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What happens in a child's world when their parent(s) goes to jail?

The voice of a child.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

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Geoffrey Taylor

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Abstract

This qualitative study provides a unique insight into the lives of six children who have a parent in prison. It adds to the limited research available and affords children an opportunity to share their experiences of parental imprisonment. A New Zealand Māori cultural perspective, which can be used across cultures, was used to engage participants and develop topic headings and questions. Six children, aged nine to sixteen, participated in an audio recorded semi structured interview, which was then transcribed verbatim. An inductive thematic analysis was used to identify and analyse themes within these transcripts. Three main themes emerged from this analysis, including loss, stigma/secretcy and support/coping. Loss played a significant role in the children's experiences, and included not only the loss of their imprisoned parent, but also financial security. The effects of loss are exacerbated by the lack of recognition, and the associated stigma it receives from the wider society. Stigma, along with secretcy appeared as a second theme, and is discussed in the context of participant's awareness of their stigma status, which then elicits the use of secretcy to manage and avoid the negative reactions of others. The theme of support and coping revealed other, more positive coping mechanisms used by participants, which included joining sports and other social groups, along with seeking out adult and peer support. It was evident from these themes, that although parental imprisonment complicates a child's life and brings many adversities, the use of positive coping mechanisms and seeking out supports, may buffer the ill effects of this experience, but not take away the grief they feel.

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Daddy, You're In Jail

Daddy, you're in jail so far, far away
and it hurts me almost every day
I knew when I was there
it was coming to an end
I knew I should of done something
right there and then.

Daddy, you're in jail so far, far away
you can't even be a part of my life today.
as I go through boyfriends and do other things
you won't be there to call
when me and my mom are
yelling names, cussing at each other,
and she's putting me to shame because
I did some of those bad teenage things.

Daddy, you're in jail so far, far away
I wonder, when you get out
will things be the same
will you be the dad that I know or
will you be someone else 'cause
jail changed your soul.
I don't understand the reason for this
going to prison for drugs when in
there it's a bigger mess.
it's like taking a drunk to a bar
and expecting him to sober up
when you know he's just
gonna get more messed up.

Daddy, you're in jail so far, far away
when you get out I guess I will see
the answers to the question I have today
but for right now I will just continue to pray
and hope for the best until that day.
I still love you and will write you too
please don't forget about me because
I will always care and miss you

Daddy, you're in jail so far, far away
while I sit here, tears running down my face
hoping everything will fall into place
I will never forget the time we had
and try to be brave and not be sad
Daddy, I know it's hard and you got a lot on your plate
but remember there's people willing to wait
for you to turn straight

Daddy, you're in jail so far, far away
you got 3 kids and parents too
that haven't given up on you
you got a second chance to make it right
so continue the fight of the battle you've got
to make it back to the ones you love!!!!