AN IPA STUDY INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH A PARENT IN PRISON AND THE ADULTS WHO SUPPORT THEM

By

ELENYA KIM MCGOVERN

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ABSTRACT

There are an estimated 192,912 - 312,000 children with a parent in prison in England and Wales. Children impacted by parental imprisonment (CIPs) often experience an increased risk of adversities compared to children without a parent in prison including future offending, reduced school attainment, school non-attendance, mental health difficulties, externalising behaviours, and anti-social behaviour. Despite this, there is no formal process of identification or support for these children. School staff have reported feeling frustrated and unsuccessful in supporting CIPs. The main challenge of supporting this group in schools is the lack of identification, which is made harder by the attached stigma and judgement for offenders and their families within society. This thesis explored the experiences of a young person impacted by parental imprisonment and the experiences of adults who support children in schools. This study employed multi-perspective interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to explore how individuals from two sub-samples made sense of their experiences of parental imprisonment. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, transcribed, and analysed using IPA. The following personal experiential themes were identified from the young person's experience: 'Everyone Knows Everything', 'Relationships Above All Else', 'Building Resilience' and 'Time: The Chapters in her Life'. From the adult sample, 'Psychological Impact of Parental Imprisonment', 'Knowing and Sharing Information' and 'Systemic and Structural Factors' were the themes abstracted. Overlapping themes included the importance of relationships in supporting CIPs, and particularly the importance of honesty and trust between CIPs and adults. The study contributes to limited qualitative literature into the experiences of CIPs and adults who support these children in schools. The study

outlines implications for schools and educational psychologists and their role in advocating for, and creating safe, welcoming environments for CIPs.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

This volume is part one of a two-part thesis that forms the requirements of the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology at the University of Birmingham. This study was conducted in Years Two and Three of the doctorate whilst I was a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) on placement in a West Midlands local authority (LA) educational psychology service (EPS). Volume one presents a small-scale qualitative study exploring the lived experiences of children of imprisoned parents (CIPs) and how they are supported. The current study uses multi-perspective interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to gather and analyse the views of a young person and adults who support CIPs in schools. This chapter outlines the structure of this volume and provides a rationale for this study.

1.2. Research Rationale

As a TEP, I have been on placement with two LAs in the West Midlands, whilst engaging in taught sessions on a range of topics related to the educational psychologist (EP) role. Part of my role as a TEP has included working in a range of education settings across the core functions of the EP role (Farrell et al. 2006). During this time, I have had several conversations with school staff and parents who shared information regarding to parental imprisonment of children or young people (CYP). However, this was not always considered relevant or significant to their presenting needs. During my training, I have taken an interactionist approach to formulation of needs and frequently refer to Bronfenbrenner & Morris' (2006) bioecological model of human development. This theory highlights the importance of seeing children's needs not as isolated or within-child but building a contextual

understanding of the systems around the child and to identify how these interact overtime to impact child development and presenting needs. As I was scoping the breadth of literature on this topic across various disciplines, I found this model helpful to organise factors related to parental imprisonment (PI).

1.3. Research Context

England and Wales have the highest imprisonment rate per capita in Western Europe (Jones & Lally, 2024) with an increase in prison numbers in the UK, the highest since 2011 (Hoddinott et al., 2023). With this increase, it could be assumed that there would be more CYP impacted by familial imprisonment. However, due to a lack of recording of CIPs in England, there are no known statistics on the exact number, but estimations suggest between 193,000 (Ministry of justice (MoJ), 2024) and 312,000 (Kincaid, 2019) CYP each year. Previous research suggests that CIPs are at risk of future offending, absence from school (Kahya & Ekinci, 2018), reduced academic attainment, poor mental health, school exclusion (Lee et al., 2013; Murray & Farrington, 2008), externalising behaviours (Besemer et al., 2011), and poorer physical health outcomes (Turney, 2018). Despite awareness of these risks, there is little recognition of this population within national policy or visibility in society and schools. To provide appropriate support, education professionals and policy makers must better understand the experiences and needs of CIPs. There have been small scale studies into the views of children, however given this is not a homogenous group, there is still a need for more research into the experiences of this population to build our understanding and to better meet the needs of CIPs.

1.3. Structure of Volume One

The remainder of this thesis is comprised of the following chapters outlined below:

- Chapter Two offers a review of the literature which has explored the impact of PI on CYP. I have used Bronfenbrenner and Morris' (2006) Bioecological Systems Theory (BEST) to structure this chapter and to help the reader to see the interacting systems for CIPs as identified in the literature.
- Chapter Three is in two parts; part one outlines the philosophical approach of the research along with my positionality as a researcher. Part two describes my research design and the methodological approach taken including an overview of IPA, a summary of alternative methodologies considered, methods of data collection and ethical considerations.
- Chapter Four presents the findings of my research along with a discussion of participants' experiences. Within this chapter I present the single case personal experiential themes, of the young person interviewed, and the group experiential themes of the adults included in this study. I consider the abstracted themes in relation to the study's research questions and I evaluate the study's strengths and limitations and offer some suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction to the Literature Review

2.1.1. Literature Review Structure

The present study aims to explore the experiences of CYP with a parent in prison. This chapter begins by considering key terminology, the context regarding the prison population in England and Wales and that of CYP with a parent in prison. It then examines the literature surrounding PI organised through Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). This literature review will highlight that PI does not occur in isolation but is shaped by a range of individual and environmental risk and protective factors over time. A review of the extant literature leads to the rationale for the present study and my research questions.

2.1.1. Terminology

Children affected by PI are described in various ways within the literature, including, but not limited to, 'children of imprisoned parents' (Shaw et al., 2022; Weidberg,2017), 'children with parents in prison' (Riyantono et al., 2022), 'children of prisoners' (Christman et al., 2012; Kincaid et al., 2019; Manby et al., 2012; Saunders, 2018) 'children experiencing parental imprisonment' (Harris et al., 2024; Murray et al., 2009) 'children of incarcerated parents' (Ajdini, 2012; Dallaire et al., 2010; Poehlmann-Tynan & Turney, 2021) and those experiencing 'parental incarceration' (Bomysoad & Francis, 2022; Shaver et al. 2024). I have chosen to use the term 'children of imprisoned parents' (CIPs) over the more frequently used 'children of prisoners', in line with Weidberg (2017) who argues that this language highlights the

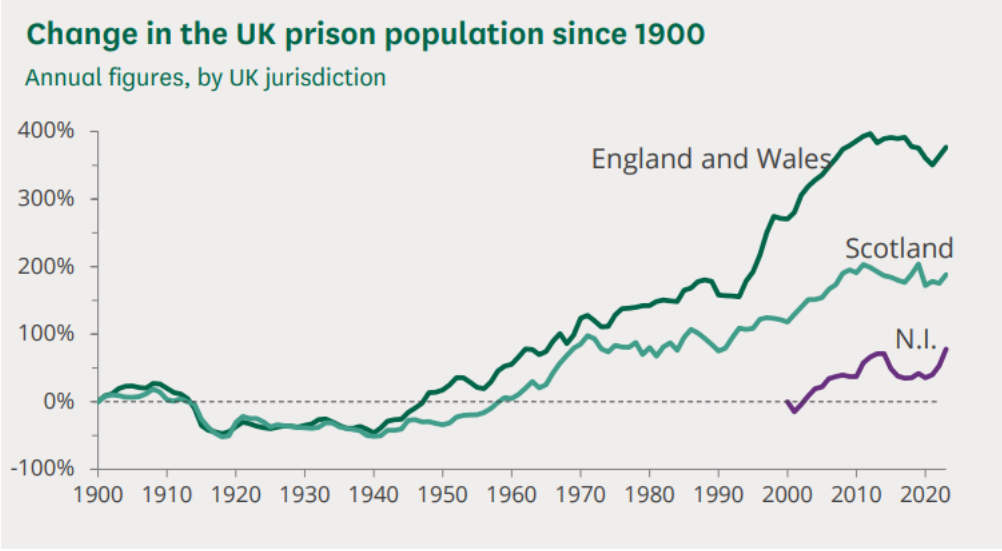
significance of the parental role. Whilst I use the term ‘parents’, I am including carers, guardians or primary attachment figures in this.

2.1.2. Context

2.1.2.1 Prison Population. The United Kingdom (UK) has a total prison population of approximately 97,800, with 87,900 in England and Wales as of March 2024, a rise of 4% since 2023 which is shown in Figure 1 (Sturge, 2024). Projections expect the population of prisoners in England and Wales to increase to between 95,100 and 114,200 by November 2027 (Sturge, 2024). Whilst not formally recorded, these statistics may suggest an increase of parents in prison and therefore an increase in CIPs in the UK.

Figure 1.

UK prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2024)



Source: MoJ (England and Wales) Offender Management Statistics Quarterly, various years; Scottish Government, Prison statistics and population projections; DoJ (Northern Ireland) The Northern Ireland Prison Population 2022/23

Most prisoners are under 40, but the prison population is aging (Sturge, 2024). Minority ethnic groups are overrepresented, making up 27% of prisoners compared to 18% of the general population, women account for 4% of the prison population

(Sturge, 2024). It is notable that whilst these characteristics are recorded, there is no data available on the number of prisoners who have children, but estimations have been made.

2.1.2.2. Children of imprisoned parents (CIPs). The Ministry of Justice (MoJ, 2024) estimated that there were 192,912 children with a parent in prison between 2021-2022. This figure is significantly higher than a previously estimated 90,000 children in 2009 (Williams et al., 2012). Other estimations sit between 310,000 and 312,000 children each year in England and Wales (National Information Centre on Children of Offenders [NICCO], 2018; Kincaid et al., 2019). Children of Prisoners Europe (COPE) estimates that there are 800,000 children within the European Union separated from a parent in prison on any given day, increasing to 2.1 million including Council of Europe countries (COPE, 2025). Without statutory processes of formal identification, this population remains statistically 'invisible' which may lead to the needs of these children being unidentified and unsupported (Beresford et al., 2020).

2.1.2.3. Outcomes for CIPs. Risks associated with PI include poverty, parental unemployment, homelessness and mental illness (Poehlmann et al., 2019). Antisocial behaviour is three times more likely to occur for CIPs (Shaw et al, 2022) as well as increased probability of future offending (Besemer et al., 2017). CIPs are more at risk of mental health problems (Davis & Shlafer, 2017), and twice as likely to experience mental health difficulties than other children (Murray et al., 2009; Shaw et al., 2022). CYP and families have reported feeling stigmatised by peers, communities, schools and the media (Brooks & Frankham, 2021;Manby et al, 2015., Saunders, 2018., Weidberg, 2017). CIPs will often keep PI a secret to protect

themselves or family members leading to further isolation (Losel et al.,2012; Riyantono et al.,2022). Despite the bleak picture painted from this literature, on the outcomes for CIPs they are commonly referred to as a 'hidden' or 'invisible' population.

2.2. Bioecological Systems Theory and CIPs

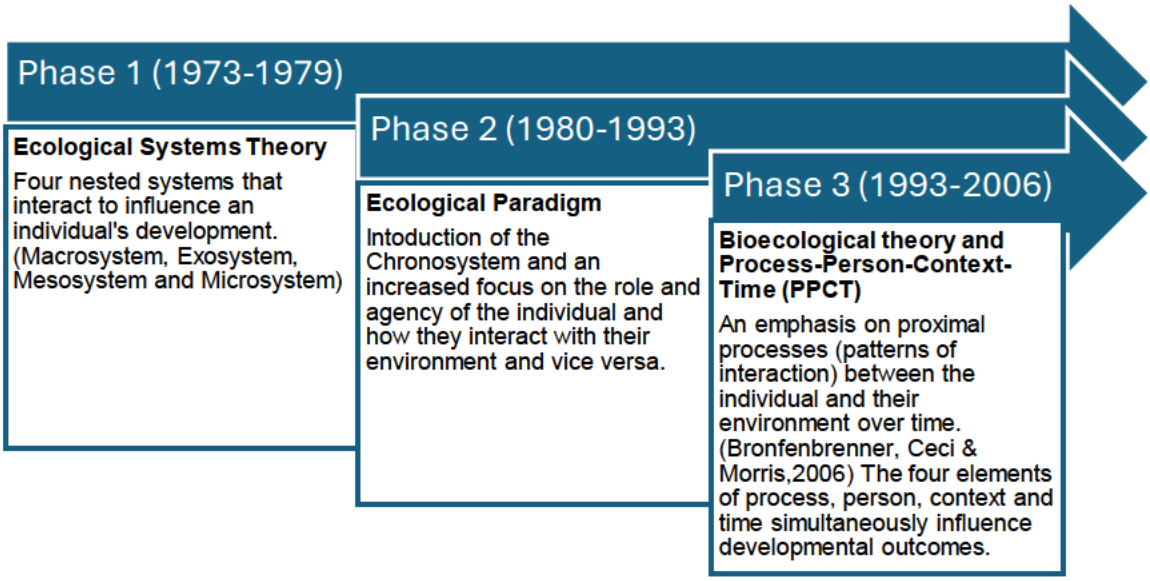
2.2.1. Theoretical Context

I apply Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Systems Theory (BEST) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006) as a lens through which to consider the literature on the impact of PI on children. This theory offers a way of contextualising experiences of a heterogenous group, whilst highlighting interrelating factors such as parent/child relationships, gender, poverty, and cultural and societal views (Arditi, 2015). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of human development posited that development is an interaction of the individual and the systems within which they exist. These systems were termed the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner developed his theory over time through various phases. The first phase (1973-1979) placed the individual within four systems and demonstrated how the systems interacted to influence the development of the child. The second phase (1980-1993) criticised the earlier model as over reliant on the environment, placing greater emphasis on the active role of the individual in influencing the environment and vice versa (Bronfenbrenner,1989). The interaction between the biological and environmental forces led to developmental outcomes. During this time Bronfenbrenner (1989) also introduced the chronosystem, this described changes that occur over a person's life and in their environment over time. The third phase (1993-2006) saw an increased focus on proximal processes

where Bronfenbrenner collaborated with Ceci (1994) and Morris (1998, 2006). They built upon the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model to demonstrate how connections between a proximal process (complex, reciprocal interaction), personal characteristics, contextual factors and time influenced individual development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris,2006). Figure 2 summarises the evolution of Bronfenbrenner's theory.

Figure 2.

The Development of the Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1973-2006)



A decision to use the bioecological model to structure my narrative literature review over other formats such as systematic literature review was made due to several key considerations. To comprehensively scope the literature on this topic, I examined research across multiple disciplines, including criminology, sociology, social work, education, and law, among others. The experience of parental imprisonment is unique to every individual, therefore, I felt this structure offered a

broader, more systemic perspective that accounts for the multiple and interconnected environments surrounding each child, rather than adhering to the linear, hierarchical framework typical of traditional narrative literature reviews. This structure allowed me to capture the diverse influences surrounding the issue whilst recognising both risk and protective factors identified in the literature. The individual is influenced by, and influences, their environment and developmental outcomes overtime, whilst interacting with unique contexts at each level. Table 1 presents an overview of the terminology used by Bronfenbrenner which is referred to throughout this literature review.

Table 1.

Bioecological Systems Theory Definitions (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Bronfenbrenner & Morris,1998)

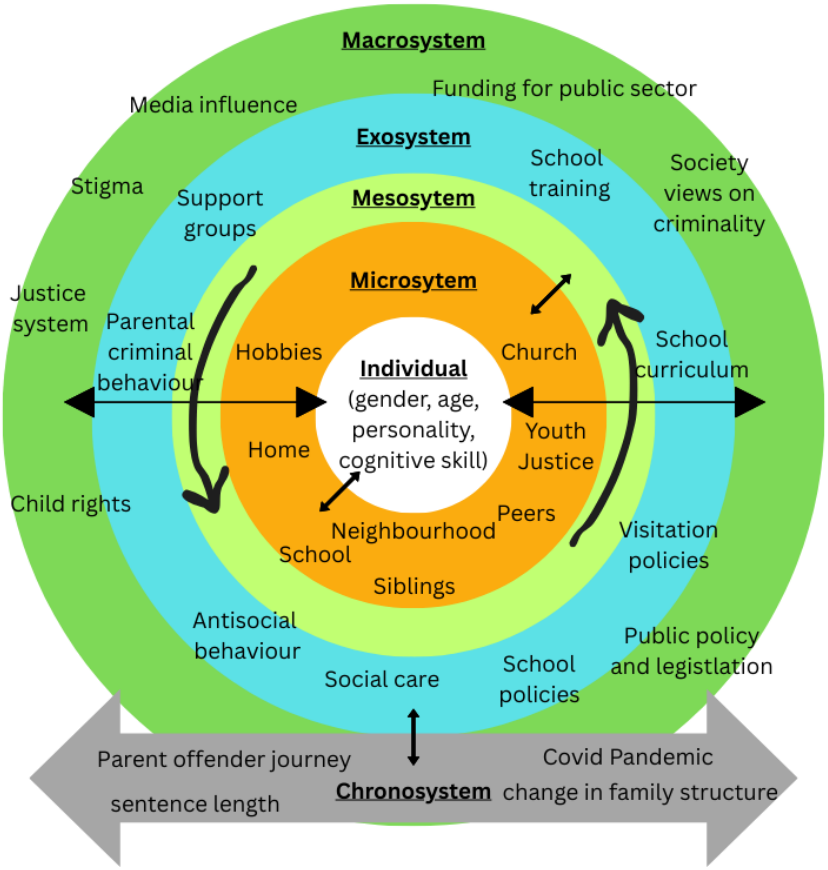
Terminology	Definition	Example
Individual level/ Person	At the centre of the model which focuses on biological, psychological and genetic characteristics and how these interact with their environment. "The developing person is viewed as an active agent who inevitably plays some part in any developmental process taking place in the microsystem… each member of a microsystem influences every other member." (Bronfenbrenner, 1989. p. 239).	Age Gender Personality Physical and mental health Temperament Attainment Likes/Dislikes
Microsystem	"A microsystem is a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features, and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief." (Bronfenbrenner,1989. p. 227).	School Home Family Peers Clubs Communities Places of worship
Mesosystem	"The linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person… a system of microsystems." (Bronfenbrenner, 1989. p.227).	Relationships between home and school. Relationships between caregiver and parent in prison.

Exosystem	"The linkage and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person, but in which events occur that influence processes within the immediate setting that does contain the person." (Bronfenbrenner, 1989. p.227) Exo and meso systems "both deal with the relations between two or more settings." (Bronfenbrenner, 1989. p.237).	School policy and staff training. Financial resources of community groups or organisations. Visiting hours and visitation centre policies. Social care involvement,
Macrosystem	"The structure and content of constituent systems, with particular reference to the developmentally-instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, patterns of social exchange opportunity structures, and life course options that are embedded in each of these systems…a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader social context" (Bronfenbrenner,1989 p.228)	Societal stigma Public policy Children's rights UK justice system Youth justice system
Chronosystem/Time	This was extended to the *Time* component of the PPCT model described as "the changing expectations and events in the larger society, both within and across generations, as they affect and are affected by, processes and outcomes of human development over the life course." (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p.995).	Historical events Personal life transitions Change in family structure Societal economic change Offender Journey Parental offender journey

Bronfenbrenner's ecological paradigm has been applied to research into PI when examining how it can impact a child's development and experiences (Arditti & Johnson, 2022; Clark et al., 2023; Rudd et al., 2019; Shaver et al.,2024). Of this research, many are based outside of the UK or within other disciplines (Arditti, 2005; Harris, 2020; Rudd, 2019). There is research exploring the perspectives of fathers (Dennison et al., 2017), mother-child conflict (Rudd et al., 2019), and parental re-integration back into communities (Clark et al., 2023). Additionally, a recent scoping review of school psychology publications used BEST to examine the extent of PI within American school psychology literature (Shaver et al., 2024) and called for more focus from schools and educational psychology into this area. Payler et al. (2025) outlined the needs and support of CIPs, describing the negative impact of PI at personal, institutional and societal levels of child development. Using BEST to examine the experiences of children impacted by PI can increase awareness of protective factors rather than solely focussing on risks and adversities. Furthermore, it allows for contextualisation of an individual's personal, social, and wider societal intersectionality that may exist overtime. Figure 3 offers an example of a populated bioecological model in relation to CIPs, showing how the systems interact.

Figure 3.

Bioecological Model and CIPs



2.2.2. Chapter Overview

This chapter is structured using the bioecological model, starting with individual factors which influence, and are influenced by, a child's environment. I will then explore features of the microsystem within the literature and how they interact with each other and the individual. Whilst I have not dedicated a section to the meso- and exosystem, factors that relate to these are acknowledged throughout. Features within the macrosystem such as public policy and societal views are explored before

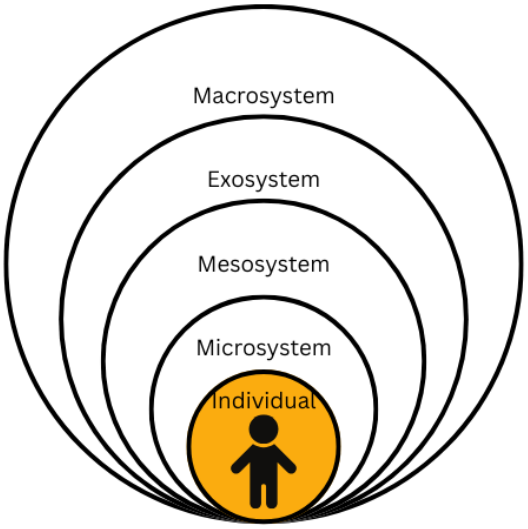
outlining some areas of the chronosystem. This will lead to a clear justification and rationale for the present study.

2.3. CIPs & individual level factors

BEST emphasises the role of the individual as agents within their own lives, negotiating their surrounding context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2007) saw individual characteristics as having influence over a person's development and their interaction with their environment. This section will explore key factors at the individual level (Figure 4).

Figure 4.

Bioecological Systems Theory: The Individual Level



These characteristics include personality, temperament and ability (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2007). Each CYP has unique characteristics which influence their interaction with their environment and their lived experiences. These can be physical, cognitive or biopsychological and the variation in these may attribute to why CIPs can have differing experiences. Resilience is an example of an interacting trait which can enable a child to flourish and succeed rather than face

further adversity. Payler et al. (2025) adopted a cultural-historical perspective to examine how CIPs in the UK are supported at an individual, institutional and societal level. The factors at each level interact with one another to impact the child's agency, engagement and motivation to participate with other factors within their microsystem (Payler et al., 2025). Due to challenges with recruitment, many studies into the experiences of CIPs use convenience sampling and therefore there has been limited research into experiences of CIPs from specific genders, ages, ethnicities or other individual factors (Jones et al., 2013; Weidberg et al.,2017).

2.3.1. Resilience and protective factors

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines resilience as "the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences" (APA, 2018). There has been an increased focus into resilience of CIPs (Christmann et al., 2012; Goodchild., 2018., Jones et al., 2013; Weidberg, 2019), but there is ongoing demand for further research to identify protective factors at multiple levels. The Children of Prisoners: Interventions and Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health (COPING) project (Jones et al., 2013) was a child-centred study which investigated resilience in CIPs across four European countries finding that relationships with imprisoned parents, support from agencies, parental contact, schools and psychological wellbeing of the caregiver were supportive. Bronfenbrenner (1989) highlights individuals as an agent in their own development, therefore research which allows children to share their own experiences is pertinent to discuss at the individual level which is discussed in section 2.7.1.

There are several factors at the individual level which can influence a child's lived experience of PI. Many of these are influenced by the child's microsystem such

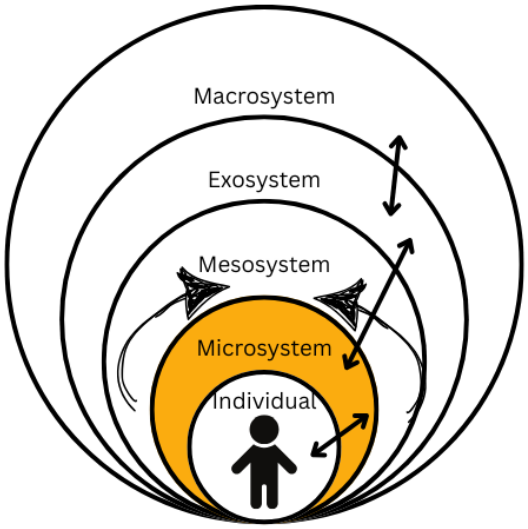
as relationships with family, friends and school. However, the child has agency of how they interact with some of these influences. Resilience is impacted by factors within the child's relationships and institutions but is also affected by the child's motivation and previous experiences. CIPs have also identified supportive factors in which they engage with, such as relationships and communities which are discussed next.

2.4. CIPs & the Microsystem

Bronfenbrenner (1989) described an individual's microsystem as consisting of activities, relationships, people and places that are immediately in the child's environment in which they are developing (as shown in Figure 5). This can include relationships and institutions such as school, home, family, peers and interests. The mesosystem was defined as the "interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979. p.25). This section incorporates processes at the meso- and exosystemic levels and how they relate to the microsystems: As Bronfenbrenner (1998, p.238) said, "the nature and power of developmental processes at the level of the meso- or the exosystem are influenced to a substantial degree by the belief systems and expectations existing in each setting about the other". This section will review literature that highlights factors within the microsystem; for CIPs this can include environments and systems which they are directly interacting with such as school, home and community.

Figure 5.

Microsystemic level



2.4.1. Family and Relationships

The ripple effects of PI are profound and unique to each situation. Condry & Minson (2021) conceptualise 'symbiotic harms' as a framework to understand the impact on families, arguing that negative effects are relational, heterogeneous and non-linear. These harms flow both ways between the family members including the imprisoned parent. Among the challenges are financial strains from the loss of parental income, combined with the costs associated with visitations and supporting the incarcerated family member (Dennison et al., 2017; Dickie, 2013; Jones et al., 2013). Murray and Farrington (2008) found that CIPs and imprisoned parents are at greater risk of mental health difficulties, suggesting genetic and environmental causes linked to their microsystem. Condry et al. (2016) underscore the pre-existing disadvantages experienced by certain families, including those from impoverished backgrounds, minority ethnic groups, gender disparities and with disrupted education

histories. The strain experienced by caregivers and families highlights the multifaceted challenges associated with PI.

Contact with the imprisoned parent can be impactful for the child and family members. In Zhang and Flynn's (2025) scoping review, most children wanted to maintain this contact. The Farmer Review (2017, 2019) described prison visits as the 'golden thread' for strengthening family ties and reducing re-offending for parents (Dallaire, 2007; Loucks, 2006), as well as contact with imprisoned parents being supportive for children (Goodchild, 2018; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). There have been mixed findings on CYP's perception of prison visits, depending on their prior relationship and individual experience. The relationship between child and parent may depend on their early relational experiences which influenced the attachment between parent and caregiver. The next section explores research which has applied attachment theory to examine the impact of PI on CYP.

2.4.2. Attachment Theory and Relationships

Attachment theory in developmental psychology highlights the importance of relationships, particularly between a caregiver and children. Bowlby (1958) described attachment as the emotional bond that provides psychological safety and security, shaping child development. Disruptions in these attachments, such as trauma, may lead to adverse outcomes for CIPs. Murray & Farrington's (2008) longitudinal study found that PI predicted more internalising problems in adolescence and adulthood when compared with three other separations (bereavement, divorce, hospitalisation) and release from prison before birth. This may suggest that PI has a greater impact on mental health and internalising behaviours than other separations. Internalised

behaviours can be characterised by inwardly directed psychological or emotional distress such as withdrawal, anxiety, depression and self-directed negative thoughts (Liu et al., 2011). The data for this study was collected almost 60 years ago with a small sample, therefore more research into this area is needed. Jones et al. (2013) and Riyantono et al. (2022) discovered that children with secure attachments[1] prior to PI often face heightened challenges in adulthood, including social and mental health difficulties.

Ambiguous loss refers to the physical absence, but psychological presence of an individual, as in cases of divorce, imprisonment, or immigration (Boss,1999). This phenomenon can lead to internalised behaviours and emotions, particularly when children are not given truthful, age-appropriate information about their parents' absence. Poehlmann (2005) found that providing children with honest, age-appropriate information about PI fosters healthier attachments. Arditi (2005) applied BEST (Bronfenbrenner, 1998) to examine the impact of PI, including ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief. Arditi (2005) references Doka's (1989) discussion on disenfranchised grief to describe a loss that "is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported." (Arditi, 2005, p. 253). Critics of attachment theory argue that it overemphasises parental influence, and oversimplifies child development (Harris,1998). For example, maternal imprisonment often leads to care arrangements away from primary caregivers, which might involve multiple placements. Not all such placements result in insecure attachments highlighting the need for a more contextualised understanding. Furthermore,

[1] An attachment style characterised by trust and safety through a responsive caregiver serving as a secure base for the child. (Bowlby, 1988)

attachment theory has been critiqued for its Western-centric perspective on caregiving relationships which may not reflect all cultural experiences. (Keller, 2018).

Schools are an identified source of support for CIPs as they provide a consistent environment that most children will access regularly over time, thereby allowing development of key relationships (Robertson, 2011; Losel, 2012; Morgan et al., 2014). The next section will explore these factors.

2.4.3. School

2.4.3.1. Relationships with Teachers and Peers. Creating a welcoming, non-judgemental school environment has been identified as supportive for CIPs and their families (Brookes & Frankham, 2021; Manby et al., 2015; Weidberg, 2017). Peers, trusted adults, mentors and school connectedness, have also been acknowledged in the literature, but schools may need upskilling in how to offer this most effectively (Morgan et al., 2013; Nichols et al., 2016). A study into the impact of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on attainment in England and Wales suggested that compulsory education can promote resilience, enabling children to progress despite adversity, alongside the importance of a positive relationship with a trusted adult, such as a teacher (Hardcastle et al., 2018). However, reduced teacher expectation has been cited as a detrimental factor in academic performance of this group (Turney, 2018) with teachers having lower expectations for children who had a parent in prison compared to children who had an absent parent for a different reason (e.g. divorce or bereavement) (Dallaire et al., 2010). Teachers have been found to have higher expectations of female students over males with a parent in prison (Poehlmann et al., 2019) and even induce feelings of shame and blame by exposing PI to peers without the child's consent (Brookes & Frankham, 2021).

Positive teacher/student relationships have been identified by CIPs as supportive (Brookes & Frankham, 2021; Kahya & Ekinci, 2018; Losel, 2012; Weidberg, 2017) and some whole school approaches can further enhance teacher awareness as explored below.

2.4.3.2. School Policy and Recommendations. There has been a shift within education in how schools manage pupil behaviour. Increased research into ACEs, along with a growing understanding of the impact of early childhood experiences has led to the development of what are known as 'attachment aware' (AA) and 'trauma informed' (TI) schools which are encapsulated within relational approaches.

A relational approach, as outlined by the Attachment Research Centre (ARC) encompasses a range of approaches to support the social, emotional and mental health needs of children and young people including awareness of ACEs, Emotion Coaching, and understanding of attachment and trauma. AA and TI are whole school approaches which have gained popularity across UK schools (Harlow, 2019).

Attachment theory, as described above in section 2.4.2. has become increasingly popular within schools. The aim of building this knowledge in schools is to provide school staff with a greater understanding of the impact of trauma and disrupted early experiences may impact learning (Bergin & Bergin, 2009). Education settings who employ attachment aware practices or receive relevant training sometimes adopt the term 'attachment aware'. Whilst the term 'attachment aware' schools is used by some LAs and schools, it is not a prescribed programme but an ongoing commitment to developing knowledge and understanding to best support the diverse needs of pupils (Kelly et al., 2020). Common elements that schools will take

part in as part of this journey to develop understanding of trauma may include training programmes, a commitment to building trusted relationships, the adoption of emotion coaching techniques, changes to behaviour policies to demonstrate a more relational approach and access to talking therapies (Tah et al., 2021). Many of these programmes requires schools to demonstrate that they are developing a range of systemic and environmental factors over a sustained period, and some programmes demarcate the steps into levels or provide recognition through awards. There is ambiguity about the meaning of these terms in schools, making evaluation of effectiveness challenging within research.

Whilst these approaches are increasingly popular, there is limited research on the effectiveness and impact on outcomes for children and young people using these approaches (Avery et al., 2020; Jones & Harding, 2023), with one review finding insufficient evidence to determine if these whole school approaches had any impact on attainment or behaviour in schools (Maynard et al. 2017). Research which has examined the role of schools in supporting CIPs have outlined several recommendations which may indirectly support CIPs. Morgan et al. (2013) reported on research from 2011 in which they gathered the views of families, children, staff and stakeholders. Their findings and recommendations mirrored an earlier study by Ramsden (1998), suggesting that little had changed in terms of policy and practice, despite known risks of adverse outcomes for this group. The main areas identified by Morgan et al. (2013) were categorised into four areas:

1. raise awareness of this group of children;
2. focus on the individual child and their needs;
3. identify the appropriate support at the right time; and

4. support for prison visits and parental contact.

A more recent systematic review by Shaw et al. (2022) identified support that schools could offer within three ecological domains (Table 2).

Table 2.

Recommendations for schools (Shaw et al.2022)

Level of support	Further information
Individual level	• Providing emotional support to the child through relational approaches. • Supporting contact with the parent in prison if in the best interest of the child e.g. sharing work and information about school. • Gathering children's views about PI in school with staff who know the child well.
Family level	• Support for the parent/carer/guardian who is at home with the child to promote a welcoming environment where they would feel safe to share the information of familial imprisonment. • Support for the parent in prison including sharing information about the child e.g. virtual parent/carer meetings. • Helping to support with planning conversations with children about PI at the appropriate age and developmental stage.
Systemic level	• Training and awareness for school staff which could be created in collaboration with EPs. • Development of the national curriculum to include information about PI to reduce stigma and social exclusion.

2.4.3.3. Perceptions of School Staff. There has been little published literature on the views and perceptions of education staff in supporting CIPs in the UK. Brown (2020) explored school counsellors' conceptualisations of PI in schools from the United States (US) which identified it as a loss which impacted the child's school experiences. A more recent study into counsellor experiences supporting students aged 14-18 found counsellors identified feelings of shame, anger and mistrust in CIPs, leading to emotional impacts on staff (Levkovich & Ne'emani, 2022). Within England there is limited published research which gathers the views of school staff and/or EPs and those that do focus on a range of stakeholders or use the same data set for multiple papers (Morgan et al., 2014; O'Keefe, 2015). More recently, there have been doctoral theses on school staff perceptions of PI (Harte, 2024; Hanrahan, 2024.; Hooper, 2019), but this a limited area of research. School staff identified feelings of anxiety, guilt and stress in CIPs as well as recognising stigma (Hooper, 2019). Lack of awareness and identification has been cited as the main barrier for schools in supporting CIPs (Leeson & Morgan, 2022; Morgan et al., 2014; O'Keefe, 2015). Whilst research has attempted to raise the profile of CIPs (Roberts, 2012; Morgan et al., 2014), staff still cite a lack of training contributing to staff uncertainty in supporting with this specific aspect of children's experiences (Harte, 2024; Hooper, 2019; Leeson & Morgan, 2022).

2.4.4. Summary of Microsystemic Factors

Relationships, communities and organisations in which the child interacts have been found to impact the outcomes of CIPs. Schools as part of a child's microsystem has been explored with several recommendations to provide support, however, there have been limited studies which share the perception of school staff to accompany

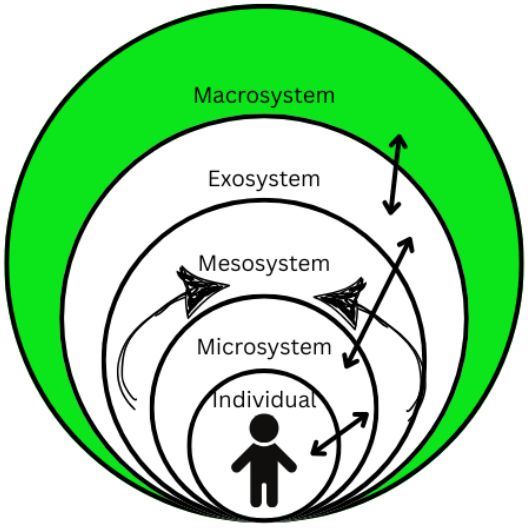
these. Factors in the microsystem are impacted by other systems such as the interaction between home and school, and individual factors such as the age and stage of the child, as well as what is available to them within their school and community systems. The child's microsystem is also influenced by factors within the macrosystem such as society views, laws and systems in place. The next section will explore these factors in more detail.

2.5. CIPs & the Macrosystem

Having examined factors at the individual and microsystemic levels, this section reviews research concerning CIPs and macrosystemic level factors (Figure 6). The macrosystem was described as the overarching political, cultural, social and economic context that influences all systems within the child's environment (Bronfenbrenner,1984). This may include views of the wider society in which an individual interacts and whilst the individual may not be involved directly, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that a child's development is impacted by the societal views and expectations in which they sit, and these interact with the other systems.

Figure 6:

Factors at the Macrosystemic level



Macrosystemic factors include government policies, social norms, economic conditions, cultural beliefs and values. Societal perception of prisons contributes to a narrative of crime and offending within the community. Negative perception of services and systems due to adverse experiences may also contribute to lack of engagement by CIPs and their families (Brookes & Frankham, 2021; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008).

2.5.1. Identifying CIPs

CIPs are often referred to as ‘invisible children’ (Beresford,2020; Department for Children, Schools, and Families [DCSF] & Ministry of justice [MoJ], 2007; Kincaid et al., 2019) or a ‘hidden group’ (Morgan et al., 2013) due to the lack of formal identification systems in either the justice or education sector. The most prevalent training course for professionals to raise awareness of this group is called “Hidden Sentence” training, originally developed by Action for Prisoners and Offenders

Families (APF) in reference to the unseen impact of PI. Gordon (2009) outlines three levels contributing to this group's 'invisibility': current policy and legislation is blind to the needs of CIPs; children often lose contact with their imprisoned parent unwillingly and without choice; and finally, CIPs will often have unmet needs related to their situation. Boswell (2018) also suggests that the deficit of policy and national focus on CIPs can be attributed to the lack of statistical information, longitudinal research and politicisation of crime.

As of May 2024, prisons in England and Wales are classified as 'crowded' (Sturge, 2024). There are several key reasons cited for the difficulties facing the UK prison system and this has been a point of recent interest in national media and politics. With increasing prison populations, it is likely that there will be increased cases of PI, however as this information is not collected through any statutory processes in the UK, there is no definite figure on how many children and young people are affected. Campaigners, researchers and advocates for CIPs have called for a formal system in the UK to ensure that this information is collected (Children Heard and Seen, 2021; DCFS & MoJ, 2007; Kincaid et al., 2019; Shaw et al.,2022). The Children of Offenders review (DCFS & MoJ, 2007) highlighted fractures within current support systems which they suggested detrimentally impacted the wellbeing of children, who could be supported through early intervention as opposed to reactive and delayed support. Schools have been identified, as well placed to identify CIPs, by noticing changes in behaviour or academic attainment and encouraging information sharing (Morgan et al., 2014). The Victims and Prisoners Act (2024) placed Operation Encompass into law, putting statutory obligation on police forces to share information on arrests in the home where there was domestic abuse with

schools (Operation Encompass, 2024). Operation Paramount has been initiated by the Thames Valley Violence Prevention Partnership (TVVPP) which allows for data on offenders to be used to identify vulnerable families where a parent is imprisoned, signposting those families to supports (TVVPP, 2025). Advocates are calling for this to become a national system of identification to alert schools to pupils who may need additional support when a parent is arrested or imprisoned (Children Heard and Seen, 2025). In March 2024, an amendment to the 'Victims and Prisoners' Act (2024) was proposed which would require the Secretary of State to publish data identifying the number of prisoners who are primary carers, and children who have a primary carer in prison and their ages by Lord Farmer (UK Parliament, 2024). This was later withdrawn but the Government project Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD) (Ministry of Justice, 2024) released their first official estimates of children with a parent in prison in July 2024. Whilst many researchers and organisations are calling for this information to be shared, others argue against the mandatory gathering of this information, but state that this should be the choice of families and children (Brookes & Frankham, 2021).

2.5.2. Stigma Facing CIPs

Society's perception of offenders is directly impacted by stereotypes, media, political discourse and stigma, with stigmatisation itself a social phenomenon which divides communities into 'us' and 'them' (Kotova, 2020). Kotova argues that UK media and popular culture contributes to the creation of a stereotypical view of offenders as violent and dangerous despite most prisoners being convicted of non-violent crimes. Boswell (2018) calls for a shift in public understanding of offenders' families as negative perception perpetuates the problem. Local media may also

contribute to community stigma by identifying local families online or in newspapers which can cause hostility or local tensions (Morgan et al., 2013).

Despite the increased focus on ACEs and the inclusion of PI within these (Hardcastle et al., 2018; Poehlmann-Tynan & Turney, 2021; Webster, 2022), families of prisoners face additional stigma for who they **are** in addition to who they **are associated with** (Kotova, 2020). Harte (2024) found that school staff had less conscious awareness of PI as an ACE which may suggest it is perceived differently to other ACEs. Qualitative studies have found that families experience institutional stigma which includes abruptness, lack of politeness and inattention directed at family members during visits to prison (Hutton, 2016; Kotova, 2017) as well as feeling isolated, powerless and lost within the community (Brookes & Frankham, 2021). Goffman (1963) identifies distinct types of stigma in his research: primary or direct stigma, which is associated with one's own or group behaviour, and courtesy stigma, due to associations of family members leading to shame. Goffman (1963) argues individuals are stigmatised due to physical and invisible attributes which include race, ethnicity, poverty, socioeconomic status and gender which highlights the bi-directional relationship of the individual and macrosystemic factors described earlier.

2.5.3. Racial Disparity of CIPs

England and Wales data on adult prisoners identifies that there is over representation of prisoners from minority ethnic groups (Sturge, 2024), therefore it could be assumed that there will be more CIPs of similar heritage. An intersectional approach could identify how this individual characteristic relates to macrosystemic issues of racism and discrimination. Previous research has identified that stigma is perceived more by families from lower socioeconomic status (SES) and minority

ethnic backgrounds than white middle-class families (Kotova, 2020). Hollins (2022) suggests that CIPs who are already facing discrimination due to ethnicity, race and/or socioeconomic status may face greater stigma with PI. There is limited research in the UK exploring the impact of PI on any global majority groups. The limited research available, identifies additional barriers to seeking support for British Pakistani families of offenders such as language barriers, accessibility to culturally specific support and cultural awareness within the criminal justice system (CJS) (Abass et al., 2016). Another identified limitation of support for CIPs is the lack of national policy and guidance available to recognise and support families of offenders, this is discussed below.

2.5.4. Policy and Legislation

Researchers and advocates for CIPs have argued that supporting CYP affected by PI requires systemic changes at policy level and changes to public perception of prisoners and their families (Boswell, 2018; Morgan & Gill, 2014; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008). Table 3 summarises the policy, legislation and government reports that have referred to or affect CIPs.

Table 3.

Table of Relevant Policies, Legislation and Reviews in the UK

Policy / Legislation	Relevance to CIPs
The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989)	The International Human Rights Treaty recognises that children have rights and entitlements that should be protected. The rights include: - protection from discrimination and harm based on familial activity (Article 2);

	- the importance of the best interest of the child is at the centre of decision making (Article 3); - the right to not be separated from parents and to keep contact (Article 9); and - the right to express their views in matters affecting them (Article 12).
Every Child Matters (DfE, 2003)	While 'Every Child Matters' (DfE, 2003) does not explicitly mention children of prisoners, it emphasises positive outcomes for all children, which the Children of Offenders Review (DfCSF/MOJ, 2007) found children of imprisoned parents was not achieving.
Families Do Matter (MoJ,2003)	This report highlighted the importance of maintaining family connections with imprisoned parents and their families and made recommendations for government policy with three main foci: visitation, education and community partnership. Implications for school and education included the recommendation that all schools have a 'parent in prison' policy and partake in 'Hidden Sentence' staff training, created with Barnardo's. However, whilst significant within policy, this report was criticised for being overly simplistic and over emphasising traditional family structures whilst lacking diversity.
Children of Offenders Review (DfCSF & MoJ, 2007)	This review aimed to examine the extent to which CIPs have poorer outcomes compared to their peers. It found that there was little awareness of need, lack of systematic support, lack of knowledge and evidence-based practice and that local authorities had little knowledge of demand in their areas.

Keeping Children Safe in Education [KCSIE] (Department for Education, 2024)	Children with family members in prison are identified within this document, which is required to be read by all adults working within education. The document highlights the risk of poor outcomes for this group and signposts to NICCO for further information. However, this guidance does not offer advice on how schools and colleges may identify this group.

Despite this policy and legislation, there is still little explicit policy in place for this population. This further contributes to CIPs being 'hidden' or 'forgotten'.

2.5.5. Summary of Macrosystemic Factors

The growing prison population will likely be impacting the number of children impacted by PI, despite no formal identification system in place for schools and organisations to preventatively meet their needs (Sturge, 2024) or clear policy or political agenda in place. The UNCRC (1989) aims to protect all children from harm and ensure child voice is heard which is central to any research into PI. Despite the potential growing numbers of CIPs, research shows due to societal stigma and public perception of prisoners, families are still reluctant to share this information (Brookes & Franklin,2021), contributing to the invisibility of CIPs (Beresford et al., 2018). Families are experiencing social exclusion due to associated stigma which is highlighted through local media and the narrative presented to the public regarding offenders and their families. The overrepresentation of global majority prisoners in the UK, and statistics on youth offending (Sturge, 2024), highlight the need to consider CIPs through an intersectional lens. For a CIP, these factors which exist

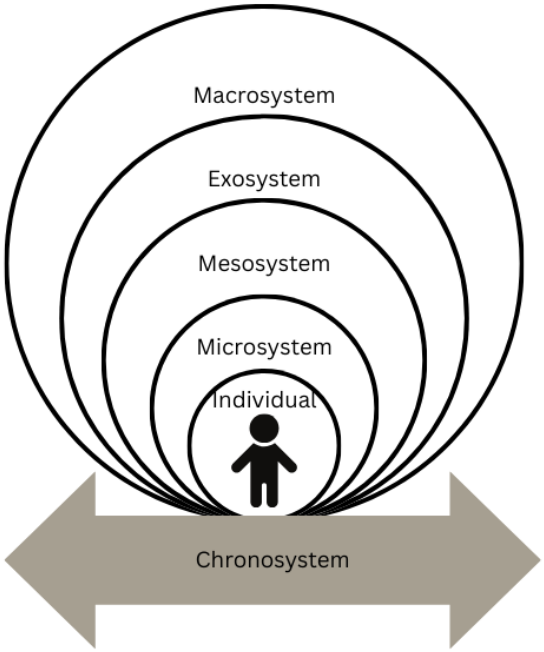
often at societal, or policy levels will impact how they view themselves, their family and their experiences.

2.6. Chronosystemic Factors

Bronfenbrenner (1993) emphasised the importance of time in the development of the chronosystem (Figure 7).

Figure 7.

Factors Within the Chronosystem.



Bronfenbrenner (1989) believed that transitions and changes within a person's life could impact family structure and child development, known as ecological transitions. PI is an external change that may be sudden and unexpected, however there may be additional internal changes co-occurring e.g. puberty and transitions (such as moving to secondary school) that sit within the chronosystem. Cultural values and social beliefs described within the macro-system evolve, and should be considered, e.g. the over-population of prisons and the Covid-19 pandemic which

impacted visitation and contact time (Minson, 2021; Zahid Mubarek Trust, 2021). As a developmental psychologist, Bronfenbrenner believed that child development must be studied over time and was an advocate for longitudinal research over extended periods of development. The chronological journey that a family may go through following parental arrest is influenced by the criminal justice system processes. The Ministry of Justice commissioned report used the term 'offender journey' to provide an overview of the path an individual may experience through the criminal justice system from arrest to resettlement (Dialogue Associates, 2014).

2.6.1. The Offender Journey and CIPs

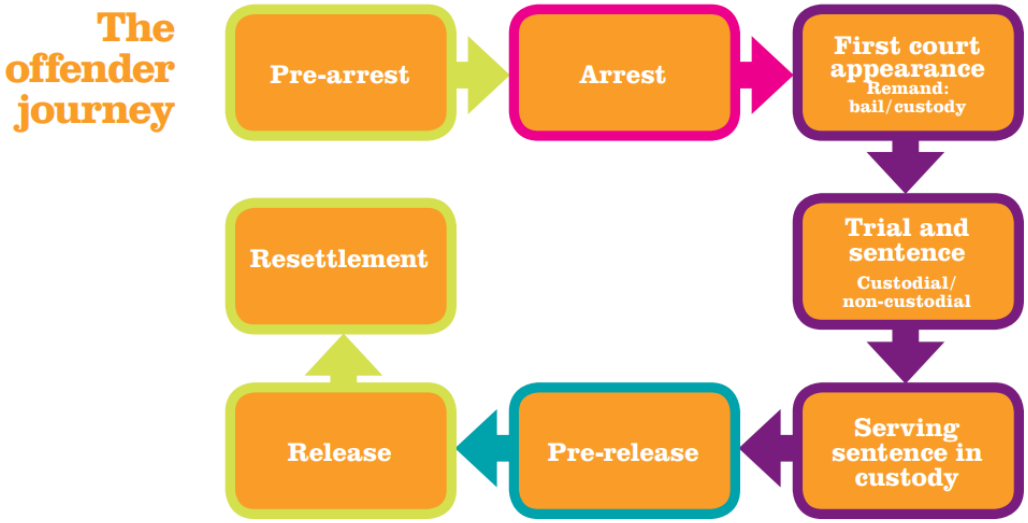
The impact of PI will depend on a range of previously discussed ecological factors including elements of time such as the stage of the offender journey. Children may need adapted and tailored support at all stages of the offender journey from arrest to release and from nursery through to secondary school (Morgan et al., 2013).The transition points are highlighted in Figure 8 from the Barnardo's handbook for schools to support children affected by the imprisonment of a family member (Morgan et al., 2015). This information can be read alongside guidance for practitioners created by Barnardo's (Sutherland & Wright, 2017) which offers further descriptions of impacts at each stage and agency referrals. Goldsmith & Byrne (2018) found that practitioners lacked awareness of the CJS therefore the offender journey tool below offers a visual representation of the chronology. Awareness of these transitions may enable schools to work preventatively and collaboratively with families ensuring the support is already in place. However, information sharing is an identified barrier to this. Research has identified that there is little support from

services with regards to parental release, therefore schools may be well placed to signpost to other organisations or offer support (Morgan et al., 2013).

The Crest report (Kincaid, 2019) highlighted responsibilities and opportunities for professionals to signpost or refer families for available support at certain points in the offender journey, for example if police were aware of children in the house at the time of the arrest. Kincaid recommends that school staff need to remain curious and attentive to CYP when they discuss PI to piece together their experiences. Promoting open, safe and non-judgemental school communities may enable families to share information about their experience of the offender journey voluntarily with schools.

Figure 8.

The Offender Journey (Morgan et al., 2015)



2.6.2. Outcomes for CIPs

2.6.2.1. Adverse Childhood Experiences. Having a household member in prison is one of the characteristics identified as an 'adverse childhood experience' (ACE) (Felitti et al., 1998). This term was first identified through the ACEs study in the

US (Felitti et al., 1998) which observed that individuals who had experienced certain events in their childhood had an increased chance of experiencing a range of health issues in adulthood. The Adverse Childhood Experiences-Questionnaire (ACE-Q) characterises exposure to ACEs (Felitti et al., 1998). Research suggests that young people who experience at least four ACEs are twice as likely to leave school without any qualifications and are at risk of unemployment compared to their peers (Hardcastle et al., 2018). CIPs are reportedly five times more likely than children who have not had a parent in prison to experience additional ACEs and that the association between multiple ACEs and PI is more prevalent in children aged six and younger (Rhodes et al., 2023; Turney, 2018). The ACE-Q, developed in a health rather than educational context, overlooks key factors such as a young person's context, protective factors, and experiences like poverty or bereavement (Shaw et al., 2021). The sample lacked cultural and ethnic diversity, raising concerns about its widespread use in schools. When used as a label, it may risk disempowering or oppressing CYP (Shaw et al.,2022., Birch & Gulliford, 2023). ACEs are not determinants of poorer outcomes and there are many protective factors identified in the literature to support children and young people to thrive. PI on its own, is not determinants of any adverse outcomes, but the combination of 'risk' factors that are often more prevalent (Hollins, 2022). Studies have identified protective factors and resilience in CIPs (Benninger et al., 2023.; Christmann et al., 2012; Jones et al., 2013; Lösel et al., 2012., Weidberg et al., 2017). Positive childhood experiences (PCEs), such as supportive relationships, emotional literacy, community participation and a sense of belonging, are linked to reduced mental health issues in children facing ACEs, including PI (Bethell et al., 2019; La Charite et al., 2023).

CIPs have been found to take on the role of a carer when a parent goes to prison and having to take on responsibilities above their typical developmental and chronological age (Leeson & Morgan, 2022; McGinley & Jones, 2018; Zhang & Flynn, 2025). Intergenerational offending is often attributed to PI, with some research finding that children with parents who have been convicted are more likely to offend compared to those with parents who have not (Besemer et al., 2017). Dallaire et al., (2007) found that adult children of imprisoned mothers were 2.5 times more likely to be imprisoned than those of fathers. The data, based on parental self-reports, lacked qualitative depth. The authors noted that CYP of imprisoned fathers often lived with their mothers, while CYP of mothers were more likely to live in care arrangements-suggesting that disrupted attachments and higher risk factors may increase the likelihood of future offending. A systematic review of research into the impacts of PI found no causal association between PI and reduced educational performance (Murray et al., 2012), however other studies which have examined academic performance of CIPs found that these CYP had lower non-cognitive school readiness (Haskins,2014) and identified PI as a negative predictor for adolescent school performance particularly for male students (Shaw,2019). CIPs were found to be at risk of school non-attendance and/or school exclusion (Kahya & Ekinci, 2018), particularly early adolescents with a mother in prison (Cho, 2010). Research has also acknowledged that some children can flourish due to PI (Hartworth & Hartworth, 2005; Shaw et al., 2022), particularly if the imprisonment is related to a crime against or witnessed by the child; therefore, it is important to gather the individual views of the child to focus on their needs and not a universal approach (Morgan et al., 2013).

2.6.3. Summary of Chronosystemic Factors

Research suggests time has a significant impact on the experiences and outcomes of CIPs and the chronosystemic factors described above relate to temporal changes in the environment, the individual, as well as the processes such as school engagement and adult interactions. Several outcomes over a lifetime have been identified as higher risk for CIPs as well as exposure to ACEs at various points in their childhood. PI is an example of a life event or significant change which impacts development over time. Whilst there has been literature from a range of disciplines exploring the impact of PI on CYP, I have identified gaps within the EP literature that I will now explore.

2.7. Gaps in the Literature

A literature review by Condry and Smith (2018) identified 260 new publications on children and families of prisoners across various fields between 2012-2016, highlighting a significant growth in research interest during this period. As children and young people's experiences are the focus of PI, I feel that hearing their voice is essential to creating policy change which then in turn impacts experiences and development.

2.7.1. Nothing about us, without us: Research gathering children's view.

Despite the interest in PI and research providing quantitative data on outcomes for CIPs, Hollins et al. (2019) emphasise the need to include family member's experiences and perspectives, advocating for the principle "nothing about us, without us'" (p.311). Siegel and Luther (2018) stress that those directly impacted by PI must be involved in partnership with researchers, policy makers and

practitioners which aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1989) BEST that child development is influenced by the interaction of multiple systems.

Saunders (2018) and Weidberg (2019) both used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the views of CYP who have experienced PI and identified themes of resilience as a coping mechanism, anxieties and trust across a small sample of 10-16 children aged between 8-18 years. CYP in Weidberg's (2017) study experienced injustice at being ignored by services (schools, criminal justice system) and frustration that they were reliant on adult's decisions. This study interviewed younger children (8-13) and did not describe the analytic process of IPA in detail. CIPs have reported feeling anger and frustration (Benninger et al.,2023), withholding information for fear of stigma and shame (Kahya & Ekinci, 2018; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Saunders, 2018) and reported difficulties in trusting others (Weidberg, 2018). The COPING project (Jones et al., 2013) was a child-centred, longitudinal study which investigated resilience and mental health problems of CIPs across four European countries. It is often cited as one of the most in-depth qualitative studies of its kind that used a mixed methods approach internationally. The study made recommendations for policy and practice change across Europe including raising public awareness of this group and the calls for research to focus on supportive factors for CIPs.

There has been a shift in focus away from 'deficit models' of research which focus on adverse and risk outcomes for CIPs, to a focus on resilience and flourishing in the face of adversity (Hollins et al., 2018), in a hope to reduce stigma and shame and promote positive outcomes for CIPs. Hart et al. (2016) advocated for co-production of research with underrepresented groups which may include CIPs to

tackle prejudice, discrimination and stigma. The researchers argue that using a social-justice lens to explore resilience positions researchers as advocates for excluded and marginalised groups. CIPs are often referred to in the literature as the 'hidden', 'invisible' or 'forgotten' victims of PI and therefore it is important to raise their profile to ensure that they are just as 'seen' as all CYP both in policy and practice.

A recent scoping review of qualitative literature analysed and synthesised 41 studies which gathered children's experiences of PI (Zhang & Flynn, 2025). This found that children perceived their needs as currently being unmet in society and felt powerless in the face of numerous stressors, many of which have been discussed in this literature review (Zhang & Flynn, 2025). They acknowledged the frequently reported difficulties in recruiting CYP but argue that prioritising child voice in research to promote individual agency is crucial for policy development as well as finding that children themselves are more focused on the relationships which support them than the 'problems' they face. The authors call for more research which explores the needs of children and what can be done to address these (Zhang & Flynn, 2025).

2.7.2. Supporting CIPs within Education

Whilst there have been several studies which have made recommendations to support schools with CIPs (Benninger et al.,2023; Kincaid et al., 2019; Morgan et al., 2013; Morgan et al., 2014; Morgan & Leeson, 2019; Shaw et al., 2022), CIPs are still at risk from adverse school outcomes as discussed above and school staff are reporting a lack of confidence in supporting CIPs. Few studies have included qualitative views of children and adults who support children in schools, and I was only able to identify one data set from 2011-2015 for research which collected the views of EPs through a survey, but these were not shared in the findings (Morgan et

al., 2013; Morgan & Leeson, 2019). One UK based scoping review has discussed implications for EPs, but the included studies did not contain EP views (Shaw et al., 2022). A recent thesis has explored how school staff make sense of CIPs and their construction of their roles in school but was not able to recruit CIPs (Harte, 2024). Shaver et al.'s (2024) recent scoping review into school psychology literature with an explicit focus on PI highlights a gap in the field of school and educational psychology. In the UK there have been more theses exploring the views of school staff when supporting CIPs but including the views of other professionals is currently lacking.

2.8. Research Rationale & Justification

This literature review employed Bronfenbrenner's (1989) BEST as a framework to explore the impact of PI on CYP. The review of literature illuminated how PI affects and is affected by factors at the individual, family, community and societal level. How these interact show the complexity of experiences for CIPs. Schools have been identified as protective factors for CIPs, but this is contradicted by the limited literature into staff perception on supporting this group which found feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness. There have been clear recommendations on how to support CIPs for schools and LAs from the literature, but more qualitative research which gathers the views and experiences of the children themselves as well as the adults supporting them is needed to add to this limited picture. There have been few recent (five years or less) UK based studies which have elicited CIP's views directly, due to the difficulty of identifying and recruiting this population. Within EP literature specifically, there are few papers that explore the issue of PI despite the identified vulnerability of this group. Consequently, the present study hoped to

address these gaps by aiming to offer insights into the views of CIPs and the professionals who support them.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to outline my research methodology and methods, considering my ontological and epistemological stance in relation to my study. I will discuss my rationale for selecting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and the data collection methods employed. This chapter is separated into two parts, Part One outlines the theoretical underpinnings of my research, whilst Part Two outlines my research design which was informed by the previous section.

3.1.1. Aims and Research Questions

Against the backdrop of existing research, the present study aimed to explore the experiences of CIPs and develop an understanding of how they are and can be further supported within schools. Through gathering the views of children, school staff and EPs, I adopted a multi-perspective design to explore how individuals in varying roles experience a shared phenomenon of PI within their ecological contexts. Following a review of extant literature, the present study aimed to address the following research questions:

- What are the lived experiences of CIPs?
- How do adults supporting CIPs make sense of their role and experiences in supporting CIPs?
- How can schools and education services better support CIPs?
- What risk and protective factors do CIPs and adults supporting CIPs identify?

This chapter begins with an overview of theoretical positionality with regards to ontology and epistemology before providing a brief description of IPA and my

justification for choosing this methodology. Following this, I offer information about my sample; the data collection techniques employed; and how I assessed the validity of this research. Finally, the chapter ends by providing an overview of how data was analysed.

3.1.2. Reflexivity

Finlay (2002,p.209) describes reflexivity in qualitative research as “where researchers engage in explicit self-aware meta-analysis”. It requires the researcher to be aware of their contribution to how knowledge, meaning and understanding is constructed and acknowledge that they cannot be ‘removed’ from the subject matter (Willig, 2012). Throughout this research I kept a reflective journal where I examined my assumptions, motivations and interests at all stages of the research process and engaged in questioning of my decision points as recommended by Saunders et al. (2023).

Recruitment for this study required ongoing reflexivity, particularly when navigating logistical challenge and external concerns regarding the appropriateness of the research focus. The societal stigma surrounding PI, as outlined in Section Two became evident during this process. Several schools and organisations expressed reluctance to approach families about participation, citing the sensitivity of the topic. While this response appeared rooted in a protective stance, consistent with the gatekeeping role, I reflected that such avoidance may inadvertently perpetuate the silence and stigma surrounding PI. It seemed to me that the gatekeeper’s discomfort and sense of secrecy were possibly more pronounced than the families may have been. Without the opportunity to communicate directly with families, I

considered how gatekeeping, though well-intentioned, might obstruct meaningful dialogue and reinforce the marginalisation of a topic perceived as taboo.

3.1.3. Positionality

My positionality as a White, postgraduate researcher, raised in a nuclear middle-class family with no personal experience of PI, impacted my perception of my research, interactions with participants and the research data. My privileges required acknowledgement as I was studying a research population which was over representative of non-white families from low socioeconomic backgrounds and who had often experienced overlapping adversities. I reflected on my decision points in conducting this research which stemmed from my values and experiences as outlined below:

- previously, as a teacher, I worked with children who had experienced adverse childhood experiences[2] and was familiar with procedures and safeguards surrounding vulnerable children. Whilst there were clear processes and identification procedures for children with SEND, children with a social worker and children from low socio-economic backgrounds, such as pupil premium funding; I was not aware of processes in place for children with a parent in prison. Furthermore, this information was often not disclosed by families, making this population vulnerable to invisibility.
- As a TEP, I became aware of several cases in short succession where parents or school staff shared that the child had a family member in prison.

[2] Adverse Childhood Experience is characterised as a harm, traumatic or stressful event that occurs during a child's development either directly or indirectly. (Hughes et al., 2017)

This was not always openly discussed or if it was, was not always considered ‘relevant’ to the child’s needs.

- Whilst it was not consciously part of my decision process in researching this population, my father worked in prisons for part of his professional career as a teacher and then for the probation service. This may have contributed to my interest in the impact of imprisonment on families and communities.

As discussed in my literature review, the narrative of this group being described as ‘forgotten’ or ‘invisible’ along with the intersectionality of those affected from a variety of backgrounds, has led me to view this research from a social justice and advocacy perspective, underpinned by anti-oppressive practice values. This, along with a call for more child voice in the literature has led me to want to incorporate the views of the children through my research. The values underlying my research influenced my ontological and epistemological decisions, as discussed next.

3.2. Part One: Theoretical Underpinnings

3.2.1. Ontology and Epistemology

Ontological assumptions (assumptions about what the social world is) lead to epistemological assumptions (how we research and find out about the subject of study) which in turn influences the methodology and data collection instruments for generating knowledge or understanding within an area (Cohen et al. 2017). Ontological viewpoints can be considered as a continuum with realist and relativist ideologies at opposite ends of the continuum. Realists argue there is one ‘truth’ which is accessible through research and observable to reveal knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Whereas relativism assumes that there are multiple realities that exist

and what is ‘true’ differs across time and contexts. This study adopted a relativist ontological position, viewing experiences of PI as subjective, and the individual perspectives of the participants as unique and individually constructed. I assumed that CIPs and adults supporting CIPs had their own constructs influenced by their experiences and the cultural, historical and socio-political contexts in which they interact.

Epistemology refers to the assumptions about knowledge and how it can be studied (Saunders et al. 2023). The two main opposing paradigms within social science research are interpretivism and positivism. Positivism holds that phenomena in the social sciences can be observed, measured and studied empirically in the same way as the natural sciences. Positivist researchers may seek to explain human behaviour through causality or applying existing theories, employing methods to record, test and experiment (Saunders et al. 2023). Interpretivism seeks to understand and identify meaning, emphasising that humans are distinct and unique from the natural world and therefore require different ways of studying them. From an interpretivist perspective, researchers aim to understand the actions and behaviours of humans from the perspective of the individual as they believe that they make sense of their worlds in ways which occur in context (Cohen et al., 2017). The phenomenological approach aligns with the interpretivist paradigm, as it seeks to explore human experience by capturing individual’s views and making sense of their experiences. These are unique to the individual and their circumstances. Such studies often focus on small samples, collecting qualitative data rather than large volumes of numerical data. The researcher is part of that world and therefore reflects on their perception of how an individual perceives the phenomena. The aim of such

research is to elicit a rich understanding and interpretation of social contexts (Saunders et al., 2023).

This study takes an interpretivist and social constructivist epistemological stance. In line with a phenomenological approach, it seeks to understand and make sense of the individuals making sense of parental imprisonment. These experiences are socially constructed through their own prior experiences, interactions, backgrounds and unique perspectives. In line with interpretivism, I see the individuals as experts in their own lives therefore I considered research methods where I could examine these experiences through the eyes of the participants. My research questions stem from a want to understand the experiences of CIPs and the factors that have been supportive or challenging within their ecological systems and over time. As I sought to gather information regarding individual experience of a phenomenon, qualitative approaches to gathering information were deemed most appropriate.

3.2.2. Qualitative Methodologies

Qualitative approaches can be used to promote advocacy and awareness of groups or experiences which are underrepresented in society or the research literature (Larkin et al.,2019). When planning my research, there were several other methodologies consistent with my interpretivist stance that would have gathered individual descriptions on the experience of parental imprisonment. These are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4.

Qualitative Methodologies Considered

Methodology	Description of Approach	Critique in Relation to Current Research
Narrative approaches	The aim of narrative approaches is to organise and give meaning to an individual's story often to a disruption to their everyday experience (Murray, 2016) Data is collected through a life-story interview with the participant encouraged to describe an account of their lives. Narrative approaches assume that individuals tell stories about their lives and experiences as part of meaning making. Narrative researchers may be interested in the identities constructed in the stories people tell about themselves overtime (Willig,2021). Willig (2021) suggests there is no standard procedure for analysis, but that it is systematic and provides insights into the function and psychological implications of a narrative.	Narrative approaches would be appropriate to use to gather the life experiences of adult or older children of imprisoned parents as they would be able to reflect on the disruptions and experiences over a long period of time. As I plan to interview children over a wide age range, younger children may find this reflection more challenging. Furthermore, given the nature of the topic, narrative approaches would go into further detail of the CIPs life experience This approach can be very participatory and may require additional multiple interviews to gather the data as it can take time for the participant to tell their story (Willig, 2021).

Grounded theory	Grounded theory seeks to create knowledge and theory from the data, which can be applied to researchers from objectivist or constructivist stances (Willig, 2021). Grounded theory merges data collection and analysis for theoretical saturation (Willing, 2021). It can use a wide range of data collection techniques, and the data collection and analysis happen simultaneously (Glaser, 1992). For theoretical saturation, 20-30+ interviews have been recommended (Thomson, 2010). Grounded theory in psychology allows aspects of human experience such as the development of individual and interpersonal processes to be explored (Charmaz, 2016)	Grounded theory offers an approach to studying human experience in a rigorous and systematic way and can be used alongside phenomenological approaches (Willig et al.,2021). As I am not concerned with creating theory from the information gathered, grounded theory was discarded. Furthermore, previous research into gathering the views of CIPs has highlighted difficulties in recruiting larger samples, and the recommended sample sizes for grounded theory is 20-30 interviews for theoretical saturation. (Thomson, 2010).
Discursive approaches	Discursive approaches (DA) are concerned with language and how this construes reality (Thomas, 2023). There are two main types: discursive psychology (DP) and Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), with DP focusing on how people use language, and FDA focusing on what kind of subjects are construed through language and what is made available to people (Willig, 2021) to examine how individuals construe their experience.	DP could be applied to research on PI if the researcher was interested in how language was used to construct experiences such as shame, stigma or judgement. The focus is on language and its construction of the phenomena rather than the person's experience. My research aims to focus on the experience of a phenomena by individuals' construction rather than the processes of

		language and discourse, therefore DA was not considered the most appropriate methodology for this research.
IPA	As discussed in section 3.2.3. below, IPA is concerned with understanding an individual's lived experience surrounding a particular experience or phenomenon. The double hermeneutic loop acknowledges the role of the researcher in making sense of participants' understanding of an experience. IPA requires rich and detailed personal accounts of the experience which are then interpreted and analysed on an individual level before identifying similarities and differences across perceptions of a shared experience.	IPA is considered to be the most appropriate methodology as it aims to make sense of individuals sense-making of a particular phenomenon or experience, in this case, PI. IPA requires rich accounts of an experience so consideration of the sample will need to be made to ensure this collection of data is appropriate.

Table 4 highlights qualitative approaches considered with regards to my research questions. Narrative and discursive approaches would have been appropriate methodologies to explore the experiences of CIPs, but IPA with its phenomenological approach and gathering of rich, detailed descriptions of experiences to understand individuals' sense making of a situation seemed most appropriate. Due to my inclusion of adults who support CIPs following recruitment challenges, applying a narrative approach for the adults would not have been appropriate as they do not have the chronology required for a life story interview.

3.2.3. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA emphasises understanding and meaning making of experiences for individuals (Smith et al. 2022). The term 'experience' in IPA carries different meaning from the everyday usage by "attempting to understand other people's relationship to the world and we are usually focusing on a particular event, relationship or process in that person's world when doing so." (Smith et al., 2022. p.36). Jonathan Smith is a significant figure in the popularisation of IPA in applied psychology, arguing for experiential psychological approaches, initially in health psychology (Smith,1996). Since this initial introduction, IPA has been widely used in educational psychology research in the UK and internationally. It seeks to gather "rich and detailed personal accounts" from an individual regarding the phenomena being studied (Smith et al., 2022. P.35). Due to the detail gathered, IPA typically consists of a relatively small and homogenous sample (Smith et al.,2022). Three key concepts are important to consider in IPA which are discussed in more detail below: phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography.

3.2.3.1 Phenomenology. Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience and can be defined as “Understanding experience and the way in which a person perceives the world they inhabit.” (Langdridge, 2007.p.14.). It is both a collection of research methods and a philosophical movement which focuses on the study of ‘being’ (Smith et al., 2022). Phenomenological approaches are concerned with what the experience ‘feels like’ for that individual – getting as close as possible to the participant’s experience (Willig,2022). Several key philosophers have contributed to our understanding of ‘experience’. Husserl developed phenomenology in the 20th century, rejecting positivist approaches and emphasising that understanding of the world comes from individual experiences and perception urging a ‘return to the things themselves’ (Langdridge, 2007). He introduced the term ‘intentionality’, the idea that consciousness is always directed towards *something,* shaping how it is perceived (Langdridge,2007). His transcendental approach aimed to uncover the essence of experience (Smith et al., 2022). Husserl also advocated for a ‘phenomenological attitude’ where researchers set preconceptions through a process he described as ‘bracketing’ (Oxley, 2016). Heidegger, disputed this, and proposed a focus on interpretation of experience in its cultural and historical context as no experience occurs within a vacuum (Langdridge,2007). Acknowledgement that our perception of phenomena may be impacted by previous experiences is important in the process of IPA. In this research I am exploring the experience of PI in the context of societal, historical and relational influences that interact with the child and acknowledging that their experiences of PI will be influenced by this.

3.2.2.2. Hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation and is the second theoretical foundation of IPA. Heidegger entwined phenomenology with hermeneutics by ascribing experience with an interrelating context to be examined

(Smith et al., 2022). Hermeneutics shifts from a description of an experience to the interpretation of a phenomenon whilst considering the context (Oxley, 2016). Interpretation can be described using the hermeneutic circle- the relationship between the part and the whole. To understand the parts, one must look at the whole and vice versa. When applied to IPA, this may include looking at the individual words or phrases within a section of text from an interview transcript and incorporating the context of the whole text for interpretation. Therefore, IPA is an iterative non-linear process (Smith et al., 2022). The double hermeneutic loop describes the researcher making sense of the participant making sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2022). Instead of 'bracketing' pre-existing knowledge and preconceptions as Husserl suggested, the researcher acknowledges and reflects on these throughout the interpretation. The current research seeks to make sense of CIPs making sense of their experiences. I am also seeking to make sense of adults making sense of their experiences of CIPs.

3.2.3.3. Ideography. Ideography is a focus on the particular. This is the particular detail of in-depth analysis but also the focus on particular experiences of particular people (Smith et al., 2022). Whereas other analysis in psychology may seek to make wider claims at a population or group level, IPA is committed to understanding the detail of experience of a phenomenon for that individual (Smith et al., 2022). Within IPA, each participant's experience, and perception of that experience is unique and therefore should be examined in depth before examining some similarities and differences among a small group of cases with a shared experience.

3.2.3.4 Limitations of IPA. IPA employs small samples due to its focus on gathering rich data which means findings cannot be generalised (Smith et al.,2022).

However, generalisation is not the aim of IPA research but rather providing rich insights into a small number of participants about a phenomenon. Due to the nature of interpretation, IPA focuses on detailed description of experience, requiring the participant to have language skills sufficient for this level of articulation. This may exclude participants with language barriers. Larkin et al. (2019) present a case for multi-perspective IPA studies to ensure inclusion of other voices with a different perspective on a shared experience.

3.2.4. Methodological Orientation

This study aims to explore how CIPs understand their experiences of PI. As CIPs are referred to as a 'hidden' and 'invisible' group, using IPA was selected as an appropriate methodology to better understand their lived experiences. Due to challenges with recruitment of this population as discussed in section 3.3.2.3, I chose to also speak to adults who may support this group in schools to understand their perception of the experiences of CIPs. Table 5 summarises the methodological orientation for the present study:

Table 5.

Overview of Methodological Orientation

Ontological Stance	Relativism
Epistemological Position	Social constructivism
Methodology	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
Research Method	Qualitative
Research Design	Multi-perspectival
Data collection method	Semi-structured interviews

3.3. Part Two: Research Design

The research was conducted as part of my doctoral thesis as a TEP. It is important to note, that my research initially aimed to explore the lived experiences of CIPs in a city within the West Midlands including their school experiences and how they feel they have been supported within education. After gaining ethical approval and beginning recruitment in my desired area it became apparent that there were challenges to reaching this population. I widened my geographical area and contacted other organisations for support but still struggled to recruit. Consequently, due to the restricted timeline of the doctoral thesis, I widened my sample to include professionals who had supported this group in schools. There had already been recent theses on the views of school staff (Harte, 2024; Hanrahan, 2024) but this study appears to be the only one that uses a multi-perspective design with school staff, EPs and CYP.

3.3.1. Ethics

The study gained ethical approval from the University of Birmingham ethics committee and adhered to the University of Birmingham Code of Practice for Research. Additionally, I complied with the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2021) and the Health Professional Council Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (HCPC, 2024). Given the nature and sensitivity of this research, additional considerations and amendments were made whilst gaining ethical approval. The ethical issues considered within this study included consent, confidentiality, the right to withdraw, reducing participant distress and harm and data usage. Following the difficulties with recruitment, I applied for ethical amendments in January 2025 to include adult participants and this was approved in February 2025.

Table 6 below outlines some of the ethical considerations that arose and the steps I took to reduce and omit risk where necessary.

Table 6.

Ethical Considerations and Safeguards

Ethical Consideration	How I Mitigated or Safeguarded Against this Risk
Anonymity	Anonymity could not be offered as the study involved carrying out face-to-face interviews. Once a participant had consented to taking part in the study, their identity and personal information were kept confidential.
Confidentiality	Participants were informed in the information and consent sheets (see appendices A,B,C,D) that confidentiality would be maintained using a pseudonym. Any identifiable information was removed from the transcripts including the names of colleagues, children, schools or local authorities. Participants were informed that once the audio recording was transcribed, this would be deleted. Participants were informed that if any information shared suggested that the individual or another individual was at risk of harm then this would need to be shared with a designated safeguarding lead.
Informed consent	Valid informed, written and freely given consent was gained from parents/carers of participants under 16 before meeting the young person and from the young person prior to starting the interview. See Appendix B for the parental consent form and Appendix C for the children's consent form. A participant information sheet was provided for the child and parent prior to consenting to take part and a phone call took place before the interview to discuss the research and provide an opportunity for the parent or

	child to ask any questions. Before the interview started, I went through the information sheet and age-appropriate assent form with the child again. For young people aged 16 and over, and adults, information sheets were sent prior to the interview. For the young person, we spoke on the phone prior to meeting to go through the information sheet and provide opportunities for questions. This was repeated before starting the interview. For the adults, I provided opportunities for questions prior to starting the interview.
Right to withdraw	The participants were informed of their right to withdraw in the information sheet given to them prior to the interviews. Participants were encouraged to contact me via the details provided on the sheet and advised of the time limits regarding this due to data analysis. One participant withdrew prior to starting the interviews and their information was deleted.
Privacy and data management	The in-person interviews were audio-recorded using a sound recorder app on a password protected laptop and a second recording device on a password protected iPad. The data was transferred onto my university OneDrive and then deleted from the recording device. The online interviews were recorded transcribed through Microsoft Teams and then manually edited to ensure it was translated verbatim. The files were saved without any identifiable information and then deleted once they had been transcribed using a pseudonym. The transcriptions were stored in line with the University of Birmingham data management and retention guidelines and are accessible for up to 10 years, after which they will be deleted. All paper documents were disposed of in confidential waste.
Risk to participants	There was an identified potential risk that the participants may become distressed or upset when discussing parental imprisonment as an emotive and sensitive topic. This may have acted as a barrier

	to recruitment of CYP for this study. Careful thought and consideration were put into planning this research to ensure participants felt safe and comfortable to share this information. Before speaking to the children, I had a conversation with a gatekeeper (teacher, family support worker, parent or youth justice worker), to see if the study was suitable for the child to take part and offer an opportunity to ask me any questions. I then arranged a pre-interview conversation where I introduced myself to the CYP and offered another opportunity to ask questions and shared an overview of what would be discussed in the interview. During the interview, I prepared alternative activities such as colouring, emotions cards and a timeline to reduce the pressure of talking. One participant chose to use these methods. Throughout the interview I employed my active listening skills to sensitively explore the topic whilst monitoring the participant's non-verbal cues for any discomfort or signs of distress throughout. Following the interviews with CYP, I arranged a follow up phone call to answer any questions or for them to share any concerns and the participant or parent was given my contact detail to contact me on if needed.

A multi-perspective design offers some additional ethical considerations due to the complexity of sampling that will be discussed in more detail below. I reflected on power dynamics before, during and after the interviews. Differences in social and cultural capital between groups may have influenced rapport and what participants felt comfortable sharing. Two of the interviews were with qualified EPs and two were with special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCos). I intentionally chose not to recruit SENCos from settings where I serve as the link trainee Educational Psychologist, to avoid blurring the boundaries between my research role—focused on capturing their perspectives on a specific experience—and our usual collaborative interactions. Additionally, I recognised that the participant–researcher relationship differs from the EP–SENCo dynamic, and that their perception of me as a trainee EP could influence power dynamics or comfort levels during the research.

3.3.2. Participants and Recruitment

3.3.2.1. Sampling. Smith et al. (2022) suggest using a 'reasonably' homogeneous sample for whom the research questions are meaningful. I had initially hoped to recruit CYP aged 8-18 years old who had experience of a parent or carer in prison. After several months of difficulties recruiting this group, I extended my sample to include adults who had supported this group in schools. A multi-perspective design was used to explore the experience of PI. Larkin et al., (2019) propose that multi-perspective IPA studies allow an "intersubjective and microsocial dimension of a given phenomenon"(p.2). They offer various multi-perspective designs including directly related groups and indirectly related groups as shown in Table 7.

Table 7.

Multi-perspective IPA designs (Larkin et al., 2019)

Design type	Key features	Suitability to this study (Parental Imprisonment)
Directly related groups	Subsamples who are immersed in the same experience or phenomena but with contrasting views. "*Surfing the same wave" (p.5.)*	EPs, SENCos and children have had experience either directly or indirectly of PI or supporting CIPs.
Indirectly related groups	A group connected by an underlying quality of experience which bridges the gap between different phenomena. "*Sharing the breeze" (p.5.)*	PI may share the same features of separation therefore it could be this would be suitable to interviewing those impacted by PI and parental bereavement.
Families, teams and other cohorts	A commonality of system or group with a shared experience. *"Tangled in the same web" (p.5.)*	Interviewing a sample of EPs about PI, or various family members impacted by the imprisonment of an individual.

Dyads	Two people with shared and distinctive features of an experience e.g. parent/child, doctor/patient. *"Two sides to every coin" (p.5)*	Interviewing a parent and teacher dyad or parent and child dyad.

A dyadic approach involving the child and school staff member was deemed inappropriate, as literature highlights CYP's desire for privacy and reluctance to share with teachers. Homogeneity in this study was defined in terms of all participants having awareness of the lived experiences of a child with a parent/carer in prison.

3.3.2.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria. As I was interested in the unique experiences of CYP with a parent/carer in prison, I wanted to collect their views directly. Purposive sampling was used to recruit CYP who had a parent or carer in prison either now or in the past and could articulate their experiences. Details of recruitment are outlined below in the 'procedures' section of this chapter. My initial inclusion and exclusion criteria and rationale are provided below in Table 8.

Table 8.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Recruitment

Inclusion/ Exclusion criteria	Rationale
Children and young people aged 8-18 (Year 4 and above) with a parent/carer or significant family member in prison now or in the past. This will be either a parent or primary carer which may include uncles, aunties, grandparents or siblings who have been the primary carer of the young person.	• My research is exploring CYPs experiences of PI therefore I wanted to gather the views of the children themselves instead of the parents. • An age range was selected considering language and communication ability, as well as appropriate cognitive and emotional maturity to take part in the interview.
Children must already be aware that they have a parent/carer in prison.	• To ensure that the children could speak about their experiences openly, children had to be aware that they had a parent/carer in prison. • When contacting schools for recruitment it was made clear to staff that families should only be approached for recruitment if a) the family had shared this information willingly with school/organisation and b) the child was aware of the PI.
Participants must have suitable communication skills to enable them to take part in a semi-structured interview.	• Due to the need for rich qualitative information participants needed to have communication skills that enabled information to be gathered via a verbal interview. Some research

	suggests that adverse childhood experiences may influence language development and communication (Dolzycka & Stead, 2020). Therefore, for the YP's interviews, I needed to be prepared to adapt language for individual needs making use of strategies such using simplified language and chunking information where necessary.
Attending a primary or secondary school or college in the local authority where I am currently on placement as a second-year TEP (this was later amended to not be limited to the West Midlands)	• Initially the research was focussed on one specific local authority, however as recruitment was difficult, this was extended to other LAs. I also widened the sample to include CYP who had previously attended an educational setting.

These criteria were adapted to later include recruitment of adult participants. Individuals were asked to take part if they had worked with CYP with a parent in prison in a professional capacity within an education context.

3.3.2.3. Recruitment Process. I initially emailed primary and secondary schools within the LA I was on placement with, as a TEP sharing my recruitment poster directly and via link EPs (See Appendix E). I followed up with phone calls to schools. During the recruitment process I kept a journal of schools, organisations and individuals I had contacted regarding my study. I contacted a high proportion of primary and secondary schools in the locality of my placement service, several local and national charities who support CIPs within the West Midlands, prisons, family support services, youth organisations and other services such as youth justice, EP teams and social work services. My research poster was shared via social media platforms and in some prison visitation centres. All these services required a gatekeeper to pass on the information to the family or individual therefore I was unsure how many CYP were directly invited to participate. Gatekeepers can be defined as “people or groups who are in positions to grant or deny access to a research setting” (Lune & Berg, 2017, p.112). For this group there was the added complication of the need for two gatekeepers; professionals and parents, a recruitment challenge also identified by Weidberg et al. (2017). O’Reilly & Dogra (2016) recommend considering carefully who the gatekeeper should be when approaching schools to recruit CYP. I initially approached the SENCo as there is often a link EP. However, on reflection I recognised that it was often the family support or pastoral member of staff that held this knowledge and had the best

relationships with families whereas CIPs may not be visible to SENCos. Therefore, I changed my direction of approach to these members of staff.

Saunders et al. (2018) produced a paper specifically on the ethical considerations of research with CIPs and as part of this highlighted three challenges for recruiting this group: invisibility, role of gatekeepers and protection of children. Many schools said that they did not have any children with a parent in prison, despite the estimated figures which suggest that every school in the UK will have a child impacted by PI (Brookes & Frankham, 2021). Some schools shared that whilst they were aware of a student with a parent in prison, they did not feel comfortable sharing the research information with families due to family circumstances or concern for the child. One organisation declined to share the information with families as they felt the time restriction would limit the time to build relationships with CYP. Aitken (2017) described similar experiences in their research where organisations had not shared the research information, therefore not giving the induvial a choice of whether to accept or decline participation. Whilst gatekeepers have reasonable and well-founded concerns about involving CIPs in research, there is an alternative argument that by denying children the opportunity to take part in research, it is disempowering and marginalising an already vulnerable group. Knudsen (2019) states that "failing to conduct research with child participants themselves acts to disempower, objectify and devalue them by creating a vacuum which is filled by caregivers' or others' voices." (p.379). Once ethical approval for amendments was granted, I used convenience sampling to recruit adult participants by contacting school staff, service professionals, and EPs with prior experience supporting this group. Some participants were referred by others based on their interest or experience with CIPs in schools.

3.3.2.4. Sample. Three children initially agreed to participate, two children were under 16 therefore parental consent was sought. One of the children withdrew prior to the interview, and another child was interviewed as a pilot study for this research, but the data was not included (see Appendix I for reflective journal entry). A fourth child expressed interest in taking part via a member of school staff, but parental consent was not confirmed; therefore, he was not eligible to participate as he was under 16 years old. Table 9 & 10 offer an overview of my final sample.

Table 9.

CYP Participant Information

Name (pseudonym)	Age	Ethnicity	Parent in prison
Alisha	17	Asian British – Pakistani	Father (in prison)

Table 10.

Adult Participant Information

Name (pseudonym)	Job role
Sophie	SENCo in a primary school
Claire	SENCo in a primary school
Katie	Educational psychologist
Andrew	Educational psychologist

3.3.3. Procedure

3.3.3.1. Pilot study. A pilot study was conducted with a 10-year-old pupil who had a father in prison. An entry from my reflective journal can be found in Appendix I which includes my reflections prior to and after the initial interview. The interview

lasted 35 minutes, and much of that time was used to build rapport and get to know the participant's strengths and interests. During the interview the child did not speak in detail but enjoyed taking part in participatory drawing activities. The child responded to questions about herself and her family (not including her father), but when asked about her relationship with her dad she shared that "we don't talk about him much" and from a selection of feelings visual cards chose "confused" to describe her feelings towards her dad. Following the interview, I reflected that I needed clearer and more specific questions about the topic I was exploring, and this was refined in my later interview schedule. I also reflected on the information shared and not shared. Whilst my interpretation of this interview provided me with insight into the difficulties children may face in talking about this issue, the data collected was not rich or detailed enough to analyse. I adapted my inclusion criteria following this interview, as the participants age and relationship with parent prior to imprisonment may have impacted her understanding and communication of her experiences Therefore following this interview, I focused my efforts on recruiting children aged 11 and above.

3.3.3.2. Semi-structured interviews. IPA research aims to collect rich, detailed, first-person accounts from individuals about their lived experience therefore semi-structured interviews were deemed the most suitable tool (Smith et al. 2022). Whilst focus groups have been used in IPA studies (Palmer et al., 2010), the sensitive and private nature of this study meant that this would not have been appropriate for this research. Semi-structured interviews can be used to elicit thoughts and feelings about the phenomena being studied through a "'conversation with a purpose'" (Smith et al. 2022.p.54). An interview schedule of open-ended questions, supported by guidance from Smith et al. (2022) was constructed to guide

the interview (See Appendix F and G) but the topic of conversation was led by the participant. Smith et al. (2022) outlines different types of questions that make up a semi-structured interview schedule such as descriptive, narrative and structural questions. Prompts and probes were also added to the schedule to support deeper understanding. A 'one page profile' was shared with the CYP before meeting with them, to provide some information about myself to support rapport building (See Appendix H). Practical considerations were made when preparing for the interview such as location of the interview, vocabulary, communication style, and participatory methods as suggested by O'Reilly and Dogra (2016). The interview with the young person (YP) was in person and lasted one hour and ten minutes. The adult interviews were all online via Microsoft teams and lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. All participants were given a choice of which method they would prefer and consented to the interviews being recorded and transcribed.

3.3.4. Validity

As a qualitative research study, using traditional scientific criteria to measure the validity of this study would be unsuitable as it is not in line with the study's underlying epistemology. Therefore, measures such as reliability, generalisability and objectivity are not applied (Willig, 2021). However, researchers should communicate and assess the scientific value of qualitative research. Yardley (2000, 2017) offers open-ended flexible principles that can be applied to such research. Table 11 outlines my use of these principles to assess the present study's trustworthiness.

Table 11.

Yardley's (2000, 2016) Quality Principles Applied to my Study.

Principle	Actions Taken	Limitations of this study
Sensitivity to Context **Awareness of the context in which the research is conducted including consulting existing literature across contexts (Yardley, 2016).**	• Research into CIPs was undertaken to identify what literature was already out there and what was lacking, especially in the EP world. • Research reviewed from a range of disciplines including criminology, sociology, education, social work, psychology and child development. • Use of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems to frame my thinking and understanding about the wider context of PI as presented in Chapter Two. • Awareness and sensitivity to the stigma surrounding imprisonment in the UK and careful thought and consideration to approaching families and individuals. • Interviews conducted in safe, familiar spaces with participants having a choice of where this would happen. • Discussions with a range of other professionals in this area including charities and academics.	• Whilst I tried to reduce power balance with participants through rapport building and sharing information about myself this may have still been present as the term 'interviewer' may carry connotations for individuals. Particularly for the younger participant this may have impacted how she responded. • Due to recruitment difficulties, I was not able to interview a YP who currently attends an educational setting. • Due to my professional position, possible power imbalances, and social desirability factors may have influenced participants.
Commitment and Rigour	• IPA guidance (Smith et al.2022) was followed throughout the research process.	• Practical restrictions such as time impacted my recruitment for this study therefore the

(Sufficient depth of analysis and recruitment of sample for phenomenon studied) (Yardley, 2016).	• Purposive and convenience sampling was used to strive for a homogenous sample with multiple perspectives. • A reflective diary was kept ensuring rigour in recruitment to ensure as many individuals were invited to participate. • Interviews were transcribed. • Rigorous recruitment: I managed to recruit three CYP but one withdrew. Received child interest from a 4th but did not receive parental consent.	sample was smaller and not as homogenous as planned.
Transparency and Coherence **(To what extent the project makes sense and is consistent) (Yardley, 2016).**	• My positionality is explored in section 3.1.3 and includes how this may have impacted my interpretation of data. • I have presented my rationale for my choice of methodology and data collection methods based above. • The steps taken in IPA analysis of the data are outlined in section 3.4 and this was an iterative process. • The use of a reflective journal to refer back to as part of the iterative process and promote reflexivity.	• Due to difficulties recruiting CIPs, I had to widen my sample size to include adults which resulted in a change in my research design to incorporate multiple perspectives as I was no longer seeking to explore the phenomenon from the child perspective alone.

Impact and Importance **(How this research will make a difference and have an impact by building upon what is already known) (Yardley, 2016).**	• The role of the EP is discussed including implications for how CIPs can be supported within an education context. • My study has contributed to the literature on the experiences of CIPs from multiple perspectives. • Unique contribution: no existing studies offered qualitative perspectives of EPs on the impact of PI.	• IPA samples are small and, therefore, findings cannot be generalised beyond the sample.

3.4. Data Analysis: IPA

Smith et al. (2022) provide clear and detailed guidance on the analysis of data for an IPA study (see Table 12) but emphasise that these are not prescriptive or linear. Analysis is described as iterative and inductive to identify conceptualisations of individual participants before identifying these more widely across multiple cases. As this is a multi-perspective design, I applied IPA to the YP's interview data and then to the adult participants before identifying how the experiences related to one another using analytic strategies outlined by Larkin et al. (2019).

Table 12.

Process of Data Analysis (Smith et al.2022)

Steps outlined by Smith et al. (2022)	Details of the process in this study
Step 1: Reading and re-reading the data	Following verbatim transcription, I familiarised myself with the data by reading and re-reading the transcript. I kept a reflective diary to note down anything of significance. As I read and re-read the interviews, I created a mind map to piece together the story that the participant was trying to tell. See Appendix K for an example of this.
Step 2: Exploratory noting	I printed the transcripts and noted anything of interest in the margins (similarities, contradictions or repetition). I highlighted emotive words or statements of interest and noted why it felt significant. Smith et al. (2022) suggest three levels of exploratory noting: descriptive, linguistic and conceptual. I used three colours to highlight and comment on these three areas for each transcript in the right margin.
Step 3: Constructing experiential statements	This stage involved a shift to a more analytical focus, working with the previously made exploratory notes to construct a statement about the participants' experience, or their sense making of the experience. The statements were short phrases that tried to capture the essence of that experience as well as my interpretation of it. These statements were handwritten in the left-hand margin of the transcript.
Step 4: Searching for connections across experiential statements	I presented the experiential statements on a large surface so that I was able to move them around to identify connections. I organised similar statements, and then created clusters,

	noticing similarities or contradictions. This process took a significant amount of time, and I kept notes in my reflective journal to outline my interpretation of the clustering.
Step 5: Naming the personal experiential themes (PETS)	I assigned each cluster a Personal Experiential Theme (PET) (Smith, 2022) all relating to their own experience or sense-making. This was an iterative process where I revisited each cluster regularly and kept notes. These PETs were arranged with the experiential statements and quotes from the text to ensure that these were rooted in the participants' voice which allowed me to trace the process of analysis.
Step 6: Continuing the individual analysis of other cases	For the adult sample, I completed steps 1-5 for each interview.
Step 7: Developing group experiential themes (GETS) across cases	I looked for patterns across the PETs (including similarities, differences or unique points). I arranged each PET using a cork board to represent different themes (See Appendix L). Whilst I was looking at the level of the PETs, as suggested by Smith et al. (2022) I also looked at particular sub-themes or experiential statements that connected with other PETs from other cases and in some cases, these fitted better with other clusters.
Stage 8: Multi-perspective analysis between samples. (Larkin et al.,2019).	Patterns and connections across the sub-samples were identified to help understand the event across perspectives as outlined by Larkin et al., (2019). This involved identifying where there was consensus, conflict, reciprocity or shared experiences. Larkin et al. describe the aim as "to produce an account that capitalises on multiplicity and offers a plausible interpretive perspective on how the participant's life worlds interact and overlap." (2019. p.11)

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter will present the findings of the current study which examined the experiences of CIPs through the perspectives of one young person and four professionals who have supported CYP in schools. The phenomenon of PI is located within the child's world but also the adults who support them within the education system. As this is a multi-perspective IPA study, the cases were first analysed separately, and the PETs are presented below. Only the adult participants were cross analysed to identify GETs. Alisha's interview is presented as a single case with PETs summarised in section 4.2. Shared or congruent experiences are outlined between the adult GETs and child PETs to understand the experience from multiple perspectives. These are presented in relation to my research questions as a summary at the end of this chapter.

4.1.1. Research Aims and Questions

This small-scale exploratory research study examines the experience of one YP and four adults who have supported CIPs in schools. The research aim was to explore the experiences of children who have a parent /carer in prison alongside the views of adults who support them within the English education system. The four research questions stated earlier in this study were:

1. What are the lived experiences of CIPs?

2. How do adults supporting CIPs make sense of their role and experiences in supporting CIPs?

3. How can schools and education services better support CIPs?

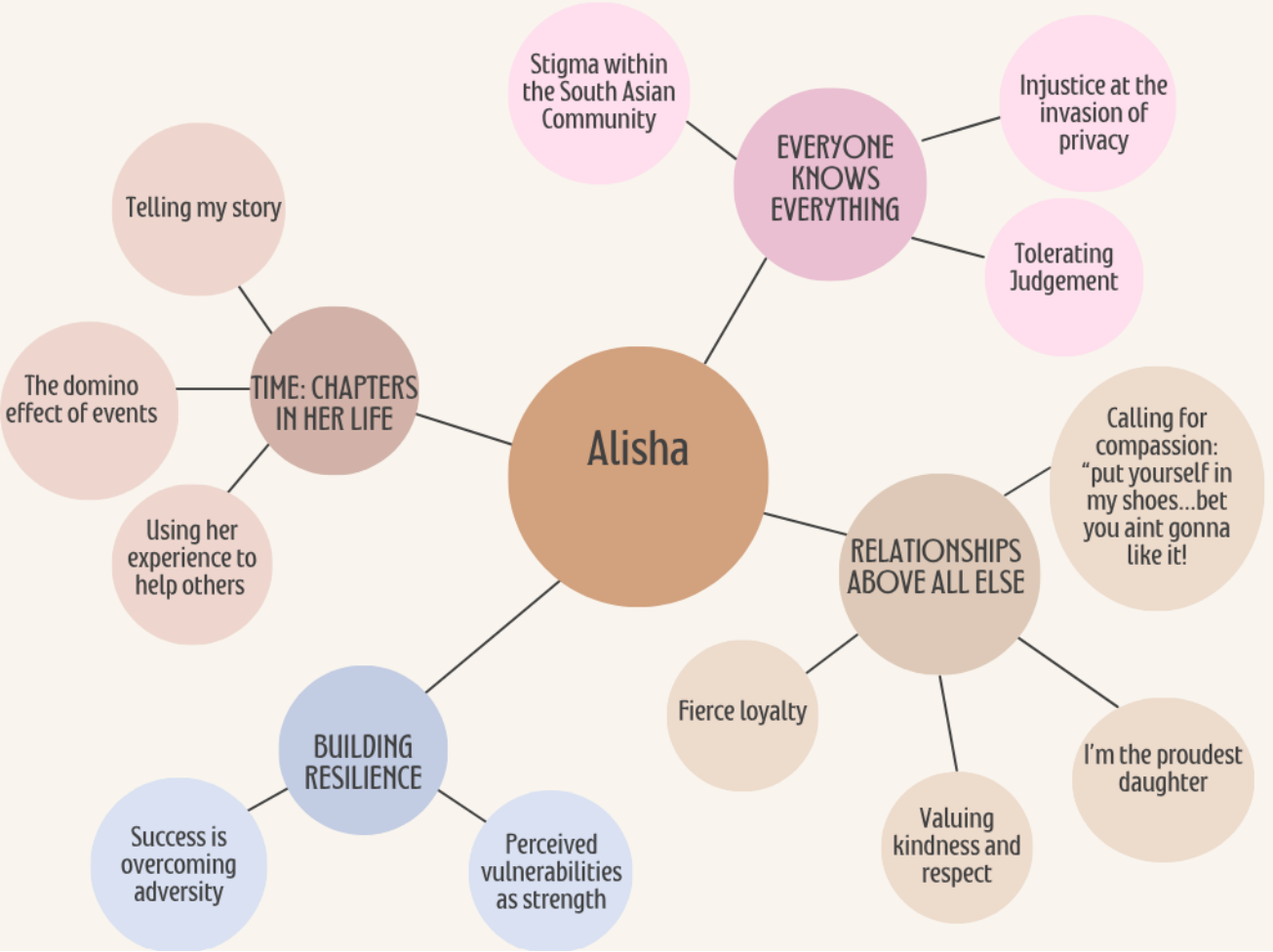
4. What risk and protective factors do CIPs and adults supporting CIPs identify?

4.2. Alisha

This section will explore the PETs generated through my interpretation of Alisha's experiences as presented in her interview. Alisha's interview provided a rich insight into her unique experience of having a parent go to prison and therefore was able to be presented as a single case. Appendix M presents the experiential statements and subthemes that contributed to the generation of PETs for Alisha that can be seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9:

Alisha's PETs

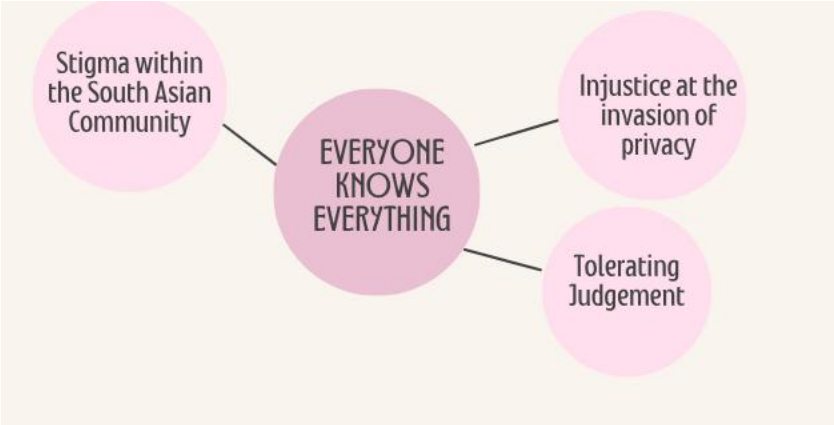


4.2.1. PET One: Everyone Knows Everything

Figure 10 shows the first PET and associated subthemes. The subthemes include her experiences of stigma, judgement and injustice at the invasion of privacy.

Figure 10.

PET One: Everyone Knows Everything



Alisha felt that her family's life was exposed to public scrutiny, leading to isolation and exclusion. She perceived judgement about her family from others, particularly within the South Asian community. Alisha described the contrast in her family's community inclusion between her two childhood homes. At her first home Alisa recalls "we were the only Asians in the area, but we loved it there*"*. I interpreted Alisha's reference to her families ethnicity and the use of 'but' as Alisha suggesting that she may not have expected to feel as comfortable due to their cultural differences but that despite this she felt included: *"*the neighbours there, completely different to how the Asian- we used to play out on the streets… we used to sit with the neighbours. They were old people… we were loved in the area". Alisha reflects on this fondly, describing feeling 'loved' which was 'different' to her later experiences. In the new area she recalled her experience of receiving unwanted attention due to

her father's wealth and involvement with criminal activity. Alisha felt this wealth was highlighted through how her family dressed and presented themselves:

> He was a drug dealer. So you can imagine we were always dressed nice in designer clothes, designer shoes, I had gold everywhere… then obviously come into an area with Asians. They're looking at "that girl's got a lot of gold"… the boy's got gold on". In Islam, boys shouldn't wear gold, but they're looking at him like "that boy, he's got gold!

The repeated phrase "they're looking at us" suggests awareness of difference due to their wealth. I interpreted this visibility as stemming from judgement within the community due to breaking of cultural norms which is illuminated through the word 'shouldn't'. 'Them*'* and 'they' are used throughout Alisha's interview suggesting segregation between her family and others. Alisha makes direct reference to her experience as a British Pakistani girl in her interview and the stigma she experienced within this community. There has been limited research into the experiences of South Asian families affected by PI, with only one identified paper which looked more broadly at experiences of any family member (Abass et al., 2016).

Alisha experienced societal exclusion within the community since she was a child "when we wanted to play with them in the park, like me and my brother, they wouldn't want to play with us. But we didn't know why…we felt left out." Here, Alisha describes feeling 'left out' and excluded from other children due to her father's involvement in dealing drugs without an understanding of why. This description is an example of courtesy stigma (Goffman, 1963) where individuals are excluded within society due the associations of a family member, despite having committed no offences themselves. Despite some findings in the literature that describe

community as a protective and supportive factor to CIPs (Harris, 2020; Luk et al., 2023; Manby et al, 2015; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008), Alisha experiences conflict and exposure to criminal activity within the community which leads to withdrawal and exclusion.

Alisha recounts criticism from adults within the community, whether directly or indirectly: “Your daddy’s naughty*”, “*drug dealer’s kids”, “Alisha’s dad’s the crack head*”* and “Alisha’s dad’s a criminal”. These derogatory and personal comments fuel Alisha’s frustration, anger and injustice that her personal life is on show for others to critique. Stigmatisation impacting childhood experience was also highlighted by Zhang & Flyn (2025) in their scoping review. Alisha does not describe keeping PI a secret, on the contrary she said, “I made it known*”*. Therefore, unlike other studies which refer to CYP maintaining secrecy and withholding information about PI (McGinley & Jones, 2018; Saunders, 2018; Weidberg, 2017), Alisha contributes to visibility. Alisha appears resigned to the fact that “everyone knew” because “everything gets about”. This is evident in her experience of teachers talking about her father’s arrest: “I beg your pardon? I can hear what you're saying.*”* The tone and phrases used suggest disbelief and incredulity at the incident, “and they’re supposed to be professionals!”. Alisha expects more discretion and honesty of her teachers as adults who hold authority in her life. This experience contributes to Alisha’s lack of trust in these relationships which may then become an additional risk factor within the school environment. Alisha’s experience resonates with the findings from Zhang & Flynn (2025) in their scoping review of CIPs experiences which found other examples of teachers and professionals demonstrating marginalisation through insensitive and negative attitudes. They suggest that this stigma and stereotyping from professionals may prevent help seeking in CIPs. Weidberg (2017) applied

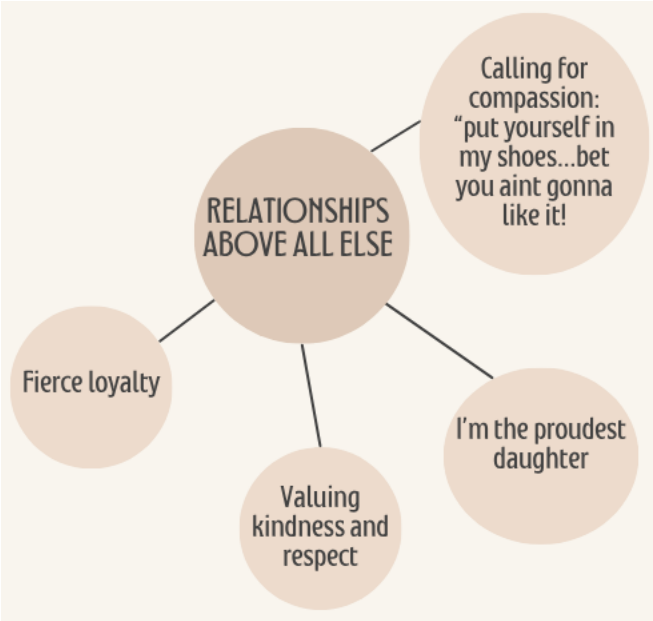
labelling theory to the experiences of CIPs where the stigma associated with 'prison' and 'criminal' lead to social discrimination in society and lead to frustration, anger and defiance. This is apparent in Alisha's reaction to her teacher.

4.2.2. PET Two: Relationships Above All Else

Figure 11 below shows the second PET and associated subthemes.

Figure 11.

PET Two: Relationships Above All Else



Relationships were important for Alisha, mirroring the findings from McGinley and Jones (2017) who identified trusted relationships as a coping strategy for CIPs. Peer relationships at school broke down following her dad's arrest due to the interrelating nature of the families involved: "She were my *best* friend when I was a kid…she were my *best* friend". The repetition and emphasis of 'best' friend suggest the severity of the relationship and more importantly the fallout of it. Alisha's relationship with her father is significant and she states, "I'm the proudest daughter." Alisha perceives him as humble and selfless, giving the example of his wealth distribution, "the only thing he spent the money on was his kids…he didn't care

about himself." Positive relationships with imprisoned parents are cited as a protective factor for CIPs in the COPING project (Jones et al., 2013) which outlined the complex perception of imprisoned parents by their children which may include idealisation.

The impact of PI for Alisha leads to withdrawal from her relationships "I drifted from everyone when my dad went to prison… It made me depressed…didn't want to do anything, I used to think…I don't wanna do it. I used to do that with my dad". This quote strongly contrasts to her description of her elation when her dad is released and wanting to show how she has changed: "I was buzzing! I couldn't sleep!... I thought, Dad ain't seen me like this… dad's never ever tasted my cooking." Alisha's experience highlights the time that has passed since he was in prison and the aspects of their relationship they have missed out on. Her close relationship with her father and then sudden and unexpected loss and separation is described as 'ambiguous loss' which has been found to lead to mental health decline in CYP (Riyantono et al. 2022). Alisha's account of mental health difficulties also aligns with the literature regarding the increased prevalence of mental health problems for CIPs (Murray et al., 2009; Shaw et al., 2022).

Loyalty and honesty are significant values within for Alisha who frequently uses the phrase "I'm not gonna lie to you" and "I've got nothing to hide" when sharing her experiences, which I interpreted as her wanting to present transparency in her experiences in an environment she appeared relaxed with. Alisha felt betrayal when her mother lied to her regarding her father's arrest: *"*she didn't tell me he was on remand…it's been three days, 'he's in prison'…. I goes 'you don't piss me off and lie mum…I don't want to be around you, you lied to me!'"*.* Although Alisha can retrospectively understand her mother's actions, she still thinks honesty is more

important: *"*I know she lied to me to try. Thought it was for the best, but honesty is key." The COPING project (Jones et al., 2013) identified that children find it more difficult to deal with PI when their absence is not honestly explained due to the erosion of trust which Alisha describes. Openness and honesty were identified in the literature as a supportive factor for CIPs which resonates with Alisha's experiences (Zhang & Flynn,2025)

Alisha recalled negative school experiences from when her dad went to prison including school exclusion. She sought empathy and compassion, describing an interaction with a teacher following the incident that led to exclusion:

> They were like, "she's gone mental, she needs help." They goes to my mum. "She needs to be sectioned off… I goes "why do I need be sectioned off?" I goes "You put yourself in *my* shoes! *You* be your father's favourite, and he goes prison. Bet *you* ain't gonna like it!

This explicit call to *"*put yourself in my shoes" suggests that Alisha felt misunderstood and isolated in this experience, and that the teachers were not acknowledging the emotional impact of her losing a parent. Kahya & Ekinici (2018) identified interactions with teachers as an influential factor in CIPs' perception of school. This experience contrasts to a later interaction at a different setting that she refers to as "the behaviour school" following her exclusion:

> It was in my area, so they already heard about what happened…People talk about it... She understood. You know what? She understood me. And I loved it….She were the Head of the school….I loved her. She used to speak to me about it. She goes "If you ever need 5 minutes, go outside. Do whatever you want"….That supported me.

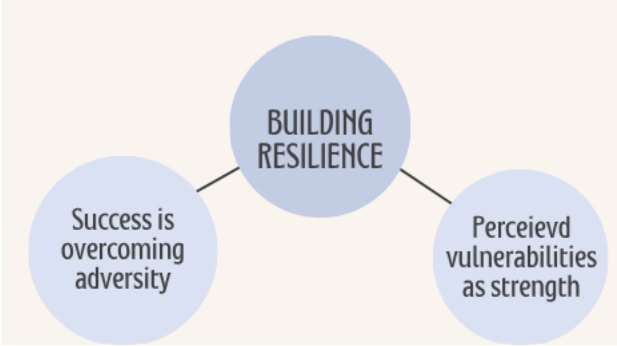
The honesty and compassion shown to Alisha here developed secure relationships that positively impacted her educational experience. This in line with findings from Losel et al. (2012) who emphasised the significant impact that positive relationships with teachers can have on CIPs. This example of a relational approach demonstrates the positive impact of focusing on the child and their needs as recommended by Morgan et al. (2013).

4.2.3. PET Three: Building Resilience

Figure 12 below shows the third PET and associated subthemes.

Figure 12.

PET Three: Building Resilience



Alisha recognises success as overcoming adversity or difficulty. This perception of resilience is in line with the APA's (2018) definitions in section 2.3.1. In her closest relationships, loved ones have demonstrated "turning their life around" when faced with addiction and loss which requires active change overtime: "you can't just come off it like within a click…takes time". Alisha prides herself as being a "respectful young lady" who can tolerate judgement: "I'm proud that I've learnt to control myself with my anger". This suggests a coping mechanism where she asserts autonomy by managing her reactions to uncontrollable situations.

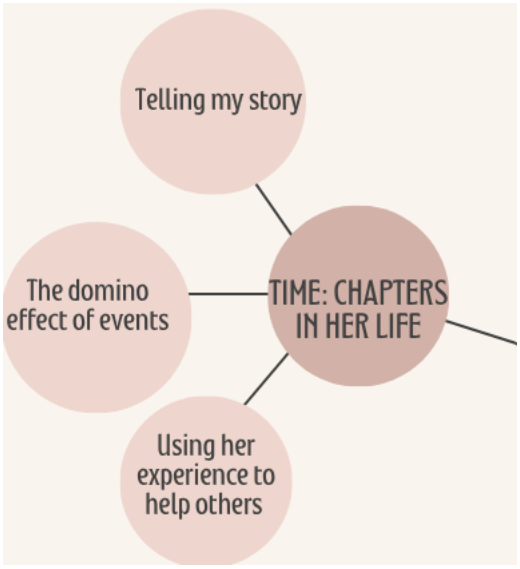
Alisha suggests that her gender protected her from going to prison as she was perceived as less threatening: *"*I should be your son dad…If I was his son I'd probably be in prison with him…with the girl, they won't retaliate as much…if I was a guy they'd retaliate….it saved me you know*"*. The 'should' suggests that she feels her behaviour, reactions and loyalty are more typical of what she would expect a son to do but being 'the girl' offers a unique form of protection as 'they won't retaliate as much*'*. The perception of female vulnerability acts as a defence. Alisha's belief of this fact is supported by the Ministry of Justice (2012) report on the impact of parental offending which found that sons of imprisoned parents were more likely to offend and receive custodial sentences than daughters. Murray and Farrington (2005) suggest that son's imprisonment is more likely due to the response of the justice system and social modelling. Data from the Prison Reform Trust (2017) reveals significant racial disproportionality within the CJS in the UK. Nationally, Black, Asian and minority ethnic women are overrepresented in prison, accounting for 18% of the women's prison population despite making up 11.9% of the women's population in England and Wales. Within the West Midlands specifically, during 2017 Asian women represented 7.5% of the women's population but constituted 12.2% of first-time entrants to the CJS. This disproportionality highlights how the combined effects of gender and race can create unique disadvantages, and highlights the need to take an intersectional approach, when considering disproportional representation within the prison population (Crenshaw, 1989; Prison Reform Trust, 2017).

4.2.4. PET Four: Time: The chapters of her story

Figure 13 below shows the final PET and associated subthemes.

Figure 13.

PET Four: Time: Chapters in Her Life



Alisha's unique experience is told through vivid descriptions, quotes and reference to her 'story'. Alisha voices her frustration at being spoken about rather than being spoken to, insisting on her right to tell her own story: "If you want to know the story, come to me and ask me yourself. I'll tell you the story." This relates to the above theme of Alisha seeking control and agency over the situation in response to feeling powerless which is found in other studies that gather the views of CIPs (Weidberg, 2017; Zhang & Flynn,2025).

Alisha's experiences demonstrate that PI rarely occurs within a vacuum but that there are inter-relating factors across her ecological systems which feed into her experiences. For Alisha this includes community, relationships and altercations with peers and teachers and the ripple effect of crime. Alisha suggests the geographical area to be a significant factor that impacted her happiness "when we were in (place name) there were no problems, nothing. We were all a happy family". This transition included an upheaval of community, school and peers. Alisha's own involvement in crime impacted her getting a job and a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check.

Despite this, Alisha shared how she wants to use her experiences to help others who have had a parent in prison *"*You know being in youth offending, I'd love it. Yeah I'd say to 'em 'cos they'd probably listen to me more 'cause I'm a younger person."

Alisha's references to witnessing violence and criminal activity aligns with McGinley & Jones (2018) study into CIPs experience and found that this was a common occurrence and resulted in the children growing up too fast. When describing an interaction with police, Alisha shared "I bet they didn't realise how young I was 'cause I looked a lot older." Alisha is describing adultification bias which can contribute to discrepancy in how CYP are treated by professionals. CYP from Black, Asian and minoritised ethnic communities are more likely to be presumed older, aggressive and less vulnerable than other children (Davis, 2022). These biases relate to the issue of systemic racism, as with the recent case of Child Q. Adultification was identified as a contributing factor when a 15-year-old Black girl who was subjected to a strip search in 2020 at her London school without an appropriate adult present. A safeguarding practice review found that adults applied a disciplinary rather than child protection response due to perceiving her as older (Gamble & McCallum, 2022). Alisha's presentation as an older child impacted how she was perceived by other adults and professionals. It is important for professionals supporting CIPs to consider not only chronological age and developmental stage, but also how individual characteristics—such as race and gender—intersect to further oppress and marginalise specific individuals.

4.2.3 Summary of PETs

At the individual level, Alisha's experience of PI is shaped by factors including gender, age, ethnicity, school connectedness, educational experiences, and personal values. She expressed a desire for agency over her narrative, having felt

that others often spoke on her behalf. Alisha emphasised the importance of honesty in relationships and a need for truthfulness. Her father's imprisonment coincided with multiple transitions, including school exclusion, social withdrawal, and mental health challenges. Despite this, she demonstrated resilience in reflecting on her experiences and recognising it in others. Alisha also reported negative encounters with professionals, such as teachers and police, which may reflect processes of adultification. This aligns with Zhang and Flynn's (2025) findings on the diminished childhood experienced by children of incarcerated parents (CIPs), who are often compelled to adopt adult roles.

4.3. Adult interviews

Four adult participants were interviewed about their experiences of working with CIPs and how they are supported in schools. Two of the participants (Claire and Sophie) were SENCos in primary schools and two of the participants were EPs (Andrew and Katie) in different LAs. An overview of the PETs, subthemes and experiences of each participant is presented below .

4.3.1. Claire

Claire had experience of supporting several children and families impacted by offending or imprisonment across the primary school age range. She perceived PI as a significant factor impacting children whilst intersecting with various other risk factors. Below is a summary of Claire's unique experience leading to the abstraction of the following PETs.

4.3.1.1. PET One: Visibility, Judgement and Stigma in the Community and Beyond.

Claire reflected on her observations of families impacted by PI being hidden and not wanting to draw attention to their situation, ""they act as like lone families…they always come on their own….they act quite satellitey.*"* She perceived this invisibility as a way for families to protect themselves from judgement rather than exclusion. Claire felt that this isolation allowed privacy for families, "in the community it's so private. It's something that's not discussed." Despite this privacy, Claire seems to think that criminality is an open secret that is not appropriate to discuss due to the stigma that surrounds it. *"*They would never claim to know each other."... "the rest of the community which appear not to know anything about any of it.".

The role of cultural shame within the local community was identified by Claire as a further contribution to families not feeling able to share this information with school.

> "our parents are mostly Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Somalian…people never have fights in the playground…they never scream at you… they politely ask to speak to you, and they're very composed…very respectful…they have a lot of dignity…respect and dignity is huge in this community and having someone in prison is absolutely not in line with that set of values….we don't need to share any of that because it doesn't fit in line with how we're...our presentation."

Claire perceived the diversity of the parent community as contributing to feelings of shame as the parents pride themselves on dignity and respectful values, she perceived that families where there has been imprisonment appeared more isolated

Claire felt that the hidden nature of parental imprisonment in the media and wider society contributes to reluctance of families to share this information with schools. She identified a negative societal perception that people who get arrested are portrayed to children as ‘baddies’ in cultural references such as stories and characters, and this can contribute to stigma and shame; “people who are arrested in TV and films and media are baddies.”… “Peppa Pig’s dad never gets arrested for something he hasn’t done.” Claire here uses a popular children’s character to suggest that children with a parent in prison do not see themselves represented in society in a positive way and that the ‘goodies’ and ‘baddies’ rhetoric only provides them with negative representations of what might be their loved one.

Unlike bereavement which she felt is more ‘acceptable’ in society with readily available support, parental imprisonment is a loss that is harder for children due to the shame that can surround it. She described incidences where families’ personal circumstances were exposed online via social media or news outlets.

4.3.1.2. PET Two: What we See: The Impact on the Family

Claire applied a trauma-informed lens to the children’s experiences of parental imprisonment, recognising these events as profoundly distressing for them and their families. “Seeing your dad be handcuffed is quite traumatic.” She demonstrated empathy and compassion for the families, separating the offence from the role of a parent.

> “He cares about her so much he was, he was in inverted commas a ‘good dad’…”he cared about her. She loved him, he, being a drug dealer pushed to the side, he was a good dad, and she was a little girl.”

This positive perception that parents are doing the best they can contradicts from Dallaire's (2010) study of reduced teacher expectation for CIPs based on PI.

Claire demonstrates that she has open communication with some families who can confide in her the disruption of PI within their lives. In one example a mother shares the additional caring responsibilities as a result of her partner being arrested: "she was like 'he's left me here with two kids his elderly mother to look after… left me to take all the flat'….she was quite exasperated." This open communication leads to better understanding about the family experience building empathy and compassion.

The impact of PI can be immediate and unpredictable, leaving children unprepared for the upheaval. Arrests often occur suddenly, disrupting family life- "It's rocked their world… the family weren't prepared for it". Behavioural changes were observed following a parent's release, with significant shifts in the home environment. For example, one child who had been well-behaved suddenly began acting out—"he was very good and then he went absolutely wild… he went from a good boy to doing things he shouldn't be." When speaking with the mother, it was revealed that her husband had just come out of prison. Claire recognised that the different stages of the offender's journey can be highly destabilising. However, she also identified protective factors—such as supportive peers, extended family, and maintaining residence in the family home—that help mitigate these effects

4.3.1.3. PET Three: Impact on School Staff

Claire felt that there was no clear pathway or guidance when supporting families with PI and this led to feelings of helplessness and uncertainty in her professional judgement, "But what should we have done? I don't know…". Claire felt unequipped to make decisions that she felt were out of her remit as teacher and

SENCo. Her feelings of powerlessness were emphasised by lack of time, tangible resources or professional support available to schools. She did not feel physically or emotionally 'prepared' to support with the enormity of supporting families with the knock on-effects that impact families such as children being taken into care following parental arrest. Frustration was another emotion described in Claire's interview. Whilst she empathised with the work social services was doing, she felt a disparity between their way of working and her professional values. She viewed social services as a reactive service which contributes to the above description of not feeling 'prepared' for what happens, therefore not being able to prepare the children she supports.

*"*Mum just broke down, and we're not trained to deal with that. I hadn't even had time to mentally prepare myself for it."… "I haven't made this decision and I'm having to tell you about it and I'm not sure I can fully explain it to you."

Claire felt that having to support families in this way without the appropriate support for themselves, had an impact on the wellbeing of staff *"that weighs really heavily on you".* Claire is describing the psychological impact of repeated engagement with individuals who have experienced trauma which can be described as 'vicarious trauma'.

4.3.1.4. PET Four: Sharing Information

Claire experienced a strong sense of security and reassurance in relation to safeguarding procedures, which she described as clear-cut and well-established within the school environment. These procedures incorporated formal policies and systematic protocols for logging the sharing of information, mechanisms with which schools were already familiar and competent. This structured framework provided

transparency and accountability, fostering confidence that critical information would be appropriately managed and communicated within and across educational settings to keep children safe. However, Claire identified a notable ambiguity surrounding the sharing of other forms of contextual information beyond formal safeguarding data. She expressed concern that vital contextual details—such as background factors related to parental imprisonment—might not be systematically or consistently shared across the various services and schools involved in supporting the child. This perceived lack of clarity raised the risk that important insights could be overlooked or lost, potentially hindering a full understanding of the child's needs.

From Claire's perspective, having knowledge about PI was crucial for schools, as it provided essential context that informed their understanding of the child's circumstances. She argued that such awareness could play a preventative role by enabling schools to tailor support proactively, addressing specific needs before difficulties escalated. Claire expressed an internal conflict between respecting the wishes of families, and upholding the values embraced by the school community. She illustrated this through an example of a child who was explicitly told not to discuss her parent's situation at school. This raised concerns about the potential normalisation of concealment which might impact the relationship between home and school.

Claire articulated her uncertainty about distinguishing between 'gossip' and crucial contextual knowledge that may have safeguarding relevance. This ambiguity challenged her to consider the threshold for information sharing- what should remain confidential and what must be disclosed to protect and support the child. Claire drew an interesting parallel with the case of a parent having an affair, questioning where the 'line' lies in determining the appropriateness of sharing personal information

within professional settings. Her reflections underscore the ethical complexity practitioners face in navigating confidentiality, transparency, and the child's best interests.

4.3.2. Sophie

Sophie also had experience of supporting children and families impacted by offending or imprisonment in her role as SENCo and inclusion lead. Sophie identified the importance of knowing the children and families to gain an understanding whilst describing PI as 'complex'. The below PETS were abstracted from Sophie's experience.

4.3.2.1. PET One: Relationships are Everything

Sophie valued the open and trusting relationships she had developed with pupils and families who had experienced PI, seeing these connections as foundational to providing tailored and meaningful support. She employed a psychologically informed, trauma-sensitive approach to her understanding children's presenting needs emphasising the critical importance of creating a safe environment when children feel heard and validated. Sophie highlighted specific relational practices that fostered positive engagement, such as spending quality time, offering physical comfort like a cuddle, and engaging in informal conversations—simple yet powerful gestures that built trust. For Sophie, time was a vital element in developing these relationships, and she stressed the necessity of an individualised approach that respects each child's unique context. Reflecting on a case involving twins with a parent in prison, she noted their distinctly different responses to the experience, underscoring the importance of eliciting and attending to each child's personal perspective rather than assuming a uniform reaction.

While Sophie maintained a positive and compassionate perspective towards children and their families affected by parental imprisonment, she reflected on a case where a parent was released and reintegrated into the school community. She noted that some staff members might approach this situation with caution, influenced by their own assumptions or biases about individuals with a history of imprisonment, which could create challenges in establishing initial relationships.

4.3.2.2. PET Two: How it Feels to Know This Much

Sophie experienced a strong pressure to do the “right” thing to support these children despite her limited professional knowledge and experience in supporting with this group. She described the emotional toll of maintaining constant vigilance and the tendency to ‘overthink’ potential triggers or unexpected situations that arise when working with these children. Sophie expressed that she felt insufficiently resourced and underqualified to navigate such complex experiences independently, highlighting a need for guidance, external professional input, and clear resources or protocols to provide direction and leadership.

Sophie also experienced feelings of guilt about knowing of the PI when the child was unaware. She described the discomfort of feeling compelled to withhold the truth, which evoked both guilt and sadness:

> “You don't want to lie to the child, but you almost then have to... You felt like I had information about their life and they didn't. So you almost felt guilty for knowing more. And it almost made me feel a bit sad really.”

She later revisited this emotion, reaffirming the sense of guilt she carried for possessing knowledge about the child’s life that the child themselves did not have: “I think it was guilt there. I think I definitely felt guilt that I knew this, definitely.”

Despite these feelings of guilt, Sophie emphasised that awareness of PI within the school setting was beneficial for both staff and children. This shared knowledge enabled the staff team to collaborate effectively and make necessary adjustments—for example, being mindful when topics such as crime and punishment arose in the classroom. Sophie highlighted that this contextual understanding helped prevent difficulties for the child and played a crucial role in accurately formulating and addressing their individual needs.

4.3.2.3. PET Three: Parental Imprisonment is Complex and Feels too big.

While the previous theme explored the impact of PI on staff, Sophie also acknowledged the profound and overwhelming effect it has on the children themselves. She reflected, “The sheer amount of this is big. That's a significant burden for an adult to process, let alone a child… it is a big, big thing for them to just carry on with their daily life.” Sophie recognised that PI involves a complex interplay of factors requiring careful and nuanced consideration.

She emphasised that collaboration with other professionals, such as EPs, was invaluable in providing the time and space to unpack and reflect on these complexities. This collaborative approach enhanced her confidence and informed her practice. Sophie identified consultations as key opportunities to collectively ‘unpick’ the multifaceted issues and share critical information about the family’s circumstances. However, she also highlighted parental consent as a notable barrier to effective information sharing in these processes.

The complexity of PI made it challenging for Sophie to categorise. She initially described it as a “type of bereavement” but reflected that supporting children through

bereavement felt more straightforward, due to the availability of established resources. As she explained, “It's a type of bereavement, but actually it’s not the same as bereavement. It’s not the, you know… I think it was very hard to unpick… I don’t know why that is.”

4.3.3. Katie

As an EP within a LA, Katie had experience of supporting CYP where they had a parent in prison as part of her traded casework with both primary and secondary schools. Katie described how she applied her psychological knowledge to these cases through the various aspects of the EP role.

4.3.3.1. PET One: The Hidden Impact of Parental Imprisonment

Katie observed that EPs are rarely consulted by SENCOs specifically because a child has a parent in prison. However, this information often emerges indirectly when EPs adopt a holistic perspective that considers the broader contextual factors affecting the child’s needs. Katie described a common scenario where schools initially seek EP involvement to address a learning difficulty, but through the EP’s comprehensive assessment and information gathering, the understanding of the child’s needs evolves into a more holistic picture. She reflected:

“It’s not always immediately clear when I go into work with a student.”… “The focus was around learning and cognition and executive functioning really in school…but then it moved very quickly into the whole SEMH realm of things.”

Katie highlighted several aspects of the EP role that facilitate the identification and support of CIPs. Key among these are consultation and planning meetings, which provide a structured space for sharing information between home and school, often facilitated by the EP. She also raised the importance of the questions posed

during these meetings, noting her own uncertainties about the adequacy of her questioning in one case.

Furthermore, Katie emphasised the value of supervision offered by EPs to school staff. This supervision helps staff process the emotional impact of working with vulnerable children and unpicks the complexities underlying a child's presenting behaviours. Through sharing psychological knowledge and reflective supervision, EPs support collaborative understanding and joint problem-solving in complex situations such as those involving parental imprisonment.

Katie also described an observed ripple effect whereby unaddressed or late-identified challenges destabilise not only the child but also their family system. Such escalation can lead to involvement from external agencies, including police and social care, which in one case successfully protected a child from exploitation. She recounted: "He went from a boy who found reading really hard, generally enjoyed school, had lots of friends and found it hard to sit still…. To then Dad is released and everything. The knock-on effect was significant." Interestingly, Katie noted that despite acknowledging the prevalence of PI she had not encountered it explicitly raised in secondary school cases. She suggested that this might relate to the more relational and supportive approaches typically employed in primary schools, which facilitate earlier identification.

4.3.3.2. PET Two: Systemic Gaps and A Fragmented System

Katie felt that involvement from other services such as social care were 'too late' or non-existent and that some aspects of the support required for PI were out of her remit. This led to feelings of frustration at the wider systemic barriers that impact support for CYP and their families. Katie felt that the complexities of the systems

were a barrier for professionals and families accessing the right avenues of support. “They had to navigate the system, you know, figure out where can we get support from”. Katie’s experiences of supporting CIPs were more positive within primary schools, partly due to the review systems working effectively. She had experienced working with staff who had demonstrated compassion and advocacy as well as an understanding of the complexities involved. Katie felt that when working with families who have experienced PI, different professionals may have varying roles with the social worker supporting the parent, school supporting the child and the EP supporting the school.

4.3.3.3. Pet Three: Piecing it Together

Katie highlighted that balancing psychological formulation with the co-construction of experiences alongside families is a challenging yet essential skill. This process depends heavily on families trusting the professional relationship and feeling safe enough to share sensitive information. She discussed an ethical dilemma that arises when information about PI is disclosed by school staff – information that may impact formulation but has not been directly shared by the parent themselves. Katie reflected: “sometimes you have informal conversations around it with staff to give a bit more context, but. Erm. There's definitely a feeling of. Erm Should we be sharing this?” Katie emphasised the role of consultations to open communication, yet how this information is elicited must be done sensitively, avoiding judgement or assumptions. She further described the review process as a supportive mechanism in building trust and relationships which may lead to families feeling more comfortable sharing relevant information. She acknowledged that her limited lived experience in this area influenced her perspective, leading her to interpret the situation through a particular theoretical lens.

4.3.4. Andrew

Andrew had experience supporting CYP and their families both in traded work with schools and more specialist roles working with the youth justice service. Andrew applied a bioecological lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1978; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) to risk and protective factors at the individual and system level that impact CIPs. Andrew's unique experience is summarised below.

4.3.4.1. PET One: Connection vs Correction: The Need for Relational Approaches in Secondary Schools

Andrew felt strongly that punitive behavioural systems in schools isolated, escalated and marginalised many vulnerable children. He acknowledged his own cynicism of secondary schools which was founded in his experiences of observing a lack of relational approaches compared with primary schools. Andrew expressed frustration at these school systems as he felt that *"*Schools could be better at supporting these kinds of children than making more reasonable and better adjustments."

Andrew felt that when schools have a contextual understanding of their pupils, they are better placed to offer relational support, and this enables them to work preventatively. Through Andrew's experience of working with schools, he has identified gaps in staff's understanding and application of psychological approaches such as understanding of trauma and attachment and has also experienced a lack of compassion among school staff. Andrew highlighted knowledge about trauma and attachment as important for a contextual understanding but felt that this alone is not enough, and staff attitude towards children must also be addressed "attitude is another thing… the right attitude the right empathy…how difficult it must be to be in a family where a parent is in prison".

4.3.4.2. PET Two: Visibility and Vulnerability: Uncovering Need in the EP Role

Andrew reflected on how the traded model of service delivery within educational psychology services can limit EP involvement with CIPs, particularly when schools do not perceive this as a circumstance warranting intervention. He observed that despite their potential vulnerability, CIPs may present externally as 'fine', leading their needs to be overlooked, or alternatively may exhibit escalating behaviour that place them at risk of exclusion. Crucially, Andrew noted that even in these cases, schools did not consistently associate such presentations with a need for EP involvement, *"*Often these are children at risk of exclusion, and these are children that are still not brought up to us. I don't know why."…"Schools think these children aren't for the EP 'cause these are more social problems they're not kind of education or thinking problems."

This contributed to a sense of professional powerlessness for Andrew and underscored the potential for EPs to adopt an advocacy role by actively raising the profile of vulnerable children within educational settings including CIPs. Whilst Andrew felt that awareness of PI may help his formulation of the child's contextual situation, he would not automatically connect PI with a child's presentation.

4.3.4.3. PET Three: Systemic Exclusion

Andrew highlighted a concerning lack of advocacy and accountability for CIPs and felt that they may fall through the net of support due to presenting behaviours and exclusions. Through a social justice lens, he drew attention to the role of cultural capital within schools, noting how it can reinforce power imbalances between families and educational settings, particularly if parents lack the knowledge or confidence to navigate complex systems.

This concern was illustrated in Andrew's perception of schools deliberately not seeking EP support to prevent the initiation of statutory processes that might protect the child from exclusion, "Don't get EPs involved because it might mean they get an EHCP (education, health and care plan)... that could be a protective factor from exclusion if a child had an EHCP... That kind of tribunal wouldn't go in the school's favour... it would be a protective factor."

I interpreted some of Andrew's views regarding the school environment as suggesting that systemic barriers within schools can function as a risk factor for some children, hindering rather than supporting them. Behaviour policies were an example of this; "Sometimes they stick so closely to their behaviour policy and can be so rigid... That can come from top-down type thing... It's not my responsibility to kind of change this... They have more power than they demonstrate."

Andrew described a variety of interrelating factors that can contribute to vulnerabilities for families such as poverty, parental mental health needs, parent capacity. Whilst Andrew advocated for preventative approaches to support children at risk, he acknowledged that this conflicted with the reactive nature of service delivery within LAs which are shaped by commissioning constraints. He expressed frustration at the structural limitations that compel EPs to operate in crisis-driven ways, which he felt undermined core professional values, "We're just fixing the problems... Rather than stopping the problems from happening, that is an inefficient way of working."

The above experiences were cross analysed, comparing PETs, subthemes and experiential themes across the four adult cases. There were many similarities and differences between the individual interviews whilst each experience remained

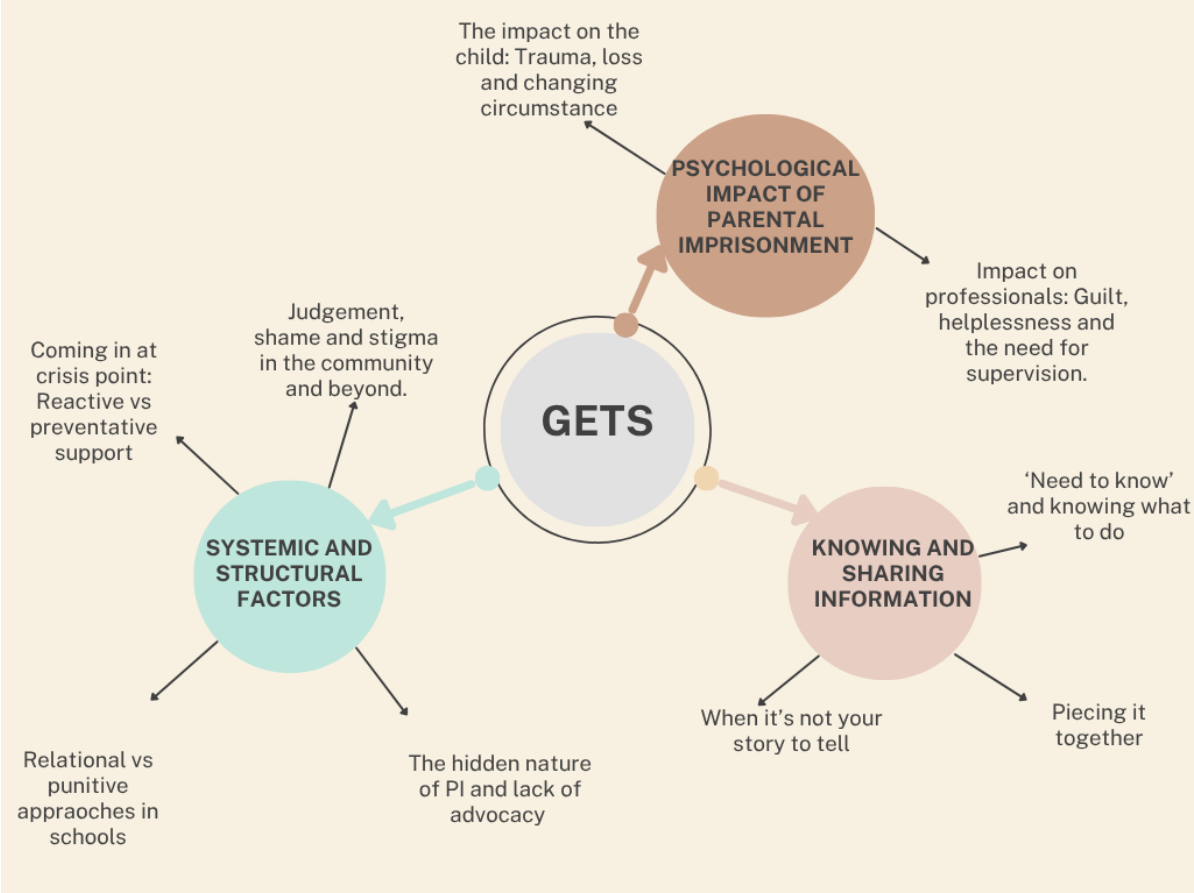
unique. Both similarities and convergences were explored to create the GETs which are outlined below and this was an iterative process that required considerable revisiting of analysis. The final GETs were ‘Psychological Impact of Parental Imprisonment’, ‘Knowing and Sharing Information’ and ‘Systemic and Structural Factors’. These are examined in the next section below.

4.4. Overview of GETs

Figure 14 below shows an overview of the GETs and the subthemes identified through cross analysis of the individual interviews.

Figure 14.

Overview of Adult GETs

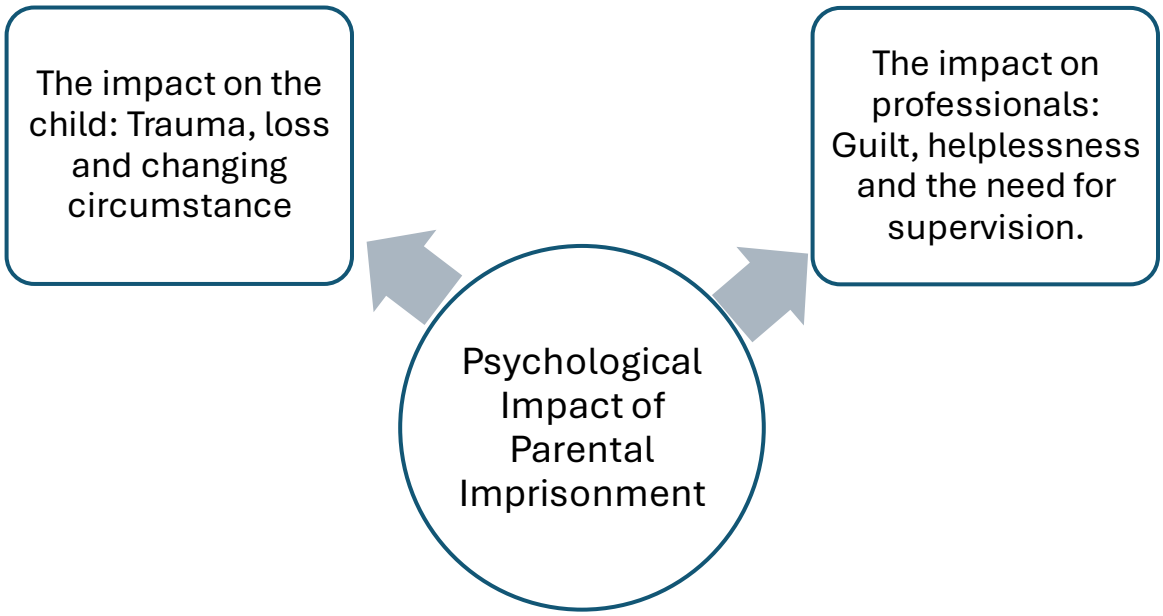


4.4.1. GET One: The Psychological Impact of Parental Imprisonment

This section will explore the GET 'Psychological Impact of Parental Imprisonment' and the related subthemes (see Figure 15)

Figure 15.

GET One: Psychological Impact of PI and Subthemes.



4.4.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Impact on the Child: Trauma, Loss and Changing Circumstances

All four participants discussed the observed impact of PI for CYP that they work with. Claire and Katie both referred to 'trauma' involved from either witnessing criminal activity or parental arrest:

"Seeing your dad be handcuffed is quite traumatic." (Claire)

"a dramatic, traumatic raid on the house." (Katie)

PI was compared with bereavement by Claire and Sophie *"*I know the dad isn't dead, but from his perspective…it's not wildly dissimilar*"* (Claire). It was perceived as *"*a type of bereavement.*"* (Sophie). This emphasises the 'ambiguous loss' (Boss, 1999) of PI- a physical absence but psychological presence. This loss is perceived as more complex and harder to express than a death as it appears less "socially validated" (Arditti, 2005. P.253). This is evident in Claire's sense making: *"*You probably don't even feel like you can talk about him because he's taboo…when people die, they become respected.*"* The word 'taboo' suggests PI feels less socially acceptable than a loss such as bereavement. The societal perception of bereavement and PI is poignant suggesting that there are more acceptable forms of loss.

The adult sample perceived escalating behaviours as a way for CIPs to communicate emotional distress linked to PI or release:

> A lot of the behaviour and lack of emotional regulation actually in the way that they're acting or with peers or lashing out because they don't know how to express their emotions or what they're feeling…seeking a lot more reassurance, wanting a lot more like cuddles…wanting to come out of class a lot more… seeking that reassurance. (Sophie)

Sophie's experience echoes the literature into CIPs' presentations in school that identified problems with behaviour (Luk et al., 2023; Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2019). Dallaire (2005) linked these behaviours to disrupted attachments leading to children seeking security. This attachment seeking behaviour observed by Sophie contrasted with the more externalised behaviour that Katie spoke about: "significant SEMH behaviours, trashing everything flooding the toilets, really, obviously, clearly very distressed, seeking control, weeing on the floor, really, you know, really gone

escalated massively*".* The need to 'seek control' relates to Weidberg's (2017) findings that many CIPs were frustrated at feeling powerless and lacking in control of this difficult situation. This shares similarities to Alisha's experience above that CYP may require more agency due to the destabilising effect of PI.

All four adults referred to the interaction of factors across systems which can cause a 'knock-on' or 'ripple' effect for families. These included poverty, parental mental health, exposure to criminal activity and domestic abuse, youth offending, taking on carer roles and disruption in the family home. Andrew uses the example of youth offending to highlight how PI is a risk but not deterministic: "most children who have a parent who's been to jail aren't offending…. Although they are at more risk of offending". Sophie recalls the deterioration of a child's wellbeing due to their father's release from prison "He went from a boy who found reading really hard, generally enjoyed school, had lots of friends, and found it hard to sit still…. To then Dad is released and everything. The knock-on effect was significant." The impact of release highlights awareness of the offender journey as outlined by Morgan et al. (2015) who described the needs and support required for children at different stages from arrest, to release. Analysis of the data prompted reflection on my initial focus of PI. Whilst I had emphasised the impact of imprisonment, interviews with adults revealed that parental release could be more significant, particularly for younger children. Claire recalled a parental request to "try to keep things really normal at school" following parental release. She felt that the instability of circumstances at home, highlighted the importance of schools providing consistent and predictable environments. This echoes Alisha's experience of the many transitions after her father went to prison, including school exclusion.

4.4.1.2. Subtheme 1.2: The Impact on Professionals: Guilt, Helplessness and the Need for Supervision. Three participants described the emotional impact on school staff of supporting CIPs, whilst Andrew observed a lack of empathy in school staff. Sophie shared the 'constant worry*'* of 'doing the wrong thing', which was 'exhausting', an experience shared by Claire who generalised this emotional impact to the wider experience of working within education where she felt there was lack of control: *"*in education we often find ourselves on the front line …the emotional impact of all of this, but not having the decision maker*."* Participants questioned their professional judgement when reflecting on cases they had supported with:

"Am I doing this right? Do I do this*?"* (Sophie)

*"*But what should we have done? I don't know*…"* (Claire)

"I don't know whether this is right*?"* (Katie)

I made sense of these expressions as seeking confirmation of the 'correct' way to support an experience which is so individualised, wanting a manual for guidance: "Where's the guide book?... what do we do?... What do we do*?"*(Claire). These extracts suggest a sense of professional powerlessness when it comes to supporting CIPs which is fuelled by wanting to do the best they can for the children and families and demonstrating empathy and compassion. This echoes the feelings of frustration and helplessness of secondary school counsellors in Levkovich and Ne'emani's (2022) study. This theme of powerlessness mirrors the views of CIPs (Weidberg, 2017) and highlights the need for further information on how to support school staff (Hanrahan, 2024; Harte, 2024).

Participants identified supervision as a way to support the impact on school staff: "I suppose a bit of supervision maybe in that she was quite emotionally

invested and impacted because she'd be having a very dysregulated child every day and she'd be trying to problem solve her way through it.*"*(Katie). This was echoed by Claire: “having supervision, the chance to talk to each other and offload… Having that supervision has worked really well for us*."* Despite the lack of tangible resources of identified specialists, these individuals valued the protected time and space to unpick and reflect on CIPs, an area that EPs supported school staff with.

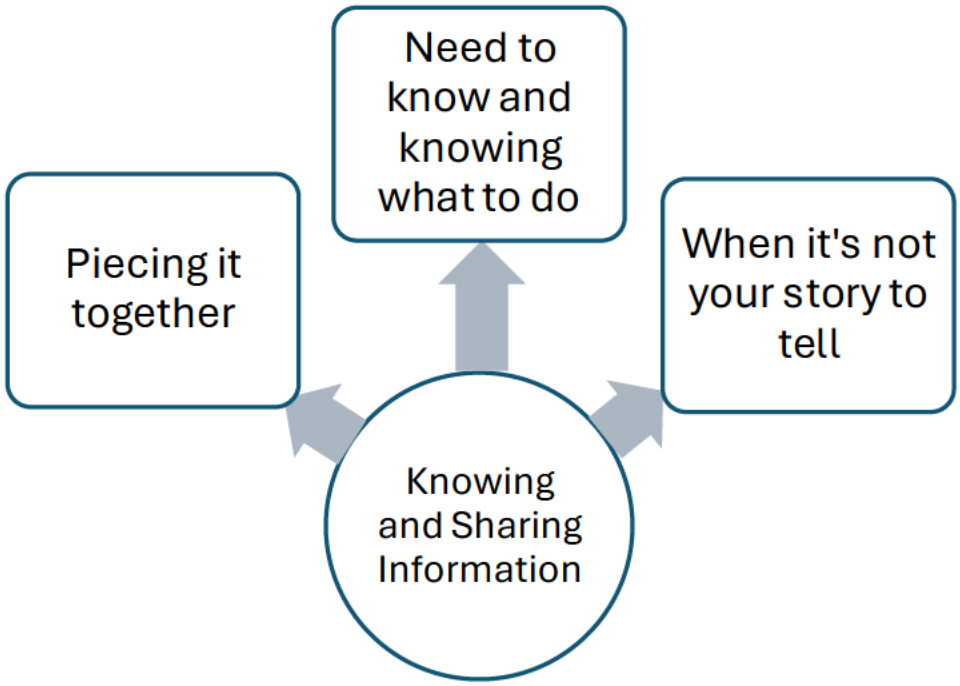
Claire felt uneasy withholding information she believed children had a right to know, often conflicting with their professional judgement: *"*I wouldn’t obviously tell her the truth because that’s not my place… how are we supposed to support this child… when we don’t agree with the approach you’re taking.*"* This came from a concern that the child would find out in a non-age-appropriate way as happened in an example shared by Katie: “He’d then found stuff online as well, having Googled his dad. So, he got this all this information in a really inappropriate way*."*

4.4.2. GET Two: Knowing and Sharing Information

If or how information about PI is shared with schools and EPs was discussed with some participants demonstrating mixed feelings about their experiences of information sharing within schools. Figure 16 below, presents the subthemes within this GET.

Figure 16.

GET Two: Knowing and Sharing Information and subthemes.



4.4.2.1. Subtheme 2.1: Piecing it Together. All four participants described how gathering contextual information of the child's experiences and circumstances informs their understanding or support. Sophie referred to her experiences of supporting CIPs as 'complex' and valued support from an EP to 'unpick' the situation collaboratively. Planning meetings, consultations and review processes were an opportunity to gather this knowledge and information through careful questioning which then informed their assessment or approach: "… it wasn't until we're in a consultation meeting that he then came out that there'd been domestic violence, a parent in prison. And we go, oh, well there's significant trauma... This could be a significant factor." (Sophie). However, this still appeared uncomfortable and stigmatising for some parents: "there are things in the air that can't actually be openly approached…they can sort of avoid talking about it too much" (Katie). This avoidance may perpetuate the hidden nature of PI: "I think she thought it was a bit taboo. I think she's been told not to tell anybody" (Claire). This idea of PI as secretive

or to be avoided acts as a barrier to gathering the full picture. For the EPs, this was discussed in relation to developing their formulation, whilst ensuring that parents were actively involved. Katie highlighted the dissonance that can occur between her own formulation, informed by her psychological lens, and how she presents this with families: *"*Formulation can be quite different in your mind to what then the sort of co-constructed one is"*.* Andrew also felt that contextual information informed his understanding but that it wouldn't be a causal factor for a child's needs: "I don't think I would connect a parent being in prison to a child's presentation. However…it would probably help make something make sense to me."

Repeated EP involvement overtime through the review process was also seen as contributing to development of relationships with families: *"*It was only through sort of cycles of involvement that greater clarity was provided around the home context*."* (Katie). Developing trust and rapport can enable open communication between home and school, ensuring that new information such as parental release, or re-entry to prison is communicated. Difficulties gaining parental consent, and feelings of shame and stigma within the community were identified as barriers to families sharing sensitive information with professionals, which is discussed in section 4.4.3. below.

4.4.2.2. Subtheme 2.2: Need to Know and Knowing What to Do. Whilst the participants expressed that they felt information sharing was helpful, respecting the families' wishes and privacy was a priority: *"*I think it's important most of the time, because I think it's important for professionals to have a good understanding of the context that child comes from*."* (Andrew)

*"…*having that information would makes a massive difference…" *(*Claire)

“They were doing a crime punishment topic. So, when they're all holding up their mug shots… For those children at this point, they knew dad? was still in prison. They're aware of it. It could have been really triggering…it was really important that the teacher knows.” (Sophie)

“I think if the SENCo had known, I think that would certainly have helped matters.” (Katie)

From these extracts, I inferred that school staff knowing about PI might alleviate some of the risk factors for CIPs by providing staff with a contextual understanding of the child’s needs to support preventative working. Curriculum adaptations were highlighted by Morgan & Leeson (2019) as a way for schools to strengthen support, however schools need to be aware of the context.

This information was described as “very sensitive” and “need-to-know” by Sophie, but this was ambiguous. Claire reflects the difference between contextual information and ‘gossip’: “It could be considered to be just gossip because it’s not…the form that you get says which one of these child protection boxes do they come under? None. … how far do you go with…gossip.” Here, Claire highlights how PI often falls outside formal safeguarding categories, making it harder to share within official frameworks, contributing to the complexity. She presents contrasting examples to further examine if it is relevant for staff to know and share:

> If you categorise it as an ACE you would pass on that a child had lost the parent and their parent had died…I would consider it an ACE like that as well. But then there might be another bit of information like. Erm.. dad had an affair. …where does parental imprisonment fit between those two things? (Claire)

This suggests that due to the ambiguity, some professionals may deem it relevant to support the pupils, whilst others may perceive it as inappropriate to share.

The SENCos wanted to know, but once they did, they lacked confidence to support as described in the above GET. They perceived a lack of training as a barrier to offering support which is a frequently identified recommendation from the literature (Morgan et al., 2014; Morgan & Leeson, 2019; Roberts,2012), yet despite this participants in this study still identified lack of information: *"*I've never had any training on how to deal with that whole situation, so you only use your training around other things. Kind of, cobble it together in the moment*," (*Claire).

Katie also felt underprepared for this area: *"*I don't think there was any training on the EP course*"* (Katie). Shaw et al. (2022) suggested that EPs could create training for schools to promote confidence in supporting CIPs and their families, and the views of the school staff here seem to support this recommendation. However, as Katie highlights, there may need to be specific training or research-based information that can be disseminated within the EP community for specific support on PI.

4.4.2.3. Subtheme 3.3: When it's not your story to tell. Some of the adult participants voiced that children should be told about PI, echoing Alisha's view that 'honesty is key'. This was apparent in Claire's interview:

> I do think it's right to tell them a child appropriate version of the truth rather than make something up… we need to maintain that trust and honesty with them…. They're never going to be honest with us if we're not honest with them.

Where children were not told about PI, this caused complexities for school staff. Sophie shared an example where a child was told their mother was in hospital rather than prison:

> It's very hard for the family then or the school to manage the worries that the child's got because she was old enough to be a bit worried about your mum being in hospital for a long period of time.

This example examines how schools may be supporting children with additional stressors. It may be that the family perceived a medical absence to be less distressing or stigmatising than PI but created added complexities. Meuntner & Eddy (2023) explored how children's knowledge of PI relates to their socio-emotional wellbeing within the US. They found that providing children with clear, direct information, especially from the imprisoned parent, was linked to fewer externalising behaviours. When caregivers withheld information, children often learned through indirect sources (e.g. media, peers), which could cause further distress.

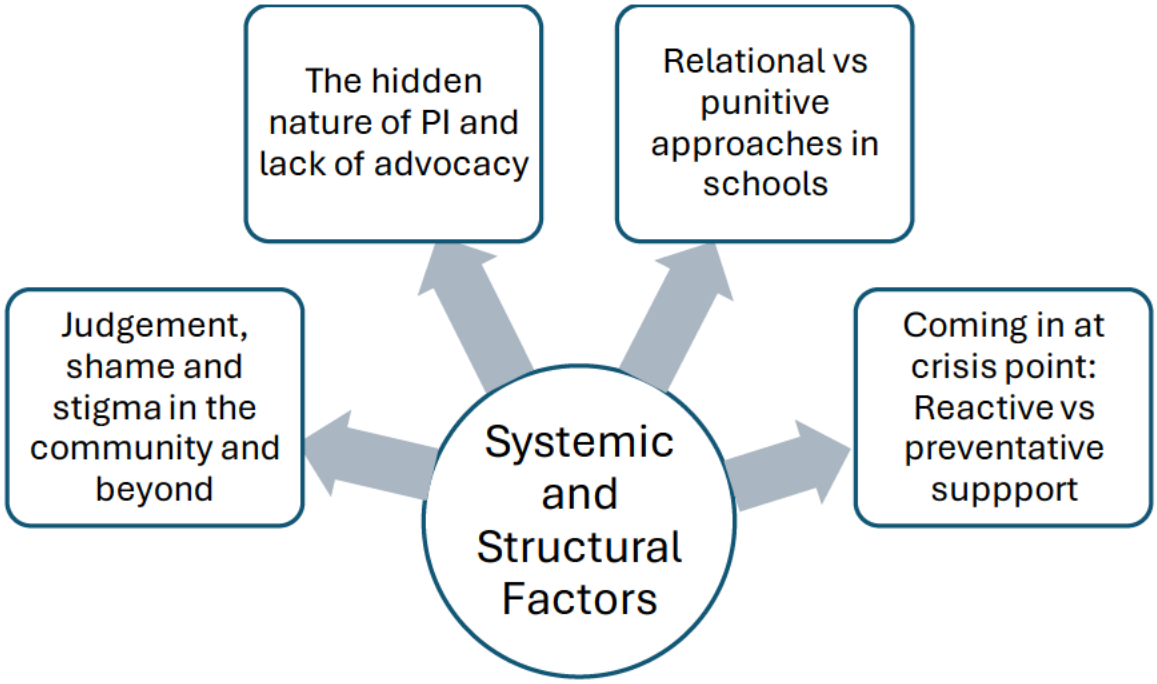
Some adults proposed that parents may choose not to tell their children because they do not see it as impactful or relevant: *"*maybe a lack of knowledge of how these things could impact their child, therefore it doesn't come to their mind*."* (Katie). Glover (2009) recognises parents desire to shield children from stigma or shame but recommends against keeping secrets from children which may lead to more negative impacts. As I did not gather family views, I cannot provide any insight into reasons for sharing or withholding information. The views of my participants do not reflect the experiences of the parents or caregivers.

4.4.3. GET Three: Systemic and Structural Factors

The participants referred to factors within different systems that impact how effective support is provided for CIPs. These were described at the family, school, community and systemic level. Figure 17 below shows an overview of the subthemes which are discussed in more detail below.

Figure 17.

GET Three: Systemic and Structural Factors and Subthemes.



4.4.3.1. Subtheme 3.1: Judgement, shame and stigma in the community and beyond. The participants described perceived judgement or stigma within the communities or schools they worked in for families impacted by PI. Claire felt that shame was more apparent in some local families from South Asian and African communities who valued 'dignity' and 'respect' and therefore PI conflicted with this presentation:

> Our parents are mostly Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Somalian … they politely ask to speak to you, and they're very composed…very respectful…they have a lot of

> dignity…respect and dignity is huge in this community and having someone in prison is absolutely not in line with that set of values….(Claire)

This description of judgement and stigma of PI within certain communities was also discussed by Alisha and requires further research. Research which examines cultural constructs of shame within South Asian communities suggests that it can have powerful influences on behaviour; and deviation from honour through breaching of social values, such as imprisonment, brings shame to individuals and families (Sangar & Howe, 2021; Toor, 2009). It is important to note that there are limited studies which explore the views and perceptions of PI within this demographic and therefore their experiences are not truly represented.

Staff perception can also impact feelings of judgement and can be a potential barrier to providing compassionate support. Sophie reflected honestly on her experience and how this impacts relationships:

> Some teachers are a little bit wary now for the parent is out of prison and if they pick up etc, and a little bit on edge... Whether that's fair or actually warranted, I don't know but again down to each case... I think if I anger this person, what are they going to do.

The attitude towards parents is ‘wary’ and ‘on edge’ due to the teachers own perception or bias about what ‘prison’ means to them. This reflects recommendations from Morgan et al. (2013) which suggested that professionals should challenge their own attitudes to imprisonment and offending to reduce stigmatisation. Shaw et al. (2022) called for welcoming and inclusive school environments to reduce sigma. Andrew felt that school staff did not always reflect this:

> The tone and some of the things that they say, sometimes it would suggest that they think the parents sometimes, sometimes don't care. When I don't think that's true... These parents are often trying to do the best that they can do with their own history of parenting... School forget that and think that... they're just poor parents. (Andrew)

This quote contrasts with Claire's perception that parents *are* doing the best they can despite their circumstances:

> He (dad) cares about her so much… he was in inverted commas a 'good dad'… he cared about her. She loved him, he, being a drug dealer pushed to the side, he was a good dad, and she was a little girl. (Claire)

In this extract, Claire is separating the parent from the offender, whilst recognising his role as a loving father. This quote echoes Alisha's description of her loving relationship with her father. Ensuring that individuals are viewed not as 'offenders' by education professionals but as parents to CYP would arguably be supportive for CYP and their families.

Whilst there is identified stigma within the child's microsystem, participants also identified macrosystemic factors. Claire describes the negative perception in society and the media: "People who are arrested in TV and films and media are baddies… Peppa Pig's dad never gets arrested for something he hasn't done!". This quote emphasises the underrepresentation of PI in child-friendly formats as well as the villainisation of PI within society. This echoes Kotova's (2020) view that UK popular culture only perpetuates societal stigma which detrimentally impacts the experiences of families.

Financial insecurity, changing family circumstance and community influence were identified risk factors by adult participants:

"*…to make sure that we don't downplay the likelihood of a family to go into poverty when a parent goes into prison and th- and and the extreme effects of poverty on a child"* (Andrew).

"…He started hanging out in the community. Getting into lots of trouble with the police himself. I think also all this access to community, I think I don't know, I mean maybe he...Maybe he felt that this is what dad did." (Katie)

"…*when there are strong communities and they're community leaders. They have an understanding of their populations*." (Andrew)

Andrew emphasises the knowledge and awareness of contextual risk factors by professionals of the children they are working with and how this can be supported through community membership. As discussed as part of my literature review, more than half of families with a loved one in prison experience financial hardship due to the loss of income and costs associated with visitation and supporting that family member (Dickie,2013; PACT,2023). Katie and Andrew have differing views of community involvement which may be influenced by the communities they work in, the age of the children and the role of the adults in these interactions. This could also be a reflection on the macrosystemic influences such as accessibility to resources that are available to children and young people in the community. These risks factors align with those within the literature (Poehlmann et al., 2019).

4.4.3.2. Subtheme 3.2: Developing Relational Approaches. Relationships were a consistent factor described by all four participants to support CIPs and their families. Awareness of trauma and attachment theory was identified as important for

developing relational approaches. Andrew felt that schools required upskilling: “If schools had a better understanding of attachment... That would be really supportive”. Given the varied impact of PI (Jones et al., 2013; Riyantono et al., 2022), having a contextual understanding of family dynamics along with knowledge and understanding of attachment theory and relational trauma may better equip school staff to provide effective relational support. Sophie applied psychological knowledge to her perception of the children she worked with: *“*they want to feel safe! That’s why their nervous system is constantly, they’re bubbling and they’re bouncing around all the time. They’re in hyper vigilant state, you know, because of trauma*”.* This response highlighted a discrepancy with Sophie’s self-perception, as whilst demonstrating a good understanding here, she later describes wanting *“*an expert in the field…avenues of people that have got a bit more knowledge…I don’t have that skill set…I don’t know what the right thing is to say in this situation*.”* When asked about what role educational professionals can play, Sophie did not identify herself under that umbrella “it’d be interesting to hear from them*”* suggesting that she does not see herself as part of this profession. This links to the earlier theme of staff sense of helplessness which may stem from inexperience with knowingly supporting CIPs.

Andrew identified discrepancies between primary and secondary schools in their approaches: *“*they (secondary schools) don’t have relationships…that’s one of the biggest differences that we think between primary and secondary schools is that they don’t have such strong relationships*”*. Claire and Sophie were primary school SENCos and I this may have impacted the perceptions and views gathered. Katie described a primary school “very nurturing… where relationships could be built up” this was evident with families too: “they were consistent and built a real relationship with mum, mum knew she could go in whenever....there was no judgement there*”*.

The contrast in primary and secondary school approaches was emphasised in relation to behaviour policies. Andrew suggested that strict approaches were detrimental for vulnerable pupils including CIPs, “These punitive systems, these children really struggle in them…these behaviour policies are just to me just real clear kind of pathway to exclusion.” Andrew suggests that CIPs are already facing a combination of risk factors and need relational approaches because “they don’t really respond to those kind of really punitive systems, they just fall out of education.” This is evident in the literature which found that CIPs are more likely to experience truancy and exclusion due to school difficulties (Kahya & Ekinci, 2018; Morgan et al., 2014). Alisha described both examples of relational approaches and exclusion in her secondary schools. The importance of schools providing nurturing and relational environments echoes the findings from other similar studies (Brookes & Frankham, 2021; Manby et al., 2015). From the participants experiences, primary schools may be better equipped to provide these environments despite their self-identified lack of confidence in the specific knowledge surrounding PI. Teacher relationships have been cited as a significant protective factor to support resilience for CIPs (Brookes & Frankham, 2021; Kahya & Ekinci, 2018; Losel et al., 2012), as well as with the parents and family (Dallaire et al., 2010) and this is evident in the perceptions and experiences of the participants in this study. The contrast between descriptions of primary and secondary school felt significant in my data; however, I acknowledge that there was bias within the selection of SENCos and those who took part may have done so due to an interest in either PI or psychology. I did not interview secondary school SENCos who may have provided a different and broader perspective.

4.4.3.3. Subtheme 3.3: Coming in at Crisis Point: Reactive vs Preventative Support.

Participants identified EPs as supportive for schools, children and families either through consultation, assessment, training and disseminating knowledge. This is in line with the core functions of the EP role in the Currie Report (Scottish Executive, 2002). Andrew and Katie felt the need for more preventative work within their roles as EPs. This echoes the recommendations from The Children of Offenders review (DCFS & MoJ, 2007) which called for early intervention for support systems. The complexity of navigating systems for parents and professionals was identified as a barrier to effective and timely support: *"*It is navigating that system and trying to get some joined working going and trying to do that pre-emptively rather than once, it's all you know, falling apart" (Katie). Through reactive rather than pre-emptive working, Katie suggests that there is little she can do in her role as it then becomes 'not in my remit' but requires social care involvement. Whilst interprofessional collaboration is discussed positively she suggests this could be done earlier for most effective support: "we started, you know like multi agency meetings came into effect, but late, you know late in the process, whereas really they should have been happening before Dad was released*".* This is echoed by Andrew who feels frustrated by the inefficiency of the systems: "We're just fixing the problems... Rather than stopping the problems from happening, that is an inefficient way of working*"*. When there is an arrest, support is often reactive with regards to social care involvement due to the unexpected nature of it, for Claire this leads to feelings of unease: *"*It's always right up to the end of the school wire at ten past three saying don't let the boys go. Social workers are coming to get them*."* She described how due to the nature of the situation, communication between social services and schools is limited which leads to frustration *"*I guess you could use

analogy like they're like swans like under the surface they're wildly flapping their legs, but on the surface it looks like they're doing nothing.*"* This theme was also identified by Morgan et al. (2014) who found that children were only identified where there were problems or concerns rather than putting in support preventatively.

4.4.3.4. Subtheme 3.4: Hidden and Forgotten: The Vulnerability of Invisibility. PI is often not disclosed to staff, meaning that the above impacts may not be identified or supports put in place. Andrew uses the example of managed moves to describe how a child with a parent in prison may be overlooked within the education system.

> These are just moves. They're not managed… No kind of passing on information for someone else to take responsibility… or accountability…. SENCo doesn't know this child because he's not an SEN child… the parent was like, I'm just at a loss of this because I can't find a person who has any kind of plan. (Andrew)

Due to the lack of identification or advocacy, the child is unsupported within the system, causing the parent to feel 'at a loss'. EPs were identified as supporting school staff to unpick the complexities of PI. An identified barrier to this was schools as gatekeepers to providing support to CIPs:

> One of the main big problems is that a lot of these children, they don't, educational psychologists never see them. And if we do see them, it's not until they've been excluded and we see them in a PRU and we do an assessment there. So they don't get passed to us. (Andrew)

Whilst these pupils are often vulnerable, Andrew described a lack of visibility in prioritisation of these children by schools: *"*Often these children are at risk of

exclusion and these are children that are still not brought up to us. I don't know why.*"* Planning meetings and effective questioning was considered to support schools to explore the impact of PI: *"*In a planning meeting would be saying have you got children who are, you know experiencing this, this and this... just to make sure that those vulnerable students aren't being overlooked*"* (Katie). Andrew and Katie are highlighting the need for EPs to be more aware of this group in schools. School perception of EPs as primarily supporting with learning was discussed: "Schools think these children aren't for the EP 'cause these are more social problems they're not kind of education or thinking problems" (Andrew).

The lack of available resources and supports to signpost families and schools to was discussed by Katie: *"*there's nothing from what I could tell.*"* This echoes the findings from the Crest report (Kincaid et al., 2019) which highlighted the reliance on third sector organisations due to a lack of national policy and identification systems. Whilst there are some organisations and charities nationally, not all children and families have access to services which support families. Additionally, a lack of awareness and stigma makes those available services difficult to uncover. This was raised through an evaluation of such an organisation in one geographical area which recommended awareness raising as a crucial step within the UK (Payler et al., 2024).

4.5. Answering the Research Questions

4.5.1. RQ1: What are the Lived Experiences of CIPs?

As the only young person in this study, Alisha's unique experience was used to answer this research question. Alisha shared an honest account of her life story, describing challenges with her mental health following her dad's arrest and exclusion

from peers, the community and school. Despite the reference to CIPs as 'invisible', Alisha felt very visible in her community which was discussed in the PET 'Everyone Knows Everything', which highlighted the judgement and discrimination that Alisha experienced within the community and school. In contrast to some other findings, Alisha did not describe shame or secrecy in her experiences. On the contrary she wanted to tell others rather than it be discussed covertly about her. The subtheme 'Telling my Story', suggested that Alisha regained some control over how this was done, wanting to use her experiences to help other CIPs. This is in line with Weidberg (2017) who identified powerlessness for CIPs. Alisha expressed frustration, mistrust and betrayal at adults who withheld information or talked about her without her, impacting her relationships with school and family. Alisha was proud of her father, but it was the judgement within the community and society that impacted her along with a deep sense of loss at losing her father to imprisonment. The theme 'Relationships Above all Else' identified the importance of loyalty, kindness and honesty in her relationships. Alisha demonstrated affection for her father first and foremost as her dad and she took pride in being his daughter. Alisha experienced discrimination, adultification and marginalisation related to her father's imprisonment. Despite this she developed coping skills by tolerating what others said to her, preferring to ignore rather than retaliate.

4.5.2. RQ2: How do adults supporting CIPs make sense of their role and experiences in supporting CIPs?

The adults in this study applied their psychological knowledge of trauma and attachment to support CIPs in schools with the loss and instability that can come with PI. Through relational, individualised approaches they met the needs of CIPs in various ways through open communication with families, providing nurture, creating

safe and consistent environments and applying knowledge and skills available to them. Despite these examples, Subtheme 1.2 identified how school staff could feel helpless and lacking in confidence to provide bespoke support, especially where there appeared to be limited guidance or advice available. Adults described balancing their professional judgement with the wishes of the family and the emotional impact that this could leave. EPs were used to 'unpick' complexities in cases where PI might be an interrelating factor either through consultation or supervision. EPs did not see themselves as 'experts' but emphasised the importance of working preventatively rather than reactively with vulnerable pupils including CIPs. Subtheme 3.3 presented EPs as well placed to raise the profile of CIPs through asking relevant questions within planning meetings and consultations yet subtheme 3.4. highlights the challenges EPs face in working with CIPs. Whilst EPs can be supportive for school staff through supervision and consultation, school staff are best placed to support CIPs directly due to their capacity to build relationships and demonstrate compassion and empathy. Therefore, the EPs role in supporting CIPs is best encapsulated as 'helping the helpers to help'.

4.5.3. RQ3: How can Schools and Education Services Better Support CIPs?

Schools were identified as both nurturing supports and catalysts for judgement and isolation by the participants in this study. The importance of relationships was identified by all participants as a way to help CIPs to feel valued, respected and supported. The findings from this study support previous recommendations by Morgan et al., (2014) and Shaw et al., (2022) who identified the school role as critical in promoting welcoming and non-judgemental environments to develop relationships with CIPs and their families. Primary schools were identified as demonstrating more relational approaches and one EP felt that information about PI

was more likely within primary schools, which reinforced the importance of creating these safe environments. Schools are a powerful influence on children, and within them, factors such as staff perception of and attitude towards children can have either a lasting positive or detrimental impact, as highlighted by Alisha's experience. Ensuring a place of psychological safety for children requires more than espoused values to 'trauma aware' initiatives, and schools must ensure that children feel heard and seen with regards to their individual experiences.

Alisha's contrasting experiences with school staff highlights the lasting impact of interactions and how these can influence young people's presentation and sense of school connectedness. Alisha's confidence to talk about PI suggests that gathering pupil voice to influence appropriate provision may support CIPs to feel heard and seen; and contribute to appropriate school support. Resources such as the Child Impact Assessment have been trialled with initial positive response (Prison Reform Trust, 2022).

This study highlighted a lack of identified support for the participants, with no participant mentioning national organisations such as PACT, Children Heard and Seen or Barnardo's, despite these being some of the most notable national organisations supporting CIPs. Payler et al.'s (2025) research into the current supports within the UK context gathered the views of families and stakeholders and found that most families surveyed were not aware of available support. If schools are unsure of available supports, they are less likely to signpost families, leading to perceived helplessness in staff, which was identified by the participants in this study in the theme 'Knowing and Sharing Information'. On macrosystemic and exosystemic levels, EPs and SENCos in this study highlighted gaps in communication, knowledge and resources, which stems from a lack of visibility and understanding about PI.

Payler et al., (2025) suggests that through offering support within institutions such as education, social services and YJS, CIPs may be more engaged and therefore become more visible. This visibility could lead to systemic change at a policy level to promote advocacy and support.

At the exosystemic level, this study provided some insight into the views of participants in different roles. The participants in this study identified the importance of education services working preventatively (subtheme 3.3) with agencies such as the YJS and social services. Whilst there is currently no identification process in place nationally, where schools are aware of a parental arrest or imprisonment, via Operation Encompass or Operation Paramount, steps could be taken to identify services who may be best to support. There are obviously financial and time implications that may impede such multi-agency collaboration, however from what is known about the adverse outcomes for some CIPs this may be a worthwhile investment. At an LA level, EPs may be well placed to work collaboratively with other services to develop action plans and working groups aimed at working proactively to support CIPs.

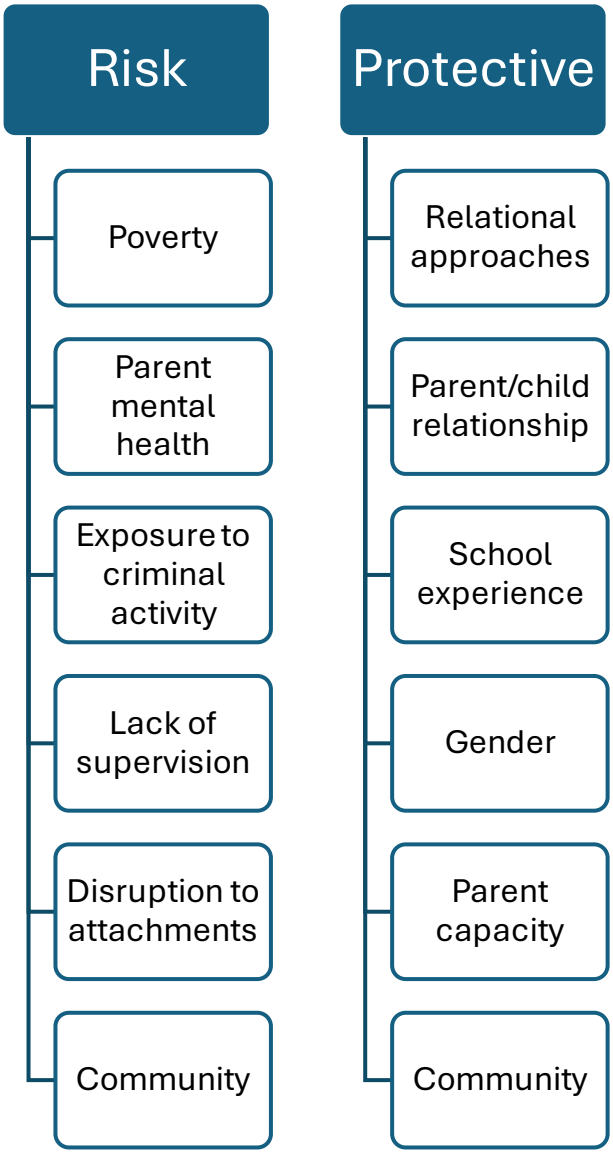
EPs were identified as well-placed to offer support to schools through training, supervision and ecosystemic consultation (with individuals at multiple levels within a child's interconnected environments e.g. school, family community). More specific implications for EPs are discussed in section 4.7.1 below.

4.5.4. RQ4: What Risk and Protective Factors do CIPs and Adults Supporting CIPs identify?

The interaction of risk and protective factors was discussed by all participants and often occurred as a knock-on or ripple effect. The risk and protective factors identified by participants are summarised in Figure 18.

Figure 18.

Overview of Identified Risk and Protective Factors



Participants referenced risks that may lead to instability within the family which can be seen in Figure 18. Community was identified as both a supportive and risk factor by participants, often dependent on how it interacts with other aspects within the child's microsystem. For Alisha, she felt exposed within her community because everyone knew about her father's imprisonment resulting in direct stigma and judgement. The age at which community factors can be supportive for CIPs requires further exploration. The role of culture within community was raised by Alisha and a SENCo participant as contributing to judgement and stigma for CIPs. There is a lack of research into the experiences of families from global majority communities on their experiences of familial imprisonment, therefore this contributes a unique perspective. Community resources such as social groups, sport and theatre were not identified by the participants as supportive despite previous findings in the literature (Jones et al., 2013; Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Sukhramani et al., 2018). This contrast may be reflective of the current financial climate within the UK with LA spending on youth services falling 73% in England since 2010-2011 (YMCA, 2025). The SENCOs and Katie were from the same LA and were not familiar with any available resources or organisations that could be used to support families impacted by PI, suggesting that this might be a lack of visibility specific to this LA as identified in subtheme 3.5. Awareness of these risk factors would support staff to consider other challenges that may be facing a family impacted by PI including characteristics such as gender, age and race through an intersectional lens.

Several macrosystemic factors impact on the experiences of CIPs in this study. This included the negative perception of offenders and their families through courtesy stigma resulting in feelings of isolation, exclusion and shame. Risk factors often overlap creating a perceived ripple effect, and this may be apparent for

protective factors and interrelating supports that can be put in place by individuals, schools and communities that will impact the wider systems and cultures with which they interact. Condry & Minson's (2020) symbiotic harms, describes the effects that imprisonment can have on families and the interaction between their connections with one another which are mutual, relational and non-linear, affecting all families differently and not in isolation. These include many of the risks identified by these participants.

Relationships and relational approaches in school are highlighted as a protective factor for CIPs in the literature (Kahya & Ekinici, 2018; Losel, 2012; McGinley & Jones, 2017) and this was a theme within Alisha's experience and those of the adult participants. Primary schools were identified as providing warm, nurturing environments but this conflicted with strict behaviour policies often associated with secondary schools. Whilst school staff did not explicitly identify whole school approaches they demonstrated a knowledge and understanding of developmental trauma and bereavement. Across all interviews, the most salient theme was the use of individualised, relational practices, whereby staff invested time in understanding each child's unique needs within their specific contexts. However, Alisha's experience of school would suggest that school can become a risk factor for children when appropriate support is lacking. While trauma-informed and attachment-aware approaches are gaining traction within UK schools, their effectiveness is dependent upon shifts in staff perceptions and the prioritisation of relational practices that foster compassion towards children and their families. For Alisha, her mainstream secondary school demonstrated a negative and exclusionary environment, contributing to social isolation and exclusion. Staff conveyed openly negative perception of Alisha and her family which she was attuned to. Alisha

identified specific qualities of a relational interaction with a member of staff which were personal (trust and honesty) which impacted her most significantly suggesting that personal and relational approaches and interactions may be more supportive than an awareness of attachment or trauma approaches. Integrating frameworks such as Bronfenbrenner & Morris (2006) BEST could support a more holistic understanding of CIPs' experiences and promote contextually attuned practice.

Relationship to the imprisoned parents can also be both a supportive or risk factor and this was identified by adults describing the destabilising impact of release on CYP, as well as Alisha's experience with her father. The COPING study (Jones et al., 2013) suggested CIPs could show idealisation or ambivalence dependent on the offence, looking forward to reunification in some cases, but where the relationship had been strained with limited contact, especially if the crime involved the child, the child may react through rebellion. Where there was a fractured parent and caregiver relationship this also had adverse effects.

4.5.5. Summary of Findings

This study analysed the experience of one YP affected by PI and four adults who have supported CIPs in schools. Alisha's case revealed the wide-reaching impact of PI on school inclusion, academic attainment, mental health and peer relationships. Both the adults and Alisha emphasised the importance of relationships in supporting CIPs. They viewed withholding PI-related information as harmful to trust and school support. Whilst participants distinguished between the role of the offender and parent, this was not always reflected in practice. Schools can be a place of nurture and support to protect CIPs from adverse outcomes, but also a place of further marginalisation and exclusion. Courtesy stigma was described as an impact of PI for families, along with perceived judgement from peers or community.

Stigma and negative perceptions of offenders within communities, schools and the wider society are shaped by the individual's experiences and interactions within their microsystem. Interactions, both positive and negative were remembered by Alisha, demonstrating the lasting impact that school staff have on young people and their school experiences. EPs and school staff should be aware of the whole context in which CYP sit and interact with when gathering information and offering support. PI was described as loss that does not feel socially acceptable and therefore has added complexities. School staff described feeling helpless in supporting CIPS, identifying a lack of support, resources and information sharing as contributing to this. EPs can offer support to school staff in a range of ways as identified by the adult participants in this study, through training to support psychological knowledge, supervision to enable school staff to reflect and provide emotional containment, or consultation to support schools with a holistic understanding of the needs of CIPs.

4.6. Strengths and limitations

I believe the present study had many strengths. It provided a unique and rich personal account of a YP's experience of PI which contributes to a limited area of qualitative research, particularly within the field of EP research in England. To my knowledge, it is the only study which uses a multi-perspective design to explore the experience of PI from the views of SENCos, EPs and a YP. Whilst previous literature has made recommendations for EPs based on the views of CYP (Weidberg, 2017) or from a review of existing literature (Shaw et al.,2022), this is the first to include and report on the views of EPs. This study gathered rich, in-depth data on a complex and sensitive topic which allowed interpretation using IPA. IPA embraces the uniqueness of individual's perceived experience and, for a 'hidden' phenomenon in society, allows for a window into some experiences. Multi-perspective IPA allowed a

deeper focus into individual experiences through the double hermeneutic, where I have attempted to make sense of participants' sense-making of their experiences. (Larkin et al.,2019). The views of school staff, EPs and a YP highlighted the need for an ecosystemic approach to understanding CIPs and their needs. As outlined in section 3.3.4 using Yardley's Quality Principles (2000,2016), I demonstrated sensitivity to context through exploring PI through various disciplines to inform my understanding. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1998,2006) BEST, I viewed PI as a factor which can influence the development and experiences of CYP but that is not deterministic of adverse outcomes. I ensured commitment and rigour of recruitment through rigorous recruitment processes and depth of analysis through iterative IPA analysis, as detailed in Chapter 3.3 and 3.4.

Despite these strengths, there were several challenges and limitations that I have identified here. Firstly, as described above the challenges with recruitment led to only one YP's experience being included for analysis. Smith et al., (2022) recommend 6-10 interviews for an IPA study, and at least two cases are needed to compare across cases when identifying GETs therefore I was only able to present the YP's PETs. This single case cannot be generalised across the experiences of other CIPS, however the aim was not to generalise findings but to identify areas of convergence and divergence across perspectives. Whilst I conducted a pilot interview with a younger pupil, I reflected that the stand-alone interview method of data collection was not successful to get the level of detail required without first having built rapport. If repeated, I would offer multiple sessions over a longer period. This isolated interaction of my research design was why one organisation did not share my research study with participants as they felt that multiple sessions would be required. I had prepared more participatory resources for interviewing CYP,

however Alisha preferred not to use these as she was a confident and fluent speaker.

Whilst I was able to include the perspectives of two SENCos, they were both from a mainstream primary school setting. I was unable to recruit a member of staff from a secondary school due to time limitations for this research and therefore their views are not represented. Only one of the EPs had experience of working in with CIPs in secondary school but their perspective is unique to their role as an EP. My positionality as a TEP who does not have lived experience of this phenomenon may have had implications on the approaches taken to complete this research. How I was perceived by the interviewees may have impacted their responses and I was aware and reflective of the potential perceived power imbalances that may have been experienced by myself and participants.

4.7. Implications for Professional Practice and Future Research

Although there is no claim that the findings of this study can be generalised, the findings have been used to highlight potential implications for educational practitioners. My own reflections on the strengths and limitations of researching the experiences of CIPs have also been used to highlight implications for researchers.

4.7.1. Implications for EPs.

EPs were identified as well placed to offer support in the form of training, consultation and supervision which enables them to provide direct support for CIPs. This support falls under the five core functions of the EP role as outlined above (Scottish Executive, 2002) and reflects other similar findings on preventative support for CIPS (Shaver et al., 2024; Shaw et al, 2022). The SENCo participants identified supervision as a valuable part of the EP role to staff with the emotional impact of

supporting CIPs. Furthermore, SENCos and EPs described awareness of their own positionality in supporting CIPS and EPs may help with confronting staff's own bias or judgment around families of offenders. EP and school awareness of intersectionality can support professionals to explore micro and macro contexts of CYP from minoritised and marginalised families.

As suggested by previous research (Shaw et al., 2022; Morgan et al., 2014), schools are advised to identify a designated member of staff to support CIPs and their families, supervision of those staff could be offered by EPs specifically related to the emotional impact that SENCos discussed in this research. Similar models of group supervision for school staff have been successful with emotional literacy support assistants (ELSAs) (Osborne & Burton, 2014) and learning mentors (Soni, 2015) through educative functions.

EPs highlighted the importance of working preventatively, though this is hindered by school referral priorities and the under-identification of vulnerable CYP. The views of EPs and SENCos support the recommendations made by Shaw et al., (2022) including the importance of training, raising awareness and gathering pupil voice. Non-direct support via consultation, person centred meetings and supervision are identified in this study as ways of EPs offering support to schools. EPs are well placed to raise the profile of CIPs through careful questioning during planning meetings and consultations. Asking questions about the family dynamic, and developmental history during consultations may provide opportunities for families to share these questions in a confidential and hopefully safe environment, facilitated by the EP. Wagner's (2000) systemic model of consultation, using an interactionist approach, is popular in many EPSs to avoid the EP being seen as the 'expert' (Jones & Atkins, 2021) and supports EPs to work in a preventative and collaborative

way (Wagner, 2000). A recent review of consultation policies in UK LAs found that whilst there was an emphasis on empowering consultees, there were some disparities between EPSs' directive and collaborative approaches (Royle & Atkinson,2025). It is helpful to consider the school staff's views that they felt an 'expert' was needed to support with CIPs in schools, and using a consultation approach may help to build capacity and self-efficacy within schools. Gathering information about family context through consultation allows for co-construction of information and formulations and allows for families to share information voluntarily. EPs must adhere to ethical standards around confidentiality and demonstrate respect by considering privacy, confidentiality and consent (BPS, 2021; HCPC, 2023).

Participants identified a lack of training or policy for EPs and school staff on PI. Some LAs have implemented policies and guidance specifically around supporting CIPs to offer consistency as recommended by Shaw et al, (2022) & Morgan et al. (2014). Within Oxfordshire this guidance was created by the EPS (Evans, 2009) and other LAs such as Gloucestershire, Buckinghamshire and Solihull have available guidance for schools or services. A LA policy specifically to support CIPs in collaboration with other agencies or services may provide some clarity for EPs and other professionals when enabling schools to provide the most appropriate support.

Within the experience of the adults who have contributed to this study, the EP role has been identified as well placed to support schools to support CIPs. EPs can provide challenge, support and application of relevant psychological knowledge to individual staff or at a wider systemic level to help schools to help CIPs.

4.7.2. Implications for schools.

The SENCos highlighted the need for more guidance and resources for schools on supporting CIPs in primary schools. By raising the profile of CIPs and receiving training, staff can become aware of the risk and protective factors that might be present for CIPs. Training packages for schools might include taking an ecological perspective of a child's development, awareness of trauma and attachment, information on the offender journey, pupil voice and available resources may support schools to feel better prepared. While training and a designated lead for PI is widely recommended in the literature (Kincaid,2019; Morgan & Leeson, 2019; Robertson, 2012; Shaw et al., 2022;), this was not experienced.

Schools were seen as having a strong relationship with families, making them well placed to offer resources and information. Relational approaches were key to schools being viewed as supportive and protective by staff. This included individualised approaches, high expectations, key adults who had built relationships overtime and were attuned to the needs of CYP, honesty and trust, and adjusting curriculum and environmental demands where necessary. Many LAs are producing attachment aware and trauma informed programmes which replace more traditional behaviourist approaches with psychosocial models, incorporating psychologically informed and relationship-based styles of managing emotions and behaviours.

To support staff to feel more confident with supporting CIPS, Morgan & Leeson (2019) recommends that all schools have their own policy on supporting CIPS in schools and a template of this is provided on the Children Heard and Seen (CHAS) website (CHAS,2025). Despite a wealth of resources produced by various organisations and charities specifically for schools and families (Barnardos, CHAS,

PACT, Families Outside, Prison Reform Trust, Action for Prisoners Families and many others) none of the education professionals described awareness of these in the interviews suggesting that more could be done to raise awareness of these resources. There was no specific adult identified in schools who may support, but often this was a family support worker or SENCo. A designated adult could support multi-agency intervention, information sharing and advocate for this group. This is in line with recommendations from the research (Morgan & Lesson, 2019; Morgan et al., 2014); and may ensure that information is shared discretely with the appropriate adults in discussion with families.

The participants' experiences reflected that parental release from prison was a significant disruptor to the child's life, particularly if the child had been very young when the parent went to prison. There has been limited literature on the impact of parental release for primary aged pupils, and this could be an area for further research. Schools can develop their understanding of the chronology of the offender journey through national training such as Hidden Sentence, or through specific guidance for schools (Sutherland & Wright, 2017).

4.7.3. Future Research

The challenges I experienced with recruitment for this study are not unique, and despite the estimated numbers of CIPs in the UK, it has widely been acknowledged that gathering their views for research is time consuming and difficult. Research which has been most successful in gathering these views is often funded or associated with projects, organisations or charities who are offering ongoing support to CIPs. Whilst this may have its own limitations, such as bias, this may allow for researchers to develop relationships over time with participants. I received

conflicting feedback from gatekeepers on my request to share information about my study and the involvement of CYP. Whilst many were positive and supportive, others felt that the research topic was too sensitive for interviewing CYP. Neelakantan et al. (2023) provide findings that account for the benefits of CYP taking part in sensitive research topics through their scoping review of adolescent views. Sharing of findings such as these with gatekeepers may encourage dissemination of research information to enable CYP to make a choice about participating. Saunders et al. (2015) argue that whilst it is essential to protect participants from harm, by construing these children as 'too vulnerable' it perpetuates the social exclusion of an already marginalised group. Further research exploring those barriers in more depth would be insightful.

Working with adult children of imprisoned parents retrospectively could be one way to gather the views of CIPs' school experiences and a narrative approach could be an appropriate methodology to gather that insight and chronology of their lived experience overtime. This would mean recruiting directly through organisations or within communities rather than schools which may be a more direct way of reaching individuals. On reflection, my biggest challenge was communicating effectively with gatekeepers about the aims of the research and the importance of gathering child voice. I received responses that the schools were not aware of any CIPs at their school, or that schools did not feel able to ask families as they felt it may be intrusive or upsetting. This highlighted to me the hidden nature of PI in schools and how few CIPs were identified within one LA. Alisha felt that she wanted the opportunity to share her experience with other YP through the research but also by going into schools to support others who shared a similar experience. Allowing CYP the opportunity to share their experiences is important so that policy and research can

be informed by them. If I were to research this area again, I would provide gatekeepers with further information about the benefits of researching this area and the importance of allowing CYP some autonomy to participate with parental consent.

4.7.4. Concluding Comments

The current study aimed to explore the experiences of children impacted by PI from the perspectives of a young person and adults who have supported CIPs in schools. My research stemmed from a wish to understand the experiences of these individuals and identify further supports that could be implemented in schools. I used multi-perspective IPA to focus on individual experiences to understand how CYP and adults make sense of the experience of PI. The idiographic and phenomenological approach allowed for in depth exploration into these experiences and how individuals make sense of it.

My findings provide further evidence for the recommendations for schools supporting CIPs as outlined by Shaw et al. (2022) and Morgan et al. (2014). This study has contributed to the limited literature on EP contribution to supporting CIPs and has identified implications for school staff and EPs when considering the needs of CIPs within their ecological systems. I have contributed to qualitative research on the experiences of CIPs as perceived by a YP alongside adults who support this group. Raising the visibility of this group through identification, building trusting relationships and recognising potential risk and protective factors will help education services to work preventatively to support these CYP. EPs can contribute to sharing psychological knowledge of the impacts of interrelating factors, providing supervision for school staff and gathering the views of CYP through individual casework or as part of research. EPs can contribute to the development of policies and guidance at an LA level, as well as promoting self-efficacy in school staff through consultation

and supervision. The importance of relationships and relational approaches in schools was highlighted across all interviews, suggesting a greater focus on whole school approaches to work preventatively to support CIPs rather than requiring external support at crisis point. What was apparent across all participants is that whilst there may be similarities or certain risk factors for CIPs, all CYP will have different experiences of PI, impacted by individual and systemic factors at the time. Alisha's experience highlights the need for adults to show compassion and for schools and professionals to advocate for the views and experiences of CIPs.

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Appendix A: Parent/carer information sheet

Parent/Carer/Guardian Information Sheet

My name is Elenya McGovern, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Birmingham, currently working with Coventry Educational Psychology Service. As part of my doctoral training, I am conducting a piece of research about the experiences of children and young people who have or have had a parent or carer in prison.

What is the research about?
This research aims to explore the experiences of children and young people aged 8-18 years old who have or have had, a parent or carer in prison. The research hopes to identify strengths and protective factors that support children and young people to help schools and education services better meet the needs of this group.

Why has your child been invited?
Your child's school has agreed to contact guardians of pupils who they believe have experience of a parent/carer in prison. The researcher hopes to work with children and young people to gain an understanding of their experiences and factors that promote resilience to hopefully provide guidance and support to other children in a similar situation.

What will happen to my child if they take part?
If you consent to your child's participation in this study, your child will be invited to an interview, lasting 45 minutes to an hour, with myself at school, online or at a local authority building. Prior to the interview I will arrange a Microsoft Teams call with yourself and your child to introduce myself and answer any questions you or your child may have. During the interview, your child will take part in rapport building games and activities and then I will ask your child some questions about their life and what and who has supported them. Some topics and areas that will be explored will include key relationships, their likes and dislikes, their educational experiences, their aspirations, their strengths and challenges. The researcher will explain before the interview that they do not have to answer any questions they don't wish to, and they can pause or end the interview at any point. At the end of the interview, we will finish with a low demand, card game and be offered the chance to ask any questions before they leave. After the interview your child will be offered a follow up online call via Microsoft teams.

What will happen to the information collected?
To ensure that an accurate record of what your child has said, the interview will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be transferred to a password protected device and deleted from the recording device. Only I will listen to the recordings and once I have typed up what has been said, the audio recordings will be permanently deleted. The research will comply with the 2018 Data Protection Act, General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the University of Birmingham Code of Practice for Research and Ethics which assures the safe storage of personal information.

Your child will be given or have the choice of a fake name for the write up of the research as will the name of their school or any other information that could make them identifiable. I may use quotations of what they say for my research write up, but this will not include any identifiable information. The anonymised data will be securely stored by the university for 10 years.

Will the information be kept confidential in this study?
Yes. I will comply with the Data Protection Act (2018) in terms of handling data, processing and destroying all participants' data. All data will be kept confidential and stored securely.

If however you or your child shares information during the research that puts yourselves or others at risk of harm, I would be required to break confidentiality and follow safeguarding procedure.

Are there any benefits in my child taking part?
Your child will have the chance to share their views and experiences in a safe environment. This information may also benefit other children and young people with similar experiences in the future. The researcher hopes to contribute to research and knowledge about how to best support children and young people with a parent/carer in prison.
At the end of the research, I will offer to share and signpost to a range of resources for your family and the child's school that focus on supporting children and young people with a family member in prison.
Your child will receive a £15 Amazon voucher as compensation for taking part.

Are there any risks involved?
Your child will be asked questions about their life experiences, including their parent going to prison. The questions are semi-structured, so your child can choose which topics to talk about.
Your child may experience various emotions during the interview. If at any point I feel your child appears distressed, I will ask them if they want to continue or use a different line of questioning. Your child can stop the interview at any point and will be asked at frequent intervals if they wish to continue. The interviews will be conducted sensitively, and I will be attuned to any verbal or non-verbal signs of discomfort or distress.

What happens if me or my child changes our mind?
Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, and you and your child can change your mind at any point before, and up to two weeks after the interview without any reason or consequence by contacting the researcher. If your child changes your mind during the interview I will terminate the interview. Any data collected up to that point will be destroyed. After the two-week period, the analysis may have begun on the data, therefore it would not be possible to withdraw it.

What will happen to the findings of the research?

Doctoral thesis: This research will be written up as part of my doctoral thesis published on the Birmingham e-theses database. A shorter version of the findings may be disseminated at a conference.

Reporting to schools and local authority professionals- I will report any findings to the educational psychology service which help schools and professionals working with children and young people to better meet the needs of individuals who have experienced the imprisonment of a family member.

Reporting to participants – children and young people who take part in the research will receive a letter thanking them for their contribution and offering them a summary of their contribution once the data has been analysed.

Where can I get more information?
If you have any queries about anything on this information sheet or for any further information, you can contact me via email:

The research is supervised by Dr Anjam Sultana at the University of Birmingham, who can also be contacted via email: .

What do I do next?
If you and your child are willing to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and contact Elenya McGovern (the researcher) directly.

Thank you for reading this information leaflet and for considering your participation in the study.

Appendix B: Parent/Carer consent form

Parent/Carer/Guardian Consent Form

Child's Name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Child's Age: Click or tap here to enter text.

Child's Gender: Click or tap here to enter text.

Child's Ethnicity (optional): Choose an item.

If other, please state: Click or tap here to enter text.

Information you would like me to know about your child prior to the interview (e.g. special educational needs, relationship to family members in prison, age of child at parent/carer imprisonment:
Click or tap here to enter text.

Parental/Guardian consent on behalf of their child		
Please tick yes to confirm that you consent to the following	Yes	No
I have read and understood the research information sheet.	☐	☐
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research.	☐	☐
I consent for my child to take part in this project. This includes my child talking to Elenya McGovern (Trainee Educational Psychologist).	☐	☐
I understand that my child's participation is voluntary. I understand that I can withdraw my child from the study at any time before the interview. If, after the study, I want to withdraw my child's data, I have two weeks from the date of the interview to inform the researcher. I know that I do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing data.	☐	☐
I agree that the findings of the study will be written in a report for the researcher's university thesis and may be later published in an academic journal or presented at a research conference. I understand that neither my child's name nor the name of their school will be included in any reports/presentation.	☐	☐
I understand that interview data will be stored securely and confidentially. Once the research is complete I understand it will be stored in an anonymised form in the University of Birmingham data repository for ten years.	☒	☐

Parent/Carer/Guardian Name: Click or tap here to enter text.
Signature_____ Date _____

Appendix C: Child consent form (8-15)

Participant consent form

My name is _____

Please make sure you have read (or listened to) the information sheet before filling out this form.
Please read the sentences below and put a tick in the box if you agree with them.

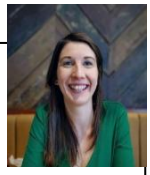
		Agree	Disagree
	I am choosing to take part in the project		
	I know that I can stop an any point in the interview		
	I know I can change my mind at any point up until January 2025 and the information will be deleted.		
	I understand that my views will be in a report but that my name will be changed, and any personal information will be kept private.		
	I understand that I will be audio recorded during the interview and that only the researcher (Elenya) will hear this.		
	I understand that if I share something that puts me or somebody else at risk, the researcher (Elenya) might need to tell someone else.		
	I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that I do not want to during the interview.		

Do you have any questions about the research project?

Signature: _____ Date: _____/_____/_____

Appendix D: Participant information and consent form (16-18)

Participant information sheet (16-18 year olds)



Hello! 👋

My name is Elenya McGovern, and I am training to become an Educational Psychologist. Part of my training means I work with children and young people, and listen to their views about their experiences of school and their life. I am interested in learning more about what it is like to have a close family member who is or has been in prison, and how that can impact children and young people. I want to learn more about what children

What is the project about?

- This project aims to gather the experiences of children and young people who have been impacted by parental imprisonment.
- My research aims to help schools and people who work with children and young people to provide the best support to other children in similar situations.
- The research wants to explore what or who has helped children and young people who have been impacted by a parent or carer going to prison.

Who can take part?

- I am looking for children and young people aged 8-18 years old who have experienced a parent or carer go to prison.

Do I have to take part?

- It is completely up to you if you want to take part or not. If you do take part and then change your mind you can tell me during or up to two weeks after the interview and I will delete any information recorded.
- If you choose to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form to say that you are happy to be part of the research.

Will happen if I take part?

- We will have a chat prior to the interview via Microsoft teams where we can get to know each other and you can ask me any questions you might have about the research.
- We will meet either at a quiet space at your school during school time, online or at a local authority building after school, wherever you would feel most comfortable, for no longer than an hour.
- We would take part in some activities which involve drawing and talking about your life and your family.
- I will ask you some questions about your life and your family, and it is up to you how much you want to share.
- You will be able to stop at any point and we will finish by playing a game.
- You will be able to choose an adult from your school to join us if you would like.
- I will record our conversation so that I can listen to it later but no one else will listen to it and I will change your name when I type it up so that no one will know that it is you.
- At the end of the interview you will receive £15 Amazon voucher to thank you for taking part.
- You will be offered a post-interview debrief with myself via Microsoft teams.



What happens if I change my mind and no longer want to take part?

- At any point during the interview, you can tell me verbally that you want to stop or hold up a 'stop' card to show me that you don't want to continue.
- If after the interview you change your mind, you will have two weeks (14 days) to let me know that you do not want to included. You can email myself or my supervisor on the following email addresses.

Elenya McGovern, Trainee Educational Psychologist Email:

[redacted]

What will happen to the information you tell me?

- I will audio record our conversation and type it up afterwards using a made-up name (which you can choose).
- I will then delete the recording and no one else will hear it. The typed notes will be stored on a password protected computer.
- The report will not use your real name but might include some quotations of things you have said.
- If you tell me something that I think may put you or someone else in danger I will have to tell someone. If I am worried about you because of what you have told me, I will let you know that I will need to tell someone.

What will happen with the findings of the study?

- I will write a report which will include a summary of the information from your interview and other young people I'm speaking to. This may include a quote of something you have said but people will not be able to know that it was you who said it.
- You will receive a letter with a summary of the information that I have collected.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information. If you would like to take part, please complete the consent form attached and return it to

[redacted]

Name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Age: Click or tap here to enter text.

Gender: Click or tap here to enter text.

Ethnicity (optional): Choose an item.

If other, please state: Click or tap here to enter text.

Information you would like me to know prior to the interview (e.g. special educational needs, relationship to family members in prison, age at parent/carer imprisonment: Click or tap here to enter text.

Please make sure you have read the information sheet before filling out this form.

Do you have any questions about this research? 

Please read the sentences below and put a tick in the box if you agree with them.

		Agree	Disagree
	I have read and understood the information sheet, and I am choosing to take part in the project.	☐	☐
	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research.	☐	☐
	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can change my mind at any point up until 14 days after the interview and the information will be deleted.	☐	☐
	I understand that my views will be in a report for the researchers thesis and may later be published in an academic journal or presented at a research conference. I understand that my name and any identifiable information will be changed.	☐	☐

	I understand that I will be audio recorded during the interview and that only the researcher (Elenya) will hear this.	☐	☐
	I agree for the data provided to be stored securely by the University for ten years.	☐	☐

Name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Signature_____ Date _____

Appendix E: Recruitment Poster

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Exploring the experiences of children and young people affected by parental imprisonment.

Who can take part?

- Children and young people aged 8-18 years who could take part in an interview.
- Children and young people who have experienced having a parent/carer in prison now, or in the past.

Why take part?

- My research hopes to improve the support for children and families who have experienced parental imprisonment.
- I am hoping to identify strengths and positive experiences of individuals and what professionals can do more of.
- I will provide signposting to resources and information that has been created by charities to support families.
- Your child will receive a £15 Amazon voucher to thank them for their time.

What will happen if my child takes part?

- An interview lasting up to an hour either at your child's school, online or an agreed space your child would feel comfortable.
- Rapport building activities to get to know each other.
- I will ask them some questions about school and family life including things that they are good at, enjoy and things that helped or didn't help when their family member was in prison.
- Their experiences of a parent going to prison.
- We will make a timeline of their life so far.

If you want to take part or want more information, please speak to your school/college SENCo or email Elenya or her University supervisor.

Elenya McGovern, Trainee Educational Psychologist

Email: ekm260@student.bham.ac.uk

Dr Anjam Sultana, Supervising tutor at the University of Birmingham

Email:

Appendix F:Semi-structured interview schedule for children and young people

Semi-structured interview schedule

Research Qs:
What are the lived experiences of CYP with a parent/carer in prison?
How can schools and education services better support children and young people?
What risk and protective factors can children and young people with a parent in prison experience?

Beginning the interview- prompts:
Greet and introduce myself explaining my role, where I work and the purpose of my research. I will aim to ask you questions which will explore your feelings, experiences and what these meant for you. I hope that by listening to you speak I will understand what helps and doesn't help children who have had a parent in prison.

Explain that the interview will include questions about the child, and their family but they can answer or not answer as many questions as you want.

Interviewer will read out the participant information sheet to the child/young person. The child/young person will be shown three cards which they can present to me at any point which include "I am okay to carry on", "I need a break" and "I want to stop the interview."

I will ask the participant if they are happy for it to be audio-recorded and show the devices and explain that a pseudonym will be used so that they are not identifiable.
Pseudonym _____
"I am going to ask you some questions and listen to your answers very carefully. Please let me know if you do not understand a question and you do not have to answer a question if you do not want to. There are no right or wrong answers, I just want to hear about your experiences."

Interviewer explains that gift vouchers are available for the CYP as an acknowledgement for their time, and to recognise the importance of their evidence for the research. Vouchers to be handed to the CYP.
Ask participant if they have any questions. Start recording.

Semi-Structured interview questions:
Introduce the timeline. "Today we are going to use this timeline to help me understand a bit more about your life and your experiences. This side is when you were born, and this side is how old you are now. I will map some of what you say onto the timeline to help me remember."

Part 1: Getting to know you

I want to start by getting to know a bit more about you. We have pencils, paper, and felt tips so you can draw as you go if you would like or we can talk.

I want to get to know you better so I'm going to ask you some questions about yourself and what's important to you.

Prompts:
What are some of the things you are good at or enjoy?/ What are your favourite things to do at home and at school?
How would you describe yourself?
How would other people describe you?
What are you good at? What do you enjoy?
Do you have any hobbies?
What places are special to you?
Are there things in your community which are important to you?
Tell me about some important memories in your life, where would they go on the timeline?
What things are you proud of in your life?

The next part is going to be finding out about people in your life. Tell me about the important people in your life now or in the past?

At school:
What does school look like on the timeline (e.g. starting school/moving school/any gaps?)
Who are the important people at school?
Prompts: Who do you like spending time with? (E.g. teachers, pastoral leads, friends)
Why are they important? (use the timeline if appropriate)
Do you have a trusted adult at school? Tell me about them…

At home:
We are going to make a family tree. Can you tell me about the people in your family?
Prompts: Tell me more about X? Who is X? Can you tell me why these people are important? Is there anyone missing?
Tell me more about…
Use the timeline if appropriate: "How old were you when…"
Can you tell me who you were living with at different points of the timeline?
How do you feel when you think about X..?

In the community?
Use the language used by the child (away/prison/arrested)
Can you tell me what you've drawn…describe to me…

Questions about X (parent/carer in prison)

Can you tell me what it was like for when X went away?
How did you feel when you first learned about it?
Prompts:
How do you feel it impacted your life?

Was there anything different in your life after this point?
Prompts:
At Home/School?
Prompts: How did that make you feel?
Who talked to you about what happened (if anyone)?

Questions about protective factors: I'd like to find out what helped you during this time.
Who or what do you think helped you?"
What sorts of things have you found helpful when you and your family were going through that?

Prompts:
Tell me about any people, places or things that were important to you when X went away/to prison? (teachers, friends, family)
Have any other organisation or individual been able to help you, for example youth leader / social worker / teacher / other adults / other organisation?
Can you tell me more about that?
(Refer back to strengths) How did these strengths help you?

Follow ups:
Why were they helpful?
How were they helpful?
What did they do?
What was helpful? Not helpful?

What would you change:

Was there anything you wish would have happened differently/you could change about that time?
What would (have) make/made things better for you while you have a parent in prison?
What would you want other people in your life to know or now know?

(Card sort available with prompts based on the literature)

That's all the questions I wanted to ask you today. Thank you for talking to me today. Do you have any questions for me?

Is there anything else you would like to say about any of the questions you have answered?

Interviewer reminds CYP that the interview is confidential.
Interviewer thanks CYP for taking part in the interview and asks if the CYP would like to play a card game before going back to class.

Research question being addressed/ Section of interview	Question	Follow up prompts	Resources/Activity
'Getting to know you' activity	I want to start by getting to know a bit more about you. Tell me about what is important to you? You can use the pencils and paper to draw if you would like or I can take notes.	What are your favourite things to do? Who do you live with at home? Who are the important people in your family? Who are the important people at school?	Blank piece of paper and pencils. Sentence starters from Therapeutic Treasure Deck cards.
Introduce the timeline	Today we are going to use this timeline to help me understand a bit more about your life and your experiences. This side is when you were born, and this side is how old you are now. I will map onto the timeline. Tell me what you remember from when you were very little?	How old were you? What was happening? What things are you proud of in your life?	Timeline activity

	Can you describe any important moments in your life.		
Experiences of children impacted by parental imprisonment.	Can you tell me who you were living with at different points of the timeline? Have there been times when any of these people were not living with you or had to go away? When did mum/dad/carer (using language used by YP in above answers) go to prison/ get arrested/ go to court? What do you remember about when mum/dad/carer was arrested/went to prison?	What did you like about being with your mum/dad/brother/sister etc.? Who looked after you then? What was that like? What was happening at that time? How did that make you feel?	Mark key events on timeline. Link to the offender journey- arrest, court, in prison, release.
How can schools and education services better support children and YP?	I would like to know about your school, what does that look like on the timeline? Has anything changed at school since your mother/father went to prison?	What things do you like? Is there anything that you don't like so much? Have you always gone to school? Have you ever missed time away from school?	Mark each school, important transitions, different teachers, key memories. Visual prompts: subjects, activities, friends, teachers,

	Have there been any changes in your life since your mother/father went to prison? When did these happen? (Mark on timeline)	This could include people you live with, changes to routines at home, looking after siblings, visiting the prison etc.	
Risk factors: What risk and protective factors can children with a parent in prison experience?	Was there anything you found difficult when X went to prison?	Can you think of an example… At home… At school… With friends/family…	
Protective factors What risk and protective factors can children with a parent in prison experience?	Tell me about any people, places or things that were important to you when X went away/to prison? What sorts of things do you think you are good at or you do well? What would (have) make/made things better for you while you have a parent in prison? What would you want other people to know or now know?	What did they do? What was helpful? Not helpful? How did that help you? Tell me more about… Have any other organisation or individual been able to help you, for example youth leader / social worker / teacher / other adults / other organisation? Have you been able to talk to anyone about your mother/father being in prison?	Mark on timeline Strengths cards treasure deck as prompts. Card prompt: “I think my.... should...” “The things which are important to me are...”

Appendix G: Interview schedule for adults

Interview Schedule for professionals working with CIPs

Topic/ Research Question	Main question	Further prompt
Background information and introductions	Can you tell me about your role and how this has/ would involve(d) supporting children and young people who have had a parent/carer in prison? How did you/might you find out that the child had a parent in prison? How important is it that professionals working with children are aware that a child has a parent/carer in prison?	(How) Was the information shared with any other professionals? Why/why not?
Lived experience and school experiences	What do you think are/were the impacts of parental imprisonment for children/that child? Do you think anything changed for that child when their parent went to prison/the information was shared?	Did you feel that the child was perceived differently by anyone? Did anything change in your relationship with this child when you became aware that they had a parent/carer in prison? Do you think this relationship changed when their parent/carer went to prison/when the information was shared?

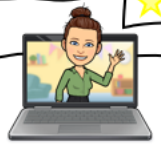
How can schools and education services better support children and young people?	What support do you think schools and education professionals can offer to CYP with a parent/carer in prison? What helped/hindered you in supporting the young person? How did you feel about supporting the yp with this? What would you define as good practice when supporting CYP with a parent in prison? What do you think practitioners need to know when working with young people with a parent/carer in prison?	Were there any resources that you found helpful? e.g. training, policy, online resources Were there any other professionals that helped? Are there any barriers to this?
What risk and protective factors can children with a parent/carer in prison experiences?	Were there any supportive factors that you have identified when working with this group? Are there any further barriers for this group that either directly or indirectly impacted them?	Is there anything on a whole school or local authority level that you feel helped/didn't help? Can you describe them?

Appendix H: One Page Profile

Elenya

What we might do together...

- Do some drawing together
- Play some games
- Talk about important people and times in your life and make a timeline.
- Talk about what is important to you and what you like/dislike.



My Job...

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist, which means I'm learning how to support lots of children, young people and families with things at school or home. I talk to young people about what they like, what they're good at and what they sometimes find hard. I use this information to make plans to help and support people.

People describe me as...

- Caring
- Funny
- Friendly
- Positive
- Good Listener

Why would I like to meet you?

I am interested in what it is like for children when a parent goes to prison. I would like to hear your view of things that have helped you or were difficult at that time. I also want to know about what adults can do more of to help other children like you.

What is important to me?

- Family
- Being in nature
- Being active
- Helping other people
- Music

What happens if you do not want to work with me?

If you do not want to meet with me or do any work together, you don't have to! It is your choice, and we will only talk about what you're comfortable with.

If you have any questions, your parent/carer or guardian can email me on [redacted]

I hope to meet you soon!

Appendix I: Reflective journal entry

Extracts from reflective journal for pilot study

Pre-interview: ***25.11.24***

- Flora (pseudonym), 10 years old, was recruited after her mother had seen my research study advertised via a social media page of the local Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Service (SENDIAS) and emailed me directly.
- I had a phone call with her mother to talk through the study and see if Flora met my inclusion criteria. I also asked about the relationship and knowledge of PI with school. Mum shared that school were aware, and she and Flora were happy for the interview to be conducted at school and gave me the contact information of a trusted member of staff.
- With Mum's permission I phoned the member of staff to arrange a space in school and confirm that Flora met the inclusion criteria.
- I had phone call with mum and Flora prior to meeting with her for the interview to introduce myself and answer any questions. I also shared a one-page profile with her to share some information about myself.

Post-interview: ***02.12.24***

- Child was 10 years old, quite quiet, she enjoyed the drawing element of the interview but this meant that there was reduced language opportunities, I should have asked more follow up questions to describe these drawings.
- She gave mostly short sentences or one-word answers.
- My questions about Dad were too closed prompting nods/head shakes
- I was aware of her age and sensitivity of the topic so spent a long time on the rapport building section of the interview.
- She found it difficult to talk about dad- She appeared quiet during the section on Dad but chose to carry on (using cards). After a few prompts with limited or no response I took non-verbal prompts that she was not comfortable and changed the subject back to strengths.
- I realised I did not know beforehand how much she knew about dad, or what she called him or how old she was when he had gone to prison.
- I think she was perhaps too young, or just did not know much about her dad and the circumstances around his imprisonment.
- This interview has made me re-think my selection criteria for recruitment as if I am applying IPA theory that we are focusing on the experience/phenomena/

the thing itself, the thing itself that I am researching is what it was like to have a parent in prison. This child did not have a relationship with her father before prison and found it difficult to talk about the thing itself.

- My initial perceptions of this interview is that the data gathered was not rich/detailed enough, however, that she found it difficult to speak to anyone about her dad being in prison and that she doesn't have a relationship with her dad is also significant to this research. I don't feel that I got the 'rich picture' of the experience due to my own questions and her discomfort at talking about it.
- I wonder if I had gone in with preconceived ideas based on the literature search about what those experiences would be?
- I am grappling with the situation that she didn't say much about her dad but that may say a lot. I think I could change my interview questions to ask more questions about how she felt when she found out about dad coming out of prison and if anything changed but I was conscious that her non-verbal communication was signalling that she did not want to talk about her dad (not talking, looking away)

Possible future changes based on reflections from pilot study:

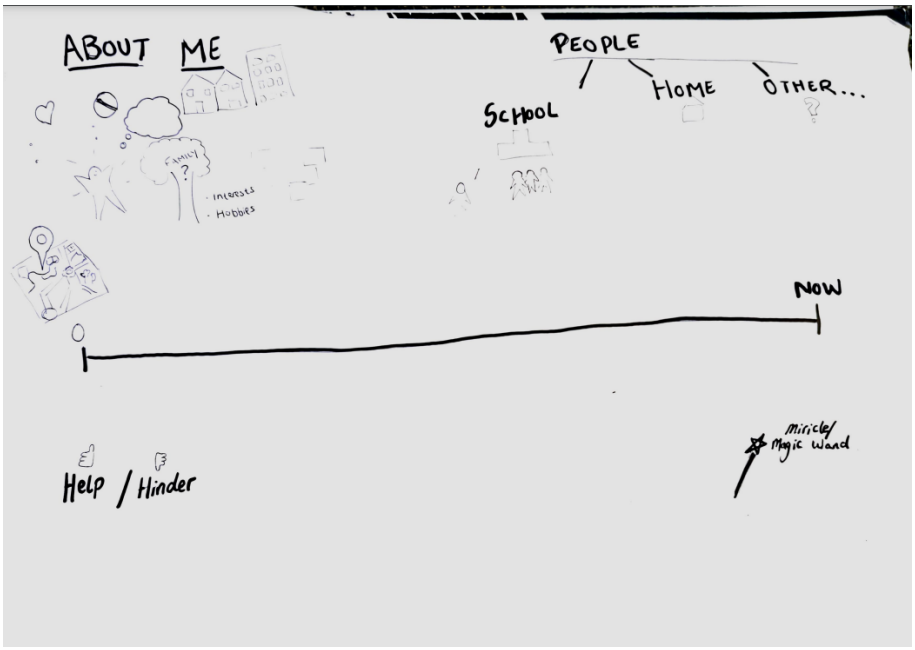
- Collect information at recruitment stage on the following:

- Relationship to the family member who has been in prison, outline of their relationship, age of the child when the family member went to prison, on a scale of 1-10 how much do you think this has impacted them? - ask the same to the child during the interview.
- Do I need to know what the offence was?
- Clarify terminology with child- dad/father/name/prison/away/arrested?

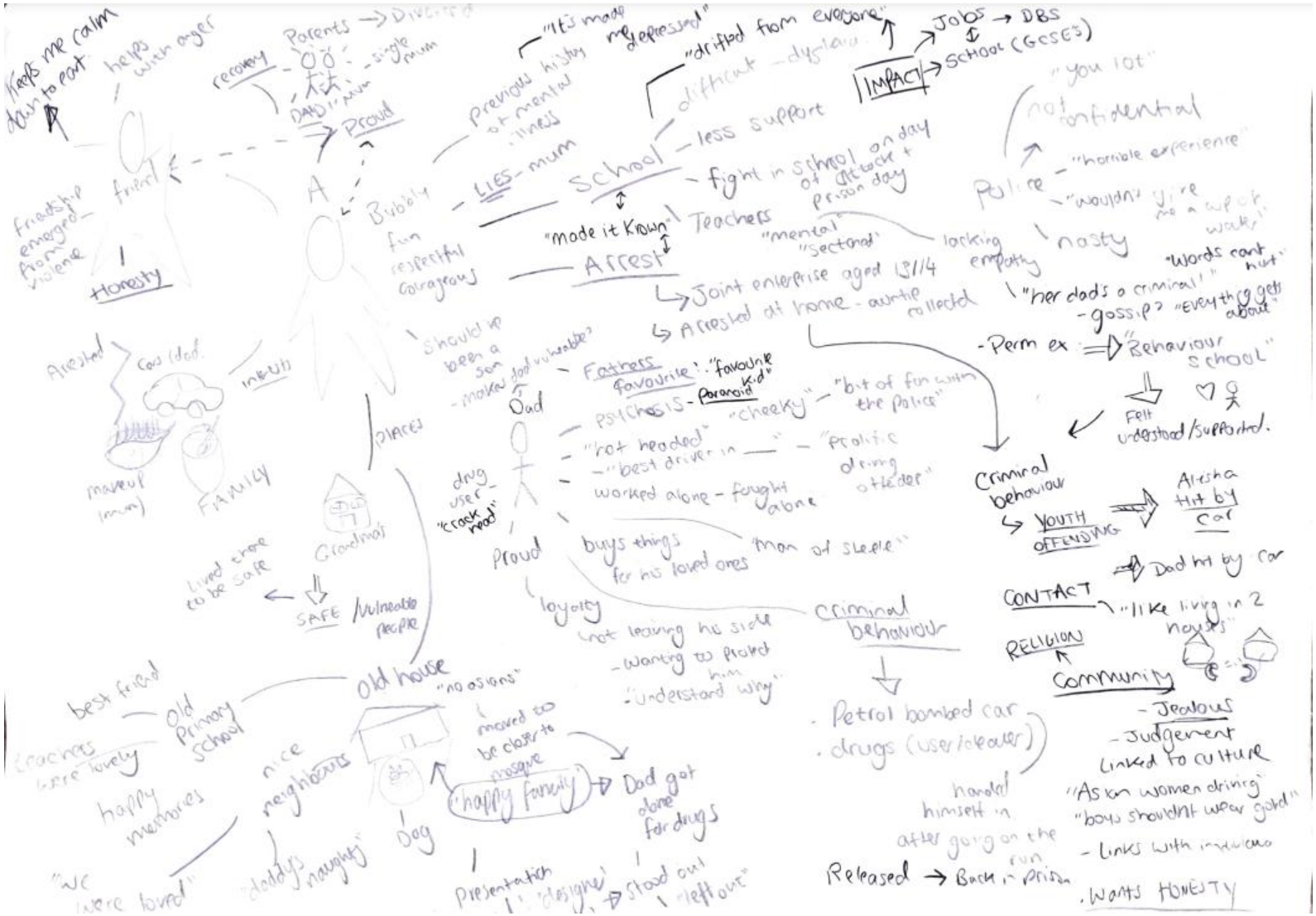
- Considerations for inclusion criteria:
- Focus on older children (11+) so need to contact more secondary schools
- If interviewing younger children, do this over two interviews if possible

- Considerations for interview schedule and data collection:
- Prompts prepared for drawing activities: “tell me about that picture” “describe what you have drawn”
- Prepare one page prompt (see below)

Appendix J: Visual prompt for interview with YP



Appendix K: Mind map from reading and re-reading Alisha's transcript.



Appendix L: Thematic analysis for GETs

Appendix M: Alisha's PETs

Personal Experiential Themes	Sub-themes	Experiential Statements
EVERYONE KNOWS EVERYTHING	**Stigma within the South Asian community**	Perceived Judgement within the South Asian community due to presentation of wealth and behaviours is perceived as jealousy.
	Injustice at invasion of privacy	Personal lives are in the open for everyone to know and be publicly judged.
	Tolerating judgement	Being able to control reactions towards others is important but difficult.
RELATIONSHIPS ABOVE EVERYTHING ELSE	**"I'm the proudest daughter"**	The role of the favourite daughter made the loss so impactful. Dad is a complex character, and she sees all sides of him.
	Relationships: Fierce loyalty	Honesty is key and provides trust in relationships. True friends know everything about each other without judgement despite how long they have known each other.

	Calling for compassion "you put yourself in my shoes…bet you aint gonna like it!"	Seeking empathy and understanding from adults but receiving judgement and criticism which cements thinking that no-one understands.
	Kindness from others is remembered and valued	Fond memories of relationships where she was shown kindness.
BUILDING RESILIENCE	**Perceived vulnerabilities as strength**	Safety comes from spaces and vulnerability can make a space safe. Being a daughter makes her less vulnerable to going to prison, but makes her dad vulnerable.
	Success is overcoming adversity	Powerful sense of pride in her parents proving others wrong and displaying resilience over time. Life hasn't been easy for her loved ones but despite this they have succeeded.
TIME: CHAPTERS OF HER LIFE	**Telling my story**	She has nothing to hide. Normality of criminal activity in her life Criminal activity and offenses occur over a period of time and not in a vacuum.
	The domino effect of events	There is a knock-on effect of experiences which contribute to difficulties in her life.

	Using her experience to help others	Recognising her experiences as valuable to supporting other young people.

Appendix M: Adult PETs

Claire:

Personal Experiential Themes & *Experiential Statements*	**Unique Experience**
VISIBILITY, JUDGEMENT & STIGMA IN THE COMMUNITY AND BEYOND • "*Peppa pig's dad never gets arrested for something he hasn't done":* Hidden or excluded • Exposed by media and gossip • Shame within a respected community • Bereavement is a more 'acceptable' loss	• Claire felt that invisibility of PI in the society leads to increased stigma and shame within communities. • Whereas bereavement feels more 'acceptable', with readily available support, PI is a more complex loss due to the shame that can surround it. • Claire perceived certain parent communities as experiencing more shame as the parents pride themselves on dignity and respectful values, she perceived that families where there has been imprisonment appeared more isolated.
WHAT WE SEE: THE IMPACT ON THE FAMILY • The trauma of witnessing an arrest • Parents are doing the best they can • Sudden disruption to family life • Safety in stability	• Claire applied a trauma informed lens to the children's experiences of PI. • She felt that the parents were 'good' parents and separated the offence from the role of a parent. Claire displayed compassion for the families and the disruption PI can cause to the children and parents. • Claire felt that the ambiguity at each stage of the offender journey can be destabilising and identified protective factors such as peers, wider family, staying in the family home that help to alleviate the impact.

IMPACT ON SCHOOL STAFF • Professional powerlessness • The emotional weight we carry • Frustration but compassion with social services	• Claire felt that there was no clear pathway or guidance when supporting families with PI and this made her feel helpless. Claire felt unequipped to make decisions that she felt were out of her remit as teacher and SENCo. This powerlessness was emphasised by lack of tangible resources or professional support available to schools. • There was a conflict between professional and personal values and those of other professionals and parents e.g. withholding information of PI from the child. • Claire described the emotional impact on her from supporting the child's experience.
SHARING INFORMATION • Security in safeguarding procedures • Between gossip and guidance: distinguishing safeguarding from curiosity • Providing contextual understanding • The honesty dilemma: school values vs family secrets	• Claire felt security and comfort in the safeguarding procedures as these were clear cut, and the sharing of information was logged via policies and systems that schools are familiar with. This contrasted with information regarding PI which is often lost across schools. • Claire felt knowing about PI was helpful to schools to provide context for the child's needs and can be preventative in the support school provides. • Claire described the ambiguity of information being need to know or 'gossip'. • Claire felt concerned about 'normalising' lies for children.

Overview of Sophie's PETs

Personal Experiential Themes & ***Experiential Statements***	**Unique Experience**

RELATIONSHIPS ARE EVERYTHING • Safe and trusting relationships promote open communications. • Taking time to get to know children promotes an individualised approach • Trusting relationships with family's vs relationship with released parents	• Sophie felt that open and trusting relationships she had developed with pupils and families who had experienced PI was supportive and allowed her to offer individualised support. • She applied a psychological, trauma informed approach to her understanding of children's presenting needs and referred to the need for them to feel safe and listened to.
HOW IT FEELS TO KNOW TOO MUCH • Uncomfortable feelings of guilt due to knowing too much • Emotional impact for staff can be supported through supervision • 'Am I doing this right?' Feelings of helplessness at the lack of clarity on how to support. • Contextual understanding changes staff perception and formulation of child's needs	• Sophie described the benefits of having a positive relationship with parents as this trust ensues that open communication occurs. However, she also shared that when staff members are made aware of a parent who has been released from prison, this can alter their perception negatively. • Sophie felt pressure to do the 'right' thing to support these children despite her limited professional knowledge and experience in supporting with this group. She described the emotional exhaustion from being vigilant and 'overthinking' the triggers or unexpected situations that come with supporting CIPs. • She felt there was a lack of clarity, resources or information for schools to support with PI and wanted identified professionals, resources or guidebooks to provide clarity and leadership on what to do. • Knowing about PI was beneficial to the staff and child as the staff team could work together to make adjustments where necessary such as when there was a topic on crime and punishment. Having a contextual awareness enabled school to prevent difficulties for the child and impacts the formulation of a child's needs.
PARENTAL IMPRISONMENT IS COMPLEX AND FEELS TOO BIG • Psychological impact for children	• Sophie felt that PI was a hugely impactful and complex interaction of factors that needed thoughtful consideration. She found PI difficult to

• Supporting with bereavement feels more straight forward as there are services to support • PI requires multi-agency collaboration • Consultation as a way to 'unpick' tricky situations and share information.	categorise, first describing it as a 'type of bereavement' but reflecting that supporting with bereavement felt more straight forward due to available resources. • Sophie felt that collaboration with other professionals such as EPs was supportive and gave her confidence in her approach. Consultations were cited as an opportunity to 'unpick' the complexities together and for information to be shared about the family's circumstances, however gaining parental consent was an identified barrier to this.

Overview of Katie's PETs

Personal Experiential Themes & *Experiential Statements*	**Unique Experience**
THE HIDDEN IMPACT OF PARENTAL IMPRISONMENT • What we're called in for isn't always what's going on • Making space to make sense: supervision as a shared support • Ripple effect of PI. • Primary schools vs secondary schools: how relational approaches uncover context.	• Katie has valued involvement overtime, as school may have requested involvement for a learning need and then the perception of the need develops overtime when more information is gathered. • Katie referred to several aspects of the EP role that can be used to identify and support CIPs and share information such as consultation and planning meetings. The significance of the questions asked was raised by Katie who doubted her own questioning on a particular case. Katie identified supervision as a supportive tool. • Katie felt that there was an observed ripple effect of events that could destabilise a child and their family if not identified early enough by staff and external professionals. Katie commented that she had never had PI raised in a secondary case despite acknowledging the prevalence, which she implied may be due to the relational approaches used in primary schools.

SYSTEMIC GAPS AND A FRAGMENTED SYSTEM • The need for early collaborative intervention • Professional frustration & disempowerment • Adapting practice: indirect vs direct work	• Katie felt that involvement from other services such as social care was 'too late' or non-existent and that some aspects of the support required for PI were out of her remit. • Katie felt that the complexities of the systems were a barrier for professionals and families accessing the right avenues of support. • Katie's experiences of supporting CIPs were more positive within primary schools, partly due to the review systems working effectively.
PIECING IT TOGETHER • Co-constructing with families to create psychological safety • The role of contextual knowledge in practice over time • It's their story through my lens	• Katie felt that families needed to be involved in co-constructing the psychological formulation, but this relied on them trusting in the process and sharing information. • She described an ethical dilemma of what to do with information about a family that had come indirectly but that may impact formulation. Information sharing was identified as requiring sensitivity to avoid judgement or assumptions. The review process was identified as supportive in building trust and relationships which could lead to families feeling more able to share information, again a practice more common in primary schools. • Katie commented on her own positionality and how this can impact her practice.

Overview of Andrew's PETs

Personal Experiential Themes & ***Experiential Statements***	**Unique Experience**

CONNECTION VS CORRECTION: THE NEED FOR RELATIONAL APPROACHES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS • Behaviour policies as a pathway to exclusion • Seeing the whole story: context matters • Cultivating compassion through psychological approaches	• Andrew felt that punitive behavioural systems in schools isolated, escalated, and marginalised many vulnerable children. • Andrew acknowledged his own views and beliefs of secondary schools and identified gaps in staff's understanding and application of psychological approaches such as understanding of trauma and attachment and has also experienced a lack of compassion among school staff. • Andrew expressed frustration at the school systems which prioritise behavioural policies over relational approaches as he felt that they do not get to know their children. When schools have a contextual understanding of their pupils, they are better placed to offer relational support, and this enables them to work preventatively.
VISIBILITY AND VULERABILITY: UNCOVERING NEED IN THE EP ROLE • Schools as gatekeepers to EP support • Seemingly fine or too much to handle • Looking beyond the behaviour • Ethical and professional dissonance in EP practice	• Andrew described barriers to working with CIPs including the traded model of service delivery for EPs meaning that schools decide on priority cases. Andrew felt that this could be because CIPs were often presenting as 'fine' or with such escalating behaviour that they were at risk of or already excluded. This created a sense of powerlessness for Andrew and suggested how EPs can use their role to promote advocacy through raising the profiles of CIPS. • Andrew described the importance of family's being aware of information sharing. Andrew shared how this information feeds into his formulation or understanding but may not report this explicitly.
SYSTEMIC EXCLUSION • Systemic failures in advocacy and inclusion • Coming in at crisis point: preventative vs reactive support	• Andrew identified a lack of advocacy and responsibility for these children, with many of them slipping through the net of support due to presenting behaviours and exclusions. • Andrew acknowledged the cultural capital of schools which can create a power imbalance between families and schools.

• Structural barriers to timely support • Ripple effect of risk factors	• Andrew identified many risk factors that have knock on effect and increase a young person's vulnerability. Andrew advocated for preventative work to identify and put in place support for those young people at high risk; however, this conflicted at times with the systemic structures which often work reactively based on commissioning restrictions.