

Mapping the needs and experiences
of children affected by parental imprisonment

National Survey | Fact Sheet

This is a snapshot of the key findings from a
2023 Monash University report on children
with a parent in custody in Australia.

The report draws on data from the first-ever national survey of carers
conducted by Monash University in partnership with Griffith University and
The Australian National University and commissioned by SHINE for Kids.

key findings

Children who experience parental
imprisonment are some of our community's
most disadvantaged and overlooked.

They often experience multiple and compounding
disadvantages, with long-term consequences,
but receive no specialised assistance.

Report findings highlight that families with children
experiencing parental imprisonment need our
immediate attention and support.

Given many children with a parent in custody are under 10,
it is concerning that schools have been mostly absent
from discussion about the issue and interventions.



SHINE for Kids®



Families Surveyed

Children were typically **under 10 years old**, with 23% preschool age.

30.9% of children were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This mirrors persistent **over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** in the Australian prison system.

The level of **disability, chronic illness and diagnosed mental health issues** reported in children was considerably higher than in the community. **19.5%** required regular help with daily activities.

64.1% of carers indicated that the child was **not connected** to any **support service**.

64.8% of carers reported at least **weekly contact** with the incarcerated parent.

70.1% of carers considered **face-to-face visits as 'best'** for the child.

55.1% of carers reported **difficulties** with the child staying in **contact** with their imprisoned parent.



Finances

81.7% of families reported that they are **struggling financially to meet basic needs**, including food, shelter and paying utilities.

Many families reported having **limited money to pay for school expenses** or children's activities. **60.3%** of carers responded that the child was not currently involved in any **community activities, sports or hobbies**.

Indigenous families were more likely to describe experiencing problems with meeting some **basic needs** – specifically the high costs of transport (**80.0%** vs **64.2%**).



School

Around **one-half** of the children are **regularly absent** from school (**49.2%**), with many struggling to get the children to attend, commonly due to feelings of **anxiety** (**75.0%**) and experiences of **bullying** (**62.5%**) and **transport problems** (**41.7%**).

29.5% of school-aged children had been **suspended or expelled** from school.



Health

21.8% of carers reported their child had been **diagnosed with anxiety** (considerably higher than the estimated **7.5%** in the community for children 4–11).

16.7% of carers reported their child had been **diagnosed with ADHD/ADD**.

11.5% of carers reported their child had been **diagnosed with depression**.



Justice

A **concerning number** of children included in the survey have had **contact with the police/youth justice** (**12.8%**).



In our experience, we had no phone call or contact until 48 days after imprisonment. By this stage children are sad, fearful, and confused. There could be a lot more done to ease that transition.

It's caused their health to decrease as their anxiety has become worse also being so young and having to deal with depression.

Both of my girls are an emotional wreck, they cry every night for their dad.

I reside with my parents ... I could not afford to live on my own with my children.

My eldest shows anger that her dad isn't at home and misses things she's achieved.

I have no support, I am in despair.

I worry about attachment and the long-term impact this will have on him.

