

Mother-infant separations in prison. A systematic attachment-focused review of the academic and grey literature.

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Abstract

This review systematically searched UK academic and grey literature in relation to mother and child separation in prison. Attachment theory is referred to in current prison policy for mothers (PSO 4801, 2008), and could provide a framework linking policy and practice. Reviewing grey literature provided an opportunity to explore practice-based literature. 24 academic papers and 51 grey documents were reviewed. Use of attachment theory in the academic literature varied according to discipline, ranging from extensive use to no use. There was greater use of attachment theory in the grey literature. Despite linguistic differences, all documents highlighted the detrimental impact of separation on imprisoned mothers. However, specificity was lacking regarding support for mothers, and staff needs were overlooked. Given its use across the sparse research and practice literature, and its basis for policy, attachment theory could underpin theoretically informed support for imprisoned mothers separated from their infants and staff who support them.

Key words: women offenders; prison; child; human attachment;

Introduction

UK prisons provide some provision for imprisoned mothers of infants in the form of Mother and Baby Units (MBUs)¹, however, most mothers are separated from their children under 18 months. Whilst the figures are unclear and not routinely collected (Dolan, 2016), there could be around 500 women a year who are in this position (see Gregoire, Dolan, Mullee, & Coulson, 2010). The early years are both crucial for children's development (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Center on the Developing Child, 2010), and are a period of vulnerability for mothers' mental health (Khalifeh, Hunt, Appleby, & Howard, 2016;

¹ Special areas of the prison where mother and child can live together for up to 18 months.

Khalifeh, Brauer, Toulmin, & Howard, 2015). This vulnerability is heightened when mothers have experienced previous difficult experiences such as violence (Howard & Bundock, 2013), and have low social support (Khalifeh et al., 2016). These social risks particularly apply to women in prison (Prison Reform Trust, 2015b), so whilst being a relatively small group of women, they are at a very high risk for mental distress arguably due to their often extensive experiences of trauma, including domestic violence and sexual violence (McNeish & Scott, 2014). The context and justification for this review are explored in more detail in an earlier policy review (Powell, Ciclitira & Marzano, 2016), which forms part of this work.

The first years of life are a key time for attachment (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008), and this theory underpins the current policy on MBUs (Prison Service Order 4801, 2008), and early years practice more generally (Department for Education, 2014). This is not reflected in the UK research on imprisoned mothers aside from a recent randomised controlled trial (RCT) (Sleed, Baradon, & Fonagy, 2013), and the remaining sparse literature is generally US-based (e.g. Byrne, Goshin, & Joestl, 2010; Kenny, 2012). Attachment as a concept encompasses a broad spectrum of ideas, however, it is widely understood to be the biological bond ensuring survival which infants form through seeking proximity to their caregivers (Bowlby, 1969). Since Bowlby's initial work, attachment theory has developed both in relation to child categorisations (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), adult classifications (Shaver, Belsky, & Brennan, 2000), cognitive concepts such as mentalization (Fonagy, Gergely & Jurist, 2004), and mind-mindedness (Meins, Fernyhough, Wainwright, Clark-Carter, Das Gupta, Fradley, & Tuckey, 2003). In general, attachment is regarded as crucial to the development of both interpersonal trust and affect regulation (Schorer, 2010). Thus, as well as underlying current prison policies, attachment theory offers a psychological model that could aid in understanding the impact of separation on mothers and their ability to cope in the prison environment (Borelli, Goshin, Joestl, Clark, & Byrne, 2010; Bifulco &

Thomas, 2013). It also potentially provides a means of linking theory, research, practice and policy in a manner that could lead to further structured research and interventions.

This paper aims to explore and understand how mother-infant separations are referred to across relevant academic and grey literature. For this review, academic literature considered was any commercially published work in either books or journals, and generally peer-reviewed. Grey literature was defined as ‘that which is produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats, but which is not controlled by commercial publishers’². For the purposes of this review it includes third sector (e.g. non-governmental organisations, international bodies, charities, quangos, independent research bodies) reports, briefings and unpublished academic work.

Arguably, these are particularly pertinent when exploring mother-infant separations in prison given the range of third sector organisations that are involved both working directly with women in prison and researching and campaigning on their behalf. Furthermore, certain key publications (e.g. North, 2006) have been repeatedly cited in policy, government and academic literature, highlighting the importance of some of this work.

A further reason for focusing on the grey literature is that practitioners may be more likely to use relevant grey literature in their work than academic publications, for reasons of physical access, direct relevance and its practical application. Whilst some grey literature can be criticised for its lack of rigour (Killoran, 2010), it is this more informal approach, including the use of first person testimony, which can make it more accessible to those in the field and also overcomes potential publication bias such as the exclusion of qualitative data (Hopewell, Clarke, & Mallett, 2006). Finally, as this is an under researched area (for notable exceptions see Dolan, Birmingham, Mullee, & Gregoire, 2013; Gregoire et al., 2010;

² See: <http://www.greylit.org/about>

Birmingham, Coulson, Mullee, Kamal, & Gregoire, 2006), examining grey literature broadens the search to be as systematic as possible in relation to what literatures are drawn on in policy and practice.

Aims

- 1) To systematically search all relevant UK academic and grey literature, including third sector and non-peer reviewed academic work, with regards to imprisoned mothers separated at any stage from their children under 18 months.
- 2) To explore the extent to which these documents draw on attachment theory.

Design

The methods are described in more detail in the policy review (Powell et al., 2016). As a brief overview, this review uses the principles of a Rapid Evidence Assessment³ (a research tool used by UK government departments), and follows the structure of Kitson, Marshall, Bassett, & Zeitz's (2012) review.

Search method and data analysis

Relevant grey and academic literature databases and third sector websites were searched⁴.

There was an element of snowball searching as references led to further references, this was particularly the case in relation to grey literature, which was often not searchable through websites. After removing duplicates, documents were sorted into categories based on organisational authorship for grey literature, and academic practice/discipline for the academic literature. The first research aim was addressed using a summative content analysis

³ See:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20140305122816/http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/networks/gsr/resources-and-guidance/rapid-evidence-assessment>

⁴ Academic databases searched: British Nursing Index, Cambridge Journals Online, CareKnowledge, Cochrane, Ebscohost – psycarticles, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, JSTOR, Ovid, PubMed, RCN, Sage, ScienceDirect, Taylor and Francis Online, Zetoc.

of references to separation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and the second with a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to understand how attachment theory is referred to. Themes were driven by the research questions and prevalence was noted as another means of comparison.

Inclusion and search terms

In order to enable direct comparison with the earlier policy review, relevant UK publications since 2007 to August 2015 were included. There were major changes to the female prison estate in 2007 following The Corston Report (Corston, 2007)⁵. The documents had to be relevant to imprisoned women separated from their children under 18 months in the UK. The content search terms were ‘mother’, ‘baby’, ‘infant’, ‘attach*’ and ‘separat*’. When none of these were present, documents were scanned for ‘child’ and ‘women’ to ensure there were no alternative terms.

Procedure

The grey and academic searches were carried out separately and are reported alongside each other to enable comparison. 33 websites were searched for grey documents, from which 51 relevant documents were identified. 14 databases were searched for academic documents yielding 27 919 items. Of these 2 389 titles were reviewed, from which 24 relevant documents were identified.

See Figure 1.

Findings

Categorisation

⁵ These changes included the implementation of gender specific standards in prison and the monitoring of women as a specific group by NOMS.

The academic documents (N=24) were categorised according to academic/practice discipline. These fell into three approximately equal groups, with research and theory/discussion papers falling into each category and were determined according to the journal and backgrounds of the authors: 'Psychology/psychotherapy' (n=4), 'Psychiatry/medical' (n=4), and 'Nursing/midwifery' (n=3).

The grey documents (N=51) were organised into four approximately equal groups of organisational authorship. There seemed to be a clear divide between organisations that mainly focused on policy and research ('Third sector – policy', n=11), and those that were primarily practice oriented organisations ('Third sector – practice', n=8), although the latter also often produce policy documents. The category 'Group' (n=5) covered any document authored by several organisations and included a range of academic, third sector and governmental. 'Academic' (n=5) covered any publications by academic institutions (and related) which had not been commercially published. Of note, there were over twice as many grey documents than academic, a further justification of the inclusion of grey literature in this area.

Key words

The summative content analysis, focussing on key words, formed part of the initial answer to the first research aim. 'Mother' or 'baby' was referred to in all grey and academic documents and 'separation' in all academic and nearly all grey documents (27 of 29).

'Attachment' was referred to in 5 of the 11 academic documents. All of the documents in the 'Psychology/psychotherapy' category discussed attachment theory in detail. There was one passing reference to attachment theory in the 'Psychiatry/medical' category and none in the 'Nursing/midwifery' category. For the grey literature, 'attachment' was referred to in all the grey document categories but proportionately most often in the 'Third

sector - practice' documents (5/8) and least often in the 'Third sector-policy' documents (1/11). It was referred to in just under half of the 'Academic' and 'Group' categories.

Themes

Themes were developed through coding the data extracts (extracted through the key word search), and re-coding once all extracts had been examined. The difference in themes between the academic and grey literature is in itself notable and reflects their perspectives. Firstly a general overview is given, followed by a brief look at each document category and a synthesis across the literatures.

In the academic literature, 'Attachment theory' and 'Separation' were the main themes and umbrella themes, which linked the subthemes, capturing the broad spectrum of theory and findings. A third category 'Research findings' was included to provide an overview of the type of research carried out, and whether there were any implications for intervention and/or any direct quotes from women's experiences.

In the grey literature, the two main themes: 'Impact' and 'Practice', were umbrella themes which linked the subthemes and appeared across all groups of documents. These themes captured the main points around separation – how it affects mothers and what can be done. Both themes mainly focused on mothers, however, reference was also made to children and staff.

Academic categories

1) Psychology/Psychotherapy

This category covered three publications concerning the ‘New Beginnings’⁶ programme and one theoretical review in a special edition on incarcerated parents.⁷

Given the background and the journals in which this work was published it is not surprising that these four documents used attachment theory extensively. They considered the impact on the child and the mother of separations from a theory-informed perspective, and also considered the impact of the prison setting and the relevant policies. In terms of the research presented it was solely from the RCT of the intervention ‘New Beginnings’, an attachment informed intervention.

See Table 1.

The variety of references to attachment theory are extensive despite the limited focus of the documents: the theory paper only used attachment theory in relation to children, and the ‘New Beginnings’ trial was specific to the intervention which only involved women in MBUs.

There was reference to the mothers’ own attachment histories as ‘highly traumatic’ and the role of the prison environment:

Many troubling aspects of the mothers’ histories are activated by the prison environment, thereby creating major problems for the establishment of care-giving bonds. (Baradon & Target, 2010:73)

This focus on the mother was also highlighted in the importance of the first few months as a sensitive period for both mother and child, something rarely mentioned in the rest of the academic literature, the grey literature or policy documents.

⁶ ‘New Beginnings’ is a 12 session programme for incarcerated mothers in prison MBUs. For more information see: <http://www.annafreud.org/training-research/research/understanding-mental-health-and-resilience/new-beginnings/>

⁷ The journals were *Attachment and Human Development* and the *Journal of Child Psychotherapy*, (plus one book).

Separation is described as a ‘painful issue’ evoking ‘enormous anxiety’ and the result of the process in MBUs is pointed out:

For example, some mothers on the MBU’s will be separated from their infants later on and, without adequate preparation, may become gradually less engaged with their baby as the time of separation draws nearer (Sleed et al., 2013:13).

This reference to the role of the prison in preparing women for separation is also highlighted in an awareness of the impact on staff:

Forced separations of mothers and their babies is a controversial and painful issue within the prison system and often evokes strong responses not only in the inmates but also in MBU staff (Baradon, Fonagy, Bland, Lenard, & Sleed, 2008:244).

The first year after birth was also seen as a ‘window of opportunity’ as mothers ‘are particularly open to change.’

2) Psychiatry/Medical

This category included two reports of the only pieces of mental health research on imprisoned mothers in the UK, one a public health research study on imprisoned women and the other a discussion paper.⁸

See Table 2.

As the table shows, there was only one reference to attachment theory (Fonagy, Target, Steele, & Steele, 1997), and this was in reference to child outcomes and was not recent. However, there were repeated references to separation and its impact, plus the only mention of reunification.

⁸ These were published in: *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology*, *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* and the *British Medical Journal*.

The clinical research into mental health outcomes highlighted the difference between separated and non-separated mothers. These supported all the observations in the practice literature and inspectorate reports in the policy review:

The separation of these mothers and children may contribute to or exacerbate the women's existing mental health problems and increase the negative effects on the child's current and future mental health (Gregoire et al., 2010:390).

Furthermore, it was found that on post-release follow-up, separated mothers were more likely to be unemployed and homeless, and less likely to have care of their children (Dolan et al., 2013). There was also a gendered analysis of the impact of separation on female prisoners:

Separation from family, especially children, adversely affects the mental health of female prisoners and is implicated in why women are more likely to break the rules in prison than men (Douglas, Plugge, & Fitzpatrick, 2009:10).

This consideration of the context was extended to consider sentencing:

Greater use could also be made of community sentences in order to prevent separation occurring (Dolan et al., 2013:435).

And post-release support:

The small number of separated mothers who subsequently had care of their children suggests that more needs to be done to help these women reunite successfully with their children on release (Dolan et al., 2013:435).

The public health research also included a vivid quote on separation by a mother:

'That's a pain that no pain relief – no painkiller can kill'. (Douglas et al., 2010:6)

3) Nursing/Midwifery

This category included three publications, two research reviews and one report of a prison-based support service for pregnant women.⁹ These publications were focussed very much on services for pregnant women in prison.

See Table 3.

Whilst there were no references to attachment there were many references to separation, highlighting the impact on mental health. Separation is described as causing depression and anxiety and fills the women with ‘dread’. There are first person quotes on the experience which include: ‘Words just can’t describe how bad it hurts’ (Wismount, 2000 in Shaw, Downe, & Kingdon, 2015:1459) and also: ‘it is a separation anxiety that you go through.’ (Chambers, 2009 in Shaw et al., 2015:1459).

There is reflection on the: ‘more serious consequences for foreign nationals who face the added stress of not being in the same country as their children’ (Foley & Papadopoulos, 2013:558). This is a rare acknowledgement on the diversity of experience within imprisoned mothers. The role of staff in mitigating the trauma of separation for women is highlighted: ‘The attitudes and actions of prison and maternity care staff can reduce or increase this sense of trauma’ (Shaw et al., 2015:1459).

Grey literature categories

1) Third sector – practice

The ‘Third sector- practice’ category covered a range of organisational publications, including Women in Prison, Barnardo’s, PACT, Together UK and NSPCC.¹⁰ Understandably

⁹ They were published in the *British Journal of Midwifery* and the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*.

the focus varied depending on whether the organisation itself is mother or child focussed, however, child-centred organisations also acknowledged the impact on mothers in their work.

See Table 4 for totals.

What is initially striking from the totals above is that the themes focus far more on the mother, both impact and support, than the child or the staff. The ‘Staff’ codes were two specific suggestions for trainings rather than any mention of the emotional impact, and the focus in general was very much on the mothers’ needs – both what works and what could be done.

The emotional impact on the mother was explored in detail with vivid language and ranged from ‘worries and fears’ to ‘feelings of isolation and powerlessness’ and ‘severe mental and emotional distress’. It is interesting that it was only in this practice category which had the most complex descriptions of the impact, including detailed awareness of the impact on mental health and this ranged from general references to ‘maternal mental health’ to more specific ones to suicide, self-harm, post-natal depression and post-natal psychosis. This awareness was also reflected in the suggestions for support for mothers which were mainly emotional and psychological:

Perinatal health care services and prisons should ensure that parents, and in particular, mothers who are separated from their babies are provided with multi-agency follow up support packages, with a specific focus on postnatal psychological wellbeing (Galloway, Haynes, & Cuthbert, 2014:39).

This quotation highlights the complexity of the support required (‘multi-agency’), and that it needs specifically to be concerned with ‘postnatal psychological wellbeing’. This focus on

¹⁰ These are two prison-focussed charities, two child-focussed charities and one mental health organisation. PACT’s publication was specifically written for mothers in prison by mothers in prison.

the psychological impact was also reflected in discussions on attachment and separation. There was an emphasis on the impact of separation with descriptions such as ‘desperate loss’ and the ‘emotional trauma of separation’ but also with nods to attachment theory in some instances e.g.: ‘the CJS [Criminal Justice System] itself disrupts family relationships so that parent or carer-infant bonding is affected’ (Raikes, 2009).

In some documents there was also a sophisticated use of attachment theory, although primarily used from a child’s perspective. These discussions covered how insecure attachment relates to disrupted relationships and future outcomes, in relation to children. In one extract there was explicit reference to how the mothers themselves are likely to have insecure attachments (Women in Prison, 2013).

2) *Third sector – policy*

The ‘Third sector – policy’ category covered documents from: Prison Reform Trust, Fawcett Society, Howard League, World Health Organisation (WHO) and Penal Reform International (PRI).¹¹ Most of the codes related to the theme ‘impact on mother’ when separation was referred to.

See Table 5 for details.

The documents in this policy category tended to be general, referring to women in prison, rather than specifically referring to imprisoned mothers of infants. They included direct quotes from imprisoned mothers and nearly all the extracts concerned the emotional impact of separation. These were described in vivid terms such as: ‘traumatic and lasting effect’, ‘great distress’, ‘emotional trauma’ ‘state of shock’ and the impact was compared to the ‘trauma of bereavement’.

¹¹ WHO and PRI are international organisations, however, the reports used had direct relevance to the UK context.

The impact of separation included references to mental health, life on release and family networks, and was mostly referred to in terms of trauma and directly related to the impact of imprisoning women:

Until more women are diverted from prison the levels of self harm, mental illness, and the long-term effects of the separation of children from their mothers will continue (Fawcett Commission, 2009:9).

There was a first-person description of self-harm as a result of separation and in another extract self-harm was described as a means of coping. There was only one direct reference to attachment, this referenced up to date research, however, it was only mentioned in relation to the impact of children.

3) Academic

Whilst it may seem odd to have an ‘academic’ category for grey literature, there is a body of work that is not published commercially by academic institutions. There were relevant works concerning mother-child separations in prison, including a key work cited by many others (Albertson, O’Keeffe, Lessing-Turner, Burke, & Renfrew, 2012). The institutions whose work was found through the review were: Huddersfield University, Sheffield Hallam University, Halsbury’s Law Exchange and the Separation and Reunion Forum. Most of the codes in this category focussed on the impact on the mother.

See Table 6 for details.

The documents in this category only discussed the impact on mother, there were no references to the impact on children, and the language used was far less emotive, for example: ‘anxiety’, ‘disruptive’ and ‘negative impact’, except when drawn directly from interviews, e.g. ‘devastating pain’. However, direct separation experiences were theorised, which was not the case in any of the third sector documents:

It is therefore anticipated that, when this dyad are separated, the mother will be preoccupied with anxieties and concerns about her children and engulfed in emotional turmoil. It is this narrative structure that underpins the narrative of the wounded mother (Lockwood, 2013).

There were a couple of aspects mentioned that were not highlighted in other categories. There was a detailed reference to ‘problematic behaviour’ in prison that highlighted this was due to stress caused by separation (Raikes, 2009). There was also a description of the guilt induced by mothers by separation from their child and the resultant lack of opportunities to engage with it (Raikes, 2009). There was one extract which could not be categorised which highlighted that prison uses separation from children as part of punishment (Arnold, 2012).

There were many examples of good practice and in general reference was made to research findings more than in the third sector work. In one example, up to date attachment research was cited (Byrne et al, 2012), however, attachment tended to be directly referred to more generally, particularly in terms of opportunities for mothers to bond and attach.

4) Group

This category was for documents produced by groups which included charities, NGOs, government departments and academic institutions. There was a wide range of perspectives and they included academic, legal, policy and practice. Not one of the documents was specifically about separation from children for female prisoners, they were either about vulnerable women more generally, women in the criminal justice system, or reviewing parenting programmes across the prison estate. The codes extracted were focussed on the mother, except one, and equally divided between support and impact.

See Table 7 for details.

The 'impact' theme covered separation as traumatic and described a range of emotions, particularly grief. Self-harm was also highlighted as particularly likely after separation. An especially powerful quote was from Sheila Kitzinger calling separation 'another form of violence against women and an abuse of children' (McNeish & Scott, 2014:26). This was the only example in any document which linked separation to systemic violence.

Extracts in the 'practice' theme were very practical, with positive practices highlighted, particularly around preparation and family support. The sole reference to attachment was in relation to children who undergo several changes of fostering placements as a result of separation. No research was cited in this instance.

Use of attachment theory

The concept of attachment is very much in the general discourse of parenting and bonding, with the idea of disrupted attachment having negative consequences for children being very present in current discourse. This idea underlies the use of attachment theory in prison policy (Prison Service Order 4801, 2008). The practice category of grey literature had the most references to attachment which suggests practitioners in the field find it a useful concept. It was also highlighted in the academic literature in the psychology/psychotherapy category with reference to a prison-based intervention. Although the women in this intervention had not been separated, attachment theory was used to discuss the impact of separation on women.

Whilst most references to attachment were in relation to children, as in the policy review, there was acknowledgement in the academic literature and particularly in the grey literature, that the mothers are likely to have problematic attachment histories too. Entire grey

report sections were titled ‘Attachment and separation’ and there was repeated description of the extensive trauma it causes to women, as well as more specific details of the impact on their mental health, especially with regards to self-harm and suicide.

When attachment was referred to as a general concept, this was in the grey literature (and the policy) and was often non-referenced. However, relevant and recent research was cited far more often in the grey literature than in the policy review. In fact, in the grey literature there was a relatively sophisticated understanding of the impact but it could be developed further in most cases, particularly in relation to citing research and theory.

In terms of the academic review, the psychiatric, medical, nursing and midwifery literatures did mention the emotional impact of separation on mothers, this was not theorised psychologically or otherwise, and no specific interventions or practice were suggested. Attachment was not mentioned, but diagnoses were, and whilst this doubtless reflects discipline differences, the one reference in the psychiatric literature was nearly ten years old.

The grey literature also highlighted that the policy focus on ‘best age of separation’, which does imply use of attachment theory, is not based on attachment research and furthermore is legally arbitrary, and therefore can be challenged.

Thus attachment theory appears to be the basis for MBU policy (and by extension mother-child separations in prison), however, this is not systematically reflected in the literature. Both attachment and separation were referred to, across all literatures in terms of the emotional impact on women, but these were generally untheorized and not translated into practice.

Discussion

It is acknowledged across multiple literatures over an eight-year time frame that separation from infants has a serious impact on imprisoned mothers. Whilst this review can make no claim to being completely systematic, given the nature of grey literature, it provides a broad overview of work in the area. The diverse body of work encompassed reports and publications with a variety of aims, audiences and authors; however, it seemed to incorporate a wide selection of policy and academic work, as well as first person testimony and practice. It is clear from this review, and the wider literature, that women separated from their children have worse mental health than women who are not separated. Separation was described as having a clear negative emotional impact both in the words of women interviewed and in descriptions. Different descriptions were used, according to the type of literature, from the ‘trauma of separation’ to mental health diagnoses and very emotive descriptions, nevertheless the impact described was the same.

However, what was really lacking in general across the literatures (apart from those mentioned) were specific interventions and practice to mitigate this impact on women in prison. There were references to ‘preparation’ and ‘support’, and the example given most often was counselling. However, there was no discussion of what form this might take or how different women serving different sentences might benefit (or not). The impact of separation was made evident in the literature with reference to diversion from prison as a way of avoiding separation. However, community sentences can also act as a ‘back door’ into custody, as Hedderman and Barnes (2015:113) explain. If structures are not available to enable female participation in community sentencing, then their failure to carry this out leads to a custodial sentence as punishment. This problem and the issue of ‘uptariffing’, when women are given prison sentences to enable them to access support services (see Gelsthorpe & Sharpe, 2015), mean that more women end up in prison, separated from their children, despite efforts to avoid this or attempts for them to access support. This important subject

area requires its own focus (see Prison Reform Trust, 2015a, and Epstein, 2012, for further details).

Staff needs were occasionally acknowledged but generally overlooked, and again very little specificity in terms of what might be supportive. There were some hints at the complexity of staff responses – one grey report analysed so-called ‘problematic behaviours’ of prisoners as a response to separation. These were highlighted in inspectorate reports as the kind of behaviours that attract harsh punishment without staff understanding the causes. However, despite being highlighted, this has not been translated into anything practical for staff to use. It is troubling to consider that the effects of separation are further punished by staff and this requires further investigation.

If policy is going to draw on psychological theory (in this case attachment theory), and a psychological theory that practitioners appear to find useful (as reflected in the grey literature), then this needs to be reflected in the literature and this theory could probably be used in interventions to mitigate the harms caused by the policy in use. Indeed, since this review was completed, the first book aimed at practitioners working with mothers in the criminal justice system has been published (Baldwin, 2015), and attachment is taken into account by a range of practitioners. The book highlights examples of good practice but there is further scope to consider how to use attachment theory for working with women and reflecting on the impact on practitioners.

Strengths and Limitations

Given the date range, some of the key work in the area was excluded (e.g. Edge, 2006), however, these particular works were referred to in the more recent documents. Involvement from a prisoner or prison worker would have added critical reflections on the literature (e.g. Sweeney, Beresford, Faulkner, Nettle, & Rose, 2009). However, there were direct quotations

from women who had been separated from their infants which added more detail to the impact of the experience of separation. Whilst the focus on the UK kept the review directly relevant to the policy, a review of international literature might have added some further insights around the use of attachment theory in prison policy and practice.

Implications and recommendations

This review adds further support to the idea that using attachment theory to inform practice around mother child separations in prisons would be of theoretical use. The scale of references to attachment, even as a general rather than a scientific concept, highlight its popularity across a range of organisations working directly with women in this situation. Whilst this is not to suggest it should be used uncritically, it could add some theoretically informed and specific suggestions to support women who are being affected by separation and the staff who work with them. More broadly, an attachment informed perspective could inform sentencing practice (and its consequences) when considering the impact on women as a result of separation. The review of grey literature suggests that this is a resource that should be drawn on further to inform practice and training, and that the academic literature needs to be made more widely available to practitioners. Combining an attachment perspective and use of the grey literature may help in designing training and addressing punitive attitudes.

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