

Introduction

Ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to be with you today. Dr Lanskey – Caroline – thank you for inviting me to speak at your research conference.

I want to start by underlining my respect for the partnership between research and policy: both Farmer Reviews have been grounded in the evidence that you have worked on over many years. People like me get the plaudits when a policy Review is published, but it's a bit like any building – one only sees what is above the ground, and the foundations it is built on are hidden, but if those foundations are weak the whole lot comes crashing down.

The research community of which you are a small subset provides vital underpinnings not just to my prison work but also to all that I do in the House of Lords. Hence my gratitude for being invited here today.

Before we start to dig around in the undergrowth, I will stand back, sketch out the shape of the forest and set the scene more strategically by explaining

1. Why we did the Reviews in the first place, and some of our main findings
2. What we recommended
3. The implications for other areas of social policy

So, first, what drove my team to carry out this work.

A key motivator for my becoming involved in politics, over 12 years ago, was the very high and concerning levels of family and relationship breakdown in this country and the lack of a government strategy to address it. In whatever way families are structured, the relationships within them have an enduring effect on our lives and any loss of these can be very hard for children and adults to bear. When relationships function so poorly that there are parental splits or children are taken into care, they may rarely see one or both of their birth parents and can lose contact with one or both sides of their extended family.

Centre for Social Justice research, which controlled for factors such as socio-economic grade and ethnicity, found those who experience family breakdown in their childhood or youth are over twice as likely to experience homelessness; to be in trouble with the police or spend time in prison.¹ They are almost twice as likely to experience educational underachievement and not raise their own children with the other parent.² In other words, repeating the cycle their own parents went through.

Around a quarter of families with dependent children are headed by a single parent,³ which has perhaps normalised relationship breakdown. An understandable zeal to avoid piling stigma on top of the very heavy load single parents are already bearing can result in a lack of public discussion about the significant challenges they face. Or they are framed almost exclusively in terms of financial poverty. Whilst lack of money is a major problem for half of

¹ Centre for Social Justice, (2019), *Why Family Matters: A Comprehensive Analysis of The Consequences of Family Breakdown*, p19

² Ibid

³ Office for National Statistics, (2017), *Families and Households: 2017*, p3

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single parents,⁴ lack of a co-parenting relationship to ease the load is a less readily acknowledged challenge.

Father absence is a large, under-stated problem in this country affecting around a million children per year.⁵ It can lead to the erasure of paternal grandparents from grandchildren's lives and the overloading of care responsibilities onto the sometimes quite fragile shoulders of maternal grandparents. As relationship breakdown tends to run in families, that can often in practice mean a single grandmother.

All of this is difficult enough without the additional strain of having a partner and father of one's children who is unavailable because he is in prison.

Research outputs from the FAIR study highlight the impact of father absence due to imprisonment. To quote Lanskey et al:

*'For some young men, the absence of a father-figure coincided with a precariousness about the direction of their lives. They had already had encounters with the police...Their school experiences were unsettled and there was volatility to their behaviour. In the father's absence, some mothers took on a more overtly disciplinary role but in other cases, boundaries faded or were not heeded.'*⁶

As I have said, the daily challenges which face these mothers are immense but at least the norm is for male prisoners' children to be cared for by the other parent. Whilst the children of only one in 17 fathers in prison are not living with their mothers, the dependent children of three quarters of women in prison are not looked after by their fathers.⁷

Behind that statistic is the reality of a bleak relational landscape for many imprisoned women. Ministry of Justice research found relationships are their biggest criminogenic need – if a woman has bad relationships and lacks good relationships this puts her at greater risk of reoffending.⁸ The numbers are similar but a little lower for men.

The prevention of intergenerational crime was also part of my remit on both Reviews. When imprisoned parents are unable to find alternative care-givers who can provide children with the safe, stable and nurturing relationships they need to thrive, and they are taken into the care system, familial relationships can wither further. Children raised in care are grossly over-represented in prison statistics.⁹ The lack of support care-experienced adults often endure whilst carrying out their sentences is harrowing.

To reiterate, very many social problems have roots in relational difficulties. Family breakdown is a driver of poverty, not just a result of it, as well as problematic substance

⁴ Gingerbread, 2018, *One in four: A profile of single parents in the UK*, p10

⁵ For the calculations and rationale behind this figure see Centre for Social Justice, (2013), *Fractured Families: Why Stability Matters*, p13

⁶ Lanskey C., et al., (2016), 'Children's Contact with Their Imprisoned Fathers and The Father-Child Relationship Following Release', (2016), *Families, Relationships and Societies*, Vol 5, No 1, p52

⁷ 2004 Resettlement Survey quoted in, Ministry of Justice, (2012), *Prisoners' Childhood and Family Backgrounds, Results from The Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) Longitudinal Cohort Study of Prisoners*, p19: 'Most men reported that these children were now living with their partner (90% from the 2003 survey, 94% from 2004). Only 21% (2003) and 27% (2004) of women reported that this was the case.'

⁸ Ministry of Justice, (2018), *Supporting Data Tables: Female Offender Strategy Tables*, Table 4.2

⁹ Ministry of Justice, (2012), *op cit.*, p8

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misuse, educational underachievement and poor mental health. All of these strangle life chances and make criminal activity more likely.

One of the governors on the female Review highlighted to me that because parenting difficulties and other family factors were not addressed in the community, she often saw the third generation of offenders coming through her gate. Yet, the broad swathe of government policy seems to pay scant attention to this reality, despite decades of rhetoric from all sides, about being tough on the causes of crime.

To remedy this, I initiated meetings with every Secretary of State after the 2015 general election to challenge them to do more to strengthen families. There are encouraging developments elsewhere in government, but to their credit the Ministry of Justice responded particularly substantively with the two Reviews. Most importantly they did not just commission the work, they have also committed to implement the recommendations.

In terms of what we found in the Reviews, clearly there was much good practice underpinned by a solid body of academic research. A plethora of robust evaluations and other studies has been invaluable in making the case to the Ministry of Justice that relationships matter and that when families of prisoners are given substantially greater consideration this benefits all who are involved – inmates, those who matter to them, the prison itself and society.

More than that, academics have long been calling for a fundamental shift in how custody is perceived given that punishment encroaches into family life in many troubling ways. The concept of the ‘referred’ pains of imprisonment, articulated by members of this Institute,¹⁰ refers to psychosocial burdens experienced by members of a family as a result of the imprisonment of a mother, father or partner. Given how far many have to travel and the financial costs of imprisonment due to lost earnings, families also bear physical burdens. These referred pains are, to quote Dr Ben Crewe, rarely due to ‘intentional abuses of power or derelictions of duty’ but are instead the unintended consequences of policies.¹¹

Hence my call for the importance of family and other relationships to be the golden thread running through the processes of the criminal justice system.¹² When families are only seen through the prism of the mechanics of providing visits and therefore as a tangential aspect of prison life, their value will not be at the forefront of those leading on and delivering all the other functions within prison. Yet relationships impinge on all areas within an establishment and indeed throughout the criminal justice system. By the way, I was able to make that point more forcibly in my second Review on women as I was asked to go beyond the gate and also look at what happens when women are diverted from custody, given community disposals and after they have served their custodial sentence.

¹⁰ Lansley C., et al., (2018), ‘Prisoners Families, Penal Power, and the Referred Pains of Imprisonment’, in Condry R., and Scharff Smith P., (eds.), (2018), *Prisons, Punishment, and the Family: Towards a New Sociology of Punishment?*, University of Oxford, pp181-195

¹¹ Crewe, B., (2011), ‘Depth, Weight, Tightness: Revisiting the Pains of Imprisonment’, *Punishment and Society*, (2011), 13 (5), p509

¹² Lord Farmer, (2017), *The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime*, Ministry of Justice, p4

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Returning to the subject of prison, if family and other relationships are explicitly valued and their importance upheld by a supportive culture, this reduces the likelihood that policies will have an unintentionally detrimental effect on families. Their interests will have been factored in from the outset. I am aware of the paradigm shift that this will require.

Professor Nicola Lacey from the LSE points out that for most of the two centuries in which imprisonment has been routinely imposed as punishment for crime, the systems of thought and governance on which it rests have:

‘...focus[ed] on the individual offender and his or her relationship with the state...Penal philosophy’s strongly individualistic presuppositions about the nature of human beings and social relations are open to challenge.’¹³

The Ministry of Justice’s own research found that prisoners who received family visits were 39% less likely to reoffend than those who do not.¹⁴ So, if the family and other relationships of criminalized individuals themselves present a challenge, they also present many opportunities when and if they are rehabilitation assets. FAIR studies spotlight the protective functions of family relationships and supportive networks for family members in the face of multiple risks to well-being, but these are no less important for offenders during and after incarceration. For example, Markson et al report that former prisoners’ coping ability scores were positively associated with family relationships whilst, conversely, difficulty with drugs and alcohol was associated with financial and family relationship problems.¹⁵

However, the neglect of this well-evidenced pillar of rehabilitation and the almost exclusive attention given to the more popularly understandable need for employment and education, fostered a wholly unacceptable inconsistency towards families across the prison estate which my first Review challenged. I talked about good relationships with families and significant others as the third leg of the rehabilitation ‘stool’, which brings stability and structure to prisoners’ lives, particularly when they leave prison.

The Ormiston report, another output from the FAIR study, points out that

‘...employment, accommodation and financial problems were important difficulties in the resettlement process. However, these were not only related to a lack of material resources, but also to a lack of social resources such as quality of family relationships and contact during imprisonment.’¹⁶

Without the motivation – and sense of responsibility – family ties can inculcate in a man who may never have seen the point of learning or grafting in lawful work, efforts to help him turn his life around may yield little fruit. I will return to the theme of responsibility later.

The FAIR study also highlights the effect of this lottery of respect for families. Lanskey et al point out that: ‘As some fathers were transferred between prisons during their sentence with more

¹³ Lacey N., (2003), ‘Penal Theory and Penal Practice: A Communitarian Approach’, in McConville, S., (ed.), *The Use of Punishment*, Willan Publishing, Devon, p178

¹⁴ May C., Sharma N. and Stewart D., (2008), *Factors Linked to Reoffending: A One-Year Follow-Up of Prisoners Who Took Part in The Resettlement Surveys 2001, 2003 and 2004*, Ministry of Justice

¹⁵ Markson L., et al, (2015), ‘Male Prisoners’ Family Relationships and Resilience in Resettlement’ in *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, (2015), Vol. 15(4), p423–441

¹⁶ Lösel F., et al., (2012), *Risk and Protective Factors in the Resettlement of Imprisoned Fathers with their Families*, University of Cambridge, p12

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*or less family-friendly regimes, the children accumulated a mix of experiences which could be both positive and negative.*¹⁷

Partners of prisoners frequently talked to me about being treated like offenders themselves – one woman had been so traumatized that she stopped visiting until her husband was transferred to another jail where she was shown far more care and respect. One can only imagine her trepidation the way to the first visit – just making that trip was a triumph of hope over experience.

Sociologist Megan Comfort describes how:

*‘...dishonouring and mortifying processes of penal power reduce the status of women who visit to that of quasi-inmates.’*¹⁸

Reframing families as potential assets so that it becomes culturally unacceptable for visitors ever to be treated as quasi-inmates again, was a key objective of both my Reviews.

Moving on, second, I will outline some of the recommendations I made to achieve the objective of shifting the culture right across the prison system.

Time is short, so I can only dip into each Review briefly. With the male Review, published two years ago,¹⁹ the key priority as I saw it was to help men develop a sense of responsibility towards their children and other family members where this might be lacking. Pioneering and innovative prison officers impressed upon me the importance of offenders understanding that even when they were behind bars there was much they could do to make life better for those on the outside. Fostering a prison culture that encouraged men in that direction was the focus of many of the recommendations.

One significant sign of progress is that as a result of the ongoing implementation plan, almost every male and female prison has published a Families and Significant Others Strategy which has to include the five ‘local family offer’ elements stipulated in the Review.²⁰ These are:

- (a) Visitor base/centre and visiting services;
- (b) Staffing structure to ensure family work is an operational priority;
- (c) Extended visits;
- (d) Family learning; and
- (e) ‘Gateway’ communication system.

There is a lot of room for flair and healthy competition between establishments and governors can tailor what they do to local needs, but the aim was to iron out differences between prisons in terms of the respect afforded to families. Visitors should be confident

¹⁷ Lansley L., et al, (2015), ‘Re-framing the Analysis: A 3-dimensional Perspective of Prisoners’ Children’s Well-being’, *Children & Society*, Volume 29, (5) pp484–494

¹⁸ Comfort M., (2007), ‘Punishment Beyond the Legal Offender’, *Annual review of Law and Social Science*, 3(1), p279

¹⁹ Lord Farmer, (2017), *The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners’ Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime*, Ministry of Justice

²⁰ *Ibid*, p32

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that there is not just a floor of basic provision but also a new approach from prison officers – a new appreciation that they are, in the main, rehabilitation assets.

Under the new Offender Management in Custody model of one keyworker officer for six men, I recommended that job descriptions must include developing personal relationships with their prisoners and training must reverse the de-skilling that has prevented many from undertaking informal support for prisoners' family ties. Even carrying out a 'Five Minute Intervention' and chatting purposefully but informally was operationally impossible before work force numbers were significantly increased.

I also recommended that as a quarter of male prisoners were formerly in the care of the local authority,²¹ personal officer training must include awareness of how to help care-experienced men with the psychological and other issues they often face. These can affect their ability to form the relationships that will help them to desist from offending and settle back into the community after their sentence.

Such a trauma-informed approach was even more important for women in prison or anywhere in the criminal justice system, not least because the typical profile of female offenders is that they are among the most vulnerable members of society. I came across this word so frequently in relation to female offenders that it was important to understand exactly what it meant. From the Latin *vulnerābilis*, it means 'wounding' and 'susceptible to; physical harm or damage; emotional injury, especially in being easily hurt; and to attack.' This describes very well many of the women I met in prison, or who were serving community sentences.

They have often experienced abuse and trauma which can profoundly impact their ability to develop and sustain healthy, trusting relationships, and this abuse can be ongoing. Therefore, whilst I emphasise, as in the original Review, that the importance of family and other relationships needs to be a golden thread running through the criminal justice system, it is essential to know which relationships are 'rehabilitation assets' in the life of a female offender and which are toxic.²²

During this second, female Review, the need to gather information about these relationships, any children in her care and other circumstances, such as her accommodation, became particularly salient. Over half of women in custody have dependent children²³: if mothers are to be enabled to continue to shoulder these responsibilities, and encouraged to do so where necessary, we need to know who and where their children are.

If the priority for men was to inculcate a sense of responsibility in them where necessary, with women the priority was to help them do what they longed to do: continue to be mothers from inside prison if this was possible and strengthen their parenting capacity in the community where necessary.

Hence, I recommended that skype-type visits be available to all for whom this did not breach the boundaries of risk and called for female prisons to have their own resident social

²¹ Ministry of Justice, (2012), *op cit.*, pii

²² Lord Farmer, (2019), *The Importance of Strengthening Female Offenders' Family and other Relationships to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime*, Ministry of Justice, p5

²³ Ministry of Justice, (2018), *Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System 2017*, p72

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workers. These professionals will be able to work closely with women and help advocate for them with community-based social workers, for instance when the custody of their children is an issue. As one prison governor on the female estate told me, I don't want more prison officers, I want social workers and family engagement workers.

Heading into my third and final section, the implications of both Farmer Reviews for other areas of social policy:

I want to argue in a somewhat basic, but theoretically informed way, for a far more relational approach to policy in all local and national government departments. My aim is to encourage others who are far better equipped academically than I am, to develop this argument further.

As I mentioned at the beginning, since I came into politics, I have been deeply frustrated by the broad tendency of social policy to treat people as individuals and largely ignore or at least pay insufficient explicit attention to, the relational aspects of all human beings. To generalize Professor Lacey's earlier quote in a very cavalier way for which I hope she will forgive me:

*'The systems of thought and governance on which **policy** [my word and my emphasis] rests have focus[ed] on the individual and his or her relationship with the state...strongly individualistic presuppositions about the nature of human beings and social relations are open to challenge.'*²⁴

To challenge these individualistic presuppositions, I will invoke the 'relational turn' in sociology championed by academics from the University of Manchester and others, describe their treatment of 'personal life' and argue that we need a corresponding 'relational turn' in social policy.

Professor Carol Smart describes how:

*"The personal" designates an area of life which impacts closely on people and means much to them, but which does not presume that there is an autonomous individual who makes free choices and exercises unfettered agency. This means that the term 'personal life' can invoke the social, indeed it is conceptualized as always already part of the social...*²⁵

And to quote Dr Vanessa May:

*'the personal is explicitly defined as relational, which is taken to mean a focus on people whose 'sense of self' is 'constructed in relationships with others, and in relation to others and to social norms.'*²⁶

Finally, Professor Jennifer Mason describes a perspective which sees 'people, selves and values' as 'relational, connected and embedded' in webs of relationships.²⁷

²⁴ See footnote 13, p6

²⁵ Smart C., (2007), *Personal Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p28

²⁶ May V., (2011), *Sociology of Personal Life*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, p5

²⁷ Mason J., (2004), 'Personal Narratives, Relational Selves: Residential Histories in The Living and Telling', *The Sociological Review*, (2004), 52(2), p166

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In her sociological research she found that the narratives of people interviewed ‘were built through relationships they had and connections they made with other people – particularly but not exclusively those whom they saw as family and kin.’²⁸ She suggests, therefore, that:

‘...we need to keep the processes of relating in focus, just as much as, if not more than, the individual or the self.’²⁹

Putting this in my own decidedly non-academic language, people’s personal lives and self-interests should not be seen by policymakers as through an individualistic lens but rather explicitly treated in relational terms. For the avoidance of all doubt, the concept of relationality as I understand it, acknowledges that, again to quote Carol Smart:

‘...people relate to others who are not necessarily kin by “blood” or marriage, thus allowing considerable flexibility in the approach.’³⁰

So, whilst family relationships are important in the lives of many prisoners, these should not be over-emphasized to the extent that relationships with significant others are downplayed or not treated with the same level of importance. After all, in one prison which collected data on this subject (which was a rarity), about half of men in prison have no family visits.

The same principle would hold in broader government policy. We want to be a relationally rich society, not one where people without family relationships feel marginalized. To echo what I said earlier, I would want to avoid policies and practices which unintentionally make lives painful. Yet, given the very great value people place on family relationships it would not be right to ignore them. The relationality I am working for in social policy needs to be inclusive of family language and concepts but not restricted to or by these.

Conclusion

Finally, returning to my Reviews and zooming out to the bigger picture. I would simply remind you that I have focused on the importance of maintaining and strengthening offenders’ family ties to prevent reoffending and intergenerational crime.

Obviously, I have been greatly motivated to improve the lives of children affected by parental imprisonment, to make it less likely that women will suffer greatly as a result of losing contact with their children and try to ensure all adults going through the criminal justice system have the unconditional support of another human being who is rooting for them.

However, I am also conscious that the referred pains of imprisonment, a theme I am sure we will return to frequently over the course of the day, are also felt to a certain extent by all of us in society. As taxpayers we all bear the financial costs of crime and reoffending, but by definition there are also many victims.

Improving rehabilitation by threading a relational approach throughout our prisons and criminal justice system will have a positive effect on us all – particularly if its success catalyzes a similar approach in other knotty areas of social policy. Thank you again.

²⁸ Ibid, p177

²⁹ Ibid, p167

³⁰ Smart C., (2007), *op cit.*, p48