

Risk? Resource? Redemption? Young fathers in custodial settings

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Presentation overview

- The Following Young Fathers study
- Research sample
- Policy context
- Desistance from crime
- Professional Support
- Findings

Introduction

- **Baseline study 2010-2012(www.timescapes.leeds.ac.uk)**
- **ESRC funded FF follow up study (Oct 2012 - Nov 2015)**
- **Lack of knowledge regarding experiences and support needs of young fathers**
- **Methods:**
 - **QL research with young fathers**
 - **Secondary data analysis of existing data sets**
 - **Mapping of service provision**
 - **Working with practitioners to co-create knowledge**

Sample

- 35 fathers (aged 16-26)
 - Different recruitment routes
 - Varied circumstances and backgrounds
 - up to 5 of interviews and activities
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- **Sub-sample**
 - 5 fathers who have been in custody
 - 4 professionals working in Youth Justice
 - Difficulties gaining access

Young fathers

- Defined as under 25 years
- Pregnancies often unplanned but participants largely positive about fatherhood
- *“I love it me... I just enjoy being a dad”* (Darren aged 22)
- Modern construct of fatherhood identity is more individualised (Dermott 2009)
- Yet structural constraints may act as a barrier

Risk

- Offenders are more more likely to be young fathers
- Popular construct of young fathers as 'feckless'
- Intergenerational cycle of offending
- Young father offenders perceived as 'risky' and a potential risk to their children
- The risk factor framework is integral to professional agencies

Desistance and the role of the family

- Desistance is contingent on emotional bonds (Sampson and Laub 1993)
- Family and friends can act as a resource and in turn he can be a resource to his family
- Key events, such as becoming a father, can trigger change
- Being a father can play a crucial role in developing a 'redemption script' (Maruna 2001)

Risk

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Findings:

Changing risk-taking behaviour

- *I'm so glad that I went to jail. I regretted it at the time like but I'm glad now because it's just changed me. Not as much as being a father's changed me. But it's stopped me like fighting over silly things (Jason, aged 22, interview 1)*
- *A lot of offenders when they have a child will calm down and desist from offending because they have a different sort of identity. They have different responsibilities. They've gone from being whatever they saw themselves as before to being a responsible father (Gary, YOT worker)*

Re-offending

- Despite his best intentions, Jason re-offended
- Continued support in the community is vital

To be honest they were absolutely useless. I've never found any help from probation or like that. Apart from now. Being released now, probation is really good to be honest. It's supporting me with me court case to see me daughter and all that... Probation's supporting me to move in looking for another house which, which I've never really done before (Steven aged 26)

Maintaining contact with their children

- *It burnt me but I had to ignore it. It burnt me. It was, I felt worthless. I felt worthless. But then again...you do the crime you do the time (Raymond aged 20)*
- *But when I got out we didn't have a bond. And it, like he'd come on visits, I'd pick him up and he'd want me to put him back down and it'd hurt me. And I'd say just, I'd say to [partner] 'I don't want to see him for a bit'. And she'd be like, 'why, you need to see him more often, not less'. And I said, 'it's hard, it breaks my heart, what, when I pick him up and he wants me to put him down and he runs to you' (Jason aged 22)*

Maintaining contact with their children

They seem as students to really engage with the idea of storytelling and education being really powerful ways to connect with their children. And that's something that they can obviously do from inside prison, because they can start writing things that they can send to their child. They can start telling more stories, playing more effectively with their child when they come on a family visit, while they're still in prison (Ashley, SafeGround)

Professional support

- No systematic provision
- Existing research on custodial fathering programmes found participants had a positive experience
- The individual relationship with professionals is important
- *“yeah we get on well... even when my order finishes, he’s already said to me, he says, ‘if you’re stuck for anything, if you need help with anything just let me know” (Jax)*

Conclusions

- Fatherhood has the potential to help young men curb offending
- Risk / resource paradox
- There is a need for a more cohesive approach and wider availability of fatherhood programmes
- Support upon their release from custody should take into account their fatherhood status