



**COPING WP3 (STAKEHOLDER AND CAREGIVER CONSULTATION)  
STAKEHOLDER GROUP: CHILDREN OF PRISONERS**

This document gives supplementary guidance on the stakeholder consultations that form WP3 of the COPING project. It should be used together with the general WP3 Stakeholder Consultation Guide and is not useable as a standalone document. It provides additional guidance on how to conduct consultations with children of prisoners, as well as question schedules for interviews and focus groups.

## **ADDITIONAL STAKEHOLDER-SPECIFIC INFORMATION**

**Stakeholder type:** Information provider.

**Areas of presumed knowledge:** Daily life, visits and other forms of contact, relationships with others, schooling, free time, emotional/mental health impact of imprisonment.

### **Additional issues – before consultation**

*Problems of ‘gatekeeping’* may occur, with caregivers being involved in deciding whether children can participate. They may also have suggestions or want to be involved in explaining to children about the study. While this carries the same risks associated with other forms of ‘gatekeeping’, it may also allow someone known and trusted by the children to explain the nature of the consultation.

*Consent of parents or caregivers* may be required, either formally or informally. Refer to WP9 on ethics and on individual country protocols for guidance.

*Involvement of caregivers during the consultation.* Either children or caregivers may want a caregiver to be present with them during the consultation. In such cases, researchers should explain that any accompanying caregivers should not actively participate in the consultation but just be there as support. Confidentiality principles for participants should also apply to any caregivers present. Researchers should also decide whether having a caregiver will have a positive or negative impact on the quality or type of answers. With focus groups, consider the impact of caregiver involvement on the dynamics of the group.

### **Additional issues – during consultation**

*Participants may talk about their personal experiences* rather than about the issues more generally. Explain that detailed individual consultations are separate and that while they can use personal examples to illustrate their points, this should not be the main focus. Questions are also phrased to help reduce the likelihood of this happening.

### **Additional issues – after consultation**

*Private discussions and follow-up* immediately after the consultation may be difficult with children of prisoners, particularly if caregivers are present, while some may find it difficult to contact researchers at a later point. Researchers

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may need to actively contact children of prisoners to update them on progress and identify any concerns or issues they have.

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

This interview schedule includes questions about various different areas of children's lives. Each numbered question includes several questions. All questions apart from the first one are supplementary, designed to gain more information about the issue or act as prompts to participants who don't provide detailed answers. Conversely, some participants may answer multiple questions in one answer, in which case move on. Apart from the introductory questions and the final question, the questions can be asked in any order, though it is probably best to complete one area before moving onto another.

### *Introductory questions*

- 1. Can you tell us your name and a little bit about yourself?**
- 2. How long have you been visiting your mum/dad in prison?**

### *Core questions*

- 3. Thinking about you and other children of prisoners you know, what do you think are the main needs of children of imprisoned parents?**  
Supplementary questions: Are there differences between what children of prisoners need and what other children need? Why do you think this is?
- 4. Do children of prisoners have more needs in some parts of their lives than others? If so, where do they have greater or fewer needs?**  
Supplementary questions: What are their needs in relation to visits? Do they need help booking a visit? Accompaniment? What kind of support do they need before, during and after seeing their imprisoned parent? What are their needs in relation to other forms of contact with their imprisoned parent? Family relations? School/education? Free time? What are their emotional needs? Physical and mental health needs? Financial needs?
- 5. Do children's needs change after a parent is imprisoned? If so, how? Why do you think this is?**
- 6. What kind of personal strength/resilience do children have to cope with parental imprisonment?**  
Supplementary questions: Are there things they do to make themselves feel better about having a parent in prison? How helpful do you think these things are? Do they change when they have a parent in prison? How? Why? Are there things they find positive about having a parent in prison? What things?
- 7. What support or help do you know of for children of prisoners?**

Supplementary questions: What help is there for visiting imprisoned parents? What facilities for children are available at prison visits? What help is available for keeping in contact? Supporting the family? Education? Free time? What support is available for children's emotional needs? Physical and mental health needs? Financial needs?

**8. Who provides this support? How does the support available differ from child to child? Why do you think it differs?**

Supplementary questions: Do other family members provide support? The imprisoned parent? Friends? Teachers? Social workers? NGOs? Prison/criminal justice officials? What kind of support do you give? Who do children tell/talk to about having a parent in prison? Why do they talk to these people?

**9. In which areas of children's lives can they get most help? Why do you think this is?**

Supplementary questions: Is there help for them in relation to visits? Other forms of contact with the imprisoned parent? Relationships with other family members? School/education? Free time? Is there support for their emotional needs? Physical and mental health needs? Financial needs?

**10. Do you have any idea about how well the different types of support and programmes work? What is good and what is bad about them?**

Supplementary questions: What would you change to make them better?

**11. How much does the criminal justice system consider prisoners' children and their needs?**

Supplementary questions: Do different parts of the criminal justice system consider their needs differently? Do police consider it? Courts? Judges? Prison staff? Probation officers? Which aspects of the children's needs do they consider? What do they miss? Why do you think this is?

**12. What does the criminal justice system do to support children of prisoners and their needs?**

Supplementary questions: What do they do that's good/positive for children of prisoners? What do they do that's bad? How do their actions affect the children's emotions? Physical and mental health? Finances?

**13. What do you recommend to make sure that the needs of children of prisoners are met? Recommendations can relate to changes in policy, practice, or attitude.**

Supplementary questions: What changes can the police make to meet the needs of children of prisoners? What changes can courts make? Judges? Prison staff? Probation officers? NGOs? Social workers? Schools? Families? The imprisoned parent? Other children? In your experience,

what things have worked best to change policy or make things better for the children? Why do you think this is?

**14. What one/three things should change to better support children of prisoners?**

Supplementary questions: What would help improve the emotional needs of children of prisoners? Physical and mental health needs? Financial needs? Is there anything that you would like to do differently?

**15. When should children be involved in research like this?**

Supplementary questions: Is it important for researchers to hear about what children have to say about the impact of prison? Why/why not? What are the benefits of including children in this research? What things need to be in place to make it okay for children to participate? Do you have any experience of children being in this kind of research? Can you tell us about it/give details?

*Final question*

**16. Is there anything else you would like to add?**

## FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

### *Initial/opening questions*

1. **Can you all tell us who you are and a little bit about yourselves?**
2. **Can you briefly tell us how many children of prisoners you know (including brothers and sisters) and how long you have had a parent in prison?**

### *Core questions*

3. **What do you think are the needs of children of imprisoned parents?**  
Prompts: What are their needs in relation to visits? Contact with imprisoned parent? Family relations? School/education? Free time? What are their emotional needs? Physical and mental health needs? Financial needs?
4. **What interventions and support exist to meet these needs?**  
Prompts: Can you give an example of something that works well? Something that works badly? What support do you give? What help is there for visiting? Keeping in contact? Supporting the family? Education? Free time? What support is available for their emotional needs? Physical and mental health needs? Financial needs?
5. **How much does the criminal justice system consider and support the needs of children of prisoners?**  
Prompts: How much do police consider their needs? Courts? Judges? Prison staff? Probation officers? Are there things they do well relating to children of prisoners? Things they do badly? How do their actions affect the children's emotional needs? Physical and mental health needs? Financial needs?
6. **What do you recommend to make sure that the needs of children of prisoners are met?**  
Prompts: What one/three things should change to better support children of prisoners? What would help improve the emotional needs of children of prisoners? Physical and mental health needs? Financial needs? Is there anything that you would like to do differently? What changes can the police make to meet the needs of children of prisoners? What changes can courts make? Judges? Prison staff? Probation officers? NGOs? Social workers? Schools? Families? The imprisoned parent? Other children?
7. **When should children be involved in research like this?**  
Prompts: Is it important for researchers to hear about what children have to say about the impact of prison? Why/why not? What are the benefits of

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including children in this research? What things need to be in place to make it okay for children to participate? Do you have any experience of children being in this kind of research? Can you tell us about it/give details?

*Final question*

**8. Is there anything else you would like to add?**