

Children of Prisoners: an often invisible group

The Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS), Australian Catholic University, is conducting research into an important gap in knowledge about prisoners in Australia.

The *Children of Prisoners Project* has directly engaged children and young people whose parents are incarcerated in the ACT, in order to explore their experiences of parental incarceration and deepen understanding about their needs.

ICPS welcomes the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report *The Health of Australia's Prisoners 2012* that provides important data about prisoners in Australia. In particular, it highlights that one in five prisoners had at least one of their own parents imprisoned when they were a child, and 28 per cent of prisoners have children who depend on them for their basic needs.

"The report from the AIHW highlights that children of prisoners need to be a key target group for support and interventions," said Project Manager and Research Fellow at the ICPS, Ms Vicky Saunders. "We know that these children and young people are more likely to experience disadvantage than their peers, including poverty, family violence, substance abuse issues and mental health issues."

"Our research with children of prisoners will give us new insights into how service systems could work more effectively and responsively together to reduce children's future involvement in welfare, health and criminal justice systems, improve their wellbeing and increase their participation in society."

The ACT Health Directorate and SHINE for Kids are funding the Children of Prisoners Project. Researchers have interviewed children and young people aged nine-18 years in the ACT and also parents and grandparents about how parental incarceration affects children. It is expected that the final report will be published by October. Vicky Saunders is also undertaking her PhD by publication on this topic.

For more information about the Institute of Child Protection Studies, visit www.acu.edu.au/icps.

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