COPING WP3 (STAKEHOLDER AND CAREGIVER CONSULTATION)
STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION GUIDE

This document gives general guidance on how to conduct the stakeholder consultations that form WP3 of the COPING project. It focuses mainly on direct consultations (interviews and focus groups), rather than the online questionnaire, which should require little supervision. It details the steps that should be gone through before, during and after the consultation, as well as issues or difficulties of which to be aware. This guide is supplemented by individual question schedules tailored to each type of stakeholder; these supplements will also include any group-specific details that will improve the quality of the consultation.

The purpose of the stakeholder consultations is to explore other issues related to children of prisoners and mental health that are not covered by WP1, WP2 and WP4. In particular, they seek the viewpoints of a wider range of participants than the other research-based Work Packages, using these experiences to augment and enrich the other research. These consultations are qualitative; the content will vary depending on the type of stakeholder and specific questions will be covered in the supplementary question schedules.

Partners may find that some of the recommendations in this document are not appropriate or feasible for them. Variations to fit to local settings are acceptable, provided they do not undermine the purpose of the consultations mentioned above.

PREPARATION FOR CONSULTATION

Selecting participants

Approach potential participants in any appropriate manner (e.g. in person, by telephone or email, putting up posters in workplace). Briefly describe the research, including aims, expected outcomes and consultation methods (interview, focus group, online questionnaire). Ask if they are interested and have any questions. Ask for contact details and availability.

Hard-to-access individuals, or those consulted because of their job, may have to be contacted through others, such as managers or parents/carers. In such cases, explain the research to these 'gatekeepers', to reassure them and so they know the kind of people you want to access – those with direct or relevant experience of children of prisoners. If you have specific desired participants in mind, request them by name. Where stakeholders are involved with children of prisoners in multiple ways or settings, try to get a broad range of experiences.

How many? The number of participants depends on researcher capacity, but direct consultation (interviews or focus groups) should take place with between 3 and 10 people from each stakeholder group.

Where from? Experiences of prison often differ widely within a country and selecting participants from different regions can help expand the breadth of the consultation. If possible, try to include participants from a broad geographical area.

Who selects? Some institutions may wish to select participants themselves, either to be helpful or to control the information that is provided. Researchers should as a minimum check that all potential participants have direct or relevant experience related to children of prisoners, and ideally decide on participants themselves but draw on the expertise of institutions to identify suitable participants.

External ethical approval. Some organisations may have formal ethical approval procedures for you to follow. In such cases check how long these procedures take and build in time to follow them. Ensure that you get written confirmation of approval once it is given. If unsure about any aspect of such ethical procedures, consult with WP9 (ethical protocols) country lead or Bernard Gallagher, WP9 overall lead.

Type of consultation: interviews or focus groups

Decide early whether you will be using an interview or focus group format, or a mixture. Participants may feel differently about participating in different types of consultation.

Interview advantages: More opportunity to go into detail and ask follow-up questions; More questions can be asked in a given time than in a focus group, providing greater depth.

Interview disadvantages: High transcription and translation costs, if many interviews used.

Focus group advantages: Allows multiple people to be consulted at once, thereby reducing researcher time for administering the consultation; options for groups with one type of stakeholder (for depth) or mixed groups of different types of stakeholder (for cross-cutting issues).

Focus group disadvantages: Problems of finding times and places acceptable to all participants; identifying individual participants may be difficult on audio recordings.

Focus group size. The size of focus groups will depend partly on availability of participants and partly on group dynamics. With groups who already know each other or are keen to express their views, smaller groups (around 6) are recommended, while groups of strangers or shy participants may benefit from larger focus group sizes (up to 10), to help ensure someone speaks. Regardless of ideal size, invite more people than you want in order to compensate for those who fail to attend. For large groups, arrange for two or three researchers to be available to manage the arrangements and the consultation itself. Details of particular roles are below.

Preparations with participants

Check practical arrangements with participants one or more weeks before face-to-face consultations take place. These arrangements should include agreeing dates, times and locations of consultations (ideally several, in case consultations need to be rearranged or to ensure enough people can come to a focus group). They should also identify any particular participant needs (including mobility, dietary and audio-visual needs) and how these can be catered for. Telephone conversations with participants, followed by emails or letters confirming details, may work well.

Provide more detailed information about the consultation to participants, including the aim of the consultation, the role they can play and assurances about confidentiality and how to withdraw. Give them an opportunity to ask questions.

Easily accessible locations and times where participants feel at ease can help the discussion. If necessary, discuss with participants where would be appropriate for them and when is inappropriate (such as religious holy days, other commitments etc).

Post information to participants. Sending information to participants to read when they choose can help them prepare for the consultation. This information should include three documents: a practical information sheet, with firm dates and times (including start and finish time) for the consultation, clear directions to the consultation location and a contact number to telephone if needed. It should also state clearly whether travel or other expenses will be paid and what must be provided for these. The second document is a copy of the question schedule, so participants know the issues we are interested in (but make it clear that you may not ask all the questions). The third document is a 'meet the researchers' sheet, containing your name, photo, a few details of who you are and what the research aims to achieve. This can make the initial meeting less intimidating, particularly if you and the participants haven't met beforehand. You may also want to provide a 'frequently asked questions' document, particularly if participants in different consultations tend to ask the same questions.

Other preparations

Appropriate locations. Consultation locations should be quiet and private, and should be visited by researchers before the consultation. Check what facilities it has (such as flipchart and pens, enough tables and chairs cups for drinks, tea or coffee-making facilities and whether there are nearby toilets). Any recording equipment should be tested to ensure there is no background noise that will interfere with transcribing. Consider whether the participants will feel at ease in the proposed location – places they already know may be better, or alternatively they may prefer a neutral space.

Data recording. Researchers should think carefully about the way information from consultations will be recorded. Using audio or video recording can allow researchers to focus more on the consultation and means more of what is actually said is recorded, but may also involve later transcription. As transcribing will take 3-5 minutes or more for each minute of recording, consider whether you have the resources for this. (An alternative is to record the whole consultation but not transcribe fully, only picking out themes and specific quotes when listening back.) If writing notes during the consultation, ensure you have one researcher asking questions and another making notes. Researchers will not be able to write everything that is said unless they can write in shorthand; they should take down at least the main points and write in full any comments they may want for quotes.

While most locations allow audio recording, some (such as prisons) may ban its use. In such cases, ensure two researchers are present, so that one can run the session while the other records what is said. Some locations also have video recording – these will record details on non-verbal communication that audio recorders don't pick up, but can be more intrusive than just audio recording and are not necessary for a successful consultation.

Food? Food can help people relax, which is important in focus groups where participants don't know each other. It is also important to provide food, drinks and breaks in extended consultations or those that take place during mealtimes. In both cases, ensure that food is appropriate for participants, that there is space to prepare or cook it (if necessary) and that there is sufficient cutlery and crockery available. If using food, find out people's food allergies and their personal/cultural/religious preferences regarding food.

DURING THE CONSULTATION

Preparations

Arrive early at the consultation, to prepare the space and to be there to greet participants when they arrive.

Bring: Informed consent forms
Spare information forms
Pens
Badges/labels/cards, so that everyone can see each other's names (focus group only)
Flipchart and pens (if using)
Notebook for researchers
Recorders (audio or video), with a spare if possible
Spare batteries (if using recording equipment)
Blank tapes or memory cards (if using recording equipment)
Details of support groups and helplines
Water or water jugs
Water glasses/cups
Food, plates and cutlery (if providing food)
Tea, coffee, milk, sugar and cups (if providing hot drinks)

Arrange the consultation space and any waiting area. Have a chair for each person, laid out in a circle or round a table, so that everyone can see everyone else. Water should be easily available before and during the consultation, particularly to stop people's throats going dry. Toilets should be easily accessible. Food or other drinks (if provided) should be available before or after the consultation, to avoid it distracting participants or muffling their voices. Put up directions or signs outside if needed and inform security personnel of who will be coming, if necessary.

Check any recording equipment (audio or visual), including how background noise or the acoustics/lighting in the room are affecting it on the day.

Wear appropriate clothes that will help you blend in with participants and put them at their ease. These should be somewhere between your normal clothes and those worn by participants.

Arrival of participants

Multiple researchers? Have one by the door to welcome people and another to speak to participants once they have entered.

Welcome all participants (and anyone accompanying them) warmly and try to make them feel relaxed.

Explain housekeeping arrangements, such as where the toilets are, and answer any questions they have. If name badges or labels are being used, provide them now or ask participants to make them themselves.

Participants being accompanied? Make sure all those not participating in the consultation can ask questions and have the process explained, including that the consultation should not be disturbed. It is not necessary to have a researcher stay with them.

Start of consultation

Introductions. Researchers should introduce themselves and their roles in the consultation, then ask participants to introduce themselves. This should include their name and their job or interest in this consultation; it could also include another simple fact such as what they ate for breakfast or one thing the others don't know about them, to help them get used to speaking. In focus groups, asking people to work in pairs and feed back this information about the other person can help them feel comfortable talking in a group.

Researchers explain purpose of the consultation and the wider COPING project, including the focus on mental health and well-being and the emphasis in this consultation on general experiences relating to children of prisoners and mental health, rather than talking about specific or personal experiences. Participants can use specific examples if they want, but should not discuss specific examples in ways that would reveal confidential information to others – this is particularly important in groups who know each other or interact with the same children of prisoners. While this information will be given verbally, it should also be included on information sheets, which should be available to anyone who wants one.

Researchers explain participants' rights in relation to the consultation, notably that they do not have to take part in the research, that they can refuse to answer any questions if they wish, that they can decide to withdraw from the research if they wish and that none of the above decisions would have any negative consequences, especially for the imprisoned parent/carer.

Provide space for questions.

Give consent forms to participants to sign.

Using recording equipment? Check it can pick up everyone's voice well enough for transcription. Ask everyone to speak briefly ("hello, my name is…" is enough) and then play back the recording. This is particularly important in a focus group where there are many voices coming from different directions. Ask participants to turn off mobile phones, or for those that need them to put them on silent and to answer calls outside the room.

Taking notes? Ensure there is sufficient space for writing/typing and explain that researchers will switch roles during the consultation, to stop one of them getting worn out with writing.

Interview

Explain role of researcher, which is to ask questions and listen to participant's answers. As researcher, you may try to clarify or reflect on what is said, or ask follow-up questions not on the original interview schedule, to develop the discussion or ensure you understand the point the participant was making.

Begin with easy questions that participants are happy answering, moving onto more detailed or difficult issues later.

Focus group

Explain ground rules for the group, which should include:

- *Respect*, particularly being polite, not talking over another person and giving everyone a chance to participate;
- *Confidentiality* (not repeating content of the consultation to anyone else);
- *Anonymity* (not giving examples in ways that reveal personal or confidential information to other group members);

Explain role of researcher, which is to ask questions but not participate in the discussion. However, researchers may try to clarify or reflect on what people have said to develop the discussion or ensure they understand the point the participant was making. The researcher will also intervene if the discussion is being dominated by some participants or to move the discussion on.

Begin with easy questions that participants are happy answering, moving onto more detailed or difficult issues later. Finish by asking if they have anything else to add – this allows any gaps to be filled in and can take 10 minutes or more.

Multiple researcher roles. If multiple researchers are present, one researcher should act as moderator (asking the questions and overseeing the discussion), another should act as observer (taking notes of key issues, non-verbal messages and body language, but not participating in the discussion), and a third, if used, should act as housekeeper, welcoming participants and dealing with organisational issues like expenses and giving directions, so that the others can concentrate solely on the consultation.[1]

Interactive sessions. Some participants answer better when being more interactive. One way of doing this is to ask people to write down or draw answers to questions on Post-it notes, with one response on each (they can use as many notes as they like). All the Post-it notes are then placed on a chart, with identical/similar answers from different people placed together. This can be useful for stimulating discussion about lots of issues covered by one question and for seeing which issues are important for many people. It can also allow quieter focus group participants to participate equally with those who dominate conversations. However, this format can take up lots of time and result in long discussions, so researchers may need to halt discussions to enable other questions to be asked.

Younger participants may be asked to draw a picture that summarises their feelings and thoughts about the issues discussed. In this case, paper should be available, and preferably also coloured pencils or pens. Older participants can also be asked to draw if the situation is appropriate.

[1] Focus group team roles from Hennick and Diamond (2000), quoted in King and Horrocks (2010) *Interviews in Qualitative Resarch*. London:Sage, p71.

AFTER THE CONSULTATION

Finishing the consultation

Finish on time. Some participants will have other commitments and you may only have the consultations facilities for a fixed period of time.

Provide expenses, if applicable. Make sure you get originals or copies of any receipts/tickets people are claiming. If paying in cash, note down how much is being given out.

Provide support information for participants who may want it. This information, which could include telephone helpline numbers or details of organisations, should be easily accessible somewhere that people can take it without having to ask.

Provide researcher contact information in case participants want to clarify anything later or are uneasy about what they said in the consultation.

Wait behind in case any participants want to discuss anything with you in private. Do not look as if you want to leave or begin packing up until the participants have all left. In cases where participants or researchers have to leave immediately after the consultation, try to finish the consultation early to allow time for such discussions, and ensure that participants have your contact details and encourage them to get in touch later, if they want.

Label recording tapes, if used. They should use the following format:

> **Date** (in the format YYMMDD, so 12 January 2011 would be 110112)
> **Country**: G (Germany), R (Romania), S (Sweden), U (UK)
> **Consultation type**: F (focus group) or I (interview)
> **Stakeholder type**: CP (children of prisoners), CG (caregiver), IP (imprisoned parent), PS (prison staff), IS (institutional staff), SW (social workers), NF (NGOs supporting families), NP (NGOs involved in policy), GO (government officials). For mixed consultations write M then list all the stakeholder types involved (e.g. MCPCG for mixed children of prisoners and caregivers).
> **Consultation number** (1, 2, 3 etc), depending on how many of that type of consultation with that type of stakeholder you have done that day. The numbers should start from 1 again on each new day.

Between each of these elements there should be a hyphen to make it easier to read.

So for example, an interview conducted on 4 May 2011 in Romania, interviewing a social worker which is the only consultation of that type on that day would be coded: 110504-R-I-SW-1. A focus group on 4 May 2011 in Germany, with government officials and NGOs involved in policy, which is the third such consultation that day, would be coded: 110504-G-F-MNPGO-3.

TRANSCRIBING AND CODING

Records must be kept of all consultations. This will generally be audio recordings, but may include written notes, video recordings or other means of collecting information. Any quotes or extracts being used for WP5 (analysis of results), WP6 (development of recommendations) or WP7 (dissemination) must be translated into English.

However, given the amount of data that may be collected for WP3, researchers will not be required to either translate or transcribe in full all of their consultations. Instead of fully transcribing, researchers will have to review their records of the consultations, then transcribe and code any information they think should be used in WP5, WP6 or WP7. Similarly, any information that is going to be used for WP5, WP6 or WP7 should be translated into English.

Please note that these requirements represent a minimum standard. If time and resources allow, consultations should be fully transcribed and translated, so that other researchers can also analyse the relevant records.