

## **Negotiating Absence and Presence: Examining Children's Wellbeing through Parental Imprisonment and Re-Entry**

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For my PhD I am looking at the impact of parental imprisonment on children's wellbeing. Specifically, I am interested in the post-release period and how factors that occur prior to the imprisonment, during the imprisonment, and after the imprisonment relate to children's wellbeing. Research over the last several decades has demonstrated that children experience negative developmental outcomes as a result of their parent's imprisonment, such as behavioural problems, mental health issues, and learning problems. However, most of this research assumes that problems occur as a result of the imprisonment period itself. Less is known about the experiences of children when their parent is released from prison and how this impacts on children's wellbeing. A child's developmental system is usually disrupted when a parent is imprisoned. For example, relationships are often disrupted, and caregiver and family structure changes often occur, as well as potentially residential and school changes. However, it is unknown whether, and to what extent, significant disruptions occur again when the parent is released from prison.

For my study I am using in-depth qualitative interviews with approximately 40 family sets in the Netherlands to examine whether, and under what circumstances, a parent's release from prison is associated with changes in children's wellbeing. Imprisoned parents, caregivers and children will be interviewed within three months prior to the parent's release (Wave 1) and within three months post-release (Wave 2). Data collection is expected to commence in March 2015. Using a developmental systems approach, this study will qualitatively examine the key features of a child's developmental system when a parent is in prison, how these developmental systems change over the course of the imprisonment and post-release, and how these systemic factors relate to children's wellbeing. This research is important to make recommendations for policy and program development to support families of prisoners and help make the reunification period more positive for all involved.