in the European Union alone, who experience parental imprisonment.

Although circumstances are unique to every family, children of incarcerated parents are at an increased risk for both internalizing (e.g., depression, anxiety, withdrawal) and externalizing (e.g., school difficulties, delinquency, substance use) problems compared to the general population (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010).

Wildeman (2010) reports that similarly to other major stressors, boys will tend to manifest their distress around parental incarceration with increased externalizing behaviours, whilst girls are more likely to engage in greater internalizing behaviours. Travis (2005) discusses how the impact of incarceration also changes depending on the child’s age. He describes how, when a parent is taken away during adolescence, the adolescent child may question the authority of the incarcerated parent and doubt the parent’s concern for them. Younger children may connect overwhelmingly to loss as they might feel that they have lost a role model in the distant parent, and are confused in their identity orientation.

In an attempt to understand the impact of parental incarceration on children, some have tried to compare it to other major disruptions in family life, notably divorce. Richards (1992) compares the experience of parental imprisonment to divorce, where similarly the child needs to adapt to new living arrangements and some level of increased distance from at least one of the parents. Whilst there are many parallels to divorce, parental incarceration still presents a different experience with different repercussions. The financial strain, uprooting and general upheaval that usually surrounds divorce is also very common in the aftermath of parental incarceration. What distinguishes imprisonment is often the shame and stigma which surrounds it, making it even more complex for families to navigate. Although traumatic in their own right, marital separation and divorce have become part of our social fabric. The imprisonment of a family member, when made public, becomes an acknowledgment of criminality within the family.

Children are very often provided a flimsy explanation of the parent’s departure, which is provided in an attempt to protect the children themselves. However uncertainty and unknown details may cause the child to feel confused, conflicted, or out of control. Children often get entangled in a psychological phenomenon known as ambiguous loss. Bocknek, Sanderson, & Britner (2008, p. 324) write that “the ambiguous loss of a family member results in family boundary ambiguity, defined as a state in which family members are uncertain in their perception about who is in or out of the family and who is performing what roles

and tasks within the family system”. Boss (2012) describes how such ambiguity can become lifelong trauma if not adequately managed. From a systemic lens the manner in which this process is lived will also depend on whether contact is maintained or not with the incarcerated parent, how the parent is spoken of within the child’s network, how others around the child have managed their own loss. Very often the incarceration is not the single traumatic event in the child’s life. Many children of prisoners would have been exposed to criminal activity with the dangers and disruptions that this may present in the years leading up to arrest and eventual incarceration (Bocknek, Sanderson, & Britner, 2008).

Children fare the best when their caregiver/ parent and/or extended family can provide a stable environment supporting open communication. However, as Ayre et. al (2014) point out, the adults responsible for these children will often themselves be under duress due to the circumstances and/or other difficulties limiting the quality of the care they give the child. Madsen (2007) describes such families as “multi-stressed”, conveying the idea that more often than not families are being challenged by a multitude of problems. This might render it difficult to reflect adequately or seek outside resources around managing the impact of incarceration. Research shows that an ambience of tension and secrecy around the incarceration impedes the child from developing personal resilience. Children seem to fare much better when they feel that significant others around them support them in articulating their feelings (Ayre et al; 2014). Schools are also increasingly being recognised as having a pivotal role in supporting children who have a parent in prison or indeed any instability in their home environment.

NEGOTIATING MOTHERHOOD AND FATHERHOOD BEHIND BARS

MOTHERHOOD

Studies on incarcerated mothers have focused on the detrimental effects the enforced separation imposes on off-springs. Indeed children with incarcerated mothers seem to fare worse than those with incarcerated fathers due to higher disrupted attachment relationships when the mother is removed (Dallaire, 2007). In such cases, along with the psychological impact of separation from a mother, children may have to face leaving their family home and moving in with relatives, most often grandmothers, or into institutional care (Mackintosh, Myers, & Kennon, 2006; Azzopardi, 2013). Nonetheless it is important to consider the impact of incarceration on the mothers themselves.

Shamai & Kochal, (2008) discuss different studies that were interested in monitoring the anxiety levels of incarcerated women. They report how consistently there seemed to be no differences in the level of anxiety between mothers and non-mothers upon entering prison. However it seems that when measured again after six months of imprisonment, the level of anxiety of women who were not mothers had diminished, whereas that of the mothers remained unchanged. The

mothers interviewed attributed this to the distress and worry brought about by being forced to be away from their children.

In the vast majority of situations the mother's relationships with her child/children prior to incarceration is already under duress due to situations relating to an unstable home environment, substance abuse and criminal activity to name a few. Mothers in prison are contending with an already fragile identity. They already face social stigma in terms of being 'bad mothers' together with the guilt of being away from their children (Arditti, 2012). At the same time Arditti (2012) posits that at times some level of detachment seems inevitable for women in order to be able to cope with difficult mother-child relationships as well as a harsh prison reality, all the more so when the prison term to be served is a long one. The pain of managing life within the prison walls and coping with the forced separation from one's children is even more intense for those mothers who were the prime caregivers of their children prior to incarceration. This creates multiple complexities around maintaining a mother-child bond during incarceration as well as after. Brown & Bloom (2009) describe how "the challenges they face that impact their childrearing before prison make reassuming their maternal roles a precarious enterprise" upon release. These authors discuss the erosion of "parental capital" (Brown & Bloom, 2009, p. 326) that likely begins before incarceration and intensifies throughout.

FATHERHOOD

Nelson (2006) describes how, from a social constructionist perspective, biological ties between a man and his child are seen as weaker than those between a mother and child. This seems to be confirmed by literature and research that, when discussing parental incarceration, mostly focuses on the detrimental effects of forced maternal separation. This is striking considering that across the E.U. and indeed world-wide, the prison population is predominantly male. This means that out there, there are many more children dealing with the forced removal of a father rather than of a mother.

Fathers also need to negotiate a new position within the family unit. Arditti (2012, p. 76) states that "father identities may be somewhat dormant during incarceration, but they do not necessarily disappear". She describes a process where, faced with life in prison men cope by appearing 'tough' to peers and often take on a heightened display of masculinity to minimise their chances of victimization. Whilst this may have a protective function in prison, conversely it can easily alienate them from children and loved ones due to an inability to connect meaningfully within a different context. This may also mean that some fathers might actually choose to cease contact with their children during the incarceration period, out of shame or in an attempt to protect them from exposure to a prison context (Arditti, 2012). Yet it seems that men who were regularly

meeting their children during visitation reported feeling close to and appreciated by them.

One also has to consider the father's relationship with his children prior to incarceration and how supported he is to pursue such a relationship by the child's caregiver, especially in a context where he is the non-custodial parent. Most children live with their mothers who may act as a "gatekeeper" to control any interaction between them and their fathers (Nurse, 2002). The quality of the relationship with the other parent prior and during incarceration will necessarily determine how supportive mothers are towards facilitating father-child relationships. In these circumstances, one needs to consider difficult contexts which may relate to domestic violence, substance abuse, the possibility of siblings from with different partners and so on.

THE EXPERIENCE OF INCARCERATION ON PARTNERS AND IMMEDIATE FAMILY

Imber-Black (2008) stresses that the negative effects of the imprisonment of a family member move beyond the immediate family and bear influence on an entire set of multi-generational relationships. The experience of minor children of imprisoned parents has drawn a lot of research interest over the years and rightly so. Other familial relationships have seldom been under the spotlight, if at all. For example the experience of adult children with an incarcerated parent has been ill-spoken about (Gadson, 2012). Following children of incarcerated parents possibly exposes issues related to the intimate attachments of inmates with their partners on the outside.

When one speaks about the partners of incarcerated adults one is primarily speaking about women, the girlfriends and wives of incarcerated men, given that the prison population is predominantly male. Research around this group of women tends to focus on the hardships faced as they parent their children, and social difficulties such as stigma and financial strain, to name a few (Travis, 2005). There seems to be far less research interest into how the quality of the intimate relationship changes upon incarceration. Massoglia et al. (2011) posit that incarceration is likely to hasten marital dissolution or the termination of an intimate relationship.

Comfort (2008) describes how wives who see their husband as a victim of the justice system will generally not experience their marriage as being under threat. However all women will experience "deficits of emotional interaction" (Massoglia et al, 2011) as they are physically separated from their partner and contact is limited, contributing towards marital dissatisfaction. Comfort et al. (2005) take a closer look at intimate and sexual contact between couples where the male counterpart is incarcerated. The women they interviewed reported an unwillingness to be sexually intimate during visits, saying that they felt under scrutiny. These authors write that for women who kept the connection with their

partner, intimacy was in some way transformed into different mediums, for example through the writing of heartfelt letters which kept the woman engaged and 'replaced' the missing physical contact. On the other hand some couples face a very different reality. Nurse (2002; p. 55) describes how to "avoid victimization, inmates must quickly and continuously display "masculine" traits of toughness and violence to survive in a prison environment". This position will often not allow them enough emotional space to connect meaningfully with their partner.

Comfort et al (2005) discuss how intimacy needs to be renegotiated all over again once the prison term ends and the couple tries to resume a 'face-to-face' relationship. Although the couple would have been eagerly anticipating this, they often face a new set of challenges in this period of adjustment. For example volatile couples may face the threat of domestic violence which was by virtue of physical separation held at bay during the incarceration period.

The impact of incarceration on siblings has not been given attention as a phenomenon per se. Indeed relationships between brothers and sisters have not attracted a lot of research interest (Namysłowska & Siewierska, 2010) although they are recognized as significant in an individual's life. Meek's (2008) study highlights the detrimental effect of sibling incarceration. Participants described strong emotional distress particularly immediately after the sibling had been taken into custody. Meek reports that sibling imprisonment had affected the school, social and family life of her interviewees and many expressed preoccupation about their brother's well-being both during incarceration and after release. This was largely kept private as these siblings felt that they could not confide in professional people accessible to them, such as teachers, about their worries for fear of being judged (Meek, 2008).

Some felt that they could voice their distress within their immediate family, whilst others felt that their sibling's incarceration led to tensions at home. This reference to the family-of-origin of incarcerated adults leads us to consider another group that is often neglected in research, namely the experience of parents whose adult children are incarcerated, parents who have a daughter or a son serving a prison sentence. Gower & Dowling (2008) discuss how Western society views the transition to adulthood in terms of independence, separation and leaving home. They describe how the parent continues to seek connection with their adult child as well as being expected 'to let go'. Gower and Dowling (2008) say that predominantly mothers continue being preoccupied with their offspring's emotional well-being as opposed to fathers.

When adult children are incarcerated the normative life cycle issues associated with having adult children are challenged. Maternal grandmothers are often bestowed the responsibility of bringing up grandchildren at least for the duration of imprisonment (Shamai and Kochal, 2008). Loper et al. (2014) describe how the grandmother needs to take responsibility for the child's developmental,

academic, and social challenges. The child's parent and grandparent/s need to develop a parenting alliance where the parent still seeks to hold the parent role in the child's life (Loper et al, 2014).

This is often happening at a life stage where one would not usually be responsible for the entire care of a grandchild. This puts parents of incarcerated adults under considerable duress, as most experience care-giver's strain (Taylor-Richardson et al. 2016). Mackintosh et al. (2006) describe how women raising grandchildren under these circumstances experience grief and anger over the incarceration of their daughters or daughters-in-law, and bereavement for the life they had expected that is now gone, and have poorer physical and mental health than non-care-giving grandparents.

It is interesting to note that research discusses the experience of the parents of incarcerated adults solely through their role as grandparents, and still this is limited. In an unpublished Masters dissertation Kell (2009) writes "I have yet to find a single publication solely and specifically about the parents of inmates". A review of the current literature also brings up this lacuna in our knowledge, although parents of inmates are very often involved in the care of their son or daughter.

2 METHODOLOGY

WORDS GIVE LIFE

This study was conceptually conceived through conversation. Mr. George Busuttil, Chairperson of Mid-Dlam ghad-Dawl Foundation, contacted me (the author) to express his concern with the way families and children are suffering consequences of their relative's criminal behavior. Having worked with all kinds of families throughout my career, including families with an incarcerated member, I could empathise with Mr Busuttil's urge of doing something to help these families voice their journey in some way. The silence surrounding this population enticed an insatiable curiosity which led to the acceptance of Mr Busuttil's invitation to collaborate in this study. The joint focal curiosity was on how families of prisoners experience the imprisonment of their dear one.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHOD

Exploring people's experiences and meaning attribution to experience, necessitates an ideographic method that allows us to meander through the complex fabric of the narratives generated around the experience of having a family member in prison. The complexity of the families' relationships with their dear ones in prison needed to be captured. It progressively transpired that a fuller understanding of the experience of families relationships requires an understanding of the context. The first interviews with families immediately revealed how these relationships are embedded within the wider system of

relationships that included the prison services, voluntary groups, agencies, policy and policy makers, and so on. In our case methodology evolved inspired by the reflexive movement between emergent themes and the new curiosities generated.

Our initial curiosity was therefore widened to include an understanding of families' experience of having an imprisoned intimate person. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was identified as the ideal method of analysis to explore participants' perspectives. IPA would allow us to examine the meanings particular experiences and events hold for participants. IPA is collaborative in its attempt to get close to the participant's personal world with the researcher holding an active, interpretative, and collaborative position in his or her attempt to get an insider's perspective.

Eventually, the ecological nature of the research evolved into an unexpected relational complexity that called for the foregrounding of systemic relationships. Making sense of relationships benefits a systemic inquiry and therefore we opted to interpret data using this perspective. This evolution towards a systemic view of data was a necessary step towards relational ethics (Simon & Chard, 2014) in that it respects the flow of emergent data and therefore privileges the participants' voice.

A narrative research perspective has also been considered. Narrative research engages with issues of social justice and social change, particularly in the current context of global and European inequalities, conflict, mobility and migration concerns. Our attempt was to address these issues in our methods and through relating the complex research processes and analysis to social transformation.

TOOLS AND PROCESS

In finding the right tool for the right purpose we considered various options including observations of interactions and scoring of behaviour, and video review of interactions between family members at home. Yet nothing proved as loyal to our research curiosity as semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the richness of the participants' experiences of having an intimate relative in prison. The interviewers' intervention during interviews was kept to a minimum, in order to leave the focus on the participant's narrative. At times the interviewer merely prompted to elicit as much detail and information as possible. A few of the families required more prompting than others due to their low verbosity, which of course, is information in itself. The questions for the interviews were designed and agreed upon collectively by the research team and commissioning agencies, namely Mid-Dlam gad-Dawl and PRISMS.

Interviews were later transcribed by the interviewers who also noted their remarks and observations along the way. The notes jotted included what the interviewers could capture in terms of non verbals, behaviour and action around

the interview setting, and also their ideas about themselves at particular points in time.

Focus groups emerged as parsimonious and an ideal alternative for gaining a large amount of relevant data in the shortest time possible and with minimal resources. Four focus groups were completed in all. One with a group of male inmates, one with a group of female inmates, another one with a group of prison wardens, and a final one with a group of volunteers working with prisoners and their families. These focus groups proved vital in the cross validation of data and the interpretations thereof.

Two focus groups, those of male and female prisoners, refused to have the session recorded but allowed interviewers to take notes. The facilitators in each focus group were two and each took notes which they later reflected upon together, and compiled a report for each focus group. The other two focus groups with volunteers and prison wardens, were recorded and transcribed by the facilitators themselves, who also included some notes and reflections.

Demographic data was also collected from families of prisoners only and included information about income, family structure, household, academic achievement, employment, and other information. This data was generally coherent with the themes emerging from the interviews and enabled systemic organisation of data.

Data gathered was initially entered into QDA Miner software for qualitative data and coded using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This choice fitted our idea of prioritizing the participants' voice. IPA's aim is to explore the participants' view (Smith, 1996) and is consistent with the idiographic position taken in this study to explore and understand the families of prisoners' experience of having an intimate member in prison. IPA is concerned with both individual experience and the common experiences and patterns across participants. It also recognizes and legitimizes the interactive and dynamic nature of the research-researched relationship and the researchers' involvement in the generation of meaning and co-construction of the emergent narrative (Chapman & Smith, 2002). IPA's thorough methodological procedure fits the recursive and reflective stance taken in a systemic research like this one, involving multiple perspectives.

The systemic stance we took on this study allowed us to take a meta perspective of the relationships between different groups of participants. The systemic paradigm understands human problems and change in a framework defined by the core themes of circularity, context and pattern. Circularity is essentially a curiosity about how problems maintain and are maintained by the system of relationships within which it occurs (Rohrbaugh, 2014). The systemic stance was crucial in helping us re-contextualise the emerging narratives into larger patterns of interaction between different sub-groups of participants. The systemic idea studying is essentially concerned about how problems persist and how they

provide a basis for the preservation of vital relationship parameters. In our case therefore, we were concerned about how the narratives that emerged during the interviews and themes extracted thereof, were positioned in the larger system and patterned into the homeostatic nature of relational beliefs and clichés about self and others, and how this contributes to the general narrative about families of prisoners.

Data was analysed and coded. Emerging themes were connected with other themes from other participants until exhaustion. Multiple codes were clustered in groups of themes and themes grouped in supra-themes. The relationship between themes provided a meta theme about the autopoietic and cybernetic nature of themes.

RECRUITMENT OF INTERVIEWERS

It was evident from the start that this study was not a one-person job. A group of three professionals from IFT-Malta joined forces with Dr Charlie Azzopardi as the lead researcher. A group of four interviewers was also selected from a pool of volunteer students on IFT-Malta's Masters course. Another group of four interviewers volunteered from MDD and PRISMS to pair up.

Interviewers, though all working in the social care field and all in their Masters training, were then given a day's training in interviewing skills delivered by two members of the core research team. The training followed a standard protocol for the training of interviewers. Interviewers teamed up and conducted the interviews in pairs. This was done for various reasons including safety and quality of interview data provided, matching with families, and so on. Meetings were held regularly between research core team and interviewers along the course of the interviews to reflect on the progression of the interviews, and process the experience in a reflexive manner.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature search was made independently by one member of the core team who consulted an international library. The lead researcher (author) thought it best to remain uncontaminated by specialist literature and was concerned that it might lead to the search for particular themes as indicated by Glaser (1992). Glaser argued that literature related to the researched area should only be read at later stages of the study. This is "... to not contaminate, be constrained by, inhibit, stifle or otherwise impede the researcher's effort to generate categories, their properties, and theoretical codes from the data."(p.31).

Rather than using the existing literature as a theoretical background, the lead researcher used the literature review compiled by the co-author as data to be used for the analytic strategies of the research (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Straus, 1967). The idea was that the author's relationship with the data would lead to the

generation of themes rather than being guided by existing literature.

RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

A group of about 50 families was approached during family meetings and during prison visits and invited to participate in this study through the NGO Mid-Dlam Ghad-Dawl volunteers. Only 21 families accepted to participate, of which one backed out upon being contacted by the interviewers.

Because we wanted as wide a spectrum of family typology as possible, no entry criteria were established except those criteria that ensure the safety of the families, their children and the interviewers. Because parents know their children best, it was decided that they would be the ones to decide about the involvement of younger children during the interviews. This decision was taken to protect small and young children from information that had not been divulged to them. We could understand that many children would have been given different explanations about a parent's absence. The participation of adults was voluntary.

Those accepting to participate were asked for their contact details to be passed on to the interviewers so that they would contact them to establish an appointment. While various premises were made available for the interviews, all participants chose to hold the interviews in their family home. As had been promised, a token of €50 was given to each participating family after all interviews were conducted.

After receiving information from the volunteers upon their first invitation, all those present for the interview were given further information about the study and handed an information sheet to read. A consent form was then presented for them to complete with their details and sign.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

We remained strictly committed to understand the lived experience of families of the imprisoned. We understood that this is a vulnerable population and we ensured that all the necessary care was taken to protect them in every possible way.

The families' participation was carried out in confidence. All personal details were removed by the interviewer upon transcription so that thereafter during the handling of the data, no identifiers were available to me or anyone on the study core team. At this stage, data could still have identifiers belonging to the specific case the person in prison was related to as certain crimes, for example murders, could stand out as identifiers. We ensured that all the related identifiers were filtered and obliterated in the coding phase and that none would be taken to the excerpt level.

Because many families of prisoners could be suffering financial hardships we had an initial dilemma whether or not to offer them a small token of appreciation for their participation. In the end we decided to offer a small token gift of €50

to each participating family to encourage participation and simultaneously assist them financially without exerting any pressure towards participation.

We also took great care in protecting the interviewers. We had ample discussions with them along the course of the interviews. It was finally their choice that they pair up as it made them feel safer and more effective in their interviewing, particularly since the interviews could be carried out in the family home. The training given to them also involved ideas about self-protection, example where to sit, how to keep mobile easily accessible, and so on.

The involvement of children during the interviews was another ethical dilemma we considered. On the one hand we wanted to give children an equal opportunity to voice and articulate their experience. On the other hand we did not want to expose them to damaging narratives, as narratives about prison and relatives in prison could potentially be. So we reached a conclusion that only adult children of the imprisoned could take part in the interviews. The participation of minors was discouraged, but was left to be decided by the adults in the family. In the majority of cases we relied on the accounts of the parents about children.

TIME-FRAME

The approval for funds was received at the end of 2015. Up until March 2016 a series of meetings was held between the core study team at IFT-Malta and the NGOs involved to establish the parameters of the study. All interviews were carried out and transcribed between March and May 2016. Data was coded and analysed by end of September and the first draft of the report was drawn in the subsequent month. This speed was necessary to abide by the contract established by the funds dispenser between MDD, PRSIMS, and the Malta Community Chest Fund. A date for a conference to present the final report on the findings was established for the 3rd of December 2016.

3 THE THEMES

The Narrative elicited in this study is definitely complex, intense and multifaceted. Made up of multiple and varied voices of adults related to, and children of those serving a sentence in prison, this narrative encapsulates a complex reality which is difficult to portray in a simple format report. The experience of having a relative in prison emerges as a shocking and life changing experience whose intensity seems to be correlated to the persons' perception of closeness to the prisoner and the length of the prison term among other factors. As one daughter of a prisoner put it: *“bħalissa hemm ħafna affarijiet differenti ...Minn fejn se naqbad nibda?”* (right now there are so many different things...I don't know from where to start)

The phenomenology of imprisonment as experienced by relatives of the

incarcerated embraces a wide spectrum of complex realities on a time-line spread between the moment of arrest and the day of release. In many cases, many expressed how their life is on hold in some bizarre ways. From their perspective it is as if life will start again the moment the person in prison is released.

The Major themes emerging from this study embrace categories of minor themes which are not being listed here. The following major themes were extracted:

- The multitude of challenges the families encounter
- Concerns and worries over the impact of incarceration
- Relationship maintenance and the changing dynamics of close relationships
- The Narrative that heals
- Support from extended family

THE MULTITUDE OF CHALLENGES THE FAMILIES ENCOUNTER

As I threaded through the fibre of the transcribed text I was struck by the unspoken power of time. As one woman put it "... there is nothing else to do but wait". The heaviness of having one's life on hold until the sentence is over touched me. While acknowledging that the challenges faced by families of imprisoned people are many, varied, and are faced at different times along the course of imprisonment, I hope that the reader supports our focus of this report on the family's experience of imprisonment which will hopefully help us get a clearer picture of what their needs are.

The challenges faced by families are myriad and emerge as quite a salient category embracing a spectrum of themes portraying families of prisoners as living in dire psychological situations. Those presented here are a glimpse of the deeper and wider phenomenological reality.

Many of the families we interviewed expressed the shock marking the initial phase of imprisonment:

"uuuu kien xokk kbir"

"uuuu it was a big shock"

"Qed tifhem, ghax ahna konna nahdmu, nkunu fuq ix-xoghol, allura xokk bhal dan, tehodha bi kbira!"

"Can you understand, because we were at work, at our work place, so this is a big shock, we were devastated!"

"Jien xi kultant nahseb li qed nohlom, ghax jien qatt ma bsart li speçi ... li tista' tolqot lili din il-haġa"

"Sometimes I think that I'm dreaming, because I never could have seen this coming...that I could be facing this"

While some experienced intense shock temporarily:

“Fl-ewwel tliet xhur lanqas kont naf x’laqatni. La kont irrid inqum ninhasel ...dejjem fis-sodda qisni wahda mejta ... Qisni ma neżiztix f’dinja! Hadtha bi kbira wisq jien”

“In the first three months I didn’t know what hit me. I wouldn’t want to wake up and shower...I would lie in bed as if dead...It’s like I stopped existing! It seems like the whole situation was too big to take in”

Some people’s shock never actually subsided and they expressed continuous confusion, bewilderment and disorientation even after years that their dear one was in prison:

“...(pawsa tibki) le għax imbagħad trid tbiddel kollox u, kelli nieqaf mill-iskola, li missieri qatt ma riedni nieqaf għax kien jghidli, kont ngħidlu ha mur nahdem. Hu kien jghidli tmurx tahdem, għax jekk tmur tahdem, ha tieqaf mill-iskola għax kont brava l-iskola... imbagħad kelli nieqaf, komplejt nipprova imma...waqaft, imbagħad tibda u... meta ma taççettahiex l-oġġett...”

“...(pause crying) because you have to change everything, and, I had to stop attending school, which my father had never wanted me to do, he used to say if you get a job, you’ll stop studying, because you did well at school...Then I had to stop, I tried to continue but...I stopped, then you start and ...when you can’t accept it...”

Shock may be exacerbated and reinforced by an overwhelming narrative of radical changes of family life. One mother of a prisoner expressed it simply:

“...il-familja tkissret ma tafx inti. Trid toqghod tmur il-ħabs! jien m’ghandhiex sahħa mmur ...”

“... the family’s shattered you know. You have to visit prison! I don’t have the strength to go...”

A partner of a prisoner who was pregnant at the time her partner went into prison recalls those disheartening and confusing moments:

“Jien lanqas kont nemmen li għad nista nimmaniġjahom. Żgur ma kontx nemmen li se jirnexxieli nasal s’hawn żgur. Għax l-aħħar fiit qabel ma daħal kont vera hażin, kuljum nibki, pregnant u hekk. Jien kont hafna dejjem inħobb l-informazzjoni, li titkellem, aware li trid tiehu hsieb sahħtek, u dejjem nibza’, ma nafx kif se ngħaddu. Ma kontx hekk kif qed nitkellem mieghek. Nahseb hafna fuq meta jiġi lura, min jaf kif se nkunu.”

“ I never believed I could manage. I never believed I could get here for

sure. Because in the few days before he went in I was in really bad shape, crying everyday, pregnant and all that. I always liked to get information, to talk, I'm aware you need to take care of your health, and I'm always scared, not sure how we'll get by. I wasn't then how I am now, talking to you. I think a lot about when he'll come back, who knows how we'll be like."

Perhaps the worse part of this experience is because many feel that they live through this alone. A wife of a prisoner expressed it thus:

"Jien dejjem waħdi, mdawra, I was surrounded with people imma still ...inhossni waħdi."

"I'm always alone, surrounded, I was surrounded by people but still...I feel alone".

A mother told the interviewers about her life and how it felt like its over for her since her son went into prison: (Which is paradoxical considering that she accepted the interviewers into her house to have this conversation).

"Jien ma noħroġx, imma issa iżjed u iżjed ma noħroġx mid-dar. Dejjem ġewwa. Hadtha bi kbira wisq. Ma rrid nara lil hadd."

"I never go out, now all the more I will not leave the house. I'm always indoors. The shock was too big. I don't want to meet anybody."

A daughter expressed it rather bluntly:

"Niġġieled waħdi ...fhimt?"

"I'm fighting this by myself...do you understand?"

It is interesting to see how different people fight loneliness in different ways.

"Niġġieled maż-żmien nahseb qieġħda, nimla l-ġurnata, biex il-ġurnata tghaddi. Nghid qtajt oħra, qtajna oħra, anka hu kif ...jghidli qtajna oħra."

"I think I'm fighting time, trying to occupy my day, so the day passes by. I tell myself another day's done, another one in, even he says ... he tells me another day's done".

Challenges continue to emerge as contingent upon the type of relationship between the person in prison and the family member outside. For example managing a parenting relationship with a partner in prison becomes very different from before. Parents of children find gross difficulties in adapting to collaborative parenting when one of the parents is in prison. One mother of a young child:

"Dan it-tifel qed inrabbih waħdi, qed insibha naqra iebsa."

"I'm raising this child by myself, I'm finding it a bit difficult"

Parenting issues are expressed differently by different participants. Some actually decide to make decisions regarding the children on one's own.

“Imma ngħid....Meta kien hemm affarijiet li ppruvajt, mhux ippruvajt biex ma ninkwetahx, ghax hemm ġew aktar jinkwetaw, aktar jinnervjaw, hafna telefonati ma jistgħu jagħmlu xejn, ma jkunx jista’ għalihom. Allura ċertu deċiżjonijiet niprova nghamilhom jien.

“But I say... When there were things I tried to do, I tried not to worry him, because in there they worry more, they get more nervous, a lot of phonecalls, they can’t do anything, he can’t stand it. So I try to take certain decisions myself.”

Of course this choice contributes to a greater sense of responsibility on the parent making the decisions, as well as making negotiating the ‘parent’ role with the other parent very difficult. Oftentimes, the parent in prison exerts more control to ensure discipline on children, leaving the parent outside somewhat helpless:

“(tidhaq u titbissem) hu jehodhom id-deċiżjonijiet, ikun x’ikun. Hu. Bilfors!!! U allahares (tidhaq)... Eżempju għandu party t-tifel irrid indaħhallu l-inviti biex jara. Biex jara li veru sejjer party. Għandu dixxiplina kbira. Inkredibbli!!! .. Id-dixxiplina wisq.”

“(Laughing and smiling) he takes the decisions, whatever it is. He has to be the one to do it. No choice in the matter!! And God forbid (laughing) ... For example if our son is invited to the party I need to take the invite so he can see it. So he can see that he’s really going to a party. He’s a man of great discipline. Incredible!!... Too disciplined.”

Some other parents on the outside experience an increasing pressure and responsibility as they take full responsibility of the children:

“Issa qed ikolli mmur kontra dak li nemmen fih speċi. Anki affarijiet żgħar, din hekk jew hekk, hu jgħidli ma nafx minn hawn, mhux int taf x’inhu l-aħjar għalih it-tifel, mela jien naf.”

“Now I need to like go against all that I believe in, kind of. Even little things, do you do this like this or like that, he tells me I don’t know from here, you know what’s best for our son, I don’t know”

Children of course, have their own perspective and take different positions vis-à-vis the imprisonment of their parent. A young woman, whose father went in when she was almost 16 years of age, recalls her 16 years of experience without her father in a rather insecure and somewhat mistrustful way:

“Għaddew sittax-il sena...Kemm kelli żmien meta daħal missieri l-habs. Kelli jiġifieri qisu sittax-il sena meta tlift lil missieri u sittax-il sena tikkumbatti waħdek. Fhimt?... tipprova tghin lilu, tghin lil ommok ... Fhimt? F’sittax-il sena kemm ghamilt. Niġġieled waħdi fhimt? Forsi mhux ghax qatt ma ġejt b’zonn in-nies imma dejjem mhux ha mmur.

Isma m'iniex dak it-tip li ha nghid ghandi bżonn hekk u ghandi bżonn hekk. Fhimt? Triq toqghod attenta minn hafna nies, anke ma min titkellem. Ghax inti imbaghad, dik hi jkollok tikber malajr u h afna drabi dawn l-affarijiet jghallmuk. Fhimt?"

"Sixteen years have passed. As old as I was when my father went to prison. So I was sixteen when I lost my father and I've been battling on my own for sixteen years. Do you understand? ... you try to help him, help your mother, you understand? I did a lot in sixteen years. Fighting by myself you understand? Maybe not because I never needed outside help but I never wanted to go. I'm not the type to say I need this and I need that. Do you understand? You need to be wary of a lot of people, even whom you talk to. Because then you, you need to grow up quickly and very often these events teach you stuff. Do you understand?"

The above is a very interesting excerpt denoting the tragic child parentification and the loss of childhood.

One other very pressing challenge families face before, during and after incarceration of a member is a marked sense of burden and 'pressure'. In its countless forms pressure is felt by different family members outside, often in different ways.

Pressure due to increased responsibilities which were usually shared:

"Le... hafna skariġġ, ikollok ir-raġel (il-habs) ...kollox jaqa' fuqek, jekk irrid immur ghand tal-ARMS, labour office, kollox jien."

"No...it's a big hassle, having your husband (in prison)... everything relies on you, if I need to go to ARMS to pay the bills, labour office, it's all on me."

Pressure due to lack of information by the prison authorities:

"Issa eżempju din tal-preċett... Jiena ma nafx hekk dan hux ser johroġ jew le. Hemm hafna problemi. Jghidlek (tirreferi ghad-direttur tal-habs) fl-aħħar tkun taf... Bħal speċi jiena l-partner tiegħu ta. Isma' ħa johroġ jew mhux se johroġ?... L-ewwel nies minhabba l-libsa, irrid nixtrilu suit ghax irid ikun bħal haddiehor. Fhimtni? U anke ghat-tifla. Jien mhux għaliġa imma għal din aktar u aktar, it-tifla tiegħu!"

"Now for example, the Holy Communion...I don't know if he will be allowed out or not. There are a lot of problems. He'll say (referring to prison director) you'll know at the last minute... But hang on I'm his partner. Will he be able to get out or not? .. Firstly because we need to get a suit, I need to buy him a suit so he'll be like everybody else. Do you understand me? And even for our daughter. It's not for me really but for her, his daughter!"

“Anka fuq flus, ghax ċertu titqibiet, alavolja gholjin, imma qisek jekk toqghod bil-ghaqal ittihomlu. Imma nghid. Imma fejn tidhol is-sahha jghid le, naraw kif nagħmlu u ttihomlu. Bhalissa wkoll, hadt it-tifel għand it-tabib u l-isptar, imma għidt ha nistenna għalissa. Xi kultant nghid imma jien qed nagħmel sew m’ghidtlux. Qisha din il-biċċa nkwiet ha tinfluwenzah. Bhalissa qieghda survival mode. Issa naraw.”

“Even about money, because certain vaccinations, even though expensive, but you’re like responsible with money, and you give them to our son. But I say. When it comes to health matters he says no, we need to see how to go about it and give them to him. Now, I took my son to the doctor and to hospital, but I said to myself ‘let me wait’. At times I say ‘am I doing right not telling him?’ As if this worry will influence him. I’m on survival mode currently. We’ll see.”

The dire financial situation of the many families involved with prison comes out loud and emerges as financial pressure. It emerges as most urgent and pressing. For some, financial pressure was related to basic needs:

“Kemm nistghu nifilhu ntuh ahna minn naqra pensjoni li għandna. Anzi kont nagħmel sagrificcji. Kont nitmagħlu l-klieb minn buti. Ma sserviniex il-pensjoni... ndur dejjem fuq it-tifla biex ittini xi haġa. Il-kbira thallaslu d-dawl ...”

“We give him as much money as we can from the small pension we have. I made a lot of sacrifices. I fed his dogs out of my own pocket. My pension is never enough...I always resort to my daughter to help me out. My eldest daughter pays his electricity bills...”

“U nohodlu l-flus, u ntih l-ikel, u nagħmel sagrificcju, hemm ara flixxun għasel nhar il-Hadd ma sibtx nixtrih minn hawn... rajt kif għamilt u xtrajtlu flixxun għasel. Nahdem hafna imma l-flus lanqas tarahom. Thallsilhom avukati, qrati u hekk...”

“I take him money, and I take him food, and I make sacrifices, look there’s a bottle of honey, on Sunday I didn’t manage to buy any in the vicinities...I set my heart on it and I bought him a bottle of honey. I work a lot but the money vanishes. You have to pay their lawyer, courts and so on...”

“Issa ahna għandna €580 pensjoni, issa li kieku ma tkunx din (binthom) ahna ma nistghux ngħaddu. Ara nagħmlu dak ix-xogħol (jagħmlu xi xogħol id-dar) biex inhallsulu €30 oħra. Irridu nħallulu xi ftiit flus fil-ġimgħa wkoll. Ma nistghux inlahhqu magħhom dawn l-affarijiet kollha. Ghax hu x’għandu spejjeż jibda jghidli, u nifhmu, m’għandix tē, m’għandix kafē, irrid nixtri zokkor, dawn għas-cereal, ikun irid jixtri xi affarijiet, ilma. Ihallas tat-televixin anki l-pirmli

nixtrilu...”

“Now our pension is €580, if it weren't for her (their daughter) we would not manage. Look we do this work (they do extra work from home) to pay another €30 for him. We have to give him some money every week too. We cannot keep up with all of this. He starts telling us about his expenses, and we understand, I don't have tea, I don't have coffee, I need to buy sugar; these for cereal, he would want to buy some things, water. He pays for television, we also buy his medication.”

This theme of financial pressure on the family has also been captured during the focus group with the prison wardens.

“The prisoners become demanding for money when they are here. They would ask their families for money all the time. And families end up having to tell them ‘The money is already finished, how can I give you more money from the little I get from my pension’, this is what they tell them. You can see during visits that some families, I would say many of them, are very poor.”

Because many people in prison smoke beyond the norm this seems to add to the financial pressure. A prison warden described it in this way:

“... they smoke a lot. They need about €30 a week. And money for water as well. Some ask for more of course as they smoke more. A bag of tobacco costs €7 and some smoke that daily. We are not talking about drug addicts who then get into complicated manoeuvres with phone cards and phones to make more money for the drugs. Most prisoners get the money from their families as they don't earn anything in here.”

There's a link to poverty that is mentioned by a prison warden who continues on what the previous one was saying. This emerges as a spiral down the poverty lane.

“I think that if you had to make a questionnaire for the family you will find that the biggest problem families face is financial. Many prisoners in here tell you how their parents had to sell property to pay off their debts and to pay fines and pay for lawyers for them.”

For others financial pressure is exacerbated due to court expenses and the fines handed by the court as part of the punishment together with a prison term. Four different excerpts from four different interviews represent quite clearly the anguish and tension various family members experience. A father who is a pensioner expresses how difficult it is for him to support his son in prison financially:

“Mhux qed nippretendi li jifthulhom il-bieb tal-habs sewwa, ghax din nafu li min ghamel irid jiehu li haqqu. Jien taf ma’ xiex ma naqbilx? Li meta jaghtu dis-somma kollha, meta jehlu per eżempju piena tehel ukoll dik il-multa kollha ta’ flus. Dawn minn fejn tridhom jithallsu? Ghax ahna biex qed inhallsulu l-multa... Issa ġiena kont ta’ disa’ mija.”

“I am not expecting that they open the prison doors for them ok, because we know that people need to pay for their mistakes. Do you know with what I don’t agree? That when they impose that big sum, when they’re given a sentence then you also get a very big fine. From where is this getting paid for? Because we pay the fine for him ... lately we got a nine hundred euro bill.”

The wife of a prisoner voices how she has to make do with the minimum wage covering all the routine expenses of herself, her daughter and her husband in prison plus paying the fine incurred by the court:

“Ha ngħidlek. Jiena llum il-ġurnata nahdem full-time... orrajt. Heqq tagħmel ġimgħa shiħa u trid terġa’ tiġi, hawn haġa u oħra. Naqbad tmien mija fix-xahar u jaqtgħuli minnhom qisu ġieli naqbad tmien mija u ġieli seba’ mija u sittin jew xi haġa hekk. Bihom irridu ngħ addu tlieta... plus multi tal-qorti, nsajjarlu kull nhar ta’ Hadd...”

“Let me tell you. At this point in my life I work full-time ... all right ... You work the whole week and then you have to come here again, for one thing or another. I get eight hundred a month and I have to pay tax on them, sometimes I get eight hundred, sometimes seven hundred and sixty or whatever. Three of us need to live off these...plus court fines, I cook for him every Sunday...”

A mother’s narrative is concerned about who was really fined, whether her son who is in prison without work or herself and her pensioner husband who have to pay a fine of thirty thousand euros:

“...tghidli “mhux hu ghamel hekk... iva naf imma jekk żbalja hu kif inbati jien ukoll. Il-kastig mhux hekk. Il-kastig, hadtlu l-libertà, u dik naqbel magħha ghax inkella jibqa’ jagħmel il-bniedem. Hudlu libertà iva. Imma dawn il-flus kollha!!! Ahjar qallu hmistax-il sena mil-ewwel milli qallu erbatax-il sena u tletin elf multa. Lilu ma waħħlu xejn tletin elf. Lilna waħħalhom... ghax ahna rridu nħallsuhomlu.”

“... You might tell me “he chose to do that” yes I know that, but if he made a mistake why do I have to suffer too. That’s not punishment. The punishment, you took away his freedom, and that I agree to because if not that person will keep on at it. Take away his freedom yes, but all

that money!!! It would have been better had he told him fifteen years straightaway, rather than fourteen years and a thirty thousand fine. They did not fine him thirty thousand. We have been lumped with them... because we have to pay them for him."

"Iva. Minn din il-multa ghandi biża, minn xejn iktar... dan mhux qed nghidu ghaxart elef. Tletin elf ebsin hux? Hu jaf li wehilhom. Bir-rispett kollu lejn il-ġustizzja dawn ma jafux... gieli jiena meta jigu hawn ihabbtu għall-flus bil-biża' nkun. Heqq kont intihom jiena minn tiegħi. Meta kellu d-dejn jien hallastulu. Issa l-multa wkoll."

"Yes, it's the fine we fear most, nothing else...we are not speaking about ten thousand. Thirty thousand is too steep. He knows he needs to come up with this amount. With all due respect to the judiciary system they don't know...sometimes I get so scared when they knock at the door for money. I used to give them money out of my own pocket. When he owed money I paid it for him. Now on top of everything the fine too".

Adding to this financial pressure are the exorbitant court and lawyer fees. This warden explains intensely the story of many desperate prisoners he worked with over the years.

"There's also this problem of lawyers ... The lawyers ... Thousands and thousands. This is not in hundreds but in thousands. I listen to the inmates talking and I'm shocked. A trial by jury would cost a prisoner 40 thousand euros! 'Where did you get this money from?' It's the father who sold this and that to pay for the lawyers. And then you see them arriving from court after a hearing, desperate, declaring "I sent him €500 yesterday to appear in court for me and he did not turn up!" The prisoners sometimes call them and the lawyers hang up on them. They don't answer the phone. The prisoners feel frustrated with this."

THE CONCERNS AND WORRIES OVER THE IMPACT OF INCARCERATION ON THEIR FAMILY

Another important category that emerged was that of the Concerns families of prisoners' experience. These concerns have presented in many different ways as concerns related to their peculiar situation. All the families we interviewed have a man in prison and this may account for the similarities in the concerns that emerged.

Concerns around children undoubtedly emerge as one of the strongest themes in this category. These concerns vary and involve children of all ages. Concerns about children emerge strongly from different relationships including grandparents, parents, and aunts and uncles. One of the most salient of these concerns is about the quality, quantity and timing of information imparted to the

child about the relative, often the father, in prison.²

“Ahna nixtiequ ngħidulha l-verità. Ghax jekk ma tghidilhiex int, se tismagħha minghand in-nies. Allura jiena ma rridx, anki qabel ma, kif tkun żghira, qabel ma tidhol l-iskola, ha ngħidilha li missierha... hi ha tkun taf li missierha mhux qieghed hawn, ghax kif tidhol l-iskola, in-nies ilsienhom hażin, jien naf ghax kont ġa rabbejt tifla sewda.”

“We would like to tell her the truth. Because if you don't tell her yourself outsiders will. So I don't want this, even before she... when she's little, even before she starts attending school, I will tell her that her father... she will know her father is not around, because when she starts school, people are spiteful, I know because I've already raised a girl of colour.”

There seems to be a general concordance that parents, or adults, should tell the children about their close relative's imprisonment as the child develops³. A mother describes her developmental solutions in explaining to the child as she develops, the imprisonment of the child's grandfather.

“Kont ngħidilha li qieghed ix-xogħol. X'ha taqbad tghidilhom? Imbagħad meta, meta bdiet qisha, ghax kienet tmur kindergarden bdiet tghidli n-nannu, fejn qieghed bil-H, mhux vera x-xogħol qieghed, bil-H fejn qieghed. Istra mbagħad qisek kemm ha ddum tisma', imbagħad gheditilha... ijwa veru n-nannu qieghed il-habs u qieghed hemmhekk ghax għamel xi haġa hażina u għalhekk meta tikber inti trid toqghod attenta ...Infatti tifla hi heqq mhux ha tghabbilha mohħha, mhux ha ngħabbilha mohħha żgur. U jekk ghax l-iktar haġa ma rridx li tghabbilha mohħha b'ċertu affarijiet fhimt? U dik il-biża' tiegħi ghax fl-aħħar mill-aħħar ha tkun taf għal xiex, u x' fatta u hekk u hekk. U qisek tidda tiddejjaq anke minnha stess fhimt?”

“I used to tell her that he was at work. What can you tell them? Then when, kind of, because when she was attending kindergarden, she started to ask about her grandfather, she asked me where is my grandfather, where he is starts with 'H' (h is the first letter of 'habs', the Maltese word for prison), it's not true that he is at work, the place he's living in starts with an H. Damn, then how much can you take, then I told her...yes it's true, your grandfather is in prison and he's there because he did something wrong, so when you grow up you need to be careful...”

²Concerns about children emerge as obvious within the Maltese cultural context. Families in Malta are presumably more closely knit as Malta is small in size and proximity. Tabone (1995) called this 'The nuclear families of the modified extended type' in which one's family determines one's public and private identity.

³The issue here may not be telling them or not and what's best for the child but HOW to tell the children, where and when. Professional input here is fundamental to the parent-child relationship, as well as to the child's healthy psycho-relational development.

In fact she's a child, you cannot overburden her mind, I don't want to overburden her mind for sure. Because the thing I most don't want to do is overburden her mind with certain things do you understand? That's my fear because at the end of the day she will know why, and what happened and that. You feel kind of uncomfortable even towards her do you understand?"

Another woman's narrative concurs with many other participants in this research as she shares her experience of informing her daughter to protect her from other children at school:

"Ghidtilha, qisek ahjar tipreparahom, ghax imbaghad jigu t-tfal jgh idulek ghala dik qaltli hekk, ghalfajn dak qalli hekk? Jew inkella jgh idulek inti m'ghandekx papà, mhux qieghed mieghek. U ghaddejna minnha, ghaddejna... Anki t-tfal ta' huh, it-tfal ta' huh ghadhom žghar, ghandhom ten u five. Ippreparhom missierhom, ghax meta l-kbira semghet fuq l-ahbarijiet, isem zijuha, qaltlu x'ghamel iz-ziju? Ghax ismu ma tantx hu komuni. Illum jghidulhom ifehmuhom, mhux ghidilhom ezatt x'gara, fehmuhom li kien pastaž, u li qieghed naqra punish, u hekk. Imma ghallinqas kif marru l-iskola, ghax malajr issib lil xi hadd (tfal), li jghidulhom 'iz-ziju tieghek, iz-zija tieghek qieghed il-habs, intom pastaži'. Imma l-tiegħi peress li ghadhom žghar nghidilhom li qieghed xogħol u qed imorru narawh ix-xogħol."

"I told her, it's better if you prepare them. Because then your children will start asking you why did that one tell me that, why did the other tell me that? Or else you'll be told that 'you don't have a dad' he's not with you. We've been through it, we've been through rough stuff... Even his brother's children, his brother's children are young, they're ten and five years of age. Their father prepared them, because when the eldest heard the news, her uncle's name, she asked what did uncle (...) do? Because his name is not very common. Today they tell them and explain, they don't know exactly what happened, they explained he had behaved badly, and that he's getting punished, and so on. But at least when they went to school, because it's easy to find somebody (children) that tells them "your uncle, your uncle is in prison, your family is bad". But since they're young I tell my children that he's at work and that we visit him at work."

The following is another expression of concern about the developmental description, this time merged with the concern about the developing relationship between son, daughter and father. The mother's concern is about how the children can develop a sense of connectedness with their father:

"Anki ž-žghir, 'qieghed far away fejn il-police'. Daqshekk jaf li

hemm... Infatti meta hareġ... l-aħħar li hareġ, qallha le mhux veru ġej, qalilna, anqas ippretendiha, le ma ppretendiehx, qallu le. Dan laħqu, kellu tliett snin meta daħal. Imma issa jaf li għalissa hu hemm irid joqghod, għax dak qagħad pastaż. Issa iktar 'il quddiem tkun problema.

“Even the youngest one, ‘he’s far away near the police’. That’s what he knows about what’s there... in fact when he was on the outside... the last time he was out, he told her he’s not really coming, he told us, he didn’t expect it, he did not expect it, he said no.

He managed to get to know this one, he was three years of age when he went in. But he knows that for now he needs to sleep there, because he was naughty. Later on it will be a problem.”

“Għax hi miskina (it-tifla), mhux ma tafux ta’, tagħrfu, anki lehnu fuq it-telefon, saret tagħrfu, anki kif immorru hemm, anki kif tinfissed, magħna ma tantx hi mfissda, hu jgħarraxha u hekk, hi toqghod tinfissed u hu joqghod jgħarraxa. Hi tgħidx kemm tinfissed miegħu. Imma għada, qisha mhux ma tafx min hu”.

“Because poor child, it’s not that she doesn’t know him, she recognizes him, even his voice over the phone, she started to recognize him, even when we go there, even how she cuddles up, with us she doesn’t cuddle up that much, he tickles her and so on, she cuddles up to him and he tickles her. She’s really affectionate with him. But she still like doesn’t know who he is.”

A mother of a toddler continues to express her concern about the child’s current and eventual relationship with his father who is in prison:

“...fil-bidu kien se jkollna naqra problem sakemm jidrah u hekk. Hmmm, ngħid aħjar li daħal issa, mhux meta kiber, għax issa 'il quddiem din il-ħaġa nissuperawha u ma tibqax taħseb fuqha, fhimt?”

“...in the beginning we had some problems until he got used to him and so on. Hmm..I tell myself that it’s better he got in now, not when he’ll be older, because now we can get over it and stop thinking about it, do you understand?...”

Plus the concern about the child missing his father who is in prison:

“Hu sensitiv hafna, anki fis-sens li t-tifel ma jkunx hafna miegħu, hu hekk hafna jara n-nuqqas.”

“He’s very sensitive, even though our son is not with him so much, he really feels the loss.”

While one may think of children of prisoners as referring to small children,

this woman reminds us that there are adult children too, and that parents' concern about them can be as strong as the parents' concern about small children. Referring to the time of arrest this now elderly woman expresses her perspective about how the imprisonment of her husband has affected, and is affecting her adult children. This woman and her husband (the person in prison) had emigrated many years back and have two adult children, both married and with children. All her children live abroad, where she and her husband also lived before her husband was sentenced in Malta. She expresses the cost of the distance from her husband who is in prison and from her children and grandchildren:

“Dak iż-żmien it-tifla kien ha jkollha, ukoll, sewwa meta bdew dawn l-affarijiet... u issa għadu kif, hmistax ilu kellha, eh tifel ieħor... jiġifieri jiena nixtieq... jiena qegħda hawn Malta bilqegħda ma naghmel xejn, u t-tifla għandha bżonn l-għajnuna (uliedha t-tnejn jgħixu barra minn Malta), ma nistax ngħinha... Issa jiena sa mmur għax jiena ġejja u sejra heqq ... dan kollu spejjeż... jiena kull darba li mmur u nigi rrid inhallas mal-hmistax il-mija ...”⁴

“At the time our daughter was expecting, as well when these things started off ... just had a fortnight ago, she had another son...so I wish... I'm here in Malta sitting doing nothing, and my daughter needs help (son and daughter both live abroad), I cannot help her...Now I'm going to visit them, because I'm always coming and going...these are all expenses...every time I come and go I have to pay fifteen hundred...”

There's also a concern about relationship quality between adult children of prisoner and prisoner himself and the way relationships change after the father was sent to prison:

“It-tifel hadha naqra bi kbira... emm... ma nafx... għax għandi t-tifel jiena mhux wieħed minn dawk li ser jiġi jgħidlek... Iżomm hafna ġo fih. Qisek lanqas taf, qed tifhem... it-tifla pereżempju ġieli ċċempillu jew hekk ta'. Dejjem kellhom kuntatt miegħu... imma mhux f'dak is-sens bħal ma konna qabel. Qed tifhem? Inbiddu f'it l-affarijiet... lanqas naf x'naqbad ngħidlek... Kif ha naqbad ngħidlek, affarijiet li ma stennejthomx, jiena qatt ma bsart li kelli nerġa' ngħaddi minn dawn l-affarijiet.”

“Our son was quite devastated...emm...I don't know...because my son is not very expressive...he keeps it all inside. You don't really know, do you understand...our daughter for example will phone him up sometimes and things like that. They always kept contact with him...but in some sense not like we were before. Do you understand? Things have changed

⁴This relates well with the family life-cycle disruption. Children and grandchildren suffer losses of participation in activities during developmental tasks and milestones.

a bit...I don't really know what to tell you... how can I tell you, things I never anticipated, I never thought I would be going through this again."

The wide spectrum of concern is infinite in its capacity to penetrate the minds of all those involved. Children also expressed their concerns vis-a-vis both their parents. A young adult woman expresses how as she grew up with a father in prison her main concern was to protect her mother and her sister from gossip:

"... jien, mhux ma naghtix kas lili nnifsi ... imma aktar kont naghti kas li ma jghidu xejn lil omni u lil ohti... hekk zghira kont... u ghadni fhimt?"

"...I, it's not that I don't see to my needs...but I was more concerned that people would say something to my mother and my sister...I was young....and still am do you understand?"

The same woman continues to express her protection towards her mother and her sister, at times even at the cost of bursting in front of her daughter.

"U tibqa', tibqa'! Issa llum il-ġurnata għeditlkom li ilni ma nitkellem hekk... imma eżempju quddiem it-tifla nibki. Eżempju ha noqghod nibki wahdi imma l-omni ma nurihex fhimt?"

"And you still do, you still do! Now I've told you it's been a long time since I spoke like this...But for example I do cry in front of my daughter. For example I will cry on my own but I won't let my mother see me, you understand?"

Referring to her daughter this woman speaks about the child's sensitivity and mood regulating behaviour:

"Tghidli mamà idhaq, ġieli nkun daqsxejn bil-furja. Tghidli mamà idhaq, naghmlilha mmm (tagħmel ġest li jdahhaq b'wiċċha). Nghid jahasra din it-tifla, ara naqa hadli l-hin tiegħi kollu kemm hu kattiv (tirreferi għas-sieheb tagħha li qiegħed il-habs). Issa fil-verità mhux hekk, imma dak li nhoss dak il-hin. Il-Hadd nkun hazin hafna jien."

"She'll tell me smile mummy, at times I'll be a bit enraged. She tells me smile mummy, I'll go mmm (she makes a funny facial expression). I say to myself poor child, he took away all my time, he's so cruel (referring to her partner in prison). Now it's not like that in reality, it's how I feel there and then. Usually on Sundays I'm very upset."

When children feel that their parents are engrossed in their own pain they not only take it on their stride to protect their parents but also take responsibility in protecting themselves from the pain and shame associated with prison, the peak

of parentification:

“Ihoss it-tifel u għalhekk ma jkellmux (lil missieru). Qalli ‘meta jkun tajjeb u wiċċu sabih...’ hekk qalli ‘...u pulit il-papà, inkellmu’. Dakinhar kellhom mixja tal-mużew u missieru mar ikellmu. U l-ħbieb tiegħu qalulu ‘dan min hu?’ u qabeż hu u qalilhom, ‘ħabib ta’ ommi dan’. Lanqas qalilhom li hu missieru. U jien ngħidlu... Ngħidlu isma’ kullhadd għandu t-tajjeb u l-ħażin. Xorta jħobbok il-papà. Jgħidli ‘nanna imma narah hekk imma le ta ma nkellmux’ ”.

“Our son feels it and that’s why he doesn’t talk to him (to his father). He told me ‘when he’s better and his face looks well... that’s what he said ‘and when he’s well groomed I will talk to daddy’. Some time ago they had a walk organized by the Museum (a Maltese religious organisation) and his father went to talk to him. His friends asked him ‘who is he?’ and promptly he replied ‘a friend of my mother’. He didn’t tell them he was his father. I tell him listen everybody has good things and bad things about them. Your daddy still loves you. He tells me ‘grandma but when I see him like that no I won’t talk to him’”.

At times children take a parentified role by default and are perceived as saviours and protégées, or rather as buffers, from the pain and suffering of the mother outside prison:

“It-tifel nahseb li mnalla ġie għax kieku nahseb li kont naqa’ f’depression, għax nieħu hsiebu u hafna affarijiet hekk u affarijiet minn dawn u tarah jikber, qisek għandek hafna obbligi lejħ u dan. Jiġifieri nahseb li t-tifel iżommni.”

“Having our son was a godsend because otherwise I feel I would have succumbed to depression, because I take care of him and things like that and you see him grow, like you’re obliged towards him. So I think my son keeps me standing.”

There was a special instance in which a grandmother expressed her concern about the danger, mostly psychological, in which she felt the child needed protection from the prisoner himself, in this case the uncle of the child, due to his chaotic lifestyle:

“Nies ġejjin u sejrjn, bħal dak t’hemm fuq (tirreferi għal wieħed li jabbuża mid-droga u dawk li jisilfu l-flus fuq l-idejn)... jien dal-kummiedji x’irridhom? Orrajt... meta kont wahdi stikkjajt u ftaħtlu għajnejħ u għamiltlu. Imma issa hawn it-tfal u ma rridx li joqgħodu jaraw dawn l-affarijiet.”

“People coming and going, like the one there (referring to drug addicts coming to meet her son and possibly loan sharks) ... I don’t need this

monkey business. Ok..when I was alone I worked hard and tried to make him come to his senses. But now there's children and I don't want them to witness such goings-on."

There is also another concern many adults expressed in relation to children in particular. This concern is about **stigma** and its many facets, in particular the negative effects stigma may have on the little ones. A woman painfully expressed how upon starting kindergarten, her daughter of three experienced bullying and rejection as a consequence of having her father in prison. The protective behaviour this woman expresses is balanced with other protective behaviour adults express to protect children in these circumstances, for example, protection from information about the prisoner or from other stigmatising information that they perceive as improper for the child to know.

"... awtomatikament, kif dahlet ta' tliet snin, it-tfal bdew jghidu lil xulxin, 'jaqq ma nilagħbux magħha, jaqq ma nilagħbux magħha.' Ghidtlu; il-mummy hekk qaltlek lilek? Ghax umbagħad ma flahtx ..."
"...automatically, as soon as she started age three, the children were telling each other 'yuck we don't want to play with her, yuck we don't want to play her'. I told him 'did mummy tell you that? Because I couldn't take it any more..."

One mother expresses what she and her family have actually been through. For them, children can be very insensitive to other children. This family experienced other children passing strong remarks to their children about their mother and their grandfather being junkies.

" 'Nannuk junkie' ... għaddejna minnhom aħna dawn. Jghajruhom 'ommok junkie, ommok l-iktar wahda junkie' tfal ta dawn... Alla hares tagħti kashom ghax in-nies... Issib min hu ilsien u hażin u jipprova jmisssek u jweggħek. Imbagħad fl-aħħar mill-aħħar inti trid tkun soda u ma tagħtix kas ilsien in-nies."

"Your grandfather is a junkie...we've been through it. They get called names 'your mother's a junkie, you mother's the biggest junkie', children you know! God forbid you had to mind what people say...you do find who's deliberately hurtful and tries to upset you and hurt you. At the end of the day you need to be strong and dismiss what people say."

This mother is also very concerned about possible bullying behaviour by children to her children about their father being in prison.

"L-esperjenza ma kinetx tajba ghax hemm it-tfal involuti hu ... Hemm it-tfal. Jiena niddejjaq qisu xi hadd ikun jaf. Mhux ghax eżatt niddejjaq imma ma tafx inti skola u hekk xi hadd ikun jaf"

jistgħu jiġu bullied jew hekk hux.. u anke huma stess... li jkollok missierek qiegħed il-ħabs... mhix xi haġa sabiha. Naraha jiena ha ngħid hekk. Ma naħsibx li hi esperjenza sabiha għal hadd hu min hu li jkollu xi hadd il-ħabs hux?"

"The experience was not positive because there are children involved... there's children. I don't like when somebody knows kind of... It's not I don't like it exactly but you know at school and if somebody knows they might get bullied and so on and if they themselves, that your father's in prison is not a nice thing. That's how I see it from my point of view. I don't think it's a pleasant experience for anybody whoever they are to have a loved one in prison."

The power of stigma assumes that crime and delinquency can also be genetic in nature. This grandmother's conversation with the interviewer reveals her concern about the genetic component her child may have inherited from his father and the relational way one can influence and change it.

Nanna: "Lill-ieħor (neputi) inbeżżgħu, ġieli ngħidlu 'jekk tagħmel xi haġa hażina xeba bastun intik' (tidħaq) bix inbeżżgħu jaħasra."

Intervistatur: "Tinkwieta li jaqbad xi vizzju wkoll."

Nanna: "Mela. Għax lilu mqaxxar hareġ jixbah. Biex jorqod bħalu, jhobb jiekol iċ-ċikkulata bħalu, mixja ta' missieru... Mela jien naf id-demmm... Id-demmm jiġbed hi."

"Grandmother: "I scare the other one (grandson), sometimes I tell him 'if you do something wrong I will beat you up with my stick (laughing) to scare him off poor he".

Interviewer: You're scared that he might pick up some bad habits too.

Grandmother: "Of course. Because he resembles him in everything. He sleeps like him, likes to eat chocolate like him, walks in his manner... I don't know blood ties ... blood ties determine similarity."

Stigma continues to persist and some families experienced some rather personal attacks. This woman recalls having quite a strong conversation with another woman who accused her of receiving stolen goods from her addicted son. It was quite painful for her:

"Bqajt, qed ngħix normali, ma jaffettwawnix... Min jaf kemm qaluli; "Min jaf x'igiblek ibnek mis-serq li jisraq... kienu jweggghuwni ... U minn tal-familja, x'jidhirlek...? Kemm qlajt fuq wiċċi. Ma ngħid xejn... allahares il-bniedem ma jinsiex binti. Allahares ma jinsiex il-bniedem."

"I'm living a normal life, it doesn't affect me ...Who knows how many times I've been told: "Who knows what your son brings you from his

stolen goods” ... I had a very rough deal. I remain silent, God forbid if man did not forget, dear. God forbid if man couldn't forget.

The following conversation denotes the painful reality some relatives experience when stigmatized. This woman explains the inevitability of being influenced negatively when stigmatized.

Mara: Thossha hux (meta n-nies jghaddu l-kummenti). Heqq thossha u taffetwak... lili tefghatni lura!

Intervistatur: Tefghatek lura?

Mara: Bilfors titfghek lura, bhal speçi, jiena hriġt ghax-xoghol u nara ċertu nies tilghin ghax-xoghol u jieħdu pjacir. Jien naghmel il-hila tiegħi. Imma jekk tiltaqa' ma wahda, ma bniedem u jghidlek ċertu diskors qed jaqtgħalek qalbek, ifixklek.

Woman: “It's hurtful (when people pass comments). It's hurtful and it impinges on you ... it damaged me!”

Interviewer: “Damaged you?”

Woman: “It cannot be any other way, like, I'd get out to work and used to see certain people leaving for work, enjoying it. I do my best. But if you meet somebody, and they tell you certain stuff, it makes you want to give up, it upsets you.”

Negative stigma is also anticipated. Expectations develop around one's sense of hopelessness, in this case to be employed after the prison term upon release from prison:

“Diffiċli biex isibu x-xoghol! Hemm min jagħmel sena priġunerija imbghad xħin joħroġ barra,... din il-madonna kondotta ġġenninhom. Jien qalbi maqtugħa li dawn xħin joħorġu biex isibu x-xogħol inutli ghax xħin jaraw il-kondotta... x'ser jagħmlu jekk mhux ser ikollhom l-ghajjnuna tan-nies, min hu bhalkom hekk! Min ha jhaddimhom?”

“It's hard for them to find employment! There are individuals who after a year's prison sentence when they leave...this blessed police conduct makes them go crazy. I'm not at all hopeful that they're going to find employment because when they see the conduct...,what are they going to do with themselves, without outsiders help, from people like you! Who is going to employ them?”

The pain of stigma is associated with the shame experienced by many relatives of people in prison. Hereunder is an excerpt highlighting the narrative of shame. This is an interesting facet of the psychological nature of stigma. This man is ashamed even to go out and reports his other children are the same. Shame persists even years after imprisonment.

“... jisthu min-nies minnhabba fih (hu l-persuna li qieghda l-habs). Ghax fejn jahdmu heqq. Wiehed minnhom plumber u darba mar ghand spettur u hasbu hu. Ghax jixbhu hafna. Anke din ghax ma rridx nghid quddiemha (tirreferi ghal ohtha li dak il-kien kienet f’kamra ohra) qabditha depression minhabba fih. Anke jien bdejt nisthi nohroġ. Kull minn ikellimni, ghadni s’issa gieli nisthi.”

“They’re ashamed of people because of him (the brother of the person in prison). Because of their place of work. One of them is a plumber and once he went to an inspector’s house and he thought it was him. Because they really look alike. Even her because I don’t want to say this in front of her (referring to sister who at that moment was out of the room) she became depressed because of him. Even I feel ashamed to leave the house. Whoever speaks to me, even now I feel ashamed.”

Fear of Stigma can be very powerfully constructed in one’s ideas. Protecting children and concern about children re-emerge:

Intervistatur: “Qisu tibza li tista’ tkun aktar ta’ hsara ghat-tfal jekk titkellem.”

Mara: “Nibza’ nghid. jien nahseb li... hekk hu, jekk nitkellem ser issir hsara zgur.”

Interviewer: “It seems like you’re scared that it will damage the children if you talk.”

Woman: “I’m really scared. I think that...yes that’s it, if I talk it will bring about damage for sure”.

Fear of stigma can be so powerful that this young girl of 15 years did not tell her new boyfriend that her father is in prison. She had asked a friend of hers to tell her boyfriend.

Intervistatur: (lit-tifla l-kbira li ghandha 15-il sena) “Int ghandek boyfriend hux? Kif kienet ghalik l-esperjenza mieghu. Kif spjegajtlu? Jew kien digà jaf?”

Tifla: “Sibtha diffiċli nighidlu.”

Intervistatur: “Ghaliex?”

Tifla: “Ma nafx hux. Imma sthajt. Domt biex ghidtlu.”

Intervistatur: “X’ghinek biex tasal tgħidlu?”

Tifla: “Qabbadt il-habib tiegħi u qallu, mhux jien.”

Interviewer: (to eldest daughter 15 years old) “You do have a boyfriend right? What was it like for you when it came to him? How did you explain it to him? Or did he know already?”

Daughter: “It was hard to tell him about it.”

Interviewer: “Why?”

Daughter: "I don't know. But I was ashamed. It took me a long time to tell him."

Interviewer: "How did you bring yourself to tell him?"

Daughter: "I got my friend to tell him, I didn't."

Stigma emerges as one's personal construct of a social reality which is many times otherwise different from the personal construct. Expectations around one's construction of stigma develop to consolidate one's construction. The conversation hereunder is a typical example of how stigma emerges as a personal construct which is different from actual occurrences. While the father of the person in prison believed that his business was hit hard, his wife interjected to contradict him and informed the interviewer that people still continued to buy their goods from him. Stigma can be associated with shame etc.:

Intervistatur:- U inti kont għadek qed taħdem meta ġara l-każ?

Omm:- Iva.

Missier:- U żgur!

Intervistatur:- U x-xogħol ġie affettwat?

Missier:- Hafna. Hafna hażin. Hafna hażin!

Intervistatur:- U x'kont taħdem dak iż-żmien ?

Missier:- Inbiegħ fit-toroq.

Intervistatur:- Eh kont tbiegħ fit-toroq. U affettwak fil-business din ?

Missier:- Affettwatni naqra, affettwatni naqra!

Ommr:- Fil-business xorta n-nies...

Missier:- Żomm. Ċertu nies affettwatni, imma l-business, peress li jiena kont nitla', fuqu, bqajt għaddej"

Omm:- U kienu jhobbuk in-nies!

Missier:- U n-nies kienu jhobbuni

Interviewer:- Were you still working when it happened?

Mother :- Yes.

Father :- Of course!

Interviewer:- Was your work affected as a result?

Father:- A lot. Very badly. Very badly!

Interviewer:- What was your job at the time?

Father:- Street hawker.

Interviewer:- Yes, you were a street hawker. Did it affect your business?

Father:- It affected me a little, it affected me a little!

Mother:- In the business. People still...

Father:- Hold on. With certain people it affected me, but because I used to..., I still kept on at it...

Mother:- And people used to love you!

Father:- Yes people used to love me!

The negative construction of stigma and the shame associated with having a family member in prison also influences one's sense of entitlement. This mother feels she is not entitled to professional help and fears the professionals' judgement.⁵

“Le ma mmurx infittex hekk. Ghax nahseb li ha jippuntaw subghajhom lejja hux. Jghiduli tfittex l-ghajnuna meta ghamel hekk ibnek!! Nahseb li ser jippuntaw subghajhom lejja. Heqq trid toqghod naqra attenta. Ninkwieta kif se jharsu lejk. U inti ma jkollok htija ta' xejn hux. Mhux talli ma jkollokx htija talli lanqas tkun tixtieqhom dawn l-affarijiet. Ghax dawn mhux affarijiet sbieh. Sakemm minn naha taghhom xi hadd jista' jghinha jiena mhux ha nirrifjuta l-ghajuna ghax fil-fatt ghandna bzonnha. Imma mhux ser immur nitlobha ...”

“No I don't seek it. Because I think they will point their finger at me. They'd tell me you're looking for help when your son did that! I think they'll point fingers at me. You need to be careful. I'm worried about how people will perceive you. And you're not guilty of anything. You're not guilty of anything and you don't even wish these things. Because these are not nice matters. If they approach us I will not refuse help because actually we need it. But I won't be asking for it...”

Notwithstanding the true occurring nature of stigma, it also emerges again as one's personal construct of a social reality which is at times otherwise different than the personal construct. Reality showed this former inmate (female) that people's construct, or at least some people's construct, is not stigmatizing, at least not in the negative sense.⁶

“... X'hin ġejt biex nohroġ ... Kif ġejna qisu kelli party hawn ġew, ġirien iħabbtu, min ġej bil-laħam, min ġej bil-frott. Il-lallu bdejt ngh amlilha l'din x'mistħija. Sibna lil din li toqghod hawn wara li anqas qatt ma kellimtha bġhatitli l-frott, min bġhatli l-baċi, kemm sibna baċi.”

“....When I was about to leave...when we got her it was like a party in here, neighbours knocking at the door, some bringing me meat, others bringing me fruit. I would say gosh to her, how embarrassing. The neighbour living behind us sent us fruit and I had never even spoken to her, some sent me chocolates, we found so many chocolates.”

⁵This is an interesting assumption implying and denoting not only entitlement of services but also one's narratives of how family connectedness and blood relationships are also guilty. There's also the implication that those who commit crimes are inflicting suffering on others and therefore are not entitled to feel any suffering or sadness. There's also the assumption of the internalization of experience, with the associated consequences on health, both physical and psychological.

⁶It needs saying here that the social solidarity of the Maltese population is incredible. The generosity expressed by the neighbours in this particular case can actually be considered as typical among the participants of this study.

A wife speaking of how she benefits from positive⁷ stigma:

“Kull fejn immur, pereżempju ngħidilhom jien. Immur nixtri oġġett, pereżempju għandi bżonn slipper, immur għand il għax ituhom id-discount mill-ħabs. Immur u ngħidilhom għandi d-discount minn tal-ħabs. Jgħinuk hafna... le hafna sibt għajnuna kull fejn immur, eż empju jekk immur s’għand il-grocer jistaqsuni għalih, Jekk immur ’l hemm, ifhimni hu kien jaf hafna nies eh. Imma anki jekk eżempju tghidilhom; għax għandi r-raġel il-ħabs, le, mela ha ngħidlek x’taġħmel, għamel hekk, nirrangawlu hekk ... Hsibt li ha tkun aktar iebes.”

“I will tell them wherever I go. When I go to buy something, for example I need sports shoes, I’ll go to because they give discounts to prison families. I’ll go there and tell them I have the prison discount. They’re very helpful, I’ve found a lot of help wherever I go, for example at the grocer’s they’ll ask how he’s doing. If I go there, you see he knew a lot of people. But even if for example you say ‘my husband’s in prison, people will say let me tell you what you need to be doing, do this, we’ll help you with that. I had thought it would be harder.”

A mother speaking about the generosity her other children received from their bosses at work:

“Jien kif ġrat għidt it-tfal ix-xogħol kemm ha jgħajruhom. Mhux għalija ta, għax jien I don’t care. Kemm se jgħajruhom, imma mbagħad ġew jgħiduli t-tfal, ‘Ma tawni l-leave’, u qalulhom dum kemm trid.”

“As soon as it happened I thought that my children would get name called at work. It’s not about me, because I don’t care. They’ll get insulted, but then my children told me ‘Ma they granted me leave’, and told them take as much leave as you want.”

Some participants understood the double-sided nature of stigma and expressed this in the following way:

“... Għax pereżempju jiena meta mort nikteb iż-żgħir, bilfors kelli ngħib xi karti tiegħu, ċertu firem, li veru qiegħed jiskonta sentenza. U darba wahda l-ewwel ma kienu staqsewni ‘għandek bżonn xi uniformi?’. Jiena m’għandix minn fejn nixtrihomlu... Imma bl-ewwel mistoqsija ġa tfajt l-ewwel look tiegħu fuqu. Din ser tibqa’ tiela miegħu sa form 5. Il-look. It-timbru!!! It-timbru hemm qiegħed diġà u jiena nitkellem

⁷I’m also reflecting here about the idea of stigma being positive. I think that it can be called beneficial but never positive. Mainstreaming the idea of giving gifts and discounts to families who have someone in prison can be dangerous in its own right as it still denotes and highlights difference.

hekk għax minn naħa tiegħi hemm min huma teachers.”

“Because when I went to register the little one for school, I had to take certain documents of his, certain signatures, that he’s really serving a sentence. And once they immediately asked me ‘do you need a uniform?’ I can’t afford them...but at the first question he already got the look. This will accompany him till Form 5. The look...the label! The label is already there and I’m speaking in this way because some relatives of mine are teachers.”

Media influence emerged as a significant concern at different levels, from an administrative point of view as expressed by the prison wardens during the focus group, as well as from a humane point of view as expressed by the families participating in this research.

This group of prison wardens and officers agreed that:

“We suffer as well when this happens. Because when you treat them ... Because media makes people believe that the officers treat the prisoners badly ... that’s what the public believes ... let me tell you ... especially media people don’t know the damage they do when they speak about inmates. It is damage towards the institution itself. And even towards the prisoners themselves. For example yesterday there was an article saying the there are no cameras during visits. When in reality, here it’s full of cameras. This is a promotion for people to bring in drugs. And even that, the public believes that prison is full of drugs. Those who are here and telling their relatives that they are not taking drugs are finding it difficult to convince their relatives. ... This can create a revolt in here. If you take something like this, you try to make an emphasis to create a sensation ... our families get scared, they get very concerned.

This woman refers to a scare broadcast by some newscaster in which it was stated that there is a high rate of illness of some sort in prison. This scared her and in order to protect her child she did not take the child to see the father in prison. Such excerpt confirms the wardens’ perception above.

“Ehe, allahares ma jġix. Dik oħra meta kien hemm dik il-biċċa tal-mard għaddeja, qisu ma tkunx taf x’se taqbad tagħmel, jekk għandekx tmur, jekk qedx jgħaġġbuhom, fis-sens. Irjiħat minn kullimkien tista’ toħodhom. Jien kont naħdem childcare qabel, so naf x’jġifieri li jimirdu u hekk, imma imbghad meta tisma’ n-nies ... le jien ma nihdux hemm, mela (tirreferi għall-ħabs)”

“God forbid he doesn’t visit. That’s another issue, when there’s illness going round, you don’t really know what to do, if you should go, if they’re making a fuss, kind of. You can catch colds anywhere. I used to work in a childcare before, so I know how often they get sick and so on, but then when you hear people speak...no as if, I won’t take them there’ (referring to prison).”

Many families shared with the interviewers their concern about having learned of their relative in prison from the news. They were referring particularly to TV broadcast news. Many, like the woman in the following excerpt, feel helpless in front of media. She also explains, together with her daughter, how hearing things about their relative on the news exacerbates their sadness and pain.

Omm:- *“Dażgur, dawn affarijiet li ma tistax taħbi. Dan kulhadd jisma’ hux.”*

Oħt:- *“Heqq dwejjaq kbar... dwejjaq kbar.”*

Omm:- *“Kif taqbad tghid! Din mhux ha żżommha hux. Hadd mhu ha jżommha, ġara każ bħal dak hux!”*

Oħt:- *“Għax bħal ma qed tghid inti, tibda tisma’ minn fuq it-televixin ... u aktar tħoss!”*

Omm:- *“Tinhasad hux.”*

Mother :- *“Of course, you cannot hide these things. Everybody gets to know”.*

Sister :- *“Ehh, a great sense of despair...a great sense of despair.”*

Mother :- *“How can you express this! You cannot contain it. Nobody can prevent it from leaking out, a serious case like that!”*

Sister :- *“Because like you’re saying yourself, you start hearing about it from the television...and it causes more of a sensation!”*

Mother:- *“It’s a shock, it is.”*

This other woman, partner of a person in prison, in a few words describes how she came to know about her partner’s arrest and how she reacted to it:

Sieħba: *“Ehe. Imbagħad qed jgħid fuq it-televixin. U jien bqajt inhares lejħ hekk (tiċċassa ssummata). Għax qisni lanqas bsartha din.”*

Partner: *“Yes, then they’re talking about it on television. And I just stared at it (staring in shock). Like I never expected this.”*

Another man talks three times about the way media reports and about the reporting itself.

Missier: *“Ma konniex qed nistennewha le minn daqshekk hux... ifhimni ... Imbagħad smajna fuq l-aħbarijiet hux ... U ġiet habta u sabta hux.”*

“Mela kien hemm hux. Jiġifieri kien hemm. Jien ma kontx naf bihom. Sirt naf bihom fuq l-aħbarijiet. Kollha kemm huma fuq il-media sirt naf. Jiġifieri... jien u ommu ma konniex flimkien hux u ċemplu lil ommu biss... jiġifieri b’hekk sirt naf imbagħad... imma meta qed tara l-aħbarijiet mhux ha tobsor li ser tisma’ dawk l-affarijiet. Xokk kbir ħadt.”

“...iva taġġmel hafna ħsara. Anke... Mhux qed ngħid li m’għandhomx jisemmew ismijiet sewwa għax kulhadd irid ipatti għal dak li għamel.

Però mbagħad meta jkun hemm it-tfal minorenni nahseb li dawn l-affarijiet iġibu haġna bullying meta jisemmew fuq il-media.”

Father: “We were not expecting this, not at all, you understand, then we heard it on the news...And it came all of a sudden.”

“Really he was there. He was there. I didn’t know about them. I got to know about them from the news. His mother and I were not together at the time and they only phoned his mother...that’s how I got to know later...but as you’re watching the news you don’t expect to hear these things. It was a big shock”.

Father: “... it causes a lot of damage this way. Even... I’m not saying that names should not be mentioned because everybody needs to pay for their mistakes. But then when there are children who are minors, these things bring about a lot of bullying when mentioned in the media.”

RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE AND THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS

When a family member enters prison, there’s a family dynamic change which emerges as quite radical and abrupt. Relatives, in their different relationships to the prisoner, often experience a complex adaptation process to new relationship dynamics and patterns, all embedded within the respective wider systems of extended family, prison, legal system, and so on. One of the most drastic changes in this process is the management of intimate and close relationships from a distance. Maintaining a relationship from a distance, barred within the boundary of the prison walls, can be extremely challenging.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

This young woman recalls her experience of how her relationship with her father changed and how this change influenced her behavior.⁸ There’s an interesting dynamic change in which her brother attempts to take parental responsibility of his sister, the participant.

“Mhux oqvja, differenti. Inti meta dahal missieri... Ġieli kont... Ma kellux kontroll fuqek, heqq ma jkollux kontroll fuqek. Niftakar kien iċempilli u kont nohroġ. Kien jghidli ‘fejn qieghda?’ Mur id-dar! Mur id-dar!...Kieku qieghed id-dar mhux ha nagħmel hekk... X’ kontroll ... min? Lanqas hadd ma kellu kontroll fuqi. Dejjem nagħtu jiena u ħija, u ngħidlu inti m’intix missieri, m’intix ha tindahalli... Hekk, l-unika haġa ommi. Imma ommi miskina dejjem tipprova, fhimt?”

“It’s obvious, it’s different. When my father got in...sometimes I used to...He did not have any control over you, he does not have control over

⁸This aspect of the study can be linked to research about fatherlessness. Dr. Charlie Azzopardi presented ‘F’HIEX ISARRAF IN-NUQQAS TAL-MISSIER FIL-FAMILJA, MINHABBA SEPARAZZJONI U L-EFFETTI FUQ IT-TFAL?’ on this topic to the Parliamentary Social Affairs Committee 21st January 2009

you. I remember he used to phone me and I used to be out. He'd ask me 'where are you?' Go home! Go home!... If he were at home I wouldn't behave like this... What control... who? Nobody had control over me. My brother and I used to fight all the time, I used to tell him you're not my father, you're not interfering with I do... The only thing, my mother. But poor soul, she was always trying..."

There is a sense of **ambiguous loss (Sluzki, 2016)** of the father that emerges from this excerpt. It's like he is there and not there simultaneously. This ambiguity, nonetheless, pushes the family into a new dynamic which is sometimes deprived of celebrations, even at an extended family level. Her personal relationship to her father is now primarily based on telephone contact.

"Differenti meta ghandek lil missierek mieghek, ha taghmel affarijiet mieghu... kollox... meta ghandek lil missierek qieghed hemmhekk. Mhux mejjet! Mhux ghax mhux qieghed hemm imma fil-verità ma tista' taghmel xejn mieghu, fhimt. Jekk jasal Milied, jekk qabel konna niċcelebrawh flimkien eżempju anke n-nanna m'ghadhiex, ommu m'ghadhiex taghmilha l-ikla fil-Milied. Hafna affarijiet."

"Having your father with you is different, doing things together... everything...when your father's there. Not dead! Not that he's not there, but the truth is you can't do anything with him, you understand. At Christmas time, if before we used to celebrate it together even my grandmother she doesn't any more, his mother doesn't host Christmas lunch any more. A lot of things."

This woman's relationship with her father has changed drastically since his imprisonment. This comment comes across as a struggle for the desired emotional contact with the father. This woman feels deprived of the possibility of developing her relationship with her father in the 'right' way.

"...Mhux hajt imma... differenti hux... differenti... Inti ma tistax heqq ...Bniedem li ma tistax toqghod taghmel affarijiet mieghu... eżempju anke meta jiġi, fil-birthday jiġi hawn ... F'Novembru ġie hawn, Kellu l-birthday u ġie... Xorta... tarah u ma tistax, anke eżempju dejjem ...l-ewwel nies anke meta tmur il-vista hemm in-nies għassa. Jekk ġie hawn fil-birthday, kien hawn in-nies għassa, qisek anke ċerti affarijiet fhimt?"

"...Not a wall but...it's different...different...you cannot...A person that you cannot do things with...for example even when he comes, he comes here for birthdays... In November he was here, it was his birthday and he came...Still...u see him but you can't, for example it's always..firstly even when you go to visit guards are present. If he came here for his birthday, some guards were here, it's like even

certain things you understand?"

She continues in tears how she feels deprived of the possibility of connecting to her father and of time with him. This sense of deprivation continues along the incarceration period:

"Jiena lil missieri jekk ha mmur nghannqu, ha nghannqu darba fil-gingha biss u xorta mhux ser nghannqu bhalma nghannaq 'l ommi ezempju (tibki). Dik qisek ma ghandekx cans tkun ma' bniedem, il-h in (tibki), il-hin m'ghandekx il-hin, fhimt? Dejjem hemm minn huwa ghassa fuqek ukoll... U ghandhom ragun imma nsomma fhimt ni m'hemmx ghažla oħra."

"If I go hug my father, I will hug him once a week and still I won't hug him like I hug my mum for example (crying). That you don't get a chance to be with the person, time (crying), time, you don't have time, you understand? There's always somebody watching over you too... They're justified too but anyway you understood that there's no other choice."

The sense of estrangement the toddler experiences from the father is captured in this narrative of an observant mother who seems to vocalise the child's experience.

"...hu jipprova jkellel lil din fuq it-telefon, biex tidra lehnu, u nurihulha fuq il-mobile, u dan u ritratti... Ghax hi miskina mhux ma tafux ta', taghrfu, anki lehnu fuq it-telefon, saret taghrfu, anki kif immorru hemm, anki kif titfissed, maghna ma tantx hi mfissda, hu jaghraxha u hekk, hi toqghod titfissed u hu joqghod jaghraxa. Hi tghidx kemm titfissed mieghu. Imma ghadha, qisha mhux ma tafx min hu..."

"..he'll try to talk to her over the phone, so she gets used to his voice, and I show him to her on my mobile, and that and photos... Because poor thing it's not that she doesn't know him, she recognizes him, even his voice over the phone, she started to recognize him, even when we go there, even how she cuddles up to him, she doesn't cuddle as much with us, he tickles her, she cuddles up to him and he tickles her. She really cuddles up with him. But still, it's like she doesn't know who he is ..."

One wonders how the narrative being told to the child about his absent father influences him in the construction fatherhood, son-hood, and the construction and development of the relationship between father and son.

"Anki ž-žghir, 'qieghed far away fejn il-police'. Dan lahqu, kellu tliet snin meta daħal. Imma jaf li għalissa hu hemm irid joqghod, ghax dak kien pastaž. Issa aktar 'il quddiem tkun problema hu. Ghax hu anqas

jista jilghab, m'ghandhomx dik li jista' jilghab, hi ghadha zghira, ghadha ma tafx."

"Even the little one 'he's far away near the police'. He managed to be around him, he was three years of age when he went in. But now he knows that he has to stay there, because he was badly behaved. Now in future it will be a problem. Because he cannot play, they are not allowed that he can play, she is still very young, she doesn't know".

One also wonders how the habits and lifestyles one learns in prison during the serving of the term influence the eventual marital dynamics when the term is over and the prisoner returns home to his family.

"Il-bierah qalli kumbinazzjoni, qalli 'mhux se nkunu helwin jiena u int x'hin nohrog..., ghidtlu ghala? 'Ghax jien drajt innaddaf, drajt kollox ezatt, issa trid iżzomm kollox ezatt'..."

"He actually spoke to me about this yesterday, he told me 'we'll be really comical me and you when I get out", I asked him why? Because I got used to cleaning up, keeping everything in perfect order; now you have to keep everything in perfect order..."

Maintaining a relationship between a separated father and his two adult children in prison seems to become difficult over time. It seems that not visiting and talking about the past over the few visits, are important mechanisms for this man to protect himself from the pain of the situation. From the children's perspective they seem to want more contact with their father. This father has his two sons in prison. He explains how his relationship to them has changed radically and how he attempts to maintain it. The primary link between people seems to be the telephone.

"Nikellmu fuq it-telefon. Ġieli mort narahom. Imma issa ili ma mmur. Il-kbir staqsieni din il-ġimgha biex immur narahom. Ghidtlu li ha mmur... Ġieli joqogħdu jitekellmu fuq kif ghaddejin, x'jigri hemm ġew, kif konna u qabel, x'kienu jagħmlu. Ġieli jsemmu l-farm. Fuq il-passat li ghaddejna" (Jibda jibki bil-mod).

"We talk over the phone. Sometimes I went to visit. But now I haven't been in a long time. The eldest one asked me to visit them this week. I told him I'll be going...Sometimes they will talk about how they're doing, what happens in there, how it was before for us, what they used to do. Sometimes they mention the farm. About the past we shared (Here he starts crying silently)."

This daughter mentions a letter her father wrote to her, another effort at keeping relationships. Letter writing was in this case a way of communicating guilt and she perceived it as a way for her father to repair the damage he incurred

on the family.

“M’ilhux meta kitibli ittra tghidx kemm bkejt. Hu jaf li għamel... li għamel wegġghana... li għamel kisser lilna fhimt? Kisser lilna m’hemmx x’taġhmel... imma eżempju m’ilux kitibli, tghidx kemm bkejt veru. Vera li ċerta affarijiet... imma fl-istess hin għedtlu m’hemmx x’taġhmel. Xorta ha jibqa’ missieri.”

“Recently he wrote me a letter and I really cried. He knows that what he did...that what he did hurt us. That what he did devastated us you understand? He damaged us so badly nothing we can do about that... but for example lately he wrote to me, I really cried for real. It’s true that certain things...but at the same time I told him now what’s done is done. He will always be my father”.

This description portrays a **child’s attempt to keep her parents connected**. Her way of working to create a safety and stability in her only system is by consciously or unconsciously connecting the parents together, and connect them with the prison system by being nice to the wardens and to everyone else.

“...ehm taqbadna hekk ‘daddy... mama’ u toqghod thusna l-hin kollu anqas tieqaf. Imbagħad hu u sejjer thusu u tghidlu ajma dak il-wiċċ ... u noqghod ninkiha... Imbagħad, jitlaq, jidhol. ‘Daddy I love you, I love you Daddy... mwa mwa’. u hi titlaq tiġri. Kulhadd ihares lejha, l-priġunieri, kulhadd ihobbha eh, u l-gwardjani jafuha ta’ xahar hux, u jafu minn xiex għaddejt jien il-gwardjani...”

“... she will grab us like ‘daddy ... mummy’ and will shower us with kisses without stopping. Then when he’s about to leave she’ll kiss him and tell him that she loves his face... and I’ll tease her... Then he leaves, he goes in. ‘Daddy I love you, I love you Daddy ... mwa mwa’ and she runs away. Everybody will have their eyes on her; the prisoners, everybody loves her; the wardens have known her since she was a month old baby, the wardens know what I’ve been through.”

This father’s journey comes across as a long haul of drug rehabilitation programmes and prison visits plus other chores all surrounding his son who is again in prison. His relationship with him has changed and the man is now trying to relate to his son differently. For this father it continues to be difficult, painful and hard.

“...ghax kull darba kienet. Meta jmur Santa Maria u johrog jagħmel ftit u jerġa jiżgarra.. Jekk ikun San Blas l-istess jagħmel ftit u jerġa jiżgarra.. Ha noqoghdu nilaġhbu.. Heqq ... (ismu) irid jagħmel xi haġa. U hu għandu żmien imbagħad. Heqq ma rridx ikisser lili ukoll. Heqq jiena fejn stajt dejjem ngħinu u ġieli ngħid ha naqta’ line ta

ghax tibda tghejja ...⁹

“...it happened every time. When he’s at Santa Maria (drug rehab programme) and he leaves he’s ok for a while and then he’s off the rails again. If he’s at San Blas (drug rehab programme) same story he’s ok for a while and then he’s off the rails again. ..It’s become a game... Heq..(short pause). He needs to do something about it. And now he’s no longer a child. I don’t want him to ruin my life. When I could I always help him and sometimes I tell myself to draw the line because I started to feel tired of all this ...”.

PARTNERS¹⁰

This woman talks about her husband in prison with a great sense of loss. As she sees it, those who sent her husband in prison have shattered her family.

Mara: “Qabel ma sar l-każ kont bhal ma għedtlek. Kissruli familja. Kelli l-familja. Konna familja magħquda... konna... It-tifel hadha naqra bi kbira... lanqas naf ngħidlek sewwa... it-tifla... pereżempju ġieli ċċempillu jew hekk ta.”

Intervistatur: “Jiġifieri qabel qishom fil-bidu huma ma kellhomx kuntatt miegħu?”

Mara: “Le le dejjem kellhom kuntatt miegħu... imma mhux f’dak is-sens bhal ma konna qabel. Qed tifhem? L-affarijiet imbidlu hafna bejniatna. Ir-relazzjoni ġiet affettwata... Kif ha naqbad ngħidlek, affarijiet li ma kontx nistennihom, jiena qatt ma bsart li kelli nerga’ ngħaddi minn dawn l-affarijiet... Heqq bhala koppja dejjem konna orrajt ghax ahna minn dejjem konna orrajt... Ghax meta tmur tarah, mhux ser toqgħod... jew titkellem fuq it-tfal, sewwa? Xi trid ngħidlek jiena. Hemm affarijiet fir-relazzjoni waqfu jew naqsu ...”.

Woman: “It was before the incident happened like I told you. They tore my family apart. I had a family. We were a united family...we were... Our son took it quite badly... I can’t tell you properly...our daughter... for example sometimes she phones him and so on. Interviewer: “That means that in the beginning they were not in contact with him?”

Woman: “No no they were always in contact with him... but in the sense not like we were before. Do you understand? Things changed a lot between us. Our relationship was affected...How can I explain, things I never expected, I never thought I would have to go through these things again... As a couple ok because as a couple it was always ok between us Because you do visit, you won’t stay... or talk about the children

⁹This is the experience of many problem drug users and families. Do drug rehabilitation programmes need to improve?

¹⁰Decline in romantic love increases the risk of marital breakdown. This adds to the spiral of poverty, loneliness, mental health problems and possibly suicide.

you understand? What am I trying to tell you? When it comes to the relationship certain things stopped or lessened ...”.

There are changes in intimate relationships which have been experienced as decline in romantic feelings. This woman describes how her romantic feelings towards her partner in prison have ‘died’ or dwindled. What remains from her side is respect.

Intervivistatur: “ *...u x’impatt qisu halliet fuq ir-relazzjoni ta’ bejnietkom il-fatt li inti l-persuna mhux qed taraha jew mhux kuljum qiegħda prezenti, taffettwa l-intimità u x’impatt halliet fuq ir-relazzjoni?”*

Sieħba: “*Bħala feelings qisek tibda ... tmut ... tibred. Mhux tibred, qisek tmur naqra lura. Ghax inti qisek ma jibqa’ xejn ġo fik. Inti kull ma tibda ssir lejn il-persuna tirrispettah. Ma tibqax bħal qabel. Imbagħad ahna konna erbgħa u għoxrin siegħa flimkien. Ahna anki nahdmu flimkien konna. Il-fatt li ma jkollniex hin biżżejjed flimkien... qisek ma jkollokx çans inti miegħu.*

Interviewer: “*...and what impact did the fact that you are not seeing the person, or is not present on a daily basis have on your relationship, does it negatively impinge on intimacy and what impact did it have on the relationship?”*

Partner: “*When it comes to feelings it’s like they start...dying...they fade. Not fading, but it is a set back. Because it’s like you have a void inside. All you start feeling towards the person is respect. You don’t remain the same. We used to spend twenty-four hours a day together. We even used to work together. The fact that we don’t have enough time together...it’s like you don’t get a chance to be with him.*

Another woman expressed the same experience of lowering of romantic feelings:

“...jiena ha ngħidlek li nhoss! Kulhadd iddispjaçih. Affettwat naqra, għax mela l-affarijiet hekk. Ir-relazzjoni nbidlet... Tbegħdna... Hafna iva”.

“...let me tell you how I feel! Everybody’s sorry. It did affect a bit, because things don’t work like that. The relationship changed...we drifted apart...a lot yes”.

Another woman vividly depicts the process of decline in romantic feelings. This excerpt highlights an important difference in experience between the locked partner and the free partner. Almost all participating women who have an important relationship with a locked partner reported a decline in their feelings towards their partner in prison:

“Għall-bidu konna il-ħin kollu nibagħtu l-ittri. Ittri biss. Issa eżempju wasal il-valentine, jien lanqas tajtu kartolina għax qisni hekk ... Imma hu tani u tghidx kemm qalali fuqha għax tani kartolina u jien ma tajtux (bid-dahqa)... u biex inpatihielu xtrajtlu flokk. Fhimtni qisu jiġifieri ... Eżempju anke dil-ġimgħa għandu l-birthday ma xtrajtlux kartolina fhimtni.”

“At the beginning we used to send each other letters all the time. Now for example it was Valentine’s, I didn’t give him a card because I felt like...But he gave me one and really had a go at me because he gave me a card and I didn’t give him one (laughing)..and to make up for it I bought him a jumper. So can you understand...For example this week it’s his birthday and I didn’t get him a card you understand.”

The mechanism by which this change happens is pictured in the way she, from the outside, constructs his life in prison, what he goes through.

“...Pereżempju qabel, qabel jekk kien ikolli xi ngħid, ha ngħidilu hekk ... wiċċ imb’wiċċ. Issa mhux immur is-sibt eżempju u ngħidilu, le... inkun irrid ngħidilu minn fuq it-telefown. Qisni mort xi naqra lura minn xi haġa. Qisni nibża’ li ser jinbidel miegħi. Nibda ngħid minn jaf xi ġralu hemm ġew u nehel miegħu jien... fhimtni? Allura qisni noqghod naqra lura.

“..For example before, before when we’d have an argument, let’s call it that...face to face. Now it’s not like I visit on Saturday and I tell him...I have to tell him over the phone. It’s like I deteriorated in some sense. It’s like I’m scared he’ll change in how he is with me. I start telling myself who knows what he’s been through in there, and I get to bear the brunt of it...you understand? So it’s like I keep a step back.”

This might appear slightly odd as an experience. Yet it is apparently quite a common one. This young woman’s experience of the love of her life being imprisoned just one month after meeting him provides a picture of the boundary-lessness (or one might say irrationality) of love. Her experience is confirmed by the in-laws who were present for the interviews.

Tfajla: “Jien kont ili nafu xahar biss qabel ma daħal il-ħabs. Imma xorta bqajt immur narah.”

Omm: “Dejjem kienet tiġi tarah. Darbtejn fil-ġimgħa. U taf fejn toqghod din hu?!”

Missier: (isemmi r-rahal fejn toqghod li xejn ma hu faċli li minnu tasal il-ħabs).

Tfajla: “Imma issa ok ta. Aċċetatha. Xorta kont bqajt immur narah darbtejn f’ġimgħa.”

Missier: *“Iii missha le. Darbtejn f’gimgha. L-erbgha u s-sibt.”*

Omm: *“Anki ghal saghtejn... u ma ssuqx dik! Bqajna mbellhin ahna wkoll.”*

Girlfriend: *“I’d only known him for a month before he went to prison. But I still keep visiting him.”*

Mum: *“She never missed a visit. Twice a week. And do you know where she lives?!”*

Dad: *(mentions a local village from which it’s certainly not convenient to travel to prison).*

Girlfriend: *“But now it’s ok. It’s accepted. I still kept on visiting him twice a week.”*

Dad: *“She sure does... Twice a week. Wednesday and Saturday.*

Mum: *“Even if just for two hours...and she doesn’t drive! Even we were astonished at this.”*

This woman continues with her sense of obligation towards this man who is in prison for quite some time. She seems to feel she has to continue to negotiate her life with him. This woman becomes even concerned about what underwear to wear for the visits.

“...pereżempju nixtri xi haġa, xi flokk... nghid issa nilbsu s-Sibt (tidhaq) jew għall-extended ha. Inhobb nistenna sakemm jasal dak iż-żmien biex nilbsu. Jew pereżempju jċempilli u jghidli ‘x’ser tilbes għall-extended?’ (tidhaq) trid tqis li dawn ser ifittxuli. Xi kultant anke bhala underwear trid toqghod naqra (tidhaq) taf kif... Tiġi xi wahda tqallibli...”

“... for example I buy something, a sweater, I’ll say to myself I’ll wear it on Saturday (laughing) or for the extended visit. I like waiting for that moment to wear it. Or for example he will call and ask me ‘What shall you wear for the extended visit?’ (laughing) You need to keep in mind that I will be searched. Sometimes even when it comes to underwear you need to be a little (laughing) you know... Maybe of one them will rummage through my stuff...”

SIBLINGS

For the family members, there are problems which come across as stronger and harder to digest than the prison term. This sister of a drug addict finds it difficult to relate to her brother who has a serious drug problem. Implied in her narrative is the hope that the way she treats him is going to help him change for the better.

“... Imma hu jċempel u jghidli ‘għalfejn mhux qed tkellimni?’ (jirreferi għal oħtu). Nghidlu ‘kif tridha tkellmek meta tarak hekk!’ Heqq ...

Nghidlu ‘ghalhekk ma tkellmekx’... Imbagħad ma jistaqsini aktar. Ifhem kuntatt hemm għax issa ċċempilu (ommu), ġieli nkellmu. Imma qabel meta jkun hekk (taħt l-effett tad-drogi) jien nipprova nevitah... L-ewwel nett ma nkunx qed nitkellem ma’ hija nkun qed nitkellem ma’ bniedem ieħor u ma jkunx qed jirraġuna.”

“Sometimes he tells me ‘why is she not talking to me?’ (referring to his sister). I reply ‘you expect her to talk to you when she sees you in this state!’...I tell him ‘that’s why she’s not talking to you’... Then he won’t ask again. Listen there is contact because now when she calls him (the mother), sometimes I’ll speak to him. But before when he used to be like that (under the influence of drugs) I tried to avoid him... First of all I wouldn’t have been talking to my brother I would have been talking to somebody else who is not reasoning properly.”

This second statement from the same sister seems to address the contradiction that is still unresolved. On the one hand she says she doesn’t want to see him like that and on the other she supports him financially.

“Qatt ma qalli biex immur narah. Mhux ha naqbad u mmur... Jiena hu jrid jghidli, jien ma mmurx. Iċċempilli jghidli jekk hux orrajt u nara x’għandu bżonn ... Il-ħwejjeġ naħsilhomlu u nnizilhomlu. Issa ordna l-frott u jghidli ixttrili din u ekk... Li nista’ ngħin jien imma mbagħad mhux aktar milli nista’. Jien nghidlu ‘jekk ikolli nixtrilek, jekk ma jkollix issaporti u nixtrilek darb’ohra.”

“He never asked me to visit him. I won’t just go and visit... He has to ask me, I don’t go. He calls me to tell me if he’s ok and I’ll see what he needs... I wash his laundry and take them to him...Now he orders fruit and asks me to buy this and that... I will help as much as I can but I won’t stretch myself beyond my limit. I tell him, When I have the money I will buy you stuff, if I don’t you have to bear with it and I’ll buy you next time.”

VISITS

Visits seem to determine the structure of how visitors and prisoners spend their time together. People develop patterns around the time available to accommodate all members of the family. Extended visits offer more space for discussing things the couple won’t otherwise discuss. Telephone conversations seem to offer another space for this couple in particular to discuss matters they would otherwise not have the forum for. She finds this ‘comforting’.¹¹ Larger families tend to share

¹¹‘Mistrieħ’ also has some sexual connotations in Maltese and refers to orgasmic release. A discourse analysis may help in understanding the deeper and metaphorical meaning of the term. During the extended visits couples have the possibility of physical contact and they can also have sex together as the meeting is private and no prison wardens or guards are present.

less one to one time of course.

“...eżempju illum il-vista. Bhal-lum għamiltha kif stajt is-shiha, joqogh du hemm magħna (tirreferi għall-membri l-oħra tal-familja), jien inkun hemm ukoll, u l-aħħar kwarta johorgu u nkunu jiena u hu, anki t-tifla jieħdu, biex jien naf, inkunu nistgħtu nitkellmu jien u hu... jien naf... kif int?, qisu affarijiet ta’ bejnietek hux. Il-bieraħ kelli l-extended, allura dik qisek tgħid dak li ma tgħidx fil-vista normali. Ghax hemmhekk jibdw jgħuk hsibijiet fl-extended, hekk ngħidilhom, nibdw nitkellmu u npaċpċu, qisna ilna hafna ma naraw lil xulxin, issa aħna nċemplu lil xulxin darbtejn kuljum, jgħifieri anki għieli tlieta, skont il-ħin li jagħtu u hekk. U pereżempju bhal bieraħ, niftħu hafna qisna topics, li għieli anki fuq it-telefon ma tkunx tista’ titkellimhom, ta’ affarijiet anki bejnietna u hekk hu, allura dik... hekk... isserrhek. Veru darba fix-xahar, imma tistrieħ.”

“...for example today we can visit. Today I spent the full one as best as I could, they stay there with us (referring to other members of his family), I’m also there and for the last fifteen minutes they leave the room, they take our daughter too, so I don’t know, we can talk me and him...I don’t know... how are you?...sort of issues that are ours.... Yesterday I had the extended visit, so you can sort of say the things you can’t say during the visit. Because during the extended visit you start having certain thoughts, that’s how I describe it, we start talking and chattering, like we haven’t seen each other in a long time, now we phone each other twice a day, sometimes even three times, according to the time they’re given and so on. And for example like yesterday we’ll talk about various topics, that sometimes you can’t really discuss over the phone, even couple stuff, and so on... so that offers some relief. It’s true it’s only once a month, but it provides relief.”

Lack of privacy emerged as a trademark of visits. Maintaining the boundaries of the relationship becomes difficult and relationships remain at a social level. Maintaining ..an intimate level of relationship becomes definitely difficult with guards overhearing the conversation.

“Fil-vista jien u hu nkunu fuq il-mejda imma ma tafx ta’ madwarek x’ikunu qed jissemmaw, ċertu affarijiet ma tkunx tista’ tgħidhom. Allura hemm inhossni komda nitkellem? Fuq it-telefon ċertu affarijiet, anki personali, mhux se tgħidhom. Anki huma, kultant jirrekordjaw it-telefonati, ma tmurx tgħid xi haġa, anki darba ktibtu ittra, kont hawnhekk kwietta u qgħadt niktiblu ittra, qalli tergax tiktibli, ghax joqghodu jaqrawha. Thossha, Kif ithuielek jew jidhqu f’wiċċek, jew jibdw jitnejku bik, hi naqra kerha hu? Orrajt, għandhom kull dritt

jaqrawha, ghax ma jkunux jafu, jien orrajt baghtha innocèntiment, imma hawn min ma jibghathiex hekk”.

“During visits it’s me and him around a table but you wouldn’t really know who’s overhearing, you can’t really say certain things. So there would I feel comfortable talking? Over the phone certain things, even personal stuff, you’re not going to say them. Even they, sometimes record phone calls, so you need to be careful what you say, once I wrote him a letter, I was here and I wrote him a letter, he told me don’t write me a letter again, because they’ll read it. It hurts, how they tell you stuff, or they laugh directly in your face, or they start ridiculing you, it’s awful... Ok, they have a right to read it, because they can’t be sure, I sent it innocently, but some people will send it with a different intention.”

“Ma tantx ikollna hin waqt il-visits biex nidhaddtu flimkien. Kien ikun jixtieq joqghod naqra ohra hin maghna. Siegha wahda hux. Barra minn hekk joqoghdu maghna fuq mejda ... mhux wehidna nkunu nitkellmu.”

“During visits there really isn’t that much time to discuss issues. He would wish to spend some more time with us. An hour. And on top of everything they sit with us around a table...we’re not alone when we talk.”

Maintaining a relationship emerges as a difficult feat for the prisoner and his family. Time is limited, visits are limited, and this effects the children and the couple’s marital relationship. Most of the time is taken up by the children’s needs to be with their father. The remaining time is for them as husband and wife. Family friendly measures are needed desperately, even to safeguard families from breaking down.

“Kif trid iżżomm relazzjoni? ...extended visits biss hux. Eżempju s-Sibt jien noqghod bil-qieghda fuq il-bank u hemm lanqas naghti każ. Ghax hemm dawn, it-tfal. L-ewwel il-hin ghalihom. Ġieli nintefa hdejh bil-kemm ihalluni nbusu ghax qishom id-dinja tieghu ghalihom... imbaghad l-extended visits l-iktar li nitkellmu fhimtni. Fuq it-telefon filghaxija qisni nhallih ghalihom (ghat-tfal). Dan (it-tifel) il-hin kollu jrid ikellmu. Imma lanqas l-extended visits mhu biżżejjed... u żgur li mhux biżżejjed bilkemm ... U li jien kontriha hafna, hafna, hafna li l-extended visits filghaxija. Dik misshom jaghmluha filghodu. Issa min ma jkollux min iżommlu t-tfal? Huma b’hekk jtkissru. Ċertu familji b’hekk jtkissru. Din missha taghmililhom filghodu u jekk huma joqoghdu bil-ghaqal tghid almenu ittih tnejn f’xahar. U filghodu mela filghaxija.”

“How are you expected to maintain a relationship?...Extended visits

only. For example on Saturday I sit on a bench and I don't mind at all. Because there's the children. First they get their time. Sometimes I sit next to him I'm scarcely allowed to kiss him because he's their world...and then it's during the extended visits that we get to talk. I leave the evening phone call for them (for the children), He (son) wants to talk to him all the time. But even the extended visits are not enough... *of course they're not enough you don't even...I am strongly, strongly against it that the extended visits take place in the evening. They should take place in the morning. What about who can't get help with looking after the kids? That's why relationships get ruined. That's how certain families get shattered. They should occur in the mornings and if they're compliant they get at least two a month. And in the morning not in the evening."*

Difficulties in maintaining a relationship through visits continues to emerge strongly in this excerpt:

Tfajla: *"Hemm bżonn aktar hin waqt il-visits... siegħa f'it wisq. U anki li tmur jumejn biss u darba fix-xahar sagħtejn... f'it wisq. Imbagħad fi tlett kwarti x'ha tghid. Ommu, missieru, hutu. Imbagħad nibqa naqra miegħu jiena. M'hemmx hin biżżejjed. Allura nitqassmu. Kulhadd ikun irid ikellmu naqra."*

Omm: *"Imbagħad ahna konna noħroġu qabel biex toqghod naqra hi. Biex tkompli miegħu. Tiġi minn hemm fuq. Trid tqis kollox hux fid-dinja. Konna noqogħdu barra. Tidħol wahda u noħroġ jien per każu. Konna nkunu hafna. It-tfal (ħutu) kienu jkunu jridu jiġu jarawh."*

Girlfriend: *Visits need to be longer...an hour is too little. And even that you can visit on two days and once a month you get two hours...it's too little. What can you really say in forty-five minutes? His mother, his father, his siblings. Then towards the end I get a little time with him by ourselves. There isn't enough time. So we share the time. Everybody wants to talk to him for a while."*

Mother: *"We used to leave a bit earlier so she can have some time with him. To relate to him. She comes from far away. You need to keep everything in mind. We'd wait outside. Someone goes in and and I leave for example. We'd be a big number. His siblings would want to come and visit."*

Referring to the extended visit where physical contact with the prisoner is possible, this woman describes how unnatural and uncomfortable she feels about it. An intimate relationship is more than just sex for this woman. To survive these feelings of unnaturalness and discomfort she packs them in the context of respect.

“...ghandek dawk is-satghejn... qisek ma tghidx pereżempju... Mhux naturali. Qisek ta bilfors għalhekk trid tmur u dik ma nħossnix komda biha. Niehu qatgħa għax tkun kważi ilek ġurnata taħsel, tnaddaf imbagħad trid tmur hemm bilfors għalhekk. Dik vera nħossha jien. Erhila... Qisek mhux dejjem... Għax jarani għajjiena... Ezempju kont ma niflahx ix-xahar l-ieħor u qalli ‘tigix’, u xorta mort. Jigifieri hu jirrispettani. Kieku ma jirrispettanix kieku jaqbad u ma jqis xejn. Fhimtni? Allura jiena dak għalija huwa punt. Li jien mhux għalhekk biss qieghda... vera hemm ir-rispett.”

“...you have those two hours...you can’t really for example...It’s not natural. It’s like forced, you’re going for that and I’m not comfortable with it. I almost resent it, you’ve been washing up the whole day, cleaning then you go there for that if you want to or not. That really upsets me. Not that always...because he would tell I’m tired...For example last month I was unwell and he told me ‘don’t come’ and I went just the same. He does respect me. If he didn’t respect me he’d just go ahead. Do you understand? So for me that’s valuable. That I’m not just there for that. There’s real respect.”

Visits time re-emerge as very limited

“...dawk it-tliet kwarti darbtejn fil-ġimgha... ismagħni tmur tarah ma jkollokx çans tittkellem. Anki fuq it-telefon m’intix ser tghid ċertu affurijiet. Heqq qed tifhem għax ikunu recorded... Imma tkun tixtieq tghidlu aktar!”

“... those forty-five minutes twice a week...you visit but you don’t get an opportunity to talk. Even over the phone you’re not going to say certain things. You understand they’re recorded...But you’d wish to tell him more!”

Apparently, during visits, visitors cannot touch or hug prisoners. Close physical contact is perceived as dangerous in some ways.

“Hemm ġew ma tistax tghannqu kemm trid, ma tistax... Ma tistax, għax ġieli noqgħod hekk jiena, qalli tella jdejk hawn. Ma tistax għax ikollhom l-camera u jekk pereżempju, għax kien hemm waħda ġiet tara lil missierha u bdiet tghannqu, qalilha oqgħod kwjeta. Għax mal-ewwel qisna, għax umbagħad meta beda jghidilha oqgħod kwjeta... ehh tghidx kemm jghiduli xorti... qed tifhem, le ma tistax.”

“In there you can’t hug him as much as you would like to...You can’t because sometimes I sit like this, he told me put your hands here. You can’t because they have a camera and if for example, because there was a woman who came to visit her father and she was hugging him, he

told her to be quiet. Because straight away, because then when he was telling her to be quiet...I've been told lots of things, you understand, no you can't."

There are those prisoners whose families decide to give them their back. What this woman recounts is how her boyfriend's **family is excluding him** completely from their lives. She is pregnant with his baby and they don't show any interest neither in him nor in her or the baby she is carrying.

"...U ejja!! Mara b'tarbija qed tistennieh. Lanqas iċemplu biex jaraw kif inhi t-tarbija tiegħu. Lanqas imorru jarawh jew iċemplulu, xejn... Xejn, kollox qattgħulu li halla għandhom. Il-ħwejjeġ kollha. Kelli nixtrilu jien kollox ġdid. Ma jridux jafu bih."

"... Come on! A woman and a baby are waiting for him. They don't even phone to see how his baby's doing. They don't visit him or phone, nothing...Nothing, they tore up all the belongings he had at their house. All his clothes, I had to buy him everything all anew. They don't want to have anything to do with him."

NEOGITATING A PARENTAL RELATIONSHIP

Negotiating a parental relationship with one parent in prison emerges as a process imbued with difficulties. This woman had separated from her husband before he went to prison. She keeps in touch with him to inform him about the children.

"Xorta nikkomunikaw kuljum fuq it-tfal anke bhala parents day, nagħtih il-feedback x'inhu jiġri, u jekk tiġri xi haġa hażina ..."

"We still communicate everyday about the children, even things like Parents' Day, I'll pass him feedback about what's happening and if something bad happens..."

The following excerpt is about communicating to the children about their father in prison (a theme already mentioned under Concerns above). This woman negotiates with her husband a way that absolves her from the responsibility of having to tell the children about their father's story. She's clear about it.

"Ifhem, hemm ċertu kliem li qisna bdejna, imma rrid nimxi pass pass. Ma rridx inkun jiena. Nixtieq li jgħidilhom hu. Ma rridx nidh ol fiha għax ma nhossnix li ... Jgħidilhom hu!! Jsib il-ħin tiegħu u l-ħin tagħhom u jgħidilhom hu għax din hija affari li hu u huma jridu jtkellmu. Għax ikollha xi mistoqsijiet tgħidhom lilu u mhux tgħidhom lili. Nixtieq aktar li ... Tkellimniha kemm-il darba jiġifieri... naf kif għandna nimxu fuqha... Meta wehel għidtlu jagħmilli żewġ ittri wahda għalih (it-tifel tiegħu) u wahda għaliha (it-tifla)

biex meta jkunu t'età biżżejjed. Infatti għidtlu jgħidilhom jagħmlulu wkoll timbru fuqha u ssiġillata b'kollox... Ikollhom l-età li hu jkun irid, jiena nagħtihomlom. Jiena rrid nohroġ minnha."

"Let me tell yo, there are certain words like we kind of started, but I need to take it step by step. I don't want to be the one. I wish that he tells them himself. I don't want to get involved because I don't feel that.. He has to tell them!! He finds a time that suits him and them and he has to tell them because this is his business and they need to talk. Because if she has questions she asks him and not me. I would like that there's more... We've spoken about this many a time...we know how we should tackle it..When he got the prison term I asked him to write two letters, one for him (for their son) and one for her (for their daughter) so when they're old enough...In fact I told him to tell them to stamp it and seal it...when he thinks they're old enough, I'll give them to them. I don't want to be part of it."

Relationship maintenance with extended family of the children, for this unmarried partner of a person in prisoner, is a must for the children. Her narrative is a healing one too, as she reframes her experience by the mirror metaphor.

"Mhux daqshekk għax kif għidtlek aħna bqajna bil-kommunikazzjoni. Jien mhux li naqta' l-kommunikazzjoni. Jekk iridu jmorru għand iż-żijiet (hut ir-raġel) dejjem marru. Allura s'ssa l-hajja baqgħet dejjem għaddeja. Għax xi kultant il-hajja ta' nies li jkunu miżmuma hemm ġew ma tibqax għaddeja għax ikun hemm l-ulied ma jhalluhomx imorru jarawhom, hafna piki, il-familja tagħhom ma jarawhomx. Issa għamel x'għamel, seta qatel volontarjament hu x'inhu missierhom hu, ma tistax thassru bil-gomma. Jiġifieri inutli toqgħod tghid... Jiena dejjem ngħidilhom 'għandkom mera jien dejjem hekk ngħidilhom. Ngħidilhom 'użaw dawn l-affarijiet bħala mera għax xi kultant minn dawn l-affarijiet johroġ il-ġid għax jien jekk nara lil missieri l-ħabs jien nipprova biex ma mmurx hemm."

"Not so much because as I told we kept communicating. I won't just cut off communication like that. If they want to visit their aunts and uncles (their father's siblings) they always went. So it's like life went on. Because sometimes the life of those in there doesn't go on because children are not allowed to visit, a lot of piques, their family doesn't visit. Now whatever he did, even if he committed a murder voluntarily, he will always be their father, you cannot rub that off with an eraser. No it's useless saying... I always tell them 'you have a mirror', that's what I tell them, I tell them use these things as a mirror because sometimes good things happen as a result because if I see my father in prison I will

try not to end up there myself.”

This narrative of the same partner above underlines the existing difference and conflict existing between herself and his family.

“...iċempilhom darbtejn kuljum lit-tfal. Eh, hekk għidlu. Xemx u xita rrid immur. Immorru darba fil-ġimgħa. Nhar ta’ Sibt. Ghax għandu ġurnata fil-ġimgħa jmorru l-mamà tiegħu u l-familja tiegħu u ġurnata għalina.”

“...he calls the children twice daily. Eh, try telling him that. Whatever the weather I have to go. We go once a week. On a Saturday. Because there’s a day a week his mother and family visit and on the other day we do.”

This woman speaks about the child’s relationship to her father. She depicts a man’s effort to retain his sense of fatherhood while serving a sentence and the child’s attempts to maintain a relationship with the father. This excerpt also depicts parental efforts at negotiating their parenthood. Her criticism to the system comes from a resonant sense of desperation.

“Id-distanza affettwatu. Anke pereżempju tal-Christmas ikollhom xi concert, u jkollhom xi DVD, jgħidli ‘d-DVD ixtrih’. Ikun xi €15 d-DVD biex kull ma jkun hemm xi kwarta biss tagħhom. Anki ritratti!! Kull ritratt nixtri ... Eżempju kull xahar indaħhalu mazz ritratti biex jarahom... Ġieli anki xi photocopies tal-homework ikolli nehodlu! Ghax hi għalihom (għat-tfal) hafna u għal din (it-tifla) aktar u aktar hafna u jien għalija hafna wkoll li pereżempju s-Sibt, vera tliet kwarti, imqar hames minuti daħallha pitazz u lapes u għamlet kwarta miegħu homework!! Din x’għamlet? Dawn affarijiet ...ċučati li hemm bżonn ibiddluhom hemm ġew. Affarijiet żgħar dawn. Ghax huma b’hekk imbagħad qishom jiddispraw minn ġewwa. Ghax tant ikun iddisprat li anki per eżempju meta jċempel tinduna ... ‘x’int tagħmel?’ ngħidlu. Jgħidli ‘xejn’... Xejn kif? Xejn x’jiġifieri? Hemm hafna affarijiet x’jistgħu jagħmlu u jridu jhegġgħom biex huma jithegġu.”

“The distance effected him negatively. Even for example at Christmas they have a concert, and they have a DVD, he’ll tell me ‘buy the DVD’. The DVD would cost around Eur 15 to only see them for fifteen minutes. Even photos!! He wants me to get every photo...For example every month I take in a bundle of photos for him to see... Sometimes even photocopies of their homework! He wants to help her with homework... It would be much better for the children, for my daughter and all the more for me if for example on a Saturday, it’s true it’s only forty-five minutes but at least for five minutes allow a copybook and a pencil and she’ll do fifteen minutes worth of homework with him! What did

she do? These things, petty stuff that need to change in there. Small things. Because that's why they break down from the inside. He'll be so distraught that even for example when he phones you can tell. I'll ask him 'what are you doing?' He tells me 'nothing'. Nothing? What do you mean nothing? There's lots of things they could be doing but they need to motivate them for them to be motivated."

THE NARRATIVE THAT HEALS

In their own right relatives choose ways of healing from the trauma of having someone in the family in prison. This theme emerges as a struggle, personal and familial, to both accept the shame associated with prison and at times the shame associated with the crime. Throughout the interviews there was a total silence about victims of their dear one's crimes. The healing process on the one hand emerges as a very personal process at times determined by relational stances taken. In itself this denotes loneliness and isolation. There also emerges a kind of family trend in healing processes whereby different family members use the same mechanism in their healing process. The narratives that heal emerge as clearer and as more consistent than the incoherent narratives that keep family members stuck for years on end. Those who accept the crime are more likely to have a clearer narrative that heals. Healing or not, the 'stain' of the crime and consequent imprisonment seems to remain ... forever.

Accepting, in fact, emerges as an effective way of dealing with the pain and suffering. In this particular case the locked person himself admits his crime to his daughter who still wanted to believe her father was innocent. After that, they continue to process the trauma alone and in silence.

Tifla: "Hu ammetta... ammetta. Għadni niftakru meta qed jgħid lilna li vera fhimt... meta kienu baġtuh, dakinhar meta żammewh hemmhekk imbaġhad kienu baġtuh qalilna li vera għax aħna... tibqa' tghid li mhux vera fhimt. Jgħidilna talli għamilt irrid inhallas, fhimt?"

Intervistatur: "U ġieli jitkellem fuq l-esperjenza?"

Tifla: "Fuq għalfejn qiegħed hemm gew? Lanqas naħseb."

Daughter: "He owned up, he owned up. I still remember when he explained to us and I really understood...when they sent him, that day when they detained him there and then they sent him and he told us it's true because we...you keep telling yourself that what you understood is not true. He tells us I need to pay for what I did, you understand."

Interviewer : "Does he ever talk about the experience?"

Daughter: "About why he's in there? ... I don't think so."

In her attempt to accept the fact that her son has multiple problems with drugs

and crime, this mother shares with the interviewer her doubt about the upbringing she gave her son. She is stuck in her attempt to find the cause of his problems.¹²

“...u kultant nibda ngħid imma jiena ma ħabbejtux biżżejjed? Għal x’hiex ġara hekk... għal x’hiex? (tibki).”

“...*Sometimes I start telling myself that maybe I didn’t love him enough? Why did this happen...why? (she cries).*”

Accepting and then looking forward emerges as an effective way of perceived healing and leaving the past behind you for this father.

“Ifihmni fil-ħajja dejjem trid thares ’il quddiem. Issa inutli toqghod tghid għax għamel hekk u għax għamel hekk għax mintix se terġa’ ġġib il-passat, għax kieku kulhadd hekk jagħmel. Nimmagina li anki hu kieku hekk jagħmel. Allura trid qisek thares ’il quddiem. Jekk tkellmu trid ma toqghodx issemmi l-istess affarijiet. Dejjem tghid “u iva bilmod tghaddi” ma tistax thares lura trid thares ’il quddiem hux.”

“Today in life you need to look forward. It’s useless to say because he did this and why did he do that because you’re not going to get the past back, because if it were so everybody would do it. I imagine that even he would do that. So you have to look forward. If you talk to him you need to not mention the same things. You need to say ‘slowly it will be over’ and you can’t look back, you need to look forward.”

The process of healing also gets the opposite reactions from relatives. Some accentuate the healing process by denying the crime committed by their dear one.¹³ Such denial emerges in different ways. There were many who framed it as God’s will:

“Ha ngħidlek... ħa nkun onesta miegħek. Xi kultant mhux nirringrazzja l-Mulej... li ġara hekk, le. Ejja ngħid nirringrazzja l-Mulej ukoll għax hu hekk ried speċi ta.”

“Let me tell you...I’ll be honest with you. Sometimes not that I thank our Lord that this happened, no. I’ll say let’s be thankful to the Lord because this was kind of his will.”

“Xi kultant ngħid Alla ried hekk. Imma nsomma, u hekk hu. Alla ried hekk għax hu jista’ kollox.”

“At times I tell myself that this was God’s will. But then, that’s how it is.

¹²This is a very common error with families. The search for the cause often keeps people and families stuck in trying to understand the un-understandable. This perpetuates the problem and deviates attention from possible solutions. This cycle can only be broken by psychotherapeutic intervention.

¹³Denial in this case entails a psychological attempt at keeping one’s construct of the other intact and unmarred by negative constructions. Children and loved ones often undergo this process of denying someone’s ill-doing in order to keep one’s construction of that person intact. Changing one’s construction of the other by accepting the crime requires a complex process of accepting the person as one really is. Idealization and denigration are difficult cohabitants especially when the person involved is someone we love dearly.

God wanted it this way because He's all mighty."

Others attempt healing through continuous conscious denial that someone they love is in prison for fourteen years. This woman made a child with this man before he entered prison believing he was going to go free in spite of him assuring her that he was going to go in.

"...b'kollox erbatax-il sena nqatghatlu. Jiena hassejtha hafna. Jien ma stennejtux li ser jehel. Ghax hekk nghidlu. Li kieku konna nafu li ser jehel kieku ma nahsibx li kont naghmel ... Qisek... Hu kien dejjem jippreparani ghaliha imma jiena qisni qatt ma... Le m'acçetajthiex jien. Ghadni s'issa kultant nghid li mhux vera. Fhimtni. Ghax qisek ma tniżżilhiex."

"...in all he got fourteen years. I was devastated. I didn't expect him to get a prison sentence. That's what I tell him. Had I known he would have got a prison sentence I don't think I would have...Like...He was always preparing me for it but I kind of never.... No I haven't accepted it. Till today I sometimes tell myself it's not true. Can you understand. Because you can never swallow this bitter pill."

Denial also takes the form of generalizing.

"Le mieghi kieku orrajt orrajt. M'ghandhomx ghalxiex jitkażaw hux? Kulhadd illum fil-familja ghandu lil xi hadd jew iehor li ... rajt nies ta' miljunarji jien li hargilhom tifel... Kulhadd ghandu xi haġa."

"With me he's ok, ok. Why should they be judgemental and shaming? In all families there's somebody or another that...I know of millionaire families that had a son...Everybody has one thing or another."

Philosophizing and intellectualizing emerge as another attempt to heal oneself from the pain imprisonment brings. There's also a hint of justification about the brain being weak and unable to distinguish between good and bad.

"...le le le fid-dinja kulhadd hażin u kulhadd tajjeb. M'hawn hadd min hu tajjeb biss u m'hawn hadd minn hu hażin biss. Kemm inti dgħajjef kemm le ... għax hawn min hu dgħajjef hux ... u hawn min ma jafx jgħid le ... allura le naħseb mhux għax il-bniedem ikun hażin, tagħmel għażla hażina dak il-ħin ... Il-moħħ dak il-ħin ma jkunx qed jaħdem tajjeb, għax jien jekk naf li ser nisraq u ninqabad allura ma mmurx biex żgur ma mmurx il-ħabs."

"...No, no, no on earth everybody is bad and everybody's good. There's nobody who's all good and there's nobody who's all bad. It depends on how weak you are... Because there's persons that are weak... There are people who don't know how to say no..So no I don't think that a human

being is bad, he makes a bad choice at that point in time... the brain at that time is not functioning properly, because if I know that if I'm involved in a burglary and could get caught, I won't get involved so that I don't go to prison."

Some attempted to heal by minimizing the committed offense. As if to say 'he's not capable of doing such harm' or 'he was not aware of doing so much harm'. In short, it was not his fault that he committed whatever he committed.

"Hu qatt ma kien jaf li jista' jidhol f'daqshekk trouble."

"He never knew that he could get into so much trouble."

"Sa sittax-il sena kien jisma' l-quddies magħna ta' dak."

"Up to sixteen years of age he used to come to church with us, you know."

"U tiġi tehel il-habs minhabba haddiehor. Ghax jekk inti jsibulek id-droga fuqek taf x'kont qed tagħmel. Imma li ma jsibulek xejn... m'hemm xejn kontrik u xorta trid tehel il-habs. Iebsa din eh! Iebsa."

"And you end up serving a prison sentence because of somebody else. Because if you're found in possession of drugs you know what you're up to. But that they didn't find anything on you...there's no proof against you and still you get a prison sentence that's hard to accept! Hard to accept."

While healing is a very personal process many participants attributed the committed crime to peer pressure.

"...ahna normali, inkunu hawn jiena u din (turi il bintha) ma jkollniex problemi. Hu l-ħbieb li fottewh."

"...we're normal, we're here me and her (pointing at daughter) we don't have problems. His friends screwed him up."

"Il-ħbieb, il-ħbieb... Għamilha ma kumpanija hażina."

"His friends, his friends...He kept bad company."

Silence emerges as another way of keeping away the pain of losing a loved one in prison. The following conversation depicts this couple's drama and how silence around the 'topic' is constructed between them and publicly, to protect them from the pain associated with their loss.

Intervistatur: "U intom eżempju jkollkom spazju fejn titkellmu eżempju fuq dak li ġara, titkellmu ma xi hadd, anki xi hadd professjonali?"

Omm: "Qatt ma tkellimna!"

Intervistatur: "Qatt ma tkellimtu? U x'kienet ir-raġuni li qatt ma titkellmu? Forsi mishija, forsi biża?"

Omm: "Le le qatt ma tkellimt. Kulhadd jaf x'ġara hu imma kif naqbad

nghid.”

Missier: “U lanqas, bejnietna... ma tantx nitkellmu fuq hekk.”

Omm: “Haġa kbira hafna hux?”

Missier: “Haġa kbira, haġa kbira hafna.”

Interviewer: “Did you find a space where you could talk about what happened, to talk with somebody, also maybe a professional?”

Mother: “We never spoke out!”

Interviewer: “You never spoke our? And what was the reason for not talking about it? Possibly shame, possibly fear?”

Mother: “No I never spoke about it. Everybody knows what happened but how can I say.”

Father: “And not even between the two of us, we don’t really talk about that.”

Mother: “It’s a very big thing.”

Father: “A big thing, a very big thing.”

Somatization in this case emerges as a way for the prisoner to distract himself from the pain of being locked up and away from his beloved.

“...u leee... nghalaq għalih innifsu. Qisu bla skop ta’ xejn hux. Jghid igri... ‘meta ha noħroġ’ u jghid ‘ha naghmel hekk u ha naghmel hekk u xi kultant... Fhimt jghid min jaf sitt snin ohra... Kemm ilu hemm ġew minn kollox qabdu. Joqġhod jahseb, attackki tal-qalb ma nafx kemm il-wiehed ... fhimt?. Kien l-ITU. Maaa kemm ġrejt...Lanqas naf kif irnexxili nasal sa l-isptar... Umbaġhad tibda tghid minn jaf jekk hux ha johroġ... Fhimt jekk johroġ minn hemm! Vera ilu dan iż-żmien issa.”

“...noo...he withdrew in himself. It’s like with no purpose in life. He says I can’t wait ‘when shall I get out’ and ‘I will do this and I will do that and I will do the other’ and sometimes.....You see he says who knows in six years time.. Since he’s been in there he’s had all sorts of health issues. He worries, I don’t know how many heart attacks he’s had ... you understand? He was in ITU. Maa ... How I rushed...I don’t know how I got to hospital ... then you start wondering if he’ll make it... You understand if he gets out of there! It’s true he’s been there a while now.”

Religion can be considered one of the strongest means of healing the wounds associated with the loss of having a dear one in prison. The following excerpt depicts some ‘works in progress’ in the construction of the association between divine intervention and the imprisonment of her son.

Omm: “Imbaġhad ikollok ir-reliġjon u nghid tghinek hafna. Dik l-aħjar haġa li sibt.”

Intervstatur: “B’liema mod?”

Omm: “Il-Madonna kienet... pereżempju għal mod tal-kelma heqq. Baqgħet tigri warajh. Orrajt kien... Kellha, kellha għal xiex hux. Imma eżempju hux...”

Intervistatur: “Ir-religjon kif tghinkom tagħmlu sens min din l-esperjenza li għaddejt?”

Missier: “Għax hemm ċertu mħabba għalih, ċertu mħabba għar-religjon. Għax jiena... heqq... dak li nhoss. Anki nkun wahdi hawn nisma’ Radju Maria, niehu pjaċir hafna.”

Woman: “Then you have religion and I say...It helps a lot. The thing I found most helpful.”

Interviewer: “In what way?”

Woman: “It was our Lady...for example as we say. She kept pursuing him. Ok he was... She had grounds, she had... but as an example ...”

Interviewer: “How did religion help you make sense of this experience you’ve been through?”

Father: “Because there’s a certain love for him, certain love for religion. Because I...eqq eqq that’s what I feel. Even when I’m alone I will listen to Radju Maria, I enjoy it a lot.”

SUPPORT MAKES A DIFFERENCES

Although support is being presented as a separate theme here, it is wise to conceptualize it as a much wider phenomenon. Its context is much wider and is as highly connected to the healing process as it is to relationship maintenance, challenges and concerns. Support as a theme can be considered as the basis of all the other themes that emerge, and the pillar of coping and resilience, which themselves seem to be connected to hope.

As a basis for this theme it is therefore important to depict the idea of hope through the narrative of the participants. It can be said that most of the participants in this inquiry expressed some kind of hope, tied with the fact that they all have a definite term to wait for their loved one to return home. This hope in itself is encouraging and emerges as people’s anticipation of the future, to a time when their dear one in prison is free.

“Ifihmni, fil-ħajja dejjem trid thares ’il quddiem. Issa inutli toqghod tghid għax għamel hekk u għax għamel hekk għax m’intix ser terġa’ ġġib il-passat, għax kieku kulhadd hekk jagħmel. Dan m’għandekx ... wara kollox ahna hawn Malta m’għandniex death sentence jġifieri xi darba jew ohra inti taf li ha tohroġ la ma wehiltx għomrok. Dawk l-aġħar nimmagina jien.”

“Listen here, in life you always need to face the future. It is pointless saying because he did this and he did that, because you cannot bring

back the past, because if that was the case, he would have done that. You don't have...after all in Malta we don't have the death sentence so at some point or another you'll get out unless if you're not given a life sentence. That's the worst I imagine."

Support also emerges as a very complex and diversified theme. What families and relatives of people in prison find supportive however remain extraordinarily relational.

Children emerge as objectified indirectly supportive beings to their parents. This links with the theme of parentification addressed above. Those who have small children in particular expressed how they experience their children as saviours of their lives and at times of the very relationship with the person in prison, the child's father.

"Ha nghidlek isma'... ghandi mara jien (tirreferi ghal bintha ta' hames snin). Jiena ghaluha nghix! Li kieku jien m'ghandix it-tifla ma nafx x'nagħmel."

"Let me tell you listen... she's like a little lady (referring to her five year old daughter). I live for her! If I didn't have my daughter I don't know what I would do."

"...jien haġa waħda... kieku ma kellix lilhom ma kontx naf xi jsarrfu, x'jissarraġ. Meta nkun ha niżgarra, inġib lil-dawn quddiem għajnejja u ngħid 'jien ma rridx inkun hekk'. Huma jżommuni."

"...Only one thing...If I didn't have them, I wouldn't know their worth, what he's worth. When I'm about to make a mistake, I think about them intensely and tell myself 'you don't want to be like that. They sustain me."

"Jien... il-verità... ma nafx, imma ngħidha haġna. It-tifla biss ngħidilha li żommni... mingħajrha... vera ta' hekk. Tad-dahq, mhux tad-dahq (tibki). Minħabba fiha biss ngħix inhossni (tkompli tibki)."

"... It's the truth ... I don't know but I say it very often. Only my daughter keeps me going...without her....it's true. Is it funny, it's not funny (crying). I feel that it's only because of her that I live (continues crying)."

While it will be useful to rethink the effects of such position as saviour children are attributed with, it is also useful to keep in mind other forms of support that participants speak about. Practical Help also emerges as an important form of support close relatives of people in prison find useful in their lives. The excerpt below highlights how practical help is important for people who in this case are living on the verge of poverty.

"Anke fuq hawn jekk jiġrili xi haġa, hawn jekk marritli kannu, u għidtlu 'marritli kannu', qalli... beda jinkwieta. 'Issa ngħid lil missieri,

*missieri hekk jahdem', u ghamilhieli hu, ghax hu kollox jibda jara, finanzi, kollox. 'Issa nghid lil-missieri. Kemm xtrajt'... €30 daww biss.'*¹⁴

"Even if something happens here, if a water pipe burst, I told him 'the water pipe burst', he said...he got worried. "Now I will tell my father, that's what he does for a living, and he fixed it for me, because he will weigh everything, finances, everything. 'Now I will ask my father. I only spent Eur30 to buy what was needed."

The excerpt below continues to elucidate some variations of practical help participants reported. Child keeping for an only parent who works full time is a very important type of support.

"Li ghandi tajjed ghandi 'l din iżzommli t-tifla, u ghandi 'l din in-neighbour ukoll, per eżempju bħal tliet ġimgħat ilu t-tifel kellu l-iscarlet fever u ma stajniex inzommu 'l din (it-tifla) fejn dan, allura, qattli 'ha nżommhielek jiena', kelli laqgħa ma stajtx noħodha miegħi u... jiġifieri nsib eh fin-nuqqas t'ommu."

"What's in my favour is that she looks after my daughter, and even my neighbour, for example three weeks ago my son developed scarlet fever and I couldn't let her

(daughter) stay next to him, so she told me 'let me keep her for you.' I had a meeting I couldn't take her with me... so I do get help in the absence of his mother."

Professional help was not sought at all by all participants in this inquiry. All preferred to have family support instead. This apparent non-distinction between professional and non-professional support is very distinctive of this population. The following excerpts, all from different participants, highlight this.

"...le le jien ma noqghodx nagħmel kuntatti ma' servizzi. Ithemni ġew m'ilux ġew jistaqsuna jekk ghandniex bżonn counselor ... Imma jien aktar lucky li ghandi l-familja tiegħi miegħi u l-hin kollu jghinuni, ghax hawn min m'ghandu lil hadd hux, u allahares ma jkunux dawn in-nies."

"...No no I don't seek contact with services. Some time ago they did ask us if we needed a counsellor's help...But I am lucky that I have my family close by and they're helping me all the time, because some people have nobody, and God forbid how it would be if it weren't for these people."

"...ehe mill-familja tiegħi ghandi ghax jien ommi toqghod hawn, nannti toqghod hawn, iz-zijiet ukoll, u hutu. Jiġifieri qisna mdawrin

¹⁴This is a depiction of the traditional gender stereotypes. One reflects on the implications of having the man in the family imprisoned and the impact this leaves on the extended family, who replaces him and how.

kollha hanwhekk f'din l-area. Ma ngergirx ha nghid hekk."

"...yes from my family, my mother lives here, my grandmother lives here, my aunts and uncles do too and even my siblings. It's like we're surrounded, we're all here in this area. I can't complain let me say so."

"Bdilna l-lokalità ghax ridt niġi hdejn il-familja tiegħi. Kelli bżonn l-ghajnuna. Ghax anki jkun ma jifilhux l-iskola u hekk... dejjem hawn min iwassalni, nghidu jkolli xi appuntament l-isptar iżommuli lil xi hadd minnhom ... Qed tifhem. Dejjem sapport hux ... Fejn nista' jien tip ta persuna nhobb inkun indipendenti. Ma nhobbx nistrieħ fuq xi hadd, jiġifieri."

"We changed locality because I wanted to live closer to my family. I needed help. Because even when they're sick off school and so on... there's always somebody who can give me a lift, if I have a hospital appointment, somebody will take care of one of them.. you understand. It's always supportive... When I can I'm the type of person who loves being independent. I don't like to rely on others."

There also emerge various pleas by families and children for the needed support. This needed support involves a wide spectrum of interventions. It is important to keep in mind the nature of this population. Like other families, many of these families have multiple issues to deal with simultaneously, including among others disabilities, older age issues, mental health issues and more. This plus the characteristic family life cycle issues involving the rearing of children and adolescents, taking care of the elderly and so on. One of the most prominent problems that featured in this multiplicity is drug and alcohol addictions. Many of the prisoners' families admit the relationship between their relative's crime and addiction or alcoholism.

A mother in tears recounts her narrative of her son's alcohol and drug problems.

"...uuu mela ...alcohol addiction minn dejjem ...imbghad wara kien hemm drug addiction ukoll. Jiġifieri bniedem xi kultant meta jkun ivvizjat jieħu dawn l-affarijiet ikun hemm il-problema li ma tibqax tirraġuna lanqas."

"...of course...he's had a longstanding alcohol addiction...Then there was drug addiction too. A person who has addiction issues and uses these things there's the added problem that you lose your capacity to reason things through."

"Din mhix l-ewwel darba li daħal il-habs... le t-tieni darba. U dejjem konnessjoni mad-droga. Mela... eħe jisraq biex jieħu d-droga... Heqq anki flus kont nghidlu ifahhom fil-kont tiegħi u jekk titlobni xi haġa nagħtik ftit ftit imma ..."

"This is not the first time he went to prison..no it's the second time. And

always connected to drugs.. He'll steal to take drugs...Even money I used to tell him to deposit it in my account and if you ask I'll give you some little by little but..."

A sister speaks about her brother's drug problem.

"Tajjeb. Meta jibda jiehu nibdew niġġieldu. Hu meta johroġ minn Santa Maria jew minn San Blas jagħmel dawn l-erba xhur l-iktar. Erba' xhur tajtek hafna ta! M'ghandniex xi ngergru. Fhimi? Ghax imur ghax-xogħol, nagħmilu l-ikel, intih l-affarijiet miegħu ghax xogħol, bħal din (tirreferi għal-binta) u jiġi... Imbagħad meta jghaddu dawk it-tliet xhur erba' xhur daqshekk... nibdew niġġieldu jien u hu. Tarah li mhux l-istess eeh, tinduna ghax jibda jiehu s-sick leave, jibda jfalli minn warajja... nibdew insakkru l-kmamar... nigu qisna ħabs, naħbu l-affarijiet ghax kollox jiehu... kollox hadli... tablet, kamera tar-ritratti, fwieha, hwejjeġ. U jghidlek li mhux hu. Heqq ngħidlu "mela dahal xi ħadd... u ma nafux bih."

"Well. When he starts using drugs we start fighting. When he leaves Santa Maria or San Blas he's ok for four months at the most...Four months is being generous! We can't complain you understand? Because he'll go to work, I'll prepare his food, I give him stuff to take to work like I do with her (pointing to daughter) and he returns..Then after those three four months pass it's over...we start fighting me and him. You can tell he's not the same, you can tell because he starts calling in sick, he starts not turning up for work behind my back.. we start locking our rooms. We live like we're in a prison, we have to hide things because he'll take everything... he took all I had.. tablet, camera, perfume, clothes. And he won't admit to it. So I'll reply 'then we have an intruder...and we don't know about it."

No wonder that one of the strongest pleas from families was to make prison a truly rehabilitative project. The ideas different family members present involve both the benefit for the person in prison and the family itself. As one women put it:

"Il-problemi mhux għalih wara ta. Hu jagħmel il-ħabs u daqshekk hux. Il-problema għalina mhux għalih. Ghax għandna jerġa' jiġi meta johroġ."

"The problems that come after release do not preoccupy him. He completes his prison term and that's that. The problem is ours not his. Because it's to us that he returns when he's released."

The idea participants have about rehabilitation emerges as quite cultural and traditional. and refers mostly to occupational rehabilitation. The families'

construction of prison life is that it is idle and that prison authorities do close to nothing to encourage work and activity to help prisoners and their families.

“Affarijiet li jimla l-hin għandhom bżonn. Daqskemm hemm affarijiet x’jistgħu jagħmlu! Jiena vera qabel hekk kont nġhidlu ‘imma issa kieku joħorġukom taħdmu naqra barra, daqskemm hawn xogħol li jrid isir.”

“Activities to occupy the time. There are so many things they could do! I really used to say to him ”But now had they taken you out to work on the outside, there’s so much work to be done.”

“Qabel kienu jista’ jcampel biex per eżempju jgibulu bott thinner biex joqgħod jagħmel xi haġa. Jew inkella tohodilhom xi naqra njam. Issa qatgħulhom kollox! Issa dawn mhux jiehdu minn tal-habs, imma jixtruhom tal-familja biex jgħaddu l-hin. U issa qatgħu kollox. Mela xi jriduna naghmlu?! Kemm ha ddum fid-division tisma’ d-dagħa u tilgħab il-ludo?”

“Before they could phone, for example, to get him a bottle of thinner to do something. Or you could take them some wood. Now they axed it! Now they wouldn’t have to use prison supplies, the family would buy them for him to pass the time. Now he gave up everything. So what do they expect from us? For how long will you last hearing swear words and playing ludo in your division?”

The disheartened family’s cry is often expressed passionately, with a touch of anger and criticism towards institutions that, according to a father ‘promise a lot and deliver very little’. This father of a young man noticed that his son is being given ‘pills’ by the prison psychiatrist. He observed his son becoming increasingly detached from him over time. He is concerned that his son gets addicted to medication.

“Il-hin hekk jgħaddi... taġmel xi haġa għall-kwiet fuq ix-xogħol. Il-moħħ hekk ... mhux noqgħod nieħu kuljum l-pilloli biex norqod u hekk. Kulhadd jibla’ l-pilloli hemm ġew. Kieku naghmel sentenza nieħu l-pilloli robot noħroġ minn hemm. Meta mmur narah nahsbu qed jitkellem miegħi imma ninduna li fil-verità mhux hu jkun qed jitkellem imma l-pilloli.”

“That’s how time passes... you do some work quietly. That’s how the mind... I don’t stay taking pills to sleep and so on. Everybody’s swallowing pills in there. If I spend my sentence taking pills I’d come out like a robot from there. When I go visit him I would think that he’s talking to me but then I realise that in reality it wouldn’t be him I would be talking to, but rather the pills would be talking.”

Parents and relatives of prisoners with a drug problem have other specific concerns about their relative's progress in prison. Services are angrily described as useless.

“L-ewwel darba li daħal jagħmel programm kellu tmintax-il-sena. Diehel u ħiereg mar xi sitt darbiet. Kollha darhomil-programmi. Dejjem l-istess... bil-problema tad-droga. U kollu għalxejn. Issa meta jerġa johroġ nerġghu l-istess. Qtajt qalbi. Anki tal-ħabs program ħa. Għalxejn.”

“He was eighteen the first time he entered a drug rehab programme. And he's been in and out and in and out, around six times. He's been to all. His drug problem is always there. And it's all for nothing. Now when he'll be out he'll be doing the same thing again. I give up. He even followed the prison programme.”

This man continues in awe at how professionals and prison staff cannot find an appropriate and effective way of healing his son.

Missier: “Ma nafx ħi... jien għandi qalbi maqtugħa minnu.”

Intervistatur: “F'liema sens qalbek maqtugħa?”

Missier: “Imma jiena bħal dak iż-żgħir... li ma jgħinuhx hemm! Jafu xi problema għandu! Diehel u ħiereg. Ma jistaqsux għaliex? Possibli ma jgħinuhx?”

Father: “I don't know ...I gave up on him.”

Interviewer: “In what sense are you giving up on him?”

Father: “But for our son, there's no help he can access in there? They know what his problem is! In and out. They don't ask how come? Is it possible that nobody helps him?”

Another disheartened mother expressed it passionately and with tears in her eyes. She speaks about rehabilitation programmes and rehabilitation in prison.

“Heqq... skont kif nisma' fuq ir-radju u t-televixin naħseb jeżistu jien. Hekk vera ma jeżistux hemm bżonnhom. Dan kemm ser idum jidħol u johroġ il-ħabs? Ma jistgħux minn ġol-ħabs stess jieħdu ħsiebhom u jagħmlulhom xi ħaġa? Vera li trid tkun int l-ewwel li tkun trid dbiddel ħajtek. Imm'allura m' hemm xejn? Ma jafuhiex din il-ħaġa dawn in-nies?”

“According to what I hear on the radio and on television, I think they exist. If they don't exist they're needed. How many times shall he keep getting in and out of prison? Can't they take care of them and set up something for them within the prison itself? It's true, firstly you need to want to change your life. So can't they do anything for him? Don't these people know about this?”

4 ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

PREAMBLE

The main aim of this inquiry remains that of understanding the experience of the families of prisoners, of the experience of having a relative in prison, and create a forum where these same families can be given a voice to express this experience. From the very first interviews and focus groups it immediately emerged that such population is voiceless and that this forum provided them with a sincere space for them to express themselves. Saying this is very important as most of those interviewed admittedly never spoke about these matters with anyone outside the immediate family before. No agency or service ever invited them for therapeutic help, no authority referred them. Many also expressed distrust at the system and authority in general. This research project is grounded in an earnest commitment to remain truthful and loyal to the families' experience and render them voiceful.

We acknowledge that imprisonment itself is just one phase in a much longer and often more painful process (Roberts et al, 2014). Some families actually spoke of the various phases including arrest and interrogation, as well as release. Aware of the resources constrains however, we decided to focus the present study on the families' experience of having a close member in prison. This, of course, is not to deny the importance of other seamlessly connected phases of the process, like arrest or release from prison, but as a way of validating the families' idiosyncratic experience of the effects of imprisonment.

To elucidate this experience, this study has attempted to combine the many voices of all involved including families, children and imprisoned people themselves, together with the knowledge and experience of NGOs, volunteers and prison staff. Embedded within existent literature on the topic this ensures that the recommendations proposed are reflected in the practical experience of participants and grounded in the literature. All these different 'voices' enriched the data analysed and of course complexified the narrative that emerged.

This is an exploratory study from which we have a lot to learn. The complexity of the data generated made it extremely difficult to capture the full picture as sharply as it is in a reality which we are yet to discover. Nonetheless, it is by attempting to create a bigger picture through the puzzle pieces, that we can eventually fully understand. The attempt is to finally provide a systemic understanding and make effective proposals that will eventually serve the families of prisoners and all those involved with them.

There were at least two levels of themes that the data collected provided. One at a family level, whereby the narratives from the interviews and focus groups depict the internal dynamics of family life and vividly elucidate the way families of the incarcerated experience their life without their loved one. The other

level deals with the system in general whereby data, analysed from a systemic perspective, is weaved into a complex dynamic pattern of relationships among the different parts of this system called the prison system, and of which the family forms an important part, along with the other players. The complexity of the themes that emerged from data analysis needs coherence and meaning-making, as is characteristic of qualitative inquiry.

SUPRA-THEMES

The themes extracted from the transcripts speak for themselves and need no further detail. It is by allowing the families to express themselves that we find purpose for this study. Yet, the fact that what emerged was in conversation with us as researchers, obliges us to express our thoughts around the themes that emerged. Definitely not to use our voice to overpower the participants' voice, but hopefully to enhance it. The following are some key points worthy of mention emerging from the results.

UNCERTAINTY ABOUT FUTURE AND THE CHANGED PERSPECTIVE OF TIME

All families described feelings of uncertainty about the future. Amongst others, these had to do with practical matters such as considering future work options as well as facing the relational damage to significant relationships as a result of incarceration. Such issues rendered people more insecure and their life more unpredictable. There's some kind of obsessiveness about time passing and the future after release. There also appears to be a sense of suspended timelessness and of living in suspense for when things can happen, awaiting the time of release. As all interviews took place in the participants' home, interviewers could notice that all the participants keep their house obsessively clean and wondered whether this obsessiveness is linked in some way to the idea of waiting and spending time. There also emerges an idea of how families live the future in paradoxical anticipation. On the one hand they look forward to it and to what it represents as freedom, reunion and connectedness, and on the other hand they dread it because it's too far and don't want to think much about it. What transpires is a psychological love-hate relationship with time. This must be the result of a changed perspective of time and about the loss of sense of predictability of one's future and destiny. One's sense of destiny also emerges as becoming somehow paradoxical through the experience of imprisonment. There emerges a sense of inability to predict the future and the related loss of control over one's current and future life.

HEALING PROCESS

A great sense of isolation emerges strongly in this study. Lack of connectedness and mis-communication with CCF and other institutions, lack of institutional support, monitoring from agencies. Added to these, are the 'not knowing', the

stigma, extended family disruptions, family life disintegration, money problems, lack of the presence of the imprisoned person. Many participants expressed how all this contributes to feeling extraordinarily empty and stunted. The implications for healing are wide.

In fact, the healing process emerges as very difficult and as being managed by a surrendering depressive mood. Maybe because healing can only occur when the dear one is released. Meanwhile, there seem to be various personalized mechanisms helping families live with the pain and the suspense. These mechanisms revolve around protecting the prisoner by the construction of an ideal HIM that makes him appear almost innocent or naive to them. This may be one of the reasons why families never mention the victims of crime.

Healing also emerges as a very personal process. Each family seems to be marked by a particular theme which overshadows all others. This understanding is critical for the appropriate design of effective therapeutic interventions and services. These major themes around healing involve, among others, shame, guilt, violence, disconnectedness, and separation.

There's an interesting particular case study which one could pursue for its narrative about the healing of a daughter whose father is in prison for murder. She talks to the interviewer about her boyfriend whose sister was murdered, and about her own child, and how the child helped her heal. She was crying while saying this. This example raises a lot of interesting questions about how the psychology of redemption is expressed in relationships and how it is carried over time. It also raises further questions about family scripts and their trans-generational transmission.

THERAPEUTIC ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

There is a visible difference in people's diverse attempts to heal from trauma of this type of separation from a dear one. Psychologically one can notice defence mechanisms working in one's attempt at self-protection. In the narratives of participants one could also notice how visible trauma is and how sadness persists indefinitely. Psycho-relationally, one also acknowledges the presence of defence mechanisms. Those interviewed have shown a great yearning for the institutions' conceptual shift from punishment to rehabilitation as they crave to have their loved ones back, better than they were when they entered prison. Many, in fact, have concerns about their loved ones' idleness in the correctional facility and have mentioned specifically that they prefer them having work to do, teaching lessons, personal development and psychotherapeutic intervention.

This study shows the importance of family support and specialist intervention. It tallies with other recent and current literature showing how family involvement, it being the main source of support people in the

correctional facility have, makes an important difference (Datchi, et. al. 2016). Furthermore, the interview itself was experienced as therapeutic by some, and taken as a cathartic opportunity after years of pent-up feelings. It is therefore wise to conceptualize and design different levels of therapeutic engagement and intervention, all along the course of contact with the justice system from arrest to release and after.

RELATING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS.

The way people in correctional facilities and their families maintain relationships is a multifarious process that needs to be studied further before it can be appropriately addressed. It also involves various psycho-relational processes which undoubtedly complexify the management of relationships.

Conversation, for example, is perceived as unsafe. Participating families seemed to hint at a fear of post-visit bullying about those overheard conversations, reporting a sense of unease over their private material being handled adequately and sensitively by facility officers who have access to it. Physical contact emerges as a very confounding process too. Some visiting women of men in the correctional facility feel very uneasy with it, knowing that others know what is supposedly going on in the room during an extended visit. Some partners and wives also expressed the embarrassment of being found with sexy underwear upon being searched before the extended visits. These circumstances often put them off as they start to reconsider their sexual activity in relation to love, commitment and romance, with some reporting they stopped feeling the spark of physical and sexual attraction towards their partners in the correctional facility.

JEALOUSY AND CONTROL

Another way of maintaining relationships emerges as the renegotiation of power between the partners, and and between father and children. Many people inside the correctional facility were reportedly controlling of their partners on the outside. They were also reported being over-concerned about their children's whereabouts and activities. We documented narratives almost possessive of the woman outside. Distance may increase one's fears of being abandoned by a loving partner thus increasing one's sense of insecurity and lowers one's self-esteem. These factors may add pressure on the partner outside with various consequences, including the suffocation of the partner and therefore the reduction of romantic feelings.

Nonetheless there emerges a marked sense of commitment by family members towards the person in the correctional facility. In spite of the distance in terms of space and time, unquestionable evidence emerges indicating psychological closeness that connects the family with the prisoner. Even where romantic love subsides there remains a commitment of loyalty to the person in prison.

MANHOOD AND PARTICIPATION IN THE RESEARCH

Men in this study were conspicuous by their absence. The only male experience shared was that of a couple of fathers of prison inmates and a handful of men in the focus groups of volunteers and prison wardens. No husbands or male partners of female prisoners made themselves available for the purposes of this research project. Ely & Ryan (2008, p.396) discuss how “expressivity is said to be a significant part of the stereotypically female communal mode”. They say that traditionally women and girls are reared to be more integrated into family and community than are males. In their work about gender differences in relation to memory, these authors posit that women’s memories about past relationships are also more vivid than those of men. According to them, girls tend to focus more on relational affiliation in their narration, whilst men will privilege themes of mastery and performance. These descriptions fall within traditional gender role stereotypes with woman’s provision of emotional care and men provision of structural care.

This perspective offers a useful understanding of why more women volunteered to participate in a study with a relational focus. The social construction of manhood as machoism has been widely implicated in censoring men to connect to their vulnerability in relationships. Male behavior in prison has been amply researched and their coping strategies involve aggression and machoism (Picken, 2012). Indeed, during the focus group with male prisoners, we were met with a general reluctance to disclose both experience and one’s feelings about the experience. This was expressed in a rather aggressive way. Women in the correctional facility were far more available to share meaningfully within a group, even though they did not want their conversation to be recorded.

This, of course, doesn’t mean that we resign ourselves to this narrative of manhood and the subsequent absence of men in this type of research endeavor. We commit ourselves for further reflection on the implications and find alternative engagement routes for men. The resonance that men need to connect with, in order to access their voice stands to be discovered. We also need to take responsibility and find ways of supporting men to engage with their inner worlds.

The low male response to research participation parallels the restricted engagement of men in psychotherapy. Men cannot afford to miss the boat and are much needed on board the therapeutic space. Their active presence is as vital within family life as is their active participation in both therapy and research. Dienhart (2001) discusses how we need to stop looking at men from a deficit perspective. It seems that rather than being hounded to access their emotional arena, men need to be validated for who they are, rather who we want them to be.

These gender implications of engagement need also to be taken into consideration in view of the recommended shift from punishment to rehabilitation. Men also make the predominant gender in correctional systems.

Talking about manhood is often full of stereotyped assumptions and deprived of the appreciation of the variety of the cultural expression of manhood. Speaking about “male-sensitive therapy” Shepard & Harway (2012) talk about conducting a therapy session whilst being mindful of the expectations, vulnerabilities, and strengths men bring to therapy, as well as to the fact that there is no one way of doing ‘manhood’. We need to keep in mind the gendered views of, for example the helping professionals, who are predominantly female. This is all the more important in a context of criminal behavior and incarceration where as we have already explored, issues related to shame and inadequacy indeed repress both genders from liberally accessing professional services.

PARENTING & LETTING CHILDREN BE CHILDREN

As amply portrayed in the literature review, children with an incarcerated parent face unique challenges of their own. The interviewed parents’ accounts of their children’s reality tallies with the experiences reported in field research (Azzopardi, 2013).¹⁵ All the parents interviewed reported a fear that their children would be stigmatized and ostracized especially fearing this of their peers at school. There seems to be a fear across the board of having their children’s innocence and ‘joie de vivre’ tainted by their parent’s criminal behaviour. Parents have reported reactions ranging from ‘jaqq’ as an expression of disgust, to a community emerging as sympathetic and generous with women and families of prisoners, rather than critical or stigmatizing.

Yet the children who featured in our study also face psychological realities that are more subtle and complex, stretching beyond social stigma. Children undoubtedly emerge as the most vulnerable. They were implicitly obliged to trade their childhood lightheartedness for holding the baton as their parents’ saviour. Other children emerged as parents themselves, taking on roles and activities that are not age appropriate. The types of parentification tasks children are expected to fulfill, such as looking after younger siblings or taking on roles within the household which the absent parent would have carried out, are in themselves forms of inequities. Such inequities are directly linked with the increased vulnerabilities and risks children in these circumstances are associated with, including low school performance and achievement, and increased mental health symptoms (Jankowski et al, 2013). Simultaneously even their caregivers believe in the biological transmission of delinquent behaviour, thus bestowing them with a life script that is difficult to contend with (Byng-Hall,2008). Family therapy is indispensable in all these diverse scenarios to address role confusion and enable

¹⁵One must say that while we did interview adult children of an incarcerated parent, we did not get first hand accounts of younger children, in respect of good ethical practice. Simultaneously we referred to a report published by the former National Commission for Child Policy and Strategy entitled Listening to the Child in Care. Such report consulted children directly among other professionals involved in their care. Many of these children had experienced the arrest and imprisonment of a parent.

the parents or caregivers to take appropriate responsibility within the family.

In order for children to be children, parents need to be supported to step up and take charge of their families' well-being. A visible struggle that the parents we spoke to highlighted is management of a new parental relationship, and the parenting of children when the other parent is incarcerated. Parenting is trying even in the best of circumstances, let alone in difficult and restraining circumstances like imprisonment. Both mothers on the outside and fathers on the inside spoke about how difficult it is for them to establish what Loper et. al (2014) call a "co-parenting alliance". Parents and caregivers need guidance and space to explore arising issues that impede such an alliance, including negative attitudes towards the other parent, and caregivers' stress. Ineffective co-parenting will spill over into adjustment difficulties and poor co-parenting quality upon re-entry of the prisoner into family life, or on resuming contact with the child. A therapeutic space that encourages co-parenting can be crucial in connecting parents, enabling them to offer their children presence and effective parenting.

It is interesting to think about the different positions the mothers interviewed took vis-à-vis parenting, following their partner's incarceration. One mother seemed to take it upon herself to act as a 'buffer' between her children and their incarcerated father. She seemed to take decisions about what to tell and what not to tell the father about the child's life, not to worry the other parent unduly. Another mother made it mandatory to involve the father in every minutiae in the child's life. Yet another mother seemed to withdraw any explanation around the incarceration to the children, claiming it was the father's sole responsibility. The mothers interviewed implicitly renegotiated their parenting identity. It would have been interesting to look more closely at how they engaged in this process, and from a therapeutic perspective, think about ways to support the role renegotiation of both parents mutually to foster a better adjustment to the enforced separation from the family home.

There are other implications associated with fatherhood and imprisonment, as fatherless children are known to be vulnerable to various risks. For example Hill & O'Neill (1993) noted that 70% of youth in US reform institutions grew up in single parent homes (Hill & O'Neill, 1993). The same authors draw our attention to the fact that 72% of murderers & 60% of rapists grew up without a father present. Fatherless children are twice likely to drop out of school, with boys being especially vulnerable to lower scores in reading and math. Daniels (1998) concurs with Hill & O'Neill that the majority of prisoners, juvenile detention inmates, high school dropouts, pregnant teenagers, adolescent murderers, and rapists come from fatherless homes (Daniels 1998).

The facilitation of co-participation of imprisoned parents, particularly fathers, with their children and partners emerges as paramount in this study. Co-parenting is expected to help families on different counts. From the interviews with wives

or partners of prisoners who have children, we often heard how possessive the locked partner becomes of their children and how involved they want to be in their parenting. An example is the narrative of that young lady who recalls how her father used to call her from prison and ask her where she was. We also had the other picture of fathers who are disinterested and whose children are also shy to identify them as their father in front of others. We also had the wardens' response about how different foreign prisoners are from Maltese and how Maltese prisoners don't seem to work for their families from inside the prison like Latin Americans do, for example. All these are clear examples reflecting the need of professional input to facilitate the parental co-involvement of fathers in prison with their children and partner outside.

INCOHERENCE AND LANGUAGE

One major difficulty observed was the limited language abilities that characterised the interviews and focus groups, in particular those with families and prisoners. It emerges quite strongly that language used by participants to express themselves was generally characterised by limited vocabulary and low verbosity. For example the use of unfinished sentences, interjections, change of subject, clichés, inappropriate wording, disjointed sentences and confused metaphors replaced an elaborate discussion.

A narrative analysis of the text may reveal some reasons accounting for this incoherence. One understanding is that incoherence is the participants' progressive attempt at repositioning their lives in relationship to the experience of having someone close within the correctional facility. "A growing number of psychological theorists, researchers, and therapists agree that people create meaningful selves through the individual and social construction of coherent life stories. Like all stories, life stories exist to be told or performed in social contexts. Most criteria for coherence, therefore, reflect the culture within which the story is told and the life is lived". (McAdams, 2006).

A second understanding of incoherence is related to educational attainment and limited language abilities that characterise the interviews and focus groups, in particular those with families and prisoners. Often, interviewers found themselves having to repeat questions using further simple language. Rather than providing answers, this raises further questions as to whether there's an existent link between verbal ability and crime in general, particularly violence.

On the other hand we also need to consider how shame impacts the interviewing process. Owens (2006) comments about how when an interviewee experiences shame at what he or she is narrating, it is more likely that the telling would become more disjointed and vague especially when emotionally charged material is spoken of. Owens (2006, p. 1169) describes shame as "the interactional elephant in the living room" that is undoubtedly there, but circled around as if it

weren't. The author advocates that it needs to be brought into the conversation and spoken about, to allow a freer flowing narrative. In retrospect, definitely out of a sense of respect, and because the interviews were not aimed as therapeutic interventions, interviewers did not bring shame to the forefront of the encounters. Shame did however come out as an important theme. A reflexive consideration of the interviewing process helped interviewers to allow it to emerge naturally.

One must also keep in mind that for many of the individuals and families interviewed, the interview was probably the first encounter where they were invited to talk about the incarceration of their loved one in an intimate way and outside their immediate circle of significant others. Some interviewers actually pointed out that some families expressed that the interview was 'healing'. There's ample literature supporting the idea that the incarceration of a loved one, such as a parent or spouse, is a traumatic life event is ample. Burke & Bradley (2006, p. 142) posit how adjusting to traumatic experiences will involve "... intra- or interpersonal verbal behaviour with an actual or imagined audience whereby an individual constructs a more coherent narrative of the experience and, thus, a more adaptive and verbally accessible memory." It can be hypothesized that the interview introduced families to such a process. In relation to children, Saltzman et. al. (2013, p.295) discuss how "parents help children make meaning and integrate protective beliefs by co-constructing a coherent and affectively organizing narrative about stressful experiences."

INTERVENTION AND PAID WORK RATHER THAN "JUST PILLS".

With the current state of affairs one wonders whether the current Correctional System is interested in the shift from punishment, to providing the necessary therapeutic tools for prisoners and their families to reform and to heal. Research on incarceration, reentry, and the family has produced evidence that relatives play a critical role in prisoners' successful return to the community. "Incarceration and reentry are a family and community affair, and family oriented programming is a critical component of offender rehabilitation in adult correctional facilities. Therapy is a good way of helping people to find words to express their experience coherently which in return influences their perception of life" (Datchi, et. al. p. 89). Many families we interviewed stress this point in different ways. Some insisted that people in prison be productive and provide for themselves and their families from inside prisons. Others suggested therapeutic interventions for people in prison, particularly for those who have addiction problems. The systemic relationship in these pleas are connected by idleness as a theme. All those interviewed have expressed worries about how idleness promotes rumination, addiction, and other negative behaviour, thus reinforcing the idea of punishment, rather than rehabilitation.

MEDIA

Many families expressed how it was through the media that they came to learn of their relative’s arrest. Concerns were raised around how such an exposure can be related to children’s vulnerability to bullying at school, as well as to the undermining of parental protection. Some stories were about small children coming to learn about their parent in prison from television, while the family concurred to explain to the child that daddy is at work. There’s also concern about how media expresses itself ethically and how it can orchestrate itself alongside other instruments of social change towards the much needed conceptual and methodological reform. This also reminds us of our responsibility in the process.

POVERTY AND LOW LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Another element unifying all participating families is a staggering low income across the board (see table below). Those who accepted to be interviewed reflect a population of families who are pensioners and single mothers, all seriously struggling on the verge of poverty, if not sucked in by it already. Such families emerge as very much related to usury and illegal money lending systems into which they fall trap, paradoxically even to pay court fines. Almost all participating families had loans to repay, some more than one, contributing to a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. Data gathered shows how low

	Relationship	Locality	Property status	Loans	Highest qualification level	Employment Status	Reference person the family
1	Partner	M’scala	Owner	1	1	Unskilled	Woman
2	Parents	Sta Venera	Rented	2	2	Unemployed	Woman
3	Parents	Paola	Owner	1	1	Unemployed	Woman
4	Daughter	Paola	Rented	2	1	Unemployed	Woman
5	Parents	Sta Lucia	Owner	2	1	Pension	Woman
6	Partner	Qormi	Rented	0	1	Unemployed	Woman
7	Parents	Qormi	Owner	1	1	Unskilled work	Woman
8	Parents	Qormi	Rented	2	1	Unemployed	Woman
9	Partner	Zurrieq	Rented	1	1	Unemployed	Woman
10	Parents	Zurrieq	Rented	0	1	Unemployed	Woman
11	Parents	Sliema	Owner	0	1	Pension	Woman
12	Partner	Tarxien	Rented	1	5	Unemployed	Woman
13	Parents	Tarxien	Rented	2	1	Pension	Woman
14	Wife	Zebbug	Owner	1	1	Unskilled work	Woman
15	Parents	Cospicua	Rented	2	1	Pension	Woman
16	Partner	Cospicua	Rented	3	1	Unemployed	Woman
17	Wife	Zabbar	Owner	1	5	Unemployed	Woman
18	Ex-Wife	Qawra	Rented	0	2	Unskilled work	Woman
19	Parents	Kalkara	Owner	1	1	Unemployed	Woman
20	Wife	Hamrun	Rented	1	1	Unemployed	Woman

their declared income is, how many of them smoke, and how they spend their money, all patterned into the spiral of poverty. Many live in rented property. All participants have low levels of education, with most having only Level 1 education. The majority are unemployed or on benefits. Those who do work are employed in low income and unskilled jobs such as cleaning, which jobs pay very little.

This is worrying, considering that families still have to fund the person in prison and to shoulder the fines and legal fees their loved one sustained. This is truly a situation where the whole family is punished and not only the person in prison. We invite the judiciary system to participate on the recommended reform from punishment to rehabilitation, and question the exorbitant fines imposed on those found to be on the wrong side of the law, among other things. It is evident that these fines serve to further penalize some families and further intensify their risk of poverty or worsen a situation that is already precarious. Many participating families had never had a holiday in their life and some never went out to a restaurant even before their relative went to prison. This may be an indicator that poverty was present before imprisonment and that crime may be linked to it in some ways.¹⁶ For example, many of those interviewed admitted their relative in prison has drug problems. Except for two partners whose partner or husband is imprisoned for child abuse, the rest of the families had a relative with drug related problems. In fact prison is populated with inmates whose crimes are connected to their drug problems in some ways. This merits more specialist national investment in this apparently never ending field of addictions.

An overarching meta-theme

SYSTEMIC INTERCONNECTEDNESS AS THE BASIS OF ISOLATION AND ESTRANGEMENT

One of the strongest dynamic narratives that emerged from this study was the disconnectedness and estrangement which characterises not only families of prisoners and prisoners amongst themselves, but also the institutions and bodies involved with them in the 'Correctional System'. Participants in the interviews and focus groups all expressed a sentiment of disconnectedness and isolation, one from the other. While it is important to validate and acknowledge the hard work being put in, and the energy being exerted by all involved, it is paramount to take heed of what emerges here as the need to coordinate coherently all this purposeful commitment.

Disconnectedness and estrangement become evident through participants' discourses (or lack of them) on mistrust. Mistrust is a powerful culprit of self-protective behaviour which in itself alienates people from others and diffuses

¹⁶Data provided by the Director of Corradino Correctional Facilities on the 20th October 2016

the sense of hopelessness about a positive outcome in the future. The excerpts below manifest these relationships between the different parts of this Correctional System and the constructions each make upon the other. Relationships are based on such constructions.

The facilitator of the Focus Group with imprisoned women report the following.¹⁷

“The general narrative of the emergent themes is circumscribed by a sense of diffidence towards authority in general. This diffidence seemed proportional to the authority a body or person has. There also emerged a visible criticism towards authority figures or agencies surrounding their lives. When the facilitators explained the terms of the research, that of being under the auspice of the President of Malta, all the women seemed to consider this research as lip service and they were very sceptical of and how any emerging recommendations would be really implemented.”

The following is typical narrative of diffidence, estrangement and helplessness volunteers experience.

“Jien nixtieq ngħid xi haġa ... se nkun skjett, mingħajr kantunieri. Dal-hafna kliem ta’ riforma, faċilità korrettiva, tal-prigunieri li jekk irid ikollu ċ-ċans li jeduka meta huwa terz biss li jmorru għal xi kors, għaliġa s-sistema falluta. Kienet u għadha falluta. Billi noqogħdu nagħmlu hafna zokkor fuq il-kelma ma ssirx ħelwa.”

“I would like to say something... straight to the point. All this talk about reforms, correctional facility for the prisoners how can this happen when only one third follow some type of course, for me the system is a failure. Was and still is a failure. Putting sugar on the word won’t make it sweeter.”

The sense of disconnectedness of services and isolation is also reflected through this excerpt extracted from the transcript of the focus group with CCF officers.

“Our experience is that at times they (external agencies) see a difficult case and politely refuse it because it’s difficult to handle. I’m not blaming anyone ... But we don’t have these specialist services and have to rely on external agencies ... We don’t have staff to work with them. We need to develop services ... We need to work together ... for the same goal. And not as it is now, everyone to his own devices.”

The facilitator of the male inmates’ focus group reported thus about her

¹⁷Participants on both focus groups with female and male inmates refused the facilitator to record the session. This text is extracted from the facilitators’ notes jotted during and immediately after the focus group.

experience of disconnectedness and estrangement, revealing also the inmates' sense of general mistrust in each other and the institution.

"The inmates were not prepared for our meeting, they did not know what to expect, they were just asked to come and meet us, they were not told that they were going to be part of a research project or that we were interested in asking them to talk about their families' experiences. Inmates were unanimous in expressing their concern in talking about their families, one got up and walked away, saying that in no way was he going to talk about his family in front of the other inmates. They wanted to know how talking to us can help their family, sceptical that anything can come out of it."

For a wife whose husband has been in prison for a longish term asking these kinds of questions reflects a lacunae in the Correctional Services relationship to the family.

Mara: "... U taf x'nixtieq inkun naf ukoll. Ha ngħidlek haġa. Issa pereżempju... nagħtu kas jinqalagħlu xi haġa... għandhom... suppost iċemplu lil tal-familja? Dik li rrid inkun naf jien. Jew jehduh l-isptar. Jistgħu huma jċemplu lili pereżempju? Din li irrid inkun naf.

Intervistatur: Imma inti, li tista' tagħmel hu li tgħid lili... lir-ragel ikellem lis-social worker t'hemmhekk u jċempillek u inti tgħidlu b'dawn il-preokkupazzjonijiet tiegħek jew inkella l-mistoqsijiet li għandek.

Mara: Ehe? Jiena... jiena imma qed nistaqsi qed tifhem?

Intervistatur: F'sitwazzjonijiet ta' mard u hekk, il-familja jċemplulha.

Woman: "...and do you know what I would like to know. Let me tell you something. For example... let's say he is sick... they have... are they supposed to phone the family? ...that is what I would like to know. Or they take to hospital. Can't they phone me? That is what I would like to know.

Interviewer: But you... what you can do is to tell him... your husband to talk to the social worker to phone you and you tell him about your preoccupations or the questions you need answered.

Woman: Yes? I... but I am asking, understand?

Interviewer: In case of sickness the family is informed.

One wonders why this woman didn't ask such a question to the wardens or anyone else in the Correctional Service. This stirs my curiosity around how many other questions she has not asked and how many other people have questions to ask, but never dared asking, and why.

Further examples of disconnectedness, estrangement, and isolation emerge

from conversations with participants who elucidate how feelings of shame and guilt, just for being a relative of someone who committed a crime or because of the experience of stigma, often contribute to a negative self-image keeping them away from the sense of entitlement to services. It is paramount for such an important system, as the Correctional System¹⁸ is, to consider its positioning within the wider context of families, agencies, court and judiciary, police, policy-makers, and so on. Considering the context and the circumstances, families of prisoners cannot be expected to look for help and support. It is perhaps the Correctional System (of which the family is part), in its attempt to improve communities, which should reach out to support families. Research on incarceration, reentry, and the family has shown how families are crucial in the prisoners' successful return to the community. Reentry is in fact a family and community affair. Family-oriented programs are essential for offender rehabilitation in adult correctional facilities (Datchi, et. al., 2016).

COMMUNICATION OR MISCOMMUNICATION

It also emerges that the families' perception of their relationship between them and the person in prison is mediated through the prison staff. For all intents and purposes, as things stand within the current culture of the 'correctional facility, it is in the interest of prison staff to protect the prison from external interference, e.g. people getting drugs in. One inevitable impact of such mediation is of course interference in the communication between the incarcerated and their families and, as indicated in the results section, the inevitable limitation of access this communication pattern invites.

Effective communication is the very essence of maintaining a functionally effective marital or parental relationship. Such limitations often generate a sense of unease and frustration which in return is expressed through reinforcing one's stereotypes and clichés about the Correctional System. For example it emerges clearly in this study that talking, whether face to face or over the phone, is perceived as unsafe by both prisoners and their families. If one takes partners as an example, and with talking being the most effective means of communication maintaining intimate relationships, this limitation will prevent the couple from further developing their intimacy and strengthening the relationship. The same assumption applies to children and their fathers in prison.

This finding fits snugly with Comfort's (2005) and Massoglia's (2011) findings. Both authors highlighted the increased risk that incarceration poses on intimate relationships. Like in Massoglia's sample, partners of imprisoned in this study expressed a decline in romantic love and attraction. Visitation times, the unfriendly environment, limitations on freedom to talk, limitations of sexual contact and other factors were claimed to contribute towards this decline. A

¹⁸By Correctional System I mean the reformed system that includes all players in an orchestrated collaborative manner.

gendered perspective on the experience of romantic relationships also needs to be kept in perspective.

Communication emerges as one of the strongest shortages of the whole process across relationships at different levels of interaction. It is interesting how the different categories of people in this study feel disconnected from each other and from the whole picture. For example a warden admitted that:

“What we hear is from the inmate’s side of course. We are not much in contact with families ourselves.”

Someone else in the focus group continued to say:

“But inside here we don’t have the family under our remit. We refer the family.”

Beyond this disconnectedness, the closure concept in psychology teaches us about people’s desire for clarity and the aversion toward ambiguity. In the absence of information people tend to generate answers with the little information they hold, and make these answers definite. This emerges clearly in the narrative of wardens’ construction about external services which they believe families are receiving, and which families are not. There is for example the mythical belief among wardens that families receive family therapy and psychological help. None of the families we interviewed ever received any psychological and relational help, and none actually sought it. Some because they are diffident, while others because they thought they were not entitled. The following is an example:

Omm: *“Le ta ma mort imkien. Ma mort imkien.”*

Intervistatur: *“Tahseb li tghin kieku jkun hawn nies apposta?”*

Missier: *“Iva”*

Omm: *“Heqq issa bhalkom mhux ghajnuna din. Anke li ġejtu u tkellimna d-dwejjaq taghna, diġa’ ghajnuna.”*

Intervistatur: *“Jiġifieri qatt ma ġie hadd ikellimkom fuq is-sitwazzjoni”*

Omm: *“Le le qatt hi qatt qatt. Qatt ma ġie hadd”*

Intervistatur: *“mmhmm... x’kienet ir-raġuni li qatt ma fittixtu l-ghajnuna?”*

Omm: *“X’ha mmur nghidilhom hi? Ghidli x’ha mmur nghidilhom?”*

Mother: *“No I did not go anywhere. Nowhere.”*

Interviewer: *“Do you think it would help if there were people specially for this.”*

Father: *“Yes.”*

Mother: *“Eh look at you... is’nt this help? Even though you only came and we talked about our worries. That is also help.”*

Interviewer: *“Do you mean to say that no one came to talk to you about*

your situation?”

Mother: “No no never. Nobody came.”

Interviewer: “...mmm... why did you never ask for help?”

Mother: “What am I to tell them dear... What am I to tell them.”

Another woman never sought help because she feared judgement:

“...Le dik le ma mmurx. Ghax nahseb li ha jippuntaw subghajhom lejja hux. Jghiduli tfittex l-ghajnuna meta ghamel ibnek!! Nahseb li ser jippuntaw subghajhom lejja. Trid toqghod naqra attenta hux?”

“...No I won't go like that. Because I think that they will start pointing their finger at me. They will tell me you look for help after what your son did. I think they will point their finger at me. You have to be careful, no?”

Communication issues also emerge as the culprit for much misinformation. Many of the participants on this study, regardless of their status, were unclear about the help that families can receive. An important confusion was about roles of professionals that could play a very important role in their lives and work. The example below is an example of what wardens expressed about professional input:

“With families ... what you have are the social workers and the psychologists, who are involved with them to do certain assessments, and who obviously come into contact with them.”

This portrays the wardens' assumption that there's no distinction between assessment and the much needed treatment. There's also the implied construction that the varied professions all do the same job. There's for example no mention of other very important professions relevant to this context like psychotherapy, youth work, family therapy, counselling and psychiatry. This miscommunication is across the board. All participants used terms like counsellor, psychologist, social worker, psychiatrist, psychotherapist and therapist interchangeably. There's a third inference here which is about the capacity to identify issues to resolve, and the capacity to ask for help. Participants on this study showed us that these capacities are missing.

THE SPIRAL THREAD

The common denominator across all emergent themes remains the disconnectedness expressed in the dysfunctional communication patterns. This spiral refers to what Wegner (1994) called the Ironic Processes 'whereby well-intentioned, persistently applied attempts to solve a problem feed back to keep the problem going or make it worse'(Rohrbaugh, 2014) .

Many challenges expressed above by the families participating in this study

emerge as connected systemically among themselves. They are also part of a bigger picture embracing the rest of the categories of themes namely Concerns, Relationships maintenance, Support, and the Healing process.

That is to say, for example, that the challenge of having to pay a fine for one's son or husband makes one concerned about it. At least one would worry about where to get the money from and what will have to give in, as a consequence. This in turn influences the way one perceives one's partner and the court and the lawyers (probably in anger and disappointment) etc. In return, this influences one's idea of the support needed, including the support not to fall behind, in the risk of poverty or real poverty, which in turn will influence one's healing process as a close relative. Each story narrated can be a typical case example. This cycle of misery and other ironic processes are involved in all the categories of themes mentioned above.

Another observation made during data analysis is that none of those interviewed ever mentioned the victims of crime, or at least the victims of their relative. The consideration of the victim is a very important aspect of restitutive justice, for example, and is also essential to the healing process of both the person in prison and his family. The questions that arise here would be those around the psycho-relational capacity to empathize with someone else, in this case the victim, when one is experiencing the misery of having a loved one in prison and the misery of having to pay the price of his or her crime. This breeds anger rather than empathy.

PUNISHMENT BASED SYSTEM – WHO IS BEING PUNISHED?

With everyone's life a misery it is wise to reflect on the conceptual positions our Correctional System is based on. It's as if there's a natural law somewhere saying that if someone makes a mistake the only way forward is to make his or her life miserable and make him or her pay for the mistake. This thinking is deprived of reflection on how cybernetic misery is, and how it spreads and spirals to contaminate those around the person until it reaches the system back, amplified. The perpetuation of misery is therefore short-sighted as it also lacks the perspective of the silent victims of crime, the families and children, and how they are involved in the payback. This leaves us with an important question about who the justice system is really punishing and who is really paying the price for the crime. This brings back to mind that father who said

“Ahjar qallu hmistax-il sena mill-ewwel milli qallu erbatax-il sena u tletin elf multa. Lilu ma wahhlu xejn tletin elf. Lilna wahhalhom ghax ahna rridu nhallsuholmli.”

“It would have been better if they had told him 15 years instead of fourteen and a thirty thousand euros fine. He did not fine him anything. He fined us... because we have to pay it for him.”

I also recall a conversation I had with a victim of a fraud, who was feeling miserable about having been defrauded of thousands of Euro. He was complaining about the fact that he will never have his money back and was satisfied that the fraudster was jailed for some years. This thinking fuels the recursive nature of punishment and misery.

This punishment-based cycle doesn't prove to be an efficient way of reaching the rehabilitative aims that our prison system targets. On the contrary, this punishment concept and the way it is enacted by our penal system through imprisonment seems actually to be making things worse, both for the person being sentenced and for his or her family, as well as for the community at large. For example repeat offenders made 75% of prison population in 2013 (The Times, 2013). Out of 555 inmates at CCF there are currently 312 repeat offenders with the number of cases ranging from 2 to 55.

There's also ample literature indicating how children of prisoners are paying the price of their parent's imprisonment. Literature consistently verifies that children of incarcerated parents are at an increased risk for both internalising and externalising problems compared to the general population (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010), with boys being more inclined towards externalising and girls towards internalising (Wildeman, 2010). What this essentially means is a trans-generational transmission of behaviour problems and eventually crime for boys, and mental illness for girls of incarcerated people.

Along with the person in prison therefore, families are also being punished for his or her crime. In this study the perpetuation of misery is clearly visible through low income, low education, financial difficulty, difficult child rearing, difficulties maintaining the relationship with the partner in prison, isolation, and more. This has been amply documented above.

Undoubtedly, the community is also being punished for the crimes committed. Apart from it being the victim of crime itself, it also pays the taxes to keep the Correctional System going. There are of course other prices the community pays. For example crime victims' healing processes are not necessarily complete by the imprisonment of the person who committed the crime, as was the case of the defrauded person who never got his money back. The community is also being punished with increased recidivism and dealing with the aftermath of re-criming. The increased possibility of trans-generational transmission of crime also makes the community more vulnerable to further criminality.

EVERYONE FEELS A HELPLESS VICTIM

There is a popular cliché which I came across along this journey. It was expressed by different people and put simply it says that "everyone in prison is innocent". It refers to prisoners of course and represents an ironic and assuming

construct by professionals¹⁹ about another construct some prisoners experience. The data generated by this study actually reveals a wider view, that in one way or another, everyone we interviewed feels they are victims. Victims of different circumstances of course.

FAMILIES AS VICTIMS

The support and services being offered to families are often the mandatory type of intervention by agents of control, like child protection services or probation services. The wardens have referred to the support received by families as that “provided by social workers”. This of course falls very short of addressing the families’ psychological and relational needs. In the absence of such help and services families often feel they’re being persecuted by mandatory services, by social workers and by agencies. This intensifies the feelings of mistrust and isolation, even further making families feel persecuted victims of the system.

Starting a relationship with court costs a lot of money which often has to either be shared by all family members or borrowed through illegal channels. Prisoners are not working and earning money, which in return puts heavy repayment burdens on the relatives of prisoners who often recourse to further illegal behaviour, like borrowing money from illegal sources, to procure the money. Banks of course would not dispense loans for such causes. An inevitable snare down poverty lane.

For example many reported feeling they’re being punished for something they did not do, especially parents who have children and feel their children are deprived of their father without any fault. Families also feel victims of impossible fines which they have to repay in some way. They also feel victims to lawyers’ and the court’s ‘exorbitant’ fees. The following are some excerpts which also hint at a relationship between imprisonment, feelings of being a victim and poverty.

“L-avukat qallu nohorġok bil-parole, lanqas sena! Ghamel kuraġġ u ammetta biex ma jgħaddix ġuri. Sa hmistax qabel l-avukat qalli tini tmax-il elf. Hadnielu tmax-il elf! Tajthomlu f’idejh! Mort isselifthom minn fuq l-idejn u żammuli l-usura, għadni qed inħallashom.”

“The lawyer told him I will get parole for you, in less than a year. So he admitted his guilt to avoid going to trial. Two weeks before the lawyer told me get me twelve thousand euros. I took the twelve thousand and put them in his hand. Had to borrow them from a loan shark at high interest and I am still paying them back.”

“Nahdem hafna imma l-flus lanqas tarahom. Thallsilhom avukati, grati u hekk. Meta hareġ bi pledge jġifieri kellu jhallas erbat elef. L-ewwel darba ried sitt elef l-avukat. Heqq. Jiena pensjonant. Tawni

¹⁹By professionals I here refer to all those professionals and volunteers related or relating to prison and prisoners in some way. It refers to the generalization, a cliché that all prisoners see themselves as innocent, which is of course not true.

xi haġa oħra ħutu. Hu ma kellux flus. Mela din mhux oħra issa... kien ilu jaħdem xi ħames ġimgħat, tah iċ-ċekkijiet. Mar il-bank biex issarraffhom u żammhomlu, ma tawhomlux il-bank.”

“I work a lot but I never see the money. You pay the lawyer, courts and such..... When he came out on pledge, it means he had to pay four thousand. The first time the lawyer wanted six thousand. Heqq, I am a pensioner. His brothers/sisters gave me something. He did not have any money. Isn't that something else now..... he had been working for five weeks, he gave him the cheques. He went to the bank to cash them and they withheld them, the bank didn't give them to him.”

“Ahna nghixu bid-donations, sabiħa. Dawn li għandi fuqi kollha donations jien (titbissem), mhux daqshekk sbieħ. Sbieħ imma, sbieħ ... ehmm... anke l-panty nahseb. Tghidli 'ma taħdimx'? L-ispejjeż huma kbar. Ma nlahħaqx mal-ispejjeż. Multi, avukati, lilu.”

“We live on donations, my dear. What I have on my back here, are all donations (smiling), not so nice. Nice however, nice.... ehmm.... even the panty I think. You may ask, 'don't you work?' The expenses are huge. I don't manage with the expenses. Fines, lawyers, him.....”

It was amazing how even a wife of a sexual abuser was feeling victim of the victim of her husband's assault. She repeatedly expressed how her husband's victim and his or her family together with the justice system have shattered her family (“*Kissruli familja*”).

PRISONERS AS VICTIMS

There is also a sense of helplessness that emerges at other levels. For example the prisoners themselves demonstrated this sense of feeling victims. As one reads through the notes taken by the facilitators of the male inmates' focus group one can capture how this sense of helplessness has contaminated even the facilitators themselves. The same sense emerged from the female inmates' focus group.

“On the other hand they wanted to know how talking to us can help their family, sceptical that anything can come out of it ... the lack of resources in prison, how they, the inmates have to buy all the personal stuff they need, toilet paper, shampoo, toothpaste, etc and how many do not have the financial resources to do so and thus lack basic needs to live decently. They feel that people, important people use inmates, to gain them points in the local media, and/or use them for political gains ... The conversation continued to deteriorate, where my colleague and I refrained from defending our position and tried to empathize with their situation, showing interest in their plight, yet not being able to offer them anything other than that.”

WARDENS AS VICTIMS

At another level wardens feel they're victims of a wider system that involves the media, society, higher authority, prisoners, agencies, and others. Here's one example capturing the sense of helplessness in relationship to other agencies outside prison.

"I think we have to look at other services and they would be working for the same goal. And not as it is now, everyone is working independently (miexi għal rasu) ... Our experience is that at times they see a difficult case and politely refuse it because it's difficult to handle. I'm not blaming anyone of course ... there may be certain difficulties for the case to be accepted. But even we suffer, because at the end of the day we come across as not doing enough. But we don't have these specialist services and rely on external agencies."

VOLUNTEERS AS VICTIMS

As seen in the excerpts above there's also volunteers who expressed a similar sentiment of being unable to make any changes to the 'system'. In this person's opinion, the responsible actor is the government.

"Kulhadd imxebba'...jitle' gvern, jinżel iehor, il-kmamar bl-umdu kienu, għadhom u hekk jibqghu. Iċ-chips biż-żejt kienet, għadha u tibqa'. Xejn mhu ser jinbidel, xejn. U din lili tbeżżaghni hafna. Ahna kif qal... ippruvajna hafna, kemm-il darba nahdmu mal-familji però mhux faċli tasal għalihom."

Everybody is fed up.... one government after the other and the very damp are still the same and will probably remain like that. Potato chips have always been full of oil, still is and will remain as it is. Nothing will change, nothing. And this frightens me a lot. We like he just said... tried many times to reach the families but it is not easy."

"Minn kemm ili nżur u nitkellem mal-priġunieri tghallimt li l-habs huwa kollox barra post ta' riforma. Kollox barra faċilità korrettiva!"
"Since I have started visiting prison and talk to prisoners I have learned that the prison is anything but a place to reform yourself. Anything but a correctional facility!"

When people feel they are helpless victims they tend to lose trust in who or what they see as authority and devise psychological and relational defence mechanisms to protect themselves rather than attend to others' needs. This also happens at an administrative level where administrators feel victims and create measures to protect themselves.

IRONIC PROCESSES AND THE SUCCESSFUL FAILURE OF THE CORRECTION SYSTEM

One could go on forever tracking and mapping the dynamics of Ironic Processes

(Wegner,1994) emerging in this study. The pattern is simple though. The justice system is based on punishment. Fines and imprisonment are two main forms of punishment relied on. There is a general idea that this way works best for everyone, giving the person who committed the crime his due, giving the victim the psychological satisfaction, and the community the peace of mind. Around this system are created a series of beliefs and measures that although failing, we still persist in doing them as if no alternatives exist. Meanwhile, when the system fails us (e.g. continued recidivism) we do more of what we know best, even though it doesn't work. We assume that punishments need increasing and give higher fines and longer sentences without noticing that we are making things worse rather than better. This leads to the successful failure of the Correctional System and, as attempted to show above, involves all the structures in the community.

5 IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

FAMILIES THAT FLY UNDER THE RADAR

There's also an invisible population of families and relatives who for different reasons could not participate in the research. Families of foreign prisoners were not contacted for this study as they are not living in Malta. Almost 40% of people the Corradino Correctional Facility are foreigners coming from many different countries. One wonders the peculiar experience these families face day in day out, and whether they would have spoken about their situation differently than Maltese families. During the literature search, no research was encountered about foreign prisoners and one can only hypothesize about their families' idiosyncratic experience of having someone in prison in a different country. One would hypothesize about amplified problems of access and communication, as well as difficulties of participation in family matters like co-parenting. It would be interesting to see how family dynamics change in the presence of such absence (Sluzki, 2016).

This takes us to cross-cultural considerations about family life and the experience of families of the incarcerated. For example one wonders how foreign families would have had a different relationship with their relative in prison had he or she been imprisoned in one's own country? For example literature on marital satisfaction shows that prisoners in U.S. prisons appear to have much less spousal contact than Maltese prisoners at CCF. It is also important to keep in mind that the literary sources contributing to this literature review are predominantly foreign, with the majority being from the U.S. or the U.K.

SENTENCED FOR LIFE

There's another special population of families of those who are sentenced for life. We are very curious about these families' peculiar needs and healing process,

as well as the constructions around their experience of life sentencing.

SILENCE SPEAKS LOUDER THAN WORDS

There are also those families who refused to take part in this study and whose voice cannot be represented. About these people we can only hypothesise - what statement did they intend to make through their refusal? We prefer to consider this refusal as an important and as valid a communication as the dialogues in the interviews or the discussion in other focus groups. Some perhaps refused out of fear, others perhaps out of rebellion towards a system they feel is failing them and their families.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF THE CURRENT PRISON STAFF

Whilst we are concerned about the well-being of inmates and their families, we believe that wardens as well as other prison staff also merit careful attention. This study has further indicated difficulties in carrying out the job. McCraty et al (2009, p. 251) discuss how "... the constant exposure to interpersonal violence, negative or confrontational interactions, and a sense of personal endangerment can affect officers on a chronic basis." Prison wardens are the front liners who deal with inmates and their families on a daily basis, often working long hours in the process, and with little preparation for the psychological complexities they will encounter.

Prison wardens hold a unique professional reality. Similarly to mental health professionals, they are susceptible to encounter difficulties relating to burnout, secondary and vicarious trauma. But as Spinaris (2013) holds "there are distinct differences between the work experiences of corrections professionals and those of helping professionals employed in non-correctional environments that would need to be taken into account." Mental health professionals are encouraged to connect meaningfully to the client's as well as one's own personal experience. There seems to be an unspoken expectation for law enforcement officers to be thick-skinned and to rise above personal vulnerability, which is often considered a weakness. This will mean that wardens and other officers might be reticent to ask for help if they experience mental health difficulties. Moreover within professional ethics, we professionals are called to regularly benefit from supervision and reflect upon our personal resonance with clients' material, whilst wardens do not. What does being professional mean for a warden? How do they handle the powerful emotions that may be stirred within them? Wardens are expected to act as agents of control. At the same time this is an invitation to participate more actively in the inmate's rehabilitation. How can they successfully manage the complexity of these roles? What do they need from the structure that employs them to feel supported in engaging on this level? And, as one warden put it during a focus group, "Even we have

families”.

6 ONE FINAL REFLECTION

Within the research team, an ongoing focus was made on how to connect and meaningfully represent a reality that was perceived as miles apart from our own. As Britt-Krause (2012) accurately describes, we are always representing our relations to others and we cannot do so independently of perspective (for perspective, read assumptions, history, theory or epistemology). Discussing imprisonment necessarily brings about discourse related to criminality and criminal behaviour. The team was predominantly composed of experienced therapists, trainee therapists, youth workers and volunteers. Within our professional remit we are all invited to walk in the client’s shoes and look out for personal resonance as a vehicle to connection. Yet thinking about criminality led us to a place where it was seductive to “other” (Kitzinger 1996) incarcerated persons and disassociate ourselves from behaviours that can be cruel or damaging to others like theft or indeed murder. As professionals we are intent on helping others rather than hurting them.

Rowe (2014, p. 414) writes that “admitting to our embodied and subjective presence in the field becomes both a source of substantive understanding and a solution to the discomfort and compromises that even marginal participation in a complex field like a prison inevitably entails”. Yet was access to the ‘darker’ sides within us so inaccessible? We questioned whether we are really immune to a fit of anger that might make us do the unthinkable, or succumb to the opportunity to access large amounts of money dishonestly. And suddenly the gap seemed to shrink down considerably. On some level there was no ‘other’ but a continuum of ‘being’ between us and them.

7 CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the experience of families of the incarcerated. We worked to achieve this understanding by involving ourselves with some of the many others involved in the Correctional System. The anguish with which the experience of having a loved one in prison is lived emerges visibly as do the difficulties experienced. Particularly visible are themes around relational issues that colour this experience, together with a gross worry on the children of the incarcerated. The painstaking commitment to overcome this experience, and the family and social support, transpire as resilience factors of this vulnerable group. The need for the shift from punishment to rehabilitation is visibly highlighted through the ironic processes existing in the Correctional System. A systemic perspective to the Correctional System emphasized the importance of introducing the collaborative approach in tackling this transition. Recommendations were made as to how this study’s

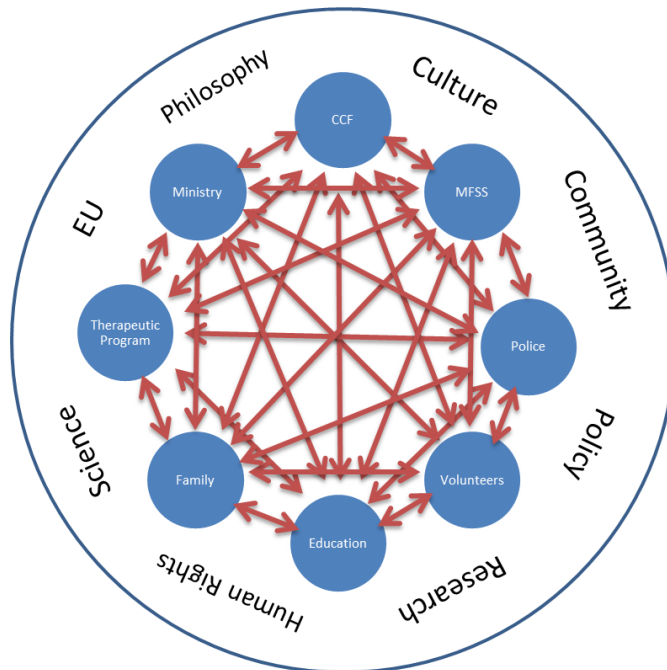
outcomes can be applied.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

AN OVERALL RECOMMENDATION

This study reveals how participants all invite a cultural reform and a shift from punishment to rehabilitation. We advocate for a systemic ecological approach to the Correctional System enabling connectedness between all players and the smooth and seamless communication and relationships between management, departments, units, services, families, government, prisoners and the community. Imprisonment is a community affair.

ECOLOGICAL CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM



SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The current situation calls for a family-centred policy and protocol that keep the family and children at its centre. Such policy and protocol should take into consideration, and incorporate into national law and practice the rights of the child as indicated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The most powerful recommendations are those addressing relationships. We believe the following measures are essential for the shift from punishment to rehabilitation.

1. Many of the challenges expressed by the families participating in this study, as well as many concerns, can be addressed by the setting up of a body for

the coordination of efforts to improve connectedness and communication between all players in the Correctional System. Such body shall be composed of representatives of all those involved in the Correctional System including the court and legal system, The Police, the correctional system, government, community, service providers, families, prisoners, and various experts including youth workers, psychologists, medical doctors, psychotherapists and family therapists.

2. This study has undoubtedly brought to our attention the importance of family involvement in the Correctional System. Family involvement is beneficial for the prevention of recidivism and trans-generational transmission of crime where there are children. The families interviewed all described a reluctance to actively seek help. Outreach services can address this reluctance effectively from arrest to release.
3. The design of a personalised family therapeutic programme from arrest to release involving the partners and family. Such involvement plays a crucial role on both the quality of the rehabilitation and the return to the community.
4. A child and family centred Correctional System will ensure that family intervention is made by professionals in the field, with additional specialist training (Gussak, 2014). Couples Therapy, Parenting Training and Family Therapy are all highly recommended.
5. It is also recommended that an improved family and child friendly setting that can welcome families and children be considered. This will allow us to be in line with the 2006 European Prison Rules that state that “arrangements for visits shall be such as to allow prisoners to maintain and develop family relationships in as normal a manner as possible” (Jones & Wainaina-Wozna, 2012).
6. A truly Rehabilitative project shall ensure that each prisoner is encouraged to pursue a personal and relational therapeutic journey involving accessible and consistent professional psychotherapeutic intervention to ensure psycho-social benefits.
7. Because official indicators show that the largest category of prisoners has drug related issues²⁰ a programme shall be designed for prisoners with addiction problems. Where collaboration with external agencies exists, such programmes shall undergo scrutiny for their efficacy and outcome by the body mentioned in number 1.
8. The Correctional system shall provide a therapeutic community model of treatment especially to all inmates, in particular to younger offenders and their families.

²⁰Data provided by the director of prisons on the 20th October 2016.

9. A national education campaign shall be launched addressing the need for a cultural shift from punishment to rehabilitation.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

10. Ensure that foreign families and children of prisoners at CCF have adequate access to their beloved. Special provisions shall also be made in their favour. The use of technology as advocated by Travis (2005) shall be implemented to overcome distance.
11. Ensure that all Correctional System staff is professionally trained particularly in areas of interpersonal skills, self-reflexivity, children and families.
12. Provide regular support and supervision to all Correctional System staff to promote their mental health and family well-being.
13. This data calls the government to seriously reconsider the national addiction prevention measures and treatment options and to uplift them to optimal professional standards to include more efficacious approaches.

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Mid-Dlam ghad-Dawl (pronounced: midlam ad-dawl) is the Maltese version of “From Darkness to Light.” This name was chosen by the founders of our organisation to express their hope in the future. The organisation was founded on April 10, 1995, by a group of prisoners held at our local Corradino Correctional Facility in Paola, Malta. The original aim of the founders was to help themselves and their families undergo the prison experience with more dignity and self-esteem.

Mid-Dlam ghad-Dawl is a valuable partner for the authorities and justice administrators of our country for the improvement of justice; an association of professionals who provide advice and support in improving the structures of the penal system; and an uncompromising foe of criminality and an unflinching defender of every prisoner’s future possibility of living happily whilst upholding the legitimate laws of the nation.

Mid-Dlam ghad-Dawl volunteers visit the prison on a regular basis. During these visits our volunteers give support, advise and help to those prisoners who might need them by:

- Helping in their emotional and social difficulties and to keep a healthy contact with their loved ones outside.
- Being there to listen and empathise before, during and after their sentence.
- Providing material help including clothing, footwear, books and sometimes even money.
- Giving temporary shelter to homeless ex-prisoners.
- Organizing training sessions, surveys and other studies to able to know better the situation of prisoners and suggest changes to the authorities.
- Giving support to the families of prisoners in the difficult situation they are facing

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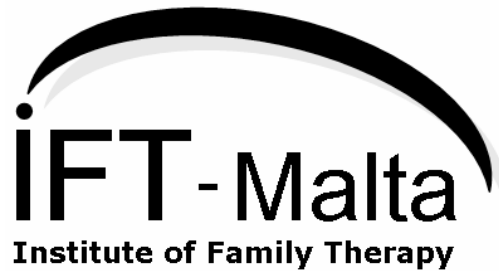
Prisms is a group of experienced youth workers and leaders that came together with the aim of creating an NGO that caters for the requirements of young people. Prisms aims to empower young people with the skills, tools, information and values necessary for personal growth and to be active participants within society. Prisms provides to the necessities of young people through various methods of education but principally through non-formal methods of education so as to reach their needs in a holistic manner.

This has led us for the past eight years to design projects that target all young people but with special focus on those young people that are not always easy to reach and young people that because of the difficult backgrounds or because they come from traditionally excluded groups tend to be marginalised and left out. It is for this reason that our focus is shifted more towards detached youth work and we go where the young people are to explore and experience their context. To do this, Prisms integrates innovation with youth work practices to ensure that projects being implemented are always effective and addressing the real needs of young people.

Through the years Prisms worked with local and foreign entities like; Appoġġ, Conservatorio Vincenzo Bugeja, Institute for Tourism Studies, St. Patricks School, Department for Students Services and various European NGOs. Through these partnerships more than 30 projects were successfully implemented on topics varying from Intercultural Communication, Disability, Online Youth Work, Coaching for Young People, Project Management, Human Rights and Volunteering. The aims of these projects are two-fold. On the one hand we equip the youth workers and other professionals with added skills and knowledge which they can then use with the young people they work with and on the other hand using the context of the young people projects are devised to cater for their needs and to provide them with knowledge and skills to make them more employable and active citizens. In fact, this has been one of the main reasons why we have been so enthusiastic to be on board of this research project since we believe it can shed light on a very important and sensitive issue and can provide the appropriate support services for the persons concerned.

In the coming years Prisms will continue to innovate on the approaches being used in the youth field. Prisms strives to continue to work to and to establish high quality youth work in Malta and on a European level.

Website: www.prismsmalta.com
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The Institute of Family Therapy Malta (IFT Malta) was established to further contribute towards securing the well-being of individuals, families and organizations and communities in Malta and Gozo.

As an Institute, IFT Malta works to provide high quality training and clinical work in the field of Systemic Family Psychotherapy with organisations, families, couples and individuals. The Institute is an Associate Member of the Training Institutes Chamber of the European Family Therapy Association and also an Institutional Member in Good Standing of the International Family Therapy Association.

The services offered by IFT Malta include training in Systemic Psychotherapy and related therapies to professionals; individual, group, and family psychotherapy; family mediation; family education to the general public; consultation to organizations and professionals in relation to clinical practice; clinical supervision to organizations and professionals in relation to clinical practice; systemic consultation to public or private organizations; research on a variety of family related subjects; constant liaison with other institutions.

IFT Malta is also committed to deliver relationship education programmes for partners, spouses, and parents, children, schools and organizations to promote well-being in society, based on positive family and work environments, and a healthy balance between the two.

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