

Final Report

Evaluation of NEPACS Early Days in Custody



'Spring Flowers'
Acrylics
Kath (released from HMP Low Newton 2019)

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the men and women in prison, and their families who have contributed to this evaluation. Your involvement is key to our collective efforts to bring about change.

We would also like to thank Emma Price and the NEPACS Early Days in Custody family support team for helping us complete the research, and for all that you do to support men and women in prison.

Foreword

I have visited dozens of prisons since 2016 when the Ministry of Justice first asked me to recommend how jails could strengthen prisoners' family ties, to prevent reoffending and intergenerational crime.

However, it was not until I visited HMP Durham (and HMP Low Newton) with NEPACS Early Days in Custody (EDiC) staff in 2022 that I became acutely aware just how much newly incarcerated men and women need the work evaluated in this report. The move into prison is a traumatic and frightening time for any prisoner, whether male or female. How those early days are conducted will set the tone for a journey which it is in everyone's interest to end well – and with no return.

However, if on reception and in the early days there is no working structure that inducts the prisoner, ensures they have the basics of life and connects them with their most important relationships, they will not settle into their cell and prison life more generally, but be gripped by fear and uncertainty. HMP Durham was the first reception prison I had visited, with a high turnover of population and prisoners constantly arriving from court. So men are daily needing help with the small details that matter so much like, 'when will I be able to get reading glasses, change my underwear and speak to my mum?' There needs to be a structure that reliably meets these needs at the start of the prison journey to allay fears, quell panic and bring stability.

Life expectations are often changing dramatically in the first few hours. By connecting them quickly with their families, EDiC Family Support Workers give men a reason to hang onto hope and come to terms with their new situation. A frightening number do not make it past the first few days: a third of all prison suicides occur within the first week in custody. The severing of relationships or a breakdown in communication can play a decisive role in that tragedy. But looking further down the line, EDiC enables prisoners to move on from a 'shellshocked' state and begin to understand the mysterious processes of prison so they settle in and serve their sentence in a way that is far more conducive to their rehabilitation.

Most women in prison are mothers, some enter prison without making arrangements for dependent children and are frantic with concern about their welfare. We also met women in HMP Low Newton who were so ashamed of where they were that they couldn't bring themselves to let their adult children know. Yet without their and other family members' support they lived out the first days and weeks in a maelstrom of anxiety and fear.

Undoubtedly many prisoners have very complex relationships back home which custody multiplies. EDiC Family Support Workers help to unravel some of that,

and to bridge the gaps when communication breaks down between the prison and prisoners' relatives. When we walked the landings with the EDiC Family Support Worker in HMP Durham, she was constantly bombarded with requests to pass information to family and a lot of grateful thanks for successfully making contact. As one prisoner said, 'In a bad world (the EDiC Family Support Worker) is a shining light'. Upon arrival in prison men and women need to know someone cares – prison should not be an emotional desert: the withdrawal of liberty is the punishment.

I was particularly struck by this report's recommendation that NEPACS train Prison Information Desk (PID) workers on induction wings so they can become EDiC peer mentors. They would then be able to interact skilfully, in a relational and meaningful way, with new prisoners and answer their basic questions. This would free up EDiC Family Support Workers to do more complex work with specific individuals and connect them to the people outside who matter to them.

Involving peers enables work like this to be sustainable and scaled up: and is an important growth area for all prisons to consider. A lifer I met in one prison, with a very long sentence ahead of him, had become a peer mentor, a mediator trained to resolve conflict on his wing. He now sees his lengthy sentence as an extended opportunity to make a difference. Everyone needs a sense of purpose in their lives, that is no less true for our prison population.

Inspired by NEPACS work, in a post-covid addendum to the initial two reports I wrote for the Ministry of Justice I recommended:

Each prison to audit, and improve where necessary, provision for first night and early days in custody, when basic needs, including for family contact, are often currently going unmet. This should include a focus on how well they are deploying peer support to increase prisoners' ability to take responsibility for their own lives and contribute to the wellbeing of others during this period. Each prison to consider if they are sufficiently harnessing the potential of peers to make a difference across the whole of prison life.

I want to thank NEPACS for paving the way and to Durham University for their evaluation of the EDiC project. The themes and recommendations from this study need to be carefully considered by HMPPS and senior leaders in individual prisons. I expect them to contribute much to the ongoing and much-needed reform of our prison system.

Lord Farmer
September, 2023

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Dr Christina Straub and Dr Kate O'Brien

Criminal Justice, Social Harms and Inequalities Research Group

Department of Sociology, Durham University

Corresponding author kate.o'brien@durham.ac.uk

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Executive Summary

The Early Days in Custody (EDiC) project is a prison-based crisis intervention delivered by NEPACS providing targeted support to prisoners and family members during the critical first two weeks of custody.

The aim is to prevent (or soften) the shock of entering custody, and to avoid an escalation of negative emotions into further problems including self-harm and suicide. EDiC was established as a pilot project in response to specific concerns from prisoners, family members and some prison staff about high numbers of men and

women in custody reporting distress and exhibiting risky behaviours during their time on induction wings. Funded by The Big Lottery Community Fund, the EDiC project was delivered in HMP Durham and HMP Low Newton between April 2020 – June 2023. The funding paid for one full-time family support worker (FSW) at HMP Durham and a part-time FSW at HMP Low Newton. The EDiC project was externally evaluated using a mixed methods approach and ran alongside delivery of the service.

Main Findings

- EDiC caters specifically to prisoners' needs during their first two weeks in custody; a high-risk period for self-harm and suicide. Prisoner's needs can differ from individual to individual, depending on whether they are male or female, their mental health, if they have caring responsibilities, or if it is their first time in custody or returning to prison.
- Often acting as a conduit between prison departments and individual prisoners, EDiC FSWs are uniquely positioned to accelerate organisational and bureaucratic procedures, such as organising clothes, helping to locate personal phone numbers, dealing with unpaid bills and benefit claims, sorting out emergency child-care arrangements, booking first visits, and locating items such as vapes and reading glasses.
- Focusing on maintaining, or in some cases establishing, positive relationships with outside loved ones, EDiC FSWs help prisoners find reasons for living, to cope with life in prison, and to move forward.
- EDiC supports prisoners' transition from being 'shell-shocked' to understanding, coping, and engaging with prison regimes further down the line. They help to stabilise them, before they move on to other prisons or wings. This takes pressure off prison staff and helps keep vulnerable men and women safe.
- EDiC's work within the prison-based ACCT (Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork) processes is crucial in enhancing mental-health support for suicidal and self-harming prisoners during their first two weeks in custody.
- The circumstances of incarcerated women, the majority of whom are mothers, are diverse and complex and require specialist support in the early days of custody. The early days in custody are a high-risk period for self-harm and suicide, especially for mothers who are detoxing during this critical period. The EDiC FSW provides a vital role in supporting women, and particularly mothers, and signposting them on to support elsewhere in the prison.

- EDiC FSWs manage complex familial situations. They fulfil an important safeguarding role; working with Safer Custody and outside agencies to keep those inside and outside (e.g., children) safe. Their immediate access to families and partners outside and those inside is unique and crucial to updating safeguarding and safety information.
- EDiC FSWs are often perceived by outside families as the only 'lifeline' during the first few days in custody, bridging the gap between the inside and outside. In times of acute communication breakdown between the prison and relatives of prisoners, the EDiC FSW is vital. Providing information about loved ones inside the prison eases distress, anxiety, and feelings of powerlessness and isolation for family members. To our knowledge, there is currently no other service or any other route for those outside to get in touch with someone inside prison, unless prisoners (or staff) make outgoing phone calls. Being able to get in touch with the EDiC FSW who is based in the prison, and able to access prisoners and pass on information quickly is both vital and unique.

Recommendations

1

Specialist crisis support aimed at prisoners and their families during the first two weeks of custody should be commissioned across the prison estate in England and Wales and included as an essential core service.

This should be achieved via inclusion in long-term core funding streams such as the MOJ 'Family and Significant Others' contract and contribute to HMPPS 'Reducing Reoffending' strategy. The intervention should be delivered by experienced family support workers. The EDiC project offers a clear and workable model for such a specialist intervention. We therefore recommend that:

- EDiC should be part of a long-term, structured, holistic **wrap-around service** delivered cooperatively by relevant prison departments and outside agencies (e.g. social services, local councils, other third sector organisations). This may require an initial **mapping exercise** to identify and develop relationships with external agencies.
- Provision and resourcing of EDiC must be **tailored to the particular needs of the prison**. Reception prisons like HMP Durham, for example, are characterised by a very high turn-over of prison population so induction wings are extremely busy and demands on EDiC FSWs are high. Women's prisons like HMP Low Newton have significantly less churn but women's needs in the early days tend to be more complex than men's, placing different pressures on EDiC FSWs. Thus, the size of the EDiC team and the skills of its staff members, need to match the profile of the prison so that workloads can be managed, and appropriate support can be provided.
- The EDiC team should be located within or close to **induction wings** and be embedded within a multi-agency partnership structure alongside other relevant departments (Safer Custody, senior management teams, chaplaincy team, Drug and Alcohol Recovery Team, mental health and other FSWs).
- EDiC FSWs shoulder a heavy workload and deal with high-intensity situations and emotions. To ensure physical and psychological well-being and integrity, it is necessary to allocate funding for EDiC FSWs to receive regular **supervision, training, and support**.

2

EDiC FSWs are vital to the success of the service. Once established, they are highly skilled and knowledgeable. Ensuring that the EDiC FSW's skills and specialist knowledge are captured and retained is critical.

- i) NEPACS should explore how EDiC FSWs can be involved in cascading individual knowledge and skills to others via training resources, (potentially co-produced with Prison Information Desk (PID) workers located on induction wings).
- ii) NEPACS should explore how EDiC FSWs can train PID workers located in induction wings to be EDiC peer mentors; to undertake brief intervention work and respond to basic questions from prisoners when they first come into prison. This would free up time for EDiC FSWs to do more complex work with specific prisoners in need and to fulfil their role as a vital conduit between prisoners and their loved ones.

3

The early days in custody are a high-risk period for self-harm and suicide amongst women, especially mothers. The EDiC FSW therefore, should link up with other family support workers to signpost and ensure swift and appropriate support to mothers after entry into custody.

- i) The EDiC FSW role should be extended to a full-time position in HMP Low Newton and other women's prisons in England in order to deliver complex and time-consuming case-work.
- ii) The EDiC FSW should receive training to work in a trauma-informed way to enable them to support women with complex emotional and mental health issues and where appropriate, refer them on to other specialist services in the prison.

4

We recognise that operational staff shortages are negatively impacting all prisons in England and Wales, however, for EDiC to work most efficiently, it is critical that adequate numbers of prison staff are deployed in induction wings to run as close to full regimes as possible.

- i) Clear demarcation lines should be established between responsibilities of EDiC and other prison staff to avoid duplicating work or burdening EDiC staff with responsibilities beyond their remit.
- ii) Induction wing processes should be structured in a way that mitigates against prisoner distress, self-injury and suicidality.
- iii) Association time should be prioritised, alongside providing men and women with meaningful activities.
- iv) Men and women should not be locked behind their door for extended periods. Doing so can have significant negative impacts on physical and mental health, and wellbeing.

5

There is a need to think about how EDiC could engage more inclusively with Black and minoritised prisoners.

- i) At HMP Durham leaflets are already available in other languages, but a more proactive and culturally aware strategy should be explored. This may require additional resources to provide more appropriate support to Black and minoritised prisoners, diversify the staff team, and cater for cultural barriers. At HMP Low Newton, important lessons can be learned from studies that have explored the specific issues facing Muslim women which highlight, for example, that a lack of family contact can be linked to shame and cultural ideas of tainting family honour (Muslim Hands 2018; see Buncy and Ahmed 2014; 2018).



Introduction

“
We're directly above the Reception Unit and we can hear the prisoners banging away, some of them as they come in, and making noises and it's very, very traumatic for a lot of them, especially prisoners who are not used to the environment. The first days are the crucial days, that's the days that make a difference.

HMP Durham, Staff Interview 6

“
I fell to me knees when I found out I was coming in. I thought it was all a dream. I just couldn't believe it.

Melanie at HMP Low Newton

“
Me head was chocka when I first came in. I wasn't planning on getting in touch with anyone. I don't know what I was going to do, to be honest. It was just too much, I just couldn't cope.

Derek at HMP Durham

As of March 2023, 84,372 people were detained in prisons in England and Wales, approximately 4% were women.

The number of people being given a custodial sentence for the first time is increasing – between October and December 2022, there were 16,422 first receptions into prison, a rise of 9% compared to the same period in 2021 (Ministry of Justice 2023). The first few days and weeks in prison can bring unimaginable upheaval for prisoners, family members and loved ones on the outside. Adjusting to the prison environment can be traumatic and extremely distressing, especially for those with past traumas and pre-existing mental health issues. As then Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice, Robert Buckland emphasised during his speech at the Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) on Deaths in Custody *Keeping Safe* conference, “the period after entry to custody – including on recall – is one of particularly high risk” (Buckland 2020).

The EDiC project was established by NEPACS, a voluntary sector organisation based in the Northeast of England, to provide a crisis support intervention for prisoners and their families during this critical period in a prisoner's journey. It was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. This report presents findings of an external evaluation of the EDiC project which ran alongside delivery of the intervention in HMP Durham and HMP Low Newton between March 2020 to June 2023. The research engaged with a racially

diverse sample of 97 prisoners, 29 of them women, and was undertaken by Dr Kate O'Brien¹ and Dr Christina Straub², based in the Department of Sociology, Durham University. The report makes a number of recommendations and provides HMPPS with an evidence base from which to strengthen and roll out the EDiC project across the prison estate in England and Wales, providing specialist crisis support for prisoners, loved ones and families during the first days in custody.

In the first sections of this report, we provide details of NEPACS, the EDiC project and how it was delivered, before moving on to outline the policy landscape and presenting a review of relevant academic literature. Here, we examine the connections between family support and prisoner well-being and review evidence related to prison-based suicide and self-harm prevention, especially during the early days of imprisonment. We also examine relevant literature that highlights the specific issues faced by women prisoners, many of whom are mothers and primary caregivers. We then present an overview of our research design before introducing our research findings in the two establishments where the EDiC project was delivered – HMP Durham and HMP Low Newton, both located in the Northeast of England. We embed our recommendations throughout the findings section, including those we deem important for NEPACS to consider as the organisation learns from, and builds upon the outcomes of 36 months delivering the EDiC project.

NEPACS

NEPACS has been delivering services to prisoners and their families since 1882. It is an organisation that has always been dedicated to strengthening ties between prisoners, their family members and the community.

Their support of those inside and outside of prisons aims to reduce the negative (secondary) effects and stigma of imprisonment and to aid rehabilitation. NEPACS support workers and volunteers aim to create positive environments during prison visits, support and relieve personal and financial hardship of those left behind by someone serving a prison sentence (e.g. through a family holiday scheme or NEPACS grants) and to raise public awareness of the effects of imprisonment on families and children. NEPACS provide a free telephone helpline to anyone needing support around the imprisonment of a loved one. They also provide support at court to families and partners of someone going through a trial and support before and during prison visits. They arrange special family visits, parent/child visits, new dad or first dad visits, homework clubs, parental focus groups and release preparation programmes. FSWs at dedicated prison establishments help to navigate and soften the often-devastating ripple effects on families and children affected by secondary imprisonment. One of their standout programmes of work is the Parental Rights Project. Working primarily with mothers, the project supports parents who have children in care, or going through care proceedings, and provides them with legal advice and support around their rights as parents. They deliver a care leavers project at HMP YO1 Deerbolt which provides pre- and post-release support to young adults with experience of the care system.³

Early Days in Custody Project

The EDiC project was established as pilot project in response to specific concerns from prisoners, family members and some prison staff about high numbers of men and women in custody reporting distress and exhibiting behaviours endangering their physical and mental well-being during their time on induction wings.

In March 2019, men at HMP Durham were surveyed by NEPACS and asked about their most pressing issues during the first two weeks of custody. Respondents predominantly mentioned the mental health impacts (stress) of having no contact with loved ones, especially when family members were going through challenges themselves (e.g., pregnancy, illness). They worried most about not being able to provide emotional and financial support to their families (NEPACS 2019). A complimentary engagement event for families was delivered by NEPACS in early 2020. Visitors Voices provided family members with the opportunity to share their views and concerns on service provision. The key concerns raised by family members at this event were about a lack of information sharing and action, and a lack of response from prison staff when concerns were raised (NEPACS 2020).

Based on preliminary findings from these events the EDiC project was envisioned as crisis intervention designed to provide targeted support to prisoners and family members, with a view to prevent (or soften) the shock of entering custody, and to prevent an escalation of negative emotions into further problems including self-harm and suicide. It was conceived as an intervention that would plug a critical gap in prison-based support; helping

¹ Dr Kate O'Brien is co-director of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Project at Durham University and has been delivering the programme at HMP Durham since 2014, at HMP Frankland since 2015, and HMP Low Newton since 2016. She co-facilitates Think Tanks at HMP Frankland and Low Newton and led on the evaluation of the HMPPS RSACC The Believed Project at HMP Low Newton. She is currently leading on the evaluation of the HMPPS NEPACS Parental Rights Programme and working with the NESWF on a Pathway 9 project with women in prison involved in sex work.

² Dr Christina Straub works as qualitative researcher in the Fields of criminology and Sociology. She currently supports Dr Kate Gooch (Department of Social and Policy Sciences at Bath University) in exploring serious harm and violence in the high-security prison estate in England and Wales. She previously worked as Senior Research Assistant together with Dr Harry Anison (University of Southampton) on a co-production project funded by the ESRC and the Prison Reform Trust on how relevant stakeholders can support families of people serving an IPP-sentence in England and Wales. She was furthermore involved as Research Assistant together with Prof Alison Lieblich and Helen Arnold in the production of a report on “Staff-Prisoner Relationships at HMP Whitemoor – 12 years on” (2011) on behalf of the UK Home Office.

³ Taken from NEPACS internal information leaflet for HMPPS partners (2022).



prisoners to quickly connect with their communities and loved ones on the outside and provide them with emotional and practical support. The EDiC project was launched in March 2020 and so commenced delivery during an extraordinary period of Covid19 related lockdown. The current funding round ended in June 2023. The funding paid for one full-time family support worker at HMP Durham and a part-time family support worker at HMP Low Newton. At HMP Durham, the EDiC FSW was based in an office located in the centre of the prison, along the same corridor as Safer Custody staff and close to the induction wing. The EDiC FSW at HMP Low Newton was based in the main corridor with close access to the induction wing.

Counteracting the ripple effect and impact of a prison sentence on families and loved ones on the outside, EDiC provides advice as well as emotional and practical support via a dedicated phone helpline. This includes establishing initial contact with loved ones, child contact and support around care proceedings, booking a first prison visit, and financial information and signposting. EDiC aims to reduce the negative impact of parental imprisonment on any dependent children, and so complements the goals of other interventions being delivered by NEPACS in the region. The EDiC project has been cited in recent HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) reports as best practice at both HMP Low Newton (HMIP 2022) and HMP Durham (HMIP 2021). At the time this report was written, EDiC complemented already established Family Engagement Services (FES) which generally operate as a casework service specialised on building and maintaining contact between prisoners and their families (Power 2021: 107).

EDiC is one of only a few projects in England and Wales providing a targeted family support intervention to men and women specifically during the first two weeks in custody. We discovered only a handful of similar interventions in the UK. For example, a “Family and Relationships First” culture has been adopted in the *Routes2Change* program, delivered by a team of the Prison Advice and Care Trust (PACT) in two London prisons – HMP Brixton and HMP YOI Isis.⁴ They, likewise, work with family members and significant others in the community and in custody offering prisoners support during their induction via a PACT Family Resettlement Practitioner. Support is tailored to individual needs and can be accessed throughout the sentence for up to six months after release.

Founded in 2014, *Children Heard and Seen*⁵ is a charity that provides support and interventions in the community for children with a parent in prison. They offer a range of one to one and online support to families nationwide, aimed at reducing negative emotional effects of parental imprisonment on children and co-parents in the community. It does not, however, involve direct contact or work with prison establishments. *Families Outside*⁶ is also a noteworthy charitable organisation, based in Scotland, as well as *Partners of Prisoners (POPs)*⁷ based in the Northwest of England. These organisations offer practical and emotional support to family members and loved ones affected by imprisonment. This is done, for example, by providing dedicated helplines, online support, booklets, or in-person support. Similar to NEPACS they also provide tools and training to those coming into contact with families affected by imprisonment to create awareness of issues and challenges they face. There are a handful of other, local projects and support groups across England and Wales that provide support to families⁸ affected by imprisonment. Setting itself apart from the services discussed above is NEPACS’ EDiC project, however, by specifically targeting the first two weeks in custody and offering a wrap-around service bridging the gap between the inside and outside of prison. EDiC acknowledges and prioritises relationships with loved ones, an area that has been the focus of academic and policy interest for a while, but which has recently gained even more traction.

⁴ prisonadvice.org.uk

⁵ childrenheardandseen.co.uk

⁶ familiesoutside.org.uk

⁷ see partnersofprisoners.co.uk

⁸ For example, Sussex Prisoners Families (see sussexprisonersfamilies.org.uk)

Policy and Academic Landscape: the Role of Family Contact in Mitigating the Risks and Pains of Early Days in Custody

In 2008, the then National Offender Management Service (NOMS), responded to a lack of focus in policy and practice on prisoners’ families and launched a ‘Children and Families Pathway’ identified as one of seven pathways crucial for reducing reoffending (Power 2021). PACT played a supporting role during the practical development of this pathway and identified the need for family support workers (FSWs) to be introduced into prisons (Power 2021). “Following a successful family focussed jointly run pilot at HMP Low Newton and the successful evaluation of PACT’s Integrated Family Support (IFS) programme in 2012, the development of family engagement work in prisons was pursued nationally” (Baldwin et al. 2022: 49). Public sector prisons have since been introducing Family Engagement Services (FES), contracted out to be provided by charities such as PACT or NEPACS. Private sector prisons have established Family Teams who deliver similar family support work (Baldwin et al. 2022).

In 2017, Lord Farmer’s landmark review of prisons, rehabilitation and reducing reoffending (2017), once again emphasised strengthening family ties as key to prison reform. The Farmer Review (2017) further stipulated that criminal justice agencies needed to work much closer with families to enhance resettlement outcomes. The review called for treating “good relationships with families and others on the outside ... as a much higher priority ... as a vital resource ... in the rehabilitation cause” (Farmer 2017: 4). Although, family engagement services had been set up in some establishments, there was still limited understanding of how prison-based family services worked (Power 2021) and the effects they have on prisoners and their families.

Describing the current state of prisoners’ family support provision in the UK, a recent Clinks report (2021) found that “eleven

voluntary sector organisations are commissioned by the Ministry of Justice to deliver family work across the prison estate, alongside other organisations who are predominantly funded by charitable trusts and foundations” (Clinks 2021: 4). Levels of funding that organisations can access vary significantly and this inevitably impacts on the quality of support on offer to families. Hucklesby and Corcoran (2016) furthermore recognise that a reduction in public spending has forced charities and other voluntary sector organisations to mainly rely on external (and often short-term, insecure) funding that – due to the introduction of a retendering process – has to be reapplied for on a regular basis. This, in turn, leaves some organisations in limbo and uncertainty, not knowing whether their service will continue beyond the next funding cycle. Precarious funding, in turn, makes it difficult for third sector organisations, such as NEPACS to offer and maintain consistent services. To relieve some of the financial pressure on third sector organisations, and echoing one of the recommendations of this evaluation, Baldwin et al. (2022) argued for FES in prisons to be permanently funded. Especially, family support work depends on consistency in staffing and income to establish trusted long-term relationships. These relationships have been identified as a key factor in successful family support work by Dominey et al. (2016) and Power (2021).

Power furthermore pointed toward the fact that family engagement/support services in public prisons are being outsourced to the voluntary sector rather than being delivered by HMPPS to reflect “a neoliberal principle of welfare state retraction... through public-private partnerships (Power 2021: 114; see also Whitehead and Crawshaw 2012). As part of a ‘responsibilization strategy’ (Garland 1996) this “transfers some

responsibilities from statutory organisations such as... the prison service to non-statutory organisations” (Power 2021: 114) such as the voluntary sector. This has led to a shift of core services (such as family support) - “which were once the state’s responsibility” (Hucklesby and Corcoran 2016: 4) - being delivered by charities or other voluntary organisations (Power 2021: 115).

In his follow-up Review for Women (2019), Lord Farmer underlined many of the key findings outlined by Baroness Corston in her landmark review of women in the criminal justice system (2007). Notably, the need to for a distinctly women-centred approach, and ‘a therapeutic environment’, with specialist staff and resources suited to meet women’s individual needs. Indeed, these are recommendations that continue to be flagged as important in current policy reviews on women and imprisonment, where emphasis is placed on embedding trauma-informed approaches in women’s prisons (The Female Offender Strategy, 2018; APPG, 2022; Prisons Strategy White Paper, 2021; and the forthcoming ‘Women’s Review’ 2023). Lord Farmer’s 2019 report also highlighted significant differences for men and women in relation to the importance of strengthening family ties. For women, their role as

primary carers was key, alongside women’s increased likelihood of having endured significant trauma, violence and abuse prior to prison entry. In acknowledging that “female offenders have often experienced abuse and trauma which can profoundly impact their ability to develop and sustain healthy, trusting relationships, trauma informed”, he set out key recommendations to address the importance of positive family members and healthy familial relationships as a “golden thread running through the criminal justice system” (Farmer 2019: 5).

The vital role of close, positive familial relationships has been attributed to their positive impact on an emotional and behavioural level, greatly influencing mental and physiological health and safety for those on the inside and outside of prison. Losing them can represent a critical loss in a person’s life, leading to profound negative emotional impacts. The pains of losing relationships with loved ones and family members have come to be regarded as one of the most severe pains of imprisonment.

1993; Giordano et al. 2002; Brunton-Smith and McCarthy 2016) who have been emphasising the importance of family and partner relationships for prisoners’ well-being and rehabilitation for decades. They point out the immense emotional pain caused by the loss of family or romantic relationships, identifying it as one of the most severe pains of imprisonment (Sykes 1958; Johnson and Toch 1982).

The physical separation and emotional trauma of imprisonment places significant strain on relationships, often heightening the risks of relational breakdown (Lynch and Sabol 2001; Lopoo and Western 2005). Someone currently serving a sentence in England or Wales is faced with a 45 per cent chance of losing contact with their family whilst inside (Clinks 2021). Losing (or severing) close outside relationships, however, can have negative consequences on prisoners’ mental well-being and sense of identity. For example, losing relationships with children - often regarded as a protective factor - can potentially lead to a “deterioration of the emotional security of prisoners during their sentence, as well as limiting the extent of social ties on release” (Brunton-Smith and McCarthy 2016: 2). In a similar vein, parent-child relationships have been found to impact on release transition outcomes such as employment, mental health, and refraining from substance use (Visher and Travis 2003). Sustaining parent-child relationships often helps to retain “a sense of connection with... pre-prison identities” (Datchi 2017: 64), offering an alternative identity to that of a prisoner (Paterline and Petersen 1999; Roy and Dyson 2005). Keeping their focus on a home and a life to return to after prison often helps incarcerated men and women to take care of their physical and mental well-being, as well as helping to manage the pressures of prison life (Naser and La Vigne 2006; Rocque et al. 2013). However, the pains of separation are felt not only by those serving a prison sentence but also by loved ones on the outside.

12

Loss of relationships as a pain of imprisonment

In 2017, the IAP learned from over 100 detailed letters and 50 transcribed telephone calls from prisoners across 60 prisons in the UK that the separation from their families was felt as “one of the hardest parts of being in custody” (IAP 2017: 32).

On the one hand, the loss of relationships with loved ones was viewed as a key factor in resorting to destructive coping mechanisms such as “violence, self-harm, suicide and the deterioration of mental health” (IAP 2017: 32). On the other hand, maintaining and developing them could help those in custody stave off feelings of isolation and depression (IAP 2017). This, and other recent reports (e.g. Hutton/Prison Reform Trust 2023, forthcoming) supported findings of criminological scholars such as Richards (1978), Flanagan (1980), Crewe et al. (2020) and others (e.g. Sampson and Laub

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Effects of imprisonment on families

Research by Murray (2005), Light and Campbell (2007), Scott and Codd (2010) and Minson (2019) amongst others, offer insights into some of the negative secondary effects of imprisonment.

Prisoners’ partners, children and extended families often find themselves on the receiving end of “social disapproval and hostility due to their affiliation with an offender” (Scott and Codd 2010: 145). Family members may also experience material struggles connected to the loss of income the incarcerated family member had provided (see Nugent, 2022). Around 312,000 children in England and Wales are separated from their parents by imprisonment each year, including an estimate of 17,000 children being separated from their mother (Kincaid et al. 2019; see also Minson 2019) of which a majority will have to leave their home to either be cared for by another family member or to enter the care system. Jardine points out that these and other social disadvantages can be profound and casts doubt “over the argument often made by policymakers that these families can or should act as a resource to promote desistance” (Jardine 2018: 114). While Jardine welcomes initiatives designed to improve the quality of family contact, she also pushes for appropriate support being made accessible to families that “limit the deleterious effects of imprisonment” (Jardine 2018: 112). In a similar vein, Kinkaid et al. (2019) point out the distinct needs of left behind families, who are struggling to come to terms not only with the loss of their loved ones but also with navigating a “heavily bureaucratic criminal justice system, often supporting their relatives ... with little to no support afforded to them” (Kinkaid et al. 2019: 4).⁹

⁹ It is important to acknowledge that not all families suffer only negative consequences over a loved one’s imprisonment. For example, women and children who are being subjected to domestic violence may well feel relief when an abusive partner is sent to prison.

For many families the emotional impact of secondary imprisonment impacts their lives and well-being negatively. It can express itself "in depression and anxiety in partners, and behavioural disturbances in children of an incarcerated parent" (Scott and Codd 2010: 147), triggered by traumatic experiences of loss and separation (Smith 2014). The first days of custodial sentence can be an especially anxious time for family members as uncertainty over their loved one's physical and psychological well-being is often a source of great anxiety and rumination (Clinks 2021). Many families find the "not knowing" and waiting to receive updates on their relative's whereabouts to be particularly stressful. Leaving additional difficulties created by Covid19-measures aside, communication between the inside and outside is often disrupted and patchy and can vary considerably from prison to prison. In a survey undertaken by HMIP between April 2019 and March 2020 over half of men (54 per cent) and a third of women in prison (29 per cent) stated that "they were not offered a free telephone call on their first night in custody" (HMIP 2020: 156).

Effects of love deprivation

The crucial element underpinning the importance and pain of losing family and partner relationships is the experience of love and belonging through those. Psychology scholars such as Rubin (1973) or Maslow (1987) regarded love as so essential to human life that they classed it as a human need.

Human needs occupy "a special psychological and biological status ... They must be satisfied or else we get sick" (Maslow 1987: 53). Consequently, the deprivation of love can induce severe mental and physiological stress resulting in dysfunctional coping mechanisms such as self-harm or psychopathologies, such as anxiety or depression. Being completely cut off from love "we feel and are endangered" (Parkes 2006: 2).

Especially a sudden and unexpected disconnection from loved ones represents a cause of severe stress to the human organism. Trauma – when defined as the sudden cessation of human interaction (Lindemann 1944) – can affect a person on a physical and psychological level. Neuroscientists explain this phenomenon by the fact that love must be understood as a "reciprocal physiologic influence" entailing "a deeper and more literal connection than most realize" (Lewis et al. 2000: 207). An "open-loop" design of the human nervous system means "that in some important ways, people cannot be stable on their own" (Lewis et al. 2000: 86). Love contributes to the neurophysiological stability of the human nervous system. In other words, human beings are dependent on each other for some of the most essential emotional and physiological processes to maintain mental well-being. Love seems to bestow a certain kind of stability without which the human organism loses its balance (Straub 2020). In the following we consider the negative effects of the loss of love and relationships on the mental health of men and women serving a prison sentence.

Suicide and self-harm in prison: a focus on men

In her research into suicides in men's prisons, Liebling (1999) argues that the trauma of losing close and loving outside relations can induce "intense fear and helplessness, sometimes overwhelming an individual's psychological coping mechanisms" (Liebling 1999: 321).

The first few weeks and months of a sentence may, in fact, be a time when relationships with family members and friends are needed the most to cope with overwhelming feelings of "anger, trauma and disorientation" (Crewe et al. 2019). Speaking to prisoners, the Harris Review (2015) into self-inflicted deaths of 18-24-year-old males in custody established that their respondents found it particularly hard to cope "during the first few days, when contact with the outside world was particularly limited, and yet feelings of fear and vulnerability were at their strongest" (Harris 2015: 101). A lack of contact with, and emotional support by loved ones during this time can leave people vulnerable to become a risk to others and particularly to themselves (Hutton, PRT forthcoming 2023; also see Hutton 2017).

Liebling (1995) points towards a heightened risk of suicide in the UK prison system that cannot be related solely to prisoners' imported vulnerabilities. A finding that male prisoners in England and Wales are "3.7 times more likely to die of suicide than the general population" (Office for National Statistics Online 2019) underscores the fact that some factors of the prison experience are deeply harmful. According to Liebling (1999: 311), "suicide and self-injury may constitute a response (or a 'solution') to painful feelings" such as "uncontrollability, helplessness, and powerlessness" (Liebling 1999: 319). These feelings are intrinsic to the prison experience and constitute reactions to a critical situation (Giddens 1979). Toch concluded that certain "features of the prison environment deprive – that is, adversely affect – inmates" (Toch 1982: 28). Johnson and Toch (1982) considered the prison environment as highly stressful. Potential responses to deprivations and stress can be physiological (e.g. high blood pressure) or psychosocial (e.g. self-medication through drug or alcohol use) (Toch 1982), self-harm, suicide, or feelings of anxiety, rage and a sense of impotence. These may in turn lead to psychological coping strategies defending against negative feelings which may in turn be diagnosed as mental health problems. Loucks (2012) and Codd (2008) point out that the immense emotional impact of the prison experience can increase the risk of suicide.

The early days of a custodial sentence are crucial for psychological and physical survival and so it is no surprise that risk of suicide for men is significantly higher in the early stages of imprisonment (Walker and Towl, 2016). The latest 12-month Safety in Custody statistics on deaths, self-harm and assaults in prison custody in England and Wales assert that "in 2021, one in ten self-inflicted deaths in custody occurred in the first week, whilst 20 per cent took place within the first 30 days" (Ministry of Justice 2023). This data "reflects a second year of Covid-19 restrictions" (Ministry of Justice 2023). 69 of 74 self-inflicted deaths in 2022 occurred in the male estate (down from 87 in 2021) and 5 in the female estate (up from 1 in 2021) and "35% of all self-inflicted deaths were by prisoners on remand" (Ministry of Justice 2023).

Suicide risk is thus unequally distributed within the prison population, with adolescent prisoners and those on remand being at particularly high risk of suicide (Fazel et al. 2008; Radeloff et al. 2015). Pope found that "male young offenders who attempted suicide were more likely to be motivated by factors relating to interpersonal relationships ... (family/children/partners)" whereas "adult men who attempted suicide were most likely to be motivated by situational factors that related directly to their

imprisonment ... such as 'depression', 'concern over children', or 'homesickness'" (Pope 2018: 15). Relatedly, prisoners have been found to be at greater risk of suicide the less regular contact they have with relatives (Liebling and Krarup 1993; Pierce 2015). Work from a forensic and clinical perspective on prison suicide in England and Wales also identified restrictions on family contact as a factor associated with an inflated risk of suicide (Towl and Crighton 2017), and further research (Humber et al. 2013; Duthe et al. 2013; Zhong et al. 2021) reported a "doubled suicide risk when prisoners were not visited" (Radeloff et al. 2021: 9). Picking up on the risks and prevention of self-harm and suicide, Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 64/2011 identifies risk factors related to demographic and individual backgrounds. These findings highlight the importance of close (love) relationships for mental well-being and their loss as a crucial driver in suicidality and a deterioration of mental health.

Self-harm is defined by HMPPS as "any act where a prisoner deliberately harms themselves irrespective of the method, intent or severity of any injury" (HMPPS 2001 PSI 64/ 2011). Self-harm can include a range of behaviours from fire setting, scratching and cutting, to swallowing objects and head-banging. Recent Safety in Custody Statistics (Ministry of Justice 2023) recorded 55,264 incidents of self-harm in the 12 months to December 2022, an overall increase of 3% from the previous year, made up of a 6% decrease amongst the male prison population and 37% increase amongst women's population (a trend we pick up on in the next section). A rapid evidence assessment conducted on behalf of HMPPS into "Self-harm by Adult Men in Prison" (Pope 2018) identified young age, precarious relationship status, being in their early days of custody, on remand or unsentenced in local prisons, as well as experiencing feelings of depression, hopelessness and substance misuse as risk factors for self-harm (Pope 2018). Psychological research (Paulus and Dzindolet 1993; Dixon-Gordon et al. 2012) into Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI) suggests that heightened cases of NSSI among those serving a prison sentence may be "attributable to the stress of imprisonment" (Dixon-Gordon et al. 2012) and may be used as "a form of coping with emotional distress or as a result of emotional dysregulation" (Pope 2018: 6). Some research sees NSSI as a form of "environmental coping" (Dixon-Gordon 2012: 39) in the face of powerlessness associated with incarceration (see also Dockley 2001).

In their collation of prisoners' views on Keeping Safe – preventing suicide and self-harm in custody, the IAP (2017) summarised further environmental problems presenting in UK prisons. In over 100 letters and 50 telephone interviews across 60 UK prisons prisoners identified the following factors that had led to a rise of self-harm and suicide in prisons:

- A marked reduction in staffing levels combined with the loss of experienced, trusted staff, and the accompanying reduction in activities, time out of cell and time to listen and talk;
- Unmet mental health, drug and alcohol treatment needs;
- An increase in illicit drug use, intimidation, violence and debt in custody;
- High numbers of recalls, and feelings of hopelessness in those past tariff on IPP sentences (IAP 2017: 3).

Contributing to the Harris Review into Self-Inflicted Deaths (SID) of 18–24-year-olds in custody, Ludlow et al. (2015) identified high-quality relationships with staff as potential protective factor against SID. They found that "experienced staff in sufficient number to enable them to engage relationally with individual prisoners can reduce prison-induced stress

by securing order, facilitating family contact ... and reducing anxiety by providing support and practical assistance " (Ludlow et al. 2015: 6). They question in how far staffing and regime impacts of Benchmarking and other changes "might be reshaping the prison landscape and the professional orientation and practices of prison staff in ways that are relevant to SID" (Ludlow et al. 2015: 6). As argued by the Prison Reform Trust (2018) policies favouring increased privatisation and budget cuts have led to a 25 per cent decrease of frontline (and particularly of experienced) staff between 2011 and 2017 (MoJ 2019). This, as well as the Covid19 pandemic, has contributed to "more restrictive regimes in many institutions and a negative shift in physical safety across the prison estate" (Crowhurst and Harwich 2016: 16).

Suicide and self-harm in prison: a focus on women

The majority of women in the prison population have been victims of much more serious offences than those they are accused of committing (80% of women in prison are incarcerated for non-violent offences. PRT, 2022).

Thus, women bring past traumas into the prison setting which are all too often traumas with roots in childhood victimisation (O'Brien and King, 2022). It is not surprising, therefore, to find that most women in custody have complex health and social care needs and they are especially vulnerable to suicide and self-harm ('The Women's Review' 2023; Public Health England 2018; Walker and Towl, 2016). Early studies of suicides amongst the female prison population highlighted that women were at least equally at risk of suicide as their male counterparts (e.g. Liebling 1994). Recent work adds further nuance and understanding. For example, a Briefing Paper from HM Inspectorate of Prisons, *A Focus on Women's Prisons (2022)* highlighted that a far higher proportion of women than men reported mental health problems on arrival at the prison and almost double the proportion of women than men reported that they felt suicidal while in custody. A recent House of Commons Justice Committee Inquiry into 'Women in Prison' (2022) reported that 46% of women in prison had attempted suicide at some point in their lives, compared to 21% of men in prison and 6% in the general population¹⁰. Baldwin, furthermore, alerts to particularly high levels of suicide risk in young women compared to rates in the community (Baldwin 2021; see also Towl and Crighton 2017).

Recent evidence also points to a concerning upward trend in the number of incidents of self-harm in the women's prison population over the past decade. Recent Safety in Custody statistics reveal that in the twelve months prior to December 2022, self-harm incidents per 1,000 prisoners decreased 1% in men's prisons but increased 4% in female prisons (Ministry of Justice 2023). In a recent study of long-term women prisoners by the Prison reform Trust (2021), self-harm (and suicide) was found to be so endemic in women's prisons that women regularly 'witness[ed] extreme self-harm and mental health crises', compounding their own suffering and trauma (2021:8). Past and more recent studies of self-harm in women's prisons explain this behaviour as a means for individual emotion regulation (e.g. temporary relief from anxiety, anger, frustration, depression or tension), and (re-)gaining a sense of control or escape from their immediate environment (Walker

¹⁰ This Justice Committee Inquiry into Women in Prison (2022) draws on Maggie Leese research here (Teeside University).

and Towl, 2016; Mangnall and Yurkovich 2010). Self-harm for many women in prison is a response to the trauma they have experienced in the past. It provides a release from intense feelings of anger, frustration and distress that surface when thinking about past experiences of domestic and sexual violence and abuse, or as a response to being separated from their children (Walker 2022; Baldwin 2022), as we explore below.

The impact of prison on mothers

“*We cannot underestimate the practical and emotional difficulties that ‘mothering’ from inside prison entails*

Lord Farmer Review of Women 2019: 5

This finding is echoed in a recent evaluation of prison-based parental rights project that found many mothers reported feeling suicidal on a daily basis because of being separated from their children, and in some cases, not knowing where their children had been placed (O’Brien and King, 2023 forthcoming).

Many mothers in prison have already had their children removed from them, or their children are removed as part of their incarceration. For others, their children are placed in foster care or in the care of family members. Once in prison, there is often no support for mothers who are left with an acute sense of loss and isolation. In her research on maternal imprisonment, Baldwin (2022) found that mothers who end up in prison have very little self-worth, self-esteem or sense of purpose. They have to endure shame, judgement and stigma as they negotiate their ‘new’ criminalised identity as a ‘flawed’ or ‘failed’ mother. For many mothers, the ‘guilt, shame and emotional trauma of being a mother in prison’ (Baldwin, 2021) and having children removed from their care, or not being permitted to maintain a relationship with their children while in prison, can be a trigger for self-medication, suicidal ideas and self-injury (Walker, 2022; Baldwin et al, 2021: see also Dominey et al. 2016; Baldwin 2017; Masson 2019). Restrictions on family visits during the Covid19 pandemic hit mothers who did have contact with their children especially hard. The APPG (2022; 5) reports that in some cases mothers stopped visits with children during Covid19 pandemic because it was too painful to watch children be in distress because they were not allowed to be hugged by her. Of particular importance to this report, evidence reveals that mothers are most at risk of self-harm and feeling suicidal in the early days of their incarceration, as they are left to cope with the rupture of being separated from their children, in some cases for the first time. Baldwin (2022) notes that the mothers in her study found the first few days and weeks of their sentence to be profoundly ‘painful’ and ‘harmful’, and that mothers felt ‘powerless’, ‘shame’ and ‘disorientation’.

Research into maternal incarceration is limited, especially within the UK context, but see recent edited collections by Isla Masson and Natalie Booth (2023), Lucy Baldwin, (2023) and Kelly Lockwood, (2020) that provide excellent overviews of this important body of work.

Implications of policy and literature review

We have illustrated that a prison sentence can harm men and women, their families and loved ones in various ways.

Combined with entering a challenging and, for some, unfamiliar environment, feelings of loss and separation can prompt crisis, distress and negative emotional states that can be overwhelming. In turn, this may lead to acts of self-harm and/or suicide in an effort to self-regulate or escape negative affective states. A study investigating the association between near-lethal self-harm in prison and social support concluded that “social contacts are essential for prisoners” (Radeloff et al. 2021). It has been found that family support or engagement services have shifted from being perceived as an optional service (Hucklesby and Corcoran 2016) “to one that is essential and contributes to prisoner safety and well-being” (Dominey et al. 2016). As we have outlined above, this finding is of course central in both Lord Farmer’s reviews (2017 and 2019), and vital to reducing reoffending. Against this backdrop, services and interventions delivered through EDiC, such as strengthening family and outside ties, dealing with left behind issues, or helping to navigate the prison environment, gain immense importance for prisoners and families. These themes are central to our findings and are vividly illustrated in the qualitative interview data we present at a later point.



Methodology

This evaluation is based on a mixed methods design, combining NEPACS-administered monitoring data with qualitative interview data¹¹.

Qualitative data is comprised of interviews with 21 prisoners (10 men and 11 women), 11 prison staff, 3 staff employed by NEPACS and 1 external social worker; impact survey data with prisoners before and after contact with EDiC collected by EDiC FSWs (9 men and 9 women); and data collected as part of participatory induction wing events (9 women and 49 men). We also conducted interviews with 3 family members. However, as we discuss below, we faced a number of challenges trying to secure interviews with family members.

We collected both qualitative and quantitative data concurrently, rather than sequentially, and asked the same questions in different ways, using different research tools. In doing so, we were able to produce reliable, rigorous and in-depth findings that we were able to cross check and verify throughout the research process (Fielding 2021). We established a good working relationship with EDiC FSWs and the EDiC project coordinator from the outset and embedded monthly meetings into our programme of work, alongside participation in quarterly EDiC project steering group meetings. This proved to be an effective strategy as it allowed us to adapt our research tools to better suit the conditions that we were all working within.

For example, during periods of restricted prison regimes due to Covid19-related lockdown we were able to switch to using in-cell phones for interviews at HMP Durham.

Our evaluation was guided by the following main research questions:

- 1 What are the impacts of the Early Days in Custody project on prisoners, family members and the wider prison environment?
- 2 What impacts does engagement with the Early Days in Custody project have on prisoners' mental well-being, especially in terms of self-harm and suicidality?

Further questions informing the evaluation were:

- i) What is the impact of EDiC on prisoners' feelings of distress and confusion in early days of custody?
- ii) What is the impact of EDiC on prisoners in terms of feeling connected to/ supported by family members and loved ones?
- iii) What is the impact of EDiC on prisoners in terms of feeling able to cope with prison life and regime?
- iv) What is the impact of EDiC on prisoners' feeling that left behind issues have been resolved?
- v) Does prisoner and family engagement with EDiC have a positive impact on long-term resettlement outcomes?

Research tools

We included data from (n=18) completed impact questionnaires in our analysis; nine at HMP Durham and nine at HMP Low Newton. The impact questionnaires were designed to capture the distance travelled for prisoners, from first contact with EDiC to last. NEPACS staff agreed to distribute them on our behalf at HMP Durham and HMP Low Newton.

Participation was voluntary and prisoners were made aware of the purpose of the research, that their identities would not be disclosed and that they could stop at any time. NEPACS staff invited prisoners to complete the survey after initial contact had been made. Towards the end of year 1 it became clear that the pre- and post-impact questionnaires needed refining to better capture changes in mental well-being. EDiC FSWs found the questionnaires too time-consuming (taking up to 45 minutes to complete). Most important, however, was feedback from NEPACS staff that highlighted the problems they encountered when asking prisoners to speak about family issues when they were in crisis. Concerns were raised about the impact of these questions on the mental health and well-being of prisoners in their acute state of shock upon entry into custody. We refined the tool to better suit the purpose for use from January 2022 onwards (see Appendix I).

One-to-one interviews (n=21) were carried out with ten men at HMP Durham and eleven women at HMP Low Newton. Both samples were racially diverse. They were a mixture of prisoners on remand and sentenced and of those serving short and long sentences (ranging from six weeks to life). The interviews provided us with an opportunity to dive deeper into the issues that had been emerging in the impact questionnaires. Interviews were semi-structured and designed in a way that fostered an open, informal and conversational exchange between interviewee and interviewer. They enquired, for example, into the role of contact with loved ones; how they experienced being in prison and the induction process; what kind of support the EDiC FSW provided and how they experienced it; how engagement with EDiC impacted, or not, on feelings toward themselves (specifically related to negative emotional states, feeling suicidal or harming themselves) and their loved ones; and if they thought EDiC was positive, or not, to the processes and atmosphere on the induction wing.

The interviews were voluntary and lasted between 25-70 minutes. With permission from participants, interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and written consent was taken prior to the interview. Due to ongoing Covid19 restrictions and staff shortages, we conducted some interviews (at HMP Durham) via phone, ringing into individual cells on prison phone numbers provided by the EDiC FSW. In these cases, verbal consent was taken prior to the interview. Our fieldwork days were facilitated by EDiC FSWs, who set up interviews and arranged a suitable space to conduct interviews. Importantly, NEPACS staff were on hand to offer emotional and practical support to men and women if they felt this was needed after an interview. In the women's prison, we were able to conduct interviews in quiet and comfortable environments (such as a therapy room) away from the busy wings. We believe that these settings helped women feel more at ease. An interview with one formerly incarcerated woman who had returned to the community was conducted and recorded via Zoom.

Interviews were carried out with staff members across the two prison establishments (n=11); seven at HMP Durham; and four at HMP Low Newton. We included members of the prison senior management teams, safer custody officers, and non-operational staff such as probation officers,

¹¹Includes the Early Days in Custody – Prisoners' survey HMP Durham (March 2019, NEPACS internal document), the Early Days in Custody – HMP Low Newton Year 1 Annual Review (April 2020 – March 2021, NEPACS internal document), the Early Days in Custody – HMP Durham Year 1 Annual Review (April 2020 – March 2021, NEPACS internal document), the Helpline report Year 1 (April 2020 – March 2021, NEPACS internal document), an evaluation of the Visitors' Voice Event 2020, and the National Lottery EDiC Annual Review Year 1 (April 2020 – March 2021, NEPACS internal document).

or members of the chaplaincy team. We also interviewed one external social worker (n=1), and staff employed by NEPACS (n=3). In most cases interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded using a Dictaphone. Due to Covid19 restrictions and for convenience in some cases, a minority of interviews with staff members were conducted online via Zoom. Staff interviews followed a semi-structured format and participants were invited to reflect on the various impacts of the EDiC project on prisoners and the prison establishment.

Interviews were carried out with (n=3) family members of men and women who were currently or had been serving a prison sentence and who had received support by EDiC. All participants were female, and interviews were conducted and recorded online. Participants were asked to think back to their interactions with EDiC and reflect upon the impacts of on their own emotional well-being, and, from their perspective, the effects of EDiC on their relative's well-being (if applicable).¹²

Participatory research events on induction wings

During the final stages of the research, we held two participatory research events on inductions wings, in April 2022 at HMP Durham (n=49), and in October 2022 at HMP Low Newton (n=9).

The events were organised around the use of visual research tools adapted from participatory action research (Kindon et al. 2007). Participatory approaches in social research view individuals as having valuable knowledge about their lives and experiences. We used flip chart paper and coloured 'post-it' notes to make the research process engaging, interactive and accessible (see Haverkate et al. 2020; Payne and Bryant 2018; and Fine et al 2003, on PAR research in prison settings).

The aim of the participatory research events in our study was to find out from men and women who had just arrived in prison, what they needed most in the first two weeks of being in custody. We also wanted to include those in the evaluation who might not have engaged with NEPACS, to find out why this might be the case. The events were run in conjunction with NEPACS; an EDiC FSW was present and able to respond there and then to any issues raised by men and women. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, that participation was voluntary, and consent was sought verbally. Participants were asked their age group, their ethnicity and how long they had been in the induction wing. They were invited to contribute as much or as little as they liked, from their perspectives, 'in their own words', if they felt comfortable writing, to the following questions:

- What are the most important things I need help with right now?
- What impact is not having my needs met having on me (emotionally and physically)?
- What has helped me the most since I have been in the prison?
- What support do women/men in here need during their first two weeks?

At HMP Durham, the event was held in the central area of the wing. Men were invited to contribute to the questions on flip chart paper, facilitated

and supported by Durham researchers. While we were able to capture the views of a relatively large sample of men, we had to fit the event into the prison regime and had only 30 minutes blocks to engage with men. This meant that we were unable to delve deeply into the issues, not least because the men were on restricted association time during our visit and many had to fit in phone calls, showers and trying to contact prison support staff during this time. This arrangement made it difficult for the team to spend more than a few minutes with each man. While one member of the research team was talking to the participants, another member was helping the participant, if needed, to write down responses on a post-it note that was then stuck onto a poster on the wall dedicated to one of the four above questions. We engaged with a total of 49 men who were ethnically diverse, but the majority identified as White British (38 men) and ranged in age from 21- 68 years.

In contrast, we were able to facilitate much longer participatory sessions with two groups of women in HMP Low Newton. Although the sample was much smaller (n=9), we were able to explore the questions in much more depth. Two sessions were run separately in the association room. Eight women identified as White British and one woman identified as BME. Five of the women were in their 20s, three in their 30s and one woman in her 60s. Coloured paper and post-it notes and pens were made available on tables. It was made clear at the beginning we would write things down on the post-it notes if they didn't want to write. Most women wanted to write their answers themselves.

Sampling

We adopted a convenience sampling strategy throughout the project.

This was because we relied on NEPACS staff to identify and support participants to participate in interviews, for example, by escorting prisoners from wings to interview rooms. Moreover, and relatedly, we benefited enormously from the positive rapport that the EDiC FSWs had established with prisoners (and staff). However, there were arguably limitations in relying on a non-random approach to sampling alone. For example, if prisoners were opting not to engage with EDiC why might this be the case? The participatory research events were designed to mitigate against sampling bias and to capture a more diverse range of prisoner voices and perspectives.

Data management and ethical issues

The evaluation received ethical approval from Durham University (SOC-2021-05-26T08_44_30-pscb64) and MOJ clearance through the NRC (2021-188). Participation in the research was voluntary and consent was required from all participants.

It was critical for a study of this kind to protect and ensure anonymity and confidentiality with all participants. Following discussions with members of the EDiC project steering group at the beginning of the evaluation research, it was agreed that we would not anonymise the prison research sites. This is partly because the EDiC project is only being delivered in two prisons at the

¹² All interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematically analysed using NVivo software. To preserve participants' anonymity and privacy we have used pseudonyms throughout the evaluation for our male and female interviewees serving sentences or being on remand at HMP Durham and HMP Low Newton, as well as their family members. We have allocated numbers to prison staff interviews and refrained from identifying any EDiC FSWs.

current time. Interviews were recorded, where possible using NEPACS audio devices (one device is stored securely in each prison). Before every interview we provided an information sheet that outlined the aims of the research and provided details about consent and anonymity. Written consent was given prior to in-person interviews (verbal consent was given when interviews were conducted using in-cell phones). No prison numbers or surnames were used or recorded. Audio files were erased from voice recorders, once securely downloaded onto an encrypted, password protected server. Audio- and text-files stored and produced by the transcription company were auto deleted after 45 days. All consent forms and interview data were stored securely for the entirety of the research, with all electronic files and digital recordings held on the Durham University server. All paper copies of consent forms were stored in a secure filing cabinet on the premises of the Department of Sociology at Durham University. Any data or documents through which persons could be recognised will be destroyed two years following publication of the research findings.

Limitations of the research

We encountered difficulties recruiting family members for interviews. We believe this was due to a combination of factors, but primarily because of the stigma attached to family members and loved ones of people in prison.

Echoing the experiences of others working in this area (e.g. Loucks 2004) it is likely that some family members, especially women with dependent children, did not want to be identified due to feelings of shame and embarrassment. Given that we were engaging with prisoners and their loved ones early in their sentence, it is also very likely that family members were themselves in a period of crisis, feeling overwhelmed, not able to talk about their loved one in prison and had more pressing matters to attend to. If the evaluation were to run again, we would recommend running a family event, several months after the critical early days in custody period and invite family members to reflect on their experiences of the first two weeks¹³.

Furthermore, we acknowledge that an in-depth exploration and analysis of topics such as suicide and self-harm can be challenging. Towl and Crighton (2017) emphasise inherent problems of generalising research on prison suicide and self-injury, for example, data may often deliver just “a snapshot assessment at a point in time yet we know that mood states fluctuate” (2017: 19). They go on to highlight that, sometimes even “a small event may trigger a cascade of events that lead to major events that are not predictable in simple ways” (2017: 41). Due to the nature of our data (i.e. non-longitudinal qualitative interviews with prisoners and prison staff¹⁴) it is difficult to claim that any permanent changes in prisoners’ acts, or thoughts of self-harm and suicide were due to their involvement with EDiC alone. Positive changes may well be explained as a result of a combination of factors or ‘small events’ taking place over time. It was therefore only possible to map momentary effects on individual prisoners’ feelings and acts connected to self-harm and suicide, if and when they attributed them directly to their engagement with EDiC. We elaborate further on these challenges in our findings section.

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¹³ We would also recommend commissioning an organisation such as Children Seen and Heard to undertake a piece of work to explore the early days in custody from the perspective of children with a parent in prison.

¹⁴ Due to lack of time, ongoing disruptions by Covid19 regulations and limited resources we were unable to explore the long-term impacts on prisoners and their loved ones by tracking their journeys through and out of prison.

Key Findings

This section presents our findings based on an analysis of data collected at HMP Durham and HMP Low Newton.

Firstly, and briefly, the monitoring data collected by NEPACS revealed that during Year 2 of EDiC delivery, of 271 men and women supported through casework, a majority of 195 experienced ‘improved contact’ with their loved ones in the first week. Furthermore, 200 of those 271 prisoners reported an improved ‘sense of safety and/or well-being’; 196 reported a ‘reduction in distress or confusion’ (NEPACS Annual Review of EDiC, 2023). Our analysis of pre- and post-monitoring forms (n=18) showed that following an intervention with the EDiC FSWs, distress and confusion levels were considerably lower for both, men and women. Likewise, feelings of ‘connection’ and ‘hope’ were increased for all, as was their perceived ability to ‘cope with prison’. Both men and women reported that they felt as if ‘left behind issues had been dealt with. These findings are also evident in the data we collected from interviews and participatory events, but with much more nuance and depth.

We have divided our findings by prison because of inherent differences between the two establishments as well as differences in the experience of and needs during imprisonment for men and women. Both prisons share certain policies and practices that offered suitable conditions

for EDiC to tie in with. As will be shown later, their provision of family visits and purple visits¹⁵ during Covid19 restrictions provided a foundation for EDiC to creatively support and improve family contact. A multi-agency ACCT screening¹⁶ and support process offered the opportunity for the EDiC FSW in each prison to provide input and support for the individual involved and his/her loved ones on the outside. A well established and well-connected family support team (with additional family support workers employed by an external healthcare provider and the prison itself), chaplaincy, Safer Custody, and Senior Management Team (SMT) in both prisons were furthermore essential in supporting and embedding the work of the EDiC FSW within the organisational structure.

We discuss our findings in each prison by considering:

- i) What are the main issues during early days in custody?
- ii) What is the role of contact with loved ones during the early days in custody?
- iii) The support EDiC delivers on a practical and emotional level
- iv) The impact EDiC has on prisoners’ mental health, self-harm, and suicidality
- v) The organisational role of EDiC within the prison
- vi) The effects of EDiC on families/loved ones’ well-being.

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¹⁵ Online ‘visits’ that were introduced during Covid.

¹⁶ ACCT stands for Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork. It is a case management approach used to support people at risk of self-harm and suicide within HMPPS. ACCT has been used since 2005 and policy governing ACCT is set out within Prison Service Instruction PSI 64/2011 [Available online: [gov.uk/government/publications/managing-prisoner-safety-in-custody-psi-642011](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/managing-prisoner-safety-in-custody-psi-642011)]



EDiC at HMP Durham

HMP Durham is located close to the city centre of Durham. It is one of England's oldest prisons, opened in 1819.

It is currently reception prison holding adult men aged 18 years and over and serves the courts of Tyneside, Teesside, Durham and Cumbria (HMIP 2021: 5). HMP Durham has an operational capacity of 980. In 2020 it received 5,000 new prisoners, around 420 per month (HMIP 2021) more than 100 men per week. The majority of them were on remand (62%), 120 were foreign nationals, and 12% from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Around 348 prisoners received support for substance misuse, and 96 for complex mental ill health (HMIP 2021). As of 2021, HMP Durham operated eight separate wings, one of which was designed as a vulnerable prisoner unit, one as a dedicated first night and induction wing (HMIP 2021).

HMP Durham is a receiving prison with a large of population of men who have "serious mental health difficulties or who misuse drugs or alcohol" (HMIP 2021: 3). As a particularly vulnerable part of the prison population, they are at heightened risk of self-harm and suicide, particularly during their first days in custody (HMIP 2021). In November 2021, HMIP recorded five self-inflicted deaths since an inspection in October 2018, and "there was evidence that the prison had taken action in response to Prisons and Probation Ombudsman recommendations following investigations into these" (HMIP 2021: 9). In relation to incidents of self-harm, the inspection found, "levels of self-harm were lower than similar prisons and were on a downward trend" (HMIP 2021: 9).

At the time of our fieldwork the prison had adopted a safeguarding strategy to complete a Suicide and Self-Harm Warning Form (SASH) for men arriving at HMP Durham from court. It would take into consideration any knowledge or signs of self-harm or suicide risks whilst men were in pre-

court custody or in court cells. The reception process would also include a vulnerable prisoner assessment, a Cell Share Risk Assessment, as well as health care screening after which it was decided whether an ACCT document would have to be opened. The chaplaincy team was involved in providing faith-related support and pastoral care during the first 24 hours of custody. This included helping the most vulnerable men arriving in the prison to contact a family member or access essentials such as bedding. During their first night in custody, newly arrived men were checked on three times by staff, whether they had been assessed to be at risk or not. Prison Information Desk (PID) workers would take care of new arrivals once allocated onto the induction wing.

At the time of our research, the family support team at HMP Durham consisted of three dedicated support workers:

- i) The NEPACS EDiC FSW, providing support to resolve issues around family contact and relationships in the first fourteen days of custody.
- ii) The healthcare provider's Drug and Alcohol Recovery Team (DART) support worker acting as a point of contact for families/carers whose loved one had substance use issues, supporting families and men during their prison journey and with recovery.
- iii) The prison's own FSW, working in partnership with NEPACS to provide family visits and continuing practical and emotional support to the men and their families/loved ones after the first 14 days in custody. Toward the end of our fieldwork (in early 2023) the EDiC FSW had transitioned into the post of the prison FSW and was working together closely with the newly hired NEPACS EDiC FSW (see Appendix III for a full outline of Family Support Services at HMP Durham).

Main issues during early days in custody for men

The participatory research event on the induction wing provided us with insights into the issues that mattered most to the men during the early days in custody.

On average they had spent between 2 days to one week in custody (one man had spent 4 weeks in custody), and a majority (n=32) said they had heard of NEPACS. However, a handful of men were unaware of NEPACS and the service they offered during the induction process. One respondent said it was, “not my first time in prison and NEPACS only supports first timers”. It is likely that some men coming into prison for the first time, as well as so called ‘frequent fliers’ (men who are in and out of prison) are unaware or misinformed about NEPACS and the specialist support provided by EDiC.

Responses to our questions included:

Question 1

What are the most important things you need help with right now?

- Family contact (7x)
- Phone-related (5x) --> No phone credit (2x), phones not working (2x), getting phone contacts (1x)
- Vapes (4x)
- Canteen food (3x: bad food; no/not enough food on canteen)
- Medication (2 x for mild epilepsy + PTSD)
- Shower (1x), hot water (1x)
- Visit information, not enough info on system
- Not enough time out of cell
- Sorting rent out
- Clothes
- Contact with solicitor

Question 2

If your needs are not being met, what is the impact on you, and others (emotionally and physically)?

- Family & contact – will impact depression (4x) and anxiety (4x) “Sick of life if I can’t speak to my partner”
- Frustration (3x)
- Self-harm (2x)
- Distress (2x)
- Medication (2x- feel bad physically, migraines, feel on edge)
- Worry about life
- People kick off
- Would have to start over again
- Climbing the walls
- Keeping clean
- Withdrawal



Question 3

What thing has helped you the most since you have been here?

- Hearing aid
- Contact with son, father son day
- Help getting boxer shorts
- Don't feel like I have had support – no in cell phone, no facilities
- Best thing is support through other prisoners who are same as you (i.e. don't take drugs and have kids)

As Toch has found in his study of prison deprivations, different personal needs might well “produce different reactions to imprisonment... Pressing problems for some are tangential or irrelevant to others” (Johnson and Toch 1982: 18). To that effect, some men were less pre-occupied with understanding how prison worked because they were returning to custody (sometimes frequently). For those who seemed reasonably accustomed to this environment, getting immediate physical needs met (e.g. medication, vapes, clothes, help with drug withdrawal) took priority. Others, who were returning to custody but had not expected to, needed help with feelings of guilt and shame toward their families (or themselves). Men, who were coming into prison for the first time, predominantly expressed needing help with understanding how prison works (e.g. operating the kiosk¹⁷, getting their relatives’ numbers approved, putting applications in, etc.).

Some men felt distinctly lost, especially, but not exclusively, those coming to prison for the first time. For many men, their most pressing needs were not being met. It left them feeling frustrated and distressed about their inability to resolve problems themselves. These themes were powerfully echoed in our interviews:

“

It's a continuous struggle because everything in prison is difficult, it's designed to be difficult. It's not designed to be easy, you're probably trying to get something that should be relatively easy that then becomes hard, it magnifies the problem.

Nathan

“

Even when you manage to get your numbers on the kiosk it might take up to a week. So, you've got that frustration each time of like getting knock-backs off staff, not knowing what I'm doing for the next day.

Derek

¹⁷ Electronic kiosks with self-service software have been in use since 2017. The provider is Unilink and they are located on prison wings. The kiosk system allows prisoners to make contact with their offender supervisor, choose meals, book visits, submit internal applications, and transfer pay to their phone credit.

Staff members were aware of these difficulties and how they left men feeling frustrated and powerless, especially when they first came into prison:

“
All the things you would just do instantly at home, suddenly in here you can't. There's no instant about it. Everything is process led and process driven, you're caught in those wheels and all your control has been taken away. And I think that's the biggest part of the frustration.

D Staff Interview 2

Obstacles preventing men from remaining in touch with family and loved ones were experienced as particularly stressful and immensely impacted their mental well-being. Preserving meaningful connections to the outside world ranked highly in the men's needs hierarchy and featured consistently in our interviews.

Role of contact with loved ones during early days in custody

“
I think about the bairn all the time.

Lawrence

Upon entry into custody, the sudden, traumatic loss of connection to partners and children who had been part of men's daily lives could cause severe stress and anxiety, affecting mental health negatively:

“
It was during Covid. I had a little boy when I first come in and it took us roughly a year to see him. That took a big toll on us, on my mental health. The last year and half have been the worst of me life.

Lawrence

Feelings of distress and anxiety were mostly related to worrying about the welfare of their loved ones, to “lying there worrying 24/7 thinking ‘Oh, what are they doing back home?’” (Chris at HMP Durham). Impact data collected by EDiC FSWs also highlighted that feelings of distress were most attributed to the men not knowing how family members and loved ones were doing on the outside. Feelings of helplessness and powerlessness to support a loved one who might be struggling were also expressed by men. Staff members were aware of how difficult it was for men to be separated from family members during critical moments:

“
I've been working in the system for 16 years, and the part that I find prisoners get really upset by, it's when something happens to a family member, or they've had a bereavement or a family member that's really unwell they feel they need to be there, but they can't physically be there. Problems in prison they like to sort out themselves but when it comes to family members it really breaks them.

D Staff Interview 1

Relationships with loved ones played a crucial part in the men's mental well-being, impacting emotions significantly. If emotional needs to connect with family were repeatedly ignored, stress and feeling upset could quickly change into frustration and ultimately express itself in anger and aggression, as this PID worker explained:

“
A lad, first time in jail. I remember he got unlocked, he came over to me and I was helping him on the kiosk. The officer went, 'no, behind your door, I don't care whether it's done with, I want you behind the door.' The lad was trying to explain to the officer, 'I just want to phone my son, that's all I want to do'. 'Get behind your door'. Three days later we didn't get opened up because they (officers) got kitted up... he had threatened a member of staff. I remember speaking to an officer afterwards and I said, 'What happened there?' and he says, 'He said if he can't get in touch with his family, he's going to hit a kettle off our head'... The lad's been in for a week, and he's tried to have this conversation with them, so what's a man meant to do?

PIDS 1

On the other end of the emotional spectrum were the positive effects of meaningful connection with significant people in men's lives. Interviewees acknowledged the importance of receiving love as a motivational and mental health factor. On the one hand, the pain caused by the loss of love could “shock” people into rethinking and reinventing parts of their identity:

“
I've just took loads of drugs, not a care in the world. It was when I lost my grandad. I felt pain. I never felt pain before. I wanted to be somebody different. I've wasted so much time. I've put so much of my energy into the wrong things, and I choose not to now, so I try and do everything better.

Callum

On the other hand, receiving support from loved ones could help men come to terms with and serving their sentence:

“
Having [name of partner] is like a little ray of light and something positive in my life, something that keeps me connected to the outside. Keeps that little spark alive inside me, it keeps that little ray of hope coming through the bars on the window.

Derek

It sometimes was “that little ray of hope” which turned out to be the crucial factor in improving mental well-being. Participants described a noticeable change in mood and outlook after they were able to get in touch with or see their family during their first days or weeks at HMP Durham, as Paul reveals here:

“

You talk to the lads when they come in and you can see they're down and they're upset that they haven't been able to get in touch with anybody, aren't able to have any visits yet. And then they'll come and say, 'Oh, I'm getting me numbers on' and they're changing their mood, you can just see it. Or they say, 'Oh, I'm getting a visit'. You can just see it, it makes everything a lot better.

Paul

EDiC FSWs prioritised establishing and nurturing meaningful connections with the outside as early as possible during the men's stay at HMP Durham. It was achieved in various ways and included supporting men practically with PIN numbers, finding and registering their relatives' phone numbers, booking visits, or getting in touch with outside family members to update them on the whereabouts of their relatives. However, it was not only what support was provided but more importantly how it was provided that impacted men on a deeper, emotional level. It was a personal touch that resonated with them and that was deeply appreciated:

“

She helped us getting a little teddy bear for me boy. You speak to him saying 'I miss you; I love you' it's like a recording teddy bear. Me little boy, he was crying, he loved it. Takes it to bed with him. That was a really nice thing that she did.

Chris

The FSW facilitated loving relationships despite the limiting conditions of the prison environment. Her idea to pass on written verbatim messages on cards between prisoners and their loved ones, for example, was repeatedly mentioned in interviews as crucial in helping to overcome negative affective states: “As a vehicle for family practices and displays” (Jardine 2018: 124), sending or receiving a personal, hand-written message reinforced and sustained family relationships (Jardine 2018). In this sense, “objects themselves can provide great comfort, providing a means of curating and storing memories that can be drawn on in times of difficulty or loss” (Jardine 2018: 124).

The EDiC FSW reflects on the importance of the postcard initiative from her perspective here:

“

I was able to put the nickname on the bottom of the message that she sent. He welled up when I took the message to him. I saw him today and he said, 'I kept reading it last night' he said, 'and I've looked at it again today'. That's them making that link back out into the community.

EDiC FSW



When face-to-face visits had been reestablished, Family Days, organised by NEPACS and supported by the EDiC FSW were very important to many of the men. The opportunity to show and receive love as a father reminded one of our respondents of an important part of himself that would momentarily propel him out of his current predicament:

“

When I had that family day, he (young son) just lit up. I felt like I was a responsible dad and I was doing what I wanted to do by being able to play with him, by being able to show my compassionate side to him. I loved every second of it. I didn't feel like I was in prison. I felt like I was having a fun day out somewhere, everything around us I forgot, and it was just focus on me and my little boy and his mum was there, and we were just interacting. I loved it, and he did too.

Callum

Callum was able to shift perspective, not only toward a life outside of prison but also toward an identity different to that of a prisoner. It helped to momentarily restore his role as a parental figure (Dixey and Woodall 2012; see also Hutton, Prison Reform Trust, forthcoming). Moloney et al. (2009) and an HM Inspectorate of Probation report (2016) found that taking on emotional and practical responsibilities of fatherhood and close relationships with a child could act as protective factor throughout a prison sentence. Again, relationships, and the love flowing through them, could help to shift negative affective states and provided hope and a new outlook on life to men engaging with services provided through EDiC.

Practical and emotional support provided by EDiC

Most of the men of our interview sample, as well as those who had engaged in our participatory research event, reported feeling 'lost', 'confused' and 'frustrated' during their first days of custody, not knowing what to expect and whom to approach regarding immediate needs such as phone credits, putting numbers on their phones or getting clothes.

In pre- and post-engagement monitoring forms, the men described experiencing strong emotions of hopelessness, guilt, shame and fear. However, after interacting with the EDiC FSW, respondents reported feeling a lot more settled, calm, and more hopeful for the future.

We further found that EDiC acted as a crucial catalyst to move processes forward within an austere, confusing, and slow environment. Heavily impacted by staff shortages during and after the Covid19 pandemic, a recent HMIP report (November 2021) found that HMP Durham struggled to connect prisoners with family members and fulfil its duty to facilitate visits (HMIP 2021: 11). Against this background, the EDiC FSW played a crucial role, being described by HMIP as invaluable support, as ‘very visible on the wings’, and that ‘many prisoners spoke highly of her’ (HMIP 2021: 52). The men we interviewed echoed these sentiments describing the EDiC FSW as filling a critical gap in the prison's information communication processes:



“
A lot of the practical information of living in prison is absent on induction. And when [the EDiC FSW] turns up, she knows everything. ‘This is what happens, this is what we can do, this is how long it’s going to take.’ It just gives you that bit of clarity.”

Derek

“
I didn’t know how to do anything. I didn’t know how to book visits and I was just troubled, and I thought, ‘Who do I ask here?’ Then, all of a sudden, somebody come to me door, which was [the EDiC FSW].”

Chris

The support provided by EDiC was perceived as effective and impactful because of the FSW’s daily presence on the wing, but also because she was perceived to be committed to speeding up clunky prison processes:

“
You pull her on the landing and say, ‘Oh listen, I’ve been waiting on the kiosk for a week, or two weeks for a visit’, and she’s like, ‘no bother’, and then within like an hour the lads will get a phone call saying, I’ve sorted your visit out.’ [EDiC FSW] means a lot. I think she’s helped me more in here than anyone else.”

Lawrence

On the surface, most of the men’s needs seemed to be of a practical nature (e.g. using the kiosk, getting visits booked, getting clothes parcels), however, their fulfilment had positive emotional impacts, as Paul reveals here:

“
Some of the lads I’ve seen come in, they were homeless, they’ve had nothing. She helped them get some socks and underpants, even like some trackie bottoms that weren’t jail trackie bottoms, so it was their own, some cheap trainers. They were happy that they had something that was theirs and they weren’t having to wear prison issue stuff.”

Paul

Clothing items held symbolic meaning and for some, having clothes sent in served to connect them to loved ones on the outside. EDiC FSWs and operational staff were aware of the positive ripple effects that followed when men’s personal needs were met, and their personhood acknowledged:

“
When they come into prison, they get underwear from the prison. It’s clean but it’s recycled. And I think it’s just too intimate. I can authorise a clothing parcel to be sent in for that man to be able to get a smell of home, to be able to put on that cardigan that will take him back to being at home, sat in a comfy chair, and that’s what he needs to help stabilise him.”

EDiC FSW

“
[EDiC FSW] realised that they were struggling ‘cause they didn’t want to wear the socks and underpants that we could offer. She worked with NEPACS to get clothing grants for the first few days and people felt more decent, they were able to wash their own stuff and keep hold of it. And that massively improved the respect they felt for themselves because they were able to look after themselves.”

D Staff Interview 4

A further example of the emotional impacts that stem from practical support provided by the EDiC FSW is illustrated here:

“
I explained to her (EDiC FSW) that I would like a visit and could she pass a message over to me loved ones back home and she says, ‘not a problem, I’ll do that straight away for you’, which she did. And that night when I went to bed I was happy, I was over the moon and I felt safe, I felt like me family are safe. You feel happier in yourself and you’re not so worried.”

Chris

In the longer term, practical support like providing fresh clothing or contacting loved ones also feeds into how men cope with their life inside for the remainder of their sentence (or on remand). The ripple effects of “successful” acclimatisation during their early days can contribute to men better managing their sentence further down the line. As one staff member pointed out, “If we get things right here it can have an impact on other establishments along the prisoner’s journey” (HMP Durham, Staff Interview 3). Above examples illustrate how seemingly small gestures go a long way in helping men gain a sense of self-worth, self-respect and feel ‘safe’ in the early days. They can make the difference between a prisoner going to bed settled, or ruminating and being overwhelmed by emotions which might lead him to thoughts of suicide or self-injury.

Impact of EDiC on men's mental health, self-harm, and suicidality

Our interviewees painted a vivid picture of the various ways in which EDiC positively impacted their lives when they were struggling mentally and emotionally.

They described being in crisis, and for some, how coming to terms with a custodial sentence could propel them into depths of despair, as this extract from Callum illustrated:

“

When I came in I felt like I had left my family and didn't get time to see them. I came straight to prison, I was so distanced. I couldn't really get in touch with my baby's mum. I was all over the place, I felt horrible, I hated it. Grandad was dying, so it was tough. I was hurt. I felt a lot of pain and guilt over the things I'd done. So, in a way, I was coping by self-harm and cutting me arms.

Callum

Operational staff acknowledged that the period immediately after entering custody was crucial when it came to preventing self-harm. They pointed out that “if you looked at our self-harm data, you would see the first two weeks are where people are most vulnerable” (HMP Durham, Staff Interview 5; see also Harris 2015). Some staff described how the men's vulnerability to “frustrations in the early days are leading to self-harm” (HMP Durham, Staff Interview 2). During this crucial time, taking care of their mental health, or falling back on protective factors like family relationships was made difficult for the men by a severely curtailed regime and a perceived lack of communication:

“

The regime here is pretty grim. They'll give you a few handouts, 'Do this to improve your mental health', but they don't tell you how to go about doing it under the regime

Derek

And echoed here by one of the PID workers:

“

If they come in after nine o'clock, they're thrown straight behind their doors, given their Pin, nothing's explained to them. They're meant to come in the next day for an induction, that doesn't happen, they're not given a phone call, so they're really distressed. And I would say 70% of the issues that take place first night when people are self-harming or having suicidal thoughts, is 'cause they're worried about their family.

PIDS 1

A main stressor for the men was worrying about loved ones, and if not addressed in the first few days, could quickly escalate into risky behaviors:

“

...allow him to make a phone call because he's entitled to it. It's been over a week; any officer he goes to they just want to pass it on or 'Go and speak to this guy'. He'll start cutting up. Maybe he'll kill himself.

PIDS 3

Prison staff in our study were informed about the varied and individual reasons for self-harm and were aware that most men exhibiting self-harm behaviors were in crisis and in need of care and support:

“

People talk about self-harm as just being manipulation, it isn't, they're asking for support and it's their method of asking.

D Staff Interview 5

The plea for support could sometimes be resolved quickly and pragmatically by pinpointing (and addressing) the need that was most pressing. It could help the men to cope with their emotions, to adapt to their new situation and feel more settled:

“

To give an example about the man with the glasses. So that prisoner now will be a lot happier that he can see the TV and that just reduces his stress and anxiety and reduces the risk of him self-harming.

D Staff Interview 3

“

Once you've sort of got to the nub of the issue and you try to resolve the issues that are clouding the person's mind daily, if you can get his mind unclouded, he then starts to settle and he then starts to understand that we're here to help.

D Staff Interview 4

Getting to the 'nub of the issue' was an area the EDiC FSW was especially skilled in. In turn, she was relied upon by the prison to disentangle emotional and practical complexities for the men during their early days, which could be lifesaving, as one staff member recounted:

“

I personally have invited [the EDiC FSW] to several of my constant watch reviews. People in crisis are trying to kill themselves and they are very, very down, very lost. They struggle to see the light at the end of the tunnel. And [the EDiC FSW] has been able to unpick some really difficult things. There was a lad had a lot of issues with domestic violence. We worked with him, with [the EDiC FSW]'s input, we managed to unpick all the intricacies with his children,

identify he could actually have contact. It's all about hope at this stage. If that person has lost hope they're very likely to see through their wish to die. If you can create a sense of hope and structure, then there's something to live for. Remind them that people are thinking of them and there is an opportunity after custody.

D Staff Interview 4

As illustrated in this extract, thoughts about self-harm or suicide were often ameliorated by maintaining (or recreating) family ties. The EDiC FSW was acutely aware that one of the main tasks during the early days in custody – when shock and loss prevailed – was to, “try and support that man to make him believe he will get another chance to start again, he will get another opportunity. Because some of them come in and they just got nothing else to live for” (HMP Durham, EDiC FSW).

Her work – in collaboration with other prison departments such as Safer Custody, the First Night Centre, Safety and Residency – bore fruit. Some men whom she had supported in maintaining or recreating family ties experienced a drastic, emotional turnaround, changing their mental health status toward the positive:

“*When I first came in, I was halfway suicidal. But I managed to keep [name of partner] in my life through [the EDiC FSW]. Our relationship has only got better and better through this. I've got [the EDiC FSW] to thank for that. She turned it around for me in the first couple of months, she really did.*

Derek

Similarly in this extract, a staff member reflects on how the EDiC FSW was able to gain the trust of a prisoner in crisis and by listening and giving him hope:

“*He's the angriest man on earth and the anger was the real risk to him hurting himself. Key to working with individuals who are at the point of self-harm, you need to build trust, you need to get them to understand you care [EDiC FSW] was able to unpick all that and present some hope to him. And he got very quickly so much better and so less risky towards himself. And within a few days he'd been taken out of crisis. Every time he saw me and [EDiC FSW] on the wing he couldn't stop us quick enough to say, 'Thank you' for all the help we'd given him. He's much more settled than he's ever been, and he very rarely goes back onto an ACCT of self-harm*

D Staff Interview 4

Younger men aged 18-21 years represented a particularly vulnerable population and as we have highlighted earlier, represented a group where rates of suicide were high (Pope 2018). For some of these young men, the EDiC FSW played a crucial role, sometimes providing them with a maternal figure, easing them out of the first days of shock, fear and despair:

“*When you've got an 18-year-old who's come in and he thinks, 'me mam and dad are going to be furious, me mam and dad are going to disown me. It's that early intervention to be able to give him a message to say, 'your mam is annoyed at you but hey, she loves you, she's waiting for the visit, she'll be here to see you. What clothing do you want her to send in?' So, I think it significantly reduces their thought process that nobody loves them, everything is ruined on the outside, let me just tie a ligature round me neck or let me cut myself up.*

EDiC FSW

The EDiC FSW was regarded as crucial in supporting the prison's safeguarding agenda, with one staff member explaining:

“*If we lost [the EDiC FSW] then that would not only have a massive impact on the mental health of the lads but also on self-harm. That would possibly start creeping up 'cause that's our link, [EDiC FSW]'s like the go-to person for family and it's a massive part of prison life.*

D Staff Interview 5

Apart from the procedural, practical and emotional support she provided to men in HMP Durham, our findings revealed that the EDiC FSW's personality and outlook played an important part in stabilising and improving men's affective states:

“*She just made you feel happy. If you're having a bad day and you feel like a ton of bricks has dropped on you, she perks you up. Every time I've seen [EDiC FSW] I've felt happy.*

Chris

“*Nobody will ever get angry at [EDiC FSW] or get frustrated because she's always there to help you.*

Mick

It was the personal touch that often made the biggest difference in men's lives during the early days at HMP Durham, affecting them on a deeper and emotional level. Being treated with empathy and as an individual has been found by Walker et al. (2022) to positively affect those suffering from negative emotions and suicidal thoughts in prison. Consequently, the men and staff at HMP Durham spoke to the importance of the EDiC FSW's personal as well as professional qualities, emphasising her ability to create trust and hope:

“*I think as a person, she gives you a sense of hope, a sense of someone that wants to help you. You genuinely think, okay, she's walked away but you know something's gonna*

happen.... you can tell that she has a very compassionate side to her, a very caring side.

Nathan

The organisational role of EDiC within HMP Durham

Apart from the role the work of the EDiC FSW played in the men’s lives, she also occupied a crucial role within the organisational structure of the prison.

“

They’re a vital cog in the way the prison works.

D Staff Interview 3

“

It’s a conduit. A bridge.

D Staff Interview 6

“

It’s a secure link from the inside to the outside. A safe channel.

D Staff Interview 7

The EDiC FSW was viewed as a highly skilled, knowledgeable and respected colleague by all the staff members we interviewed. They spoke of her as playing an essential role, as this example illustrates:

“

[EDiC FSW]’s knowledge is unbelievable. What she understands of the processes outside, of supporting families, it really does work and I think that comes from many other hats she’s worn in previous roles. She knows the people to ask, the questions to ask, the laws to run by, the restrictions that have been there before, the understanding of how to work with children and families in the best manner. Those elements together just create a perfect storm for us in a really positive way, that she can then just get issues resolved very quickly, she gives integrity to what she speaks about because the prisoners know they’re not going to get bluffed, they also know they can’t bluff her.

D Staff Interview 4

Staff appreciated her skills as “an outreach worker and networking with other departments” (HMP Durham, Staff Interview 6). Her part as a (missing) link between individuals on the outside and inside but also between different places and departments in the prison contributed to her importance for the overall flow of communication:

“

It could be a wing manager, or a prison officer on the wing who has an issue with a prisoner in regard to family contact. [EDiC FSW] is really good at acting as a bridge between that situation and contacting us.

D Staff Interview 6

The EDiC FSW’s presence on the wings as well as NEPACS’ efforts to improve existing services set them apart from other departments in the prison. Comprehensive expertise, flexibility, and visibility contributed greatly to the EDiC FSW’s significance not only on the induction wing but beyond:

“

Out of most departments NEPACS they’re there because there’s always somebody walking through the wing. When it comes to chaplains as well, they’re there, they’re always coming through the wings.

Mick

“

I have heard people on the wing turn round and say, ‘If you need any help you need to see NEPACS. They are the ones that help you the best.’

Chris

Our findings reveal that EDiC was filling a void no other prison department or service was able to fill because they provided a comprehensive package, tailored toward the needs of men during their early days at HMP Durham. The following examples from prison staff and PID workers illustrate the importance of the EDiC FSW role at the individual and organisational level, providing vital support when no one else could. In the first example, the EDiC FSW was able to quickly provide a pair of reading glasses, from a batch she had pre-purchased from the high street to a known high-risk prisoner who had arrived without his own.

“

The glasses, if [EDiC FSW] wasn’t there to do that, it’s a quick five-minute job, we’d have had to try and find a different way to get glasses and possibly an appointment with an optician, which was going to take weeks. So, in that time, he is going to self-harm waiting for his glasses and getting frustrated. If we had to put more resources into doing things that EDiC do, it would take away from somewhere else and just make the place a lot less safe.

D Staff Interview 3

“

I'm a band 3 officer, so I cannot say, 'Oh yeah, I'll ring your mam for you' because you've got to do security checks and everything in here. And that's another thing that [EDiC FSW]'s good at, she knows who she can ring, who she cannot ring. If it was left to the officers on the wing saying, 'aright, I'll speak to the SO (senior officer) to get you a phone call.'... it would be a case of, 'no, we haven't got time'.

D Staff Interview 7

Her expertise and knowledge of operational and structural issues were also used as input to optimise prison procedures:

“

She'll come up with a plan and she'll have a structured delivery and then that will be reviewed and then nine times out of ten they go with what [EDiC FSW] deems necessary. Or she'll see shortfalls or intelligence gaps.

D Staff Interview 5

The practical impact of EDiC's organisational support work became especially significant when it was set off against the issues a large capacity reception prison such as HMP Durham faced on a daily basis:

“

There's always a backlog of phone numbers, there's always a backlog with the mail, there's always a problem with emails because of the churn, the turnover of prisoners that we have. Without sounding harsh or disrespectful or uncaring, you don't have the time to focus on one individual because at the end of the day we've got upwards of nine hundred and fifty prisoners.

D Staff Interview 2

And from a prisoner perspective prior to EDiC operating in HMP Durham:

“

I had to wait five weeks when I first got in, I'm not in for restraining orders or harassment, no domestic, nothing like that, but I was still waiting five weeks before I could contact my family. There's no clarity, there's no direction, there's no process. It's like a factory, just churning people around ... unlock his door, exercise for 20 minutes and back behind the door. They don't care whether you've got family out there.

PIDS 2

The Covid19 pandemic had a significant impact on the prison regime. It changed on a regular basis and was severely curtailed. Staffing levels were also negatively impacted during and post-Covid culminating in limited prisoner movement and extended periods of confinement in cells. Echoing the findings of Maruna et al (2022), these conditions had, and continue to have a huge impact on prisoner physical and mental health and led to some of our interviewees viewing prison officers in a negative light:

“

You only see the staff when they open your door for exercise, or for meals. And they might give you a little bit of help but at that point in time they're concerned about getting you out and getting you back in and locking you back up.

Derek

The EDiC FSWs set herself apart from operational staff and was seen by many men as, “the only one I would go to if I had an issue, I wouldn't go to an officer.” (PIDS 3 at HMP Durham). Staff likewise appreciated her patience and dedication:

“

Sometimes for a prison officer it's frustrating where you get the same question over and over and over again, but [EDiC FSW] sits down, and she explains it brilliantly.

D Staff Interview 7

Her work ethics of being reliable, efficient, approachable, and helpful not only let staff and prisoners hold the EDiC FSW in high esteem, but also resulted in her being in constant demand:

“

She is very well recognised by the Induction Wing staff and a lot of times they just say, 'Have you talked to [EDiC FSW] about it?'

D Staff Interview 1

“

A lot of the lads know who she is straight away, and they actually signpost other prisoners to her.

D Staff Interview 2

These findings chime with research on prison-based family engagement more generally, which identifies high caseloads as a “potential catalyst for stress and burnout” (Power 2021: 111). Funding for family engagement work is often limited and tends to fund only one post to support an entire prison (sometimes on a part-time basis only). Baldwin et al. (2022) flagged the need “for some means of quantifying the work as well as specifying it” (2022: 49). Similarly, when asked how EDiC could be improved, men and staff did not refer to any changes in delivery or content but changes that would redistribute some of the workload and expand and anchor the service more firmly within the prison:

“

If they had some more funding for some more people that would be great. I think the work that she does here is great, it does wonders for the lads.

Paul

“

It's a massive piece of work that she has to do, and some days she must be absolutely swamped. I don't know how she gets through it all but she just comes in like a tornado and works her way through it. And she is an absolute diamond, she really is, there should be more than her.

D Staff Interview 2

Some participants pointed out that the support provided by EDiC was needed beyond the cut-off date of two weeks, since issues around family ties, mental health and practical issues around clothing or prison processes persisted for different people over different periods of time:

“

Everybody needs her. Even if you're here for six months, seven months, ten months. Some people might need her today, you might need her in a few months' time.

Chris

Presented with the possibility of a discontinuation of EDiC and specifically of the family support worker's involvement, participants pointed out their concerns relating to the ability of the prison service to deliver a similarly efficient and comprehensive service. Respondents highlighted the fragmentation of departments within the prison and (institutionally created) limitations to the role of prison officers as their main concerns:

“

If they (EDiC) weren't there, someone from the prison team would have to do the work. But I've seen things where lads on the wing are asking for certain things off and they're getting passed from pillar to post and they're getting nowhere with it...

Paul

“

It would be a travesty for them to lose it (EDiC). There's nothing there for lads in the early days, nothing, no kind of support like that at all.

Derek

“

They're a massive part of the prison. The support they give. I'd hate to think they weren't here. It would make my job a lot harder and the staff's job a lot harder.

D Staff Interview 3

We expand on the ways in which EDiC can be supported by external and internal measures in our final section.

Summary of findings from HMP Durham

The first few days and weeks in custody could be extremely distressing and traumatic for men in HMP Durham, especially for those entering the gates for the first time.

Establishing or staying in touch with loved ones was of utmost importance to mental health during the early days. The shock of losing outside life and relationships could contribute to intentions and acts of self-harm and suicide, especially during the first night(s) and week(s). Men told us that amongst their most pressing needs were practical ones, such as getting vapes, sorting out medication, receiving clothes parcels, accessing phone numbers or getting time out of the cell to use the kiosk. However, their practical needs were often closely connected to emotional and mental well-being. Clothes, for example, held symbolic meaning, and the provision of individualised clothing parcels could impact men on a deeper level, making them feel better about themselves, and potentially less inclined to resort to coping with distress through self-harm, for example.

As a large reception prison covering a large geographical catchment area, HMP Durham faced specific challenges. High levels of churn brought with it a unique set of operational challenges, not least managing the high turnover of prison population during periods of Covid19 lockdown which had a huge impact on prisoner wellbeing, staffing levels and prison regimes. Within the organisational structure of HMP Durham, EDiC had established itself as an indispensable department supporting individual safety and wellbeing and contributing to organisational stability. As a conduit between different teams and departments within the prison, the EDiC FSW successfully navigated a fragmented prison-based communication system to enable a more efficient and whole-prison approach to supporting prisoners and their loved ones on the outside.

The immediacy, efficiency and personalisation with which this support was delivered impacted positively on men's well-being during and after EDiC engagement. Prison staff and men acknowledged the positive impact of EDiC on men, many of whom were at risk of, or who were already self-harming, or were at risk of suicide.

EDiC at HMP Low Newton

HMP and YOI Low Newton is one of 12 women's prisons in England holding women on remand and sentenced. It is a local and resettlement prison located in County Durham, serving courts from the Scottish Borders to Cumbria and North Yorkshire.

At the time of our research the prison operated seven separate wings, one of which was designed as a psychologically informed, planned environment (PIPE), and one dedicated to early days in custody, including dedicated support for women coming in to prison with substance use issues. Throughout the research period, the prison operated at capacity with a population between 302-344 women (HMIP 2021). In 2021 the prison received on average 10 new receptions each week, a tenth of that at HMP Durham (HMIP 2021). According to a survey completed as part of HMIP inspections in June 2021, "127 women were receiving support for substance use problems", and "on average, 45 to 50 women a month were referred for a mental health assessment" (HMIP 2021: 5).

Considering the high number of women who enter the establishment with complex mental health issues, often rooted in histories of abuse, serious childhood trauma and substance use, the latest HMIP report (2021) found that staff made a concerted effort to provide support. "Levels of self-harm were lower than at most similar prisons and there was a very good range of support available to help women manage their feelings and avoid potential crisis" (HMIP 2021:3). Repeated self-harm incidents tended to be distributed among a relatively small number of women. In the 12 months before April 2021

recorded data indicates that an average of 13 women a month had harmed themselves. During this same period there were 502 recorded incidents of self-harm involving 83 individuals (HMIP 2021: 19). Despite effective day-to-day support for women at risk of self-harm, HMIP noted that "work to reduce self-harm was not underpinned by a coherent strategy and measures of success were unclear" (HMIP 2021: 8). These findings were echoed by some of our interview participants as we explore below. Another point for concern, and specific to HMP Low Newton at the time of the HMIP report and our evaluation, was the finding that "acutely mentally unwell women who were at risk of taking their own lives were still being sent to Low Newton because of the lack of appropriate provision in the community" (HMIP 2021: 13).

During the evaluation period, the prison induction process ceased, or was significantly stripped back, in response to the regime changes introduced by the prison service because of Covid19¹⁸. Fluctuating (and generally low) staffing levels further reduced induction provision and led to newly arrived women spending prolonged periods of time locked in their cells. Spending up to 23 hours alone consequently heightened risks of emotional struggle and mental health issues, potentially leading to acts of self-harm or suicide attempts¹⁹. Appropriate facilities to take care of basic needs (e.g. taking a shower, having a meal and exercising) were provided, however, based on our findings, a more effective and comprehensive induction process should be adopted and maintained consistently in order to keep women safe.

Although crucial safeguarding during the first 24 hours after entry into custody was provided by wing staff and other agencies such as the

Offender Management Unit (OMU) or the chaplaincy team, the HMIP report found that their collective activities needed to be streamlined to make them more effective (HMIP 2021). This disjointedness of services partly led to "delays of up to a week in approving and adding family and friends' numbers to women's telephone accounts" (HMIP 2021: 17). At times during the latter stages of fieldwork, induction had been pushed back a week so that the prison could attend to a women's most urgent issues (e.g. left behind issues, medication and drug treatment, key worker introduction) before the prison's agencies introduced themselves and their services. PID workers often played a key role in helping newly arrived women fill out application forms and explained the rules and regimes of the prison.

At the time of our research, the family support team at HMP Low Newton consisted of four dedicated support workers:

1. The NEPACS EDiC FSW, providing support to resolve early days issues around family contact and family relationships in the first fourteen days of custody.
2. The healthcare provider's Drug and Alcohol Recovery Team (DART) support worker acted as a point of contact for families/carers whose loved one had substance misuse issues, supporting families and women during their prison journey and with recovery.

3. The prison's own family support worker whose role description was awaiting confirmation at the time this evaluation was written.
4. In contrast to HMP Durham, the Family Support Team at HMP Low Newton included a Parental Rights family support worker, employed by NEPACS who specialised in supporting mothers in custody with additional issues such as safeguarding, looked after children, social care involvement, care proceedings, the perinatal pathway, liaising with professionals including schools, social workers, family law solicitors as well as maintaining family ties with children who were or had been involved in care proceedings. She provided support after the fourteen-day induction period (see Appendix IV for a detailed outline of Family Support provided at HMP Low Newton as of 2022).

¹⁸ "The Covid-19 National Framework for Prison Regimes and Services' provided a centralised approach to the ways prisons operated during the pandemic. It was removed in May 2022 (PRT 2022).

¹⁹ Evidence reported in the HMIP (2022: 3) Briefing Paper confirm that at the national level, "in some months during the Covid-19 restrictions, the rate of self-harm for women has been seven times higher than for men."

Main issues during early days in custody for women

The participatory research event on the induction wing provided us with a unique opportunity to engage with women who had not had prior contact with EDiC, and to explore the role and value of EDiC in greater depth than we were able to achieve with the men in HMP Durham.

At the time of the event, a restricted regime was in place on the wing due to staff shortages. This meant that women had limited time out of their cell and were unable to socialise with each other or go outside. The usual induction process had not been delivered for some time, and there had been no EDiC FSW in post for three months. Consequently, none of the women in the session knew about EDiC and only one woman was aware of the support available from NEPACS. Our event coincided with the arrival of a new EDiC FSW post-holder, who attended the event and was able to respond to the most pressing issues there and then. The women who participated in the research had spent between 1 day to two weeks in custody, six of them were substance users.

Responses to our questions are significant because none of the women had received any support from EDiC:²⁰

Question 1

What are the most important things you need help with right now?

- Contact with family (3x)
- Phone-related issues (2x: PINs not working; no access to phone numbers)
- Food-related issues (2x: no money for canteen; 'not enough food'/'hungry all the time')
- No spending money
- Not knowing what to do in prison, 'they don't tell you', 'you have to find out yourself'
- Coping with other prisoners on the induction wing ('their mental health' and 'their voices')
- 'Prison officers not understanding me'
- Medication for anxiety
- Not being locked in all the time

Question 2

What impact is not having your needs met having on you emotionally?

- Feeling angry (5x)
- Feeling voiceless (3x) not being heard (1x)
- Frustration (2x)
- 'Not seeing children is very painful'/'hurtful' (3x)
- Bullying (either becoming perpetrator or victim 2x)
- Potential escalation into fights (2x)
- Depression (2x) and feeling low (1x)
- Feeling worthless (2x)

- Distressed (2x)
- Anxiety
- Mental health is getting worse
- Feeling 'forgotten'
- Feeling like a burden
- Feeling unequal
- Feeling misunderstood
- Feeling on edge
- Feeling worried about family
- No clothes.
- No one can help you.

Question 3

What impact is not having your needs met having on you physically?

- Not eating (3x)
- Not sleeping (2x) Feeling tired (1x)
- Feeling physically drained (2x)
- Feeling hungry (2x)
- Feeling scruffy (no clothes other than prison clothes to wear)
- Mental health is getting so much worse

Question 4

What has helped you the most since you have been in the prison?

- Support from other women/making friends on the induction wing (4x)
- No help (2x)
- The chaplain (2x)
- Getting on a methadone script
- Feeling better by helping other people

Although participants did not express major concerns around substance withdrawal, it is important to note that some women, like men, arrived in prison and immediately needed to detox while they waited for their script. Ordinarily they were given a detox pack and allocated a single occupancy cell in a designated part of the induction wing. Women coming into prison with substance use issues often required swift referral to the DART team. Delays could cause significant distress. Women who used nicotine sometimes had to wait two or three days to be given a vape. These delays exacerbated the distress and anxieties that many women were already experiencing in the first few days.

In comparison to the men in our participatory event, women felt distinctly more angry, less heard and without a voice once they entered custody. Some also described not being able to see their children as having a physical impact- as 'painful' and 'hurtful'. They also stressed that they valued the support from other women in custody during their first two weeks more than men. Worryingly, two women told us that they had not been getting enough food and were hungry.

²⁰ Written notes were also taken to capture the discussions that took place as women were writing on post-its and discussing their responses. The lists capture the words the women wrote on post-its.

Interviews with women revealed that they experienced some similar struggles to the men in our study. For example, women reported feeling overwhelmed and not able to cope with or understand what was required of them by the prison. Many women described that the first few days and nights in custody were chaos and disorientating, their "head mixed up", "not with it". This was especially the case for women who were substance users and/ or coming into prison for the first time, as Hayley, one of our interviewees reveals in this example:

“
My first time being in prison. It was the last place I would ever think or imagine that I would end up. It was really difficult. I had no sleep, I was not eating, I was depressed, stressed.

Hayley

Like some of the men we interviewed, women told us that they did not expect to be going to prison after their court case, and so arrived at reception without a change of clothes or essentials such as a toothbrush and soap.

“
Well, the barrister kept saying to us, you're not going to go to prison, you're not gonna go to prison. And it wasn't until I got through the doors at the Crown Court. 'They're looking for a jail sentence for you'.

Sonya

Not knowing that they would be going to prison also meant some women did not have any phone numbers on hand to contact family, Sonya again here:

“
All they do when you come through those doors, they go through your phone and get a couple of numbers out if you really need them. Well, the phone I had was just for drugs because I hadn't really thought of that. So even if I had wanted to contact my daughter, I couldn't.

Sonya

One of the women who participated in the induction wing event explained that she had not been able to contact her mother or sister since she had arrived in prison eleven days ago. She was a foreign national and used Facebook to keep in contact with family and loved ones back home. She believed that her mother and sister would think that her inactivity online meant that she was dead, and this was causing her considerable distress and anxiety²¹. Similar to men at HMP Durham, women's stress and negative affective states were often tied to suddenly and irreversibly being cut off from outside relationships. In Sal's case, this meant her dogs were left unattended in the house, and this was her main concern:

“
It was quite hard. They only give you a certain amount of money to call your parents. Now I had to use that on the day I came in because my dogs were still in the house. I could only ring a mobile, I didn't know the house number. So, like you can imagine the £2 on a mobile, it goes within two minutes. Two minutes you're on the phone and I'm like, 'Mam you need to get to the house, and you need to break through the window and get my dogs out that house, please get my dogs out the house.'

Sal

Chrystal had not expected a custodial sentence either and further illustrates how suddenly being cut off from the family and friends in the early days and not being supported made her feel worthless:

“
The anxiety and your mood and the worry as well because if your numbers aren't on and you can't contact your family then you're waiting days and weeks for people to come and see you. It's hard, it's sad that it takes that long, it makes you sad 'cause you feel like you're not really important.

Chrystal

Being able to contact family and loved ones during the first days and weeks in custody were critically important for women's physical and mental well-being.



²¹The new in-post EDiC FSW who attended the participatory wing event responded and later that week contact was made with the woman's sister.

Role of contact with loved ones during early days in custody

Hayley had a very supportive family on the outside, which was an outlier in our sample. Her parents provided a home for her son while she was in prison and brought him into the prison for regular visits.

As we have outlined earlier, a prison sentence can break people’s connections to society; they can lose homes, employment, and damage their outside relationships. Having family on the outside to help mitigate against these harms and help them re-establish and reconnect to society once released is vital. However, unlike their male counterparts, we found that women were significantly less likely to have family on the outside to support and visit them in prison. Lucy, for example, told us, “I’ve got no-one, no family or owt” (Lucy at HMP Low Newton). Some of the women we interviewed were from towns and cities located far away from the prison and consequently they had few, if any visits from family and friends. The PRT (2022) highlight that the ‘average distance a woman is held from her home is 63 miles’, sometimes much further, and this can have a huge impact on women’s sense of connectedness, belonging, and hope for the future.

“Thank God I’ve got my family who have been supporting me. At the moment my family is paying my rent, paying my bills, paying everything because they didn’t want me to lose my place.”

Hayley

Women told us about experiencing strong emotions of fear, depression, and worry. Many were feeling heartbroken about not being able to meet their perceived responsibilities as mothers (e.g. ‘making Christmas nice’, helping an autistic child to cope):

“That’s one of the biggest stresses I would say for us women in here, ‘Is everybody at home all right?’ The worst thing for me, as his mum, is I can’t help him or make it better or fix it, that’s been the worst thing.”

Shelley

Women’s distress about losing touch with children (or grandchildren in two cases) was profound. It was a source of extreme worry and despair with one mother explaining that “coming to jail and losing the baby. It killed me” (Sonya at HMP Low Newton) and another woman explaining:

“The prison sentence is being separated from your kids and family, you could be in a five-star hotel and have champagne everyday but if you’re separated from your kids you can’t breathe - the pain of it.”

Woman at participatory event

Staff at Low Newton were aware of the different and distinct needs of female prisoners:

“The complexities of women are a lot different from the men. Women tend to be the primary carers of children, taking care of the home, the day to day running. So, when a woman comes into custody the first couple of days, they’re the most problematic.”

LN Staff Interview 3

The physical and emotional pains that mothers endured as a consequence of being separated from children, especially during the first few days and weeks, was at the core of much of the work undertaken by the EDiC FSW. Apart from worrying about the well-being of their children and loved ones, mothers were also worried about losing part of their identity, namely their identity as ‘a mother’ and their role and significance within the family. They feared being forgotten whilst inside prison:

“For me, having ties with outside and keeping that connection just makes us feel like I’m still part of their life. Like the bairn’s parents evening. Me mam went to it and that’s something that I would normally do. [EDiC FSW] got us a video call with the school, and I done the parent’s evening over the video link. It’s just feeling like I’m not being pushed aside, being able to be involved, it just gives you a little bit of relief that people aren’t just getting on without you.”

Shelley

For some women, being a mother and being part of a family represented a motivation to change positively and to ‘work on myself’ whilst inside prison:

“I need to put a bit of weight on. I want to impress them and show them how well I’m doing. Gives you something to work towards. Everything is going to be worth it because I know I’m going to be part of that family again.”

Sal

Positive feelings like love, connected to and experienced through family relationships were important for emotional and mental well-being. Echoing the sentiments of some of the men we interviewed, a heartfelt connection with a loved one could significantly reduce a woman’s feelings of distress and anxiety:

“I saw the impact of these vocal messages you know, when I went to see a woman in her cell and said, ‘I’ve spoken to your mum, she’s okay but she just wants you to know how much she loves you’ and the woman would cry tears of relief, of happiness, of like love basically.”

EDiC FSW

Practical and emotional support provided by EDiC

Women told us about the support they received from the prison during their time in the induction wing and invariably women emphasised some of the shortcomings.

Quite often, the gaps in support were picked up by the EDiC FSWs:

“
I really get on with [name of offender manager]. I've only seen her through my sentence planning. She did come and help me to call my bank, but [EDiC FSW] had already been by that time and let me ring the bank first anyway. So, [EDiC FSW] really gets in there and does her job. It was about a week later when my offender manager came to do it. I'd already done it by then.

Sal

This included providing practical information to women about how things worked in the prison:

“
I would have really struggled; I wouldn't have known. There's a lot of things that I've found out off the girls, but I mean if you were somebody coming in and you weren't really sociable or confident, you basically don't get telled anything off the officers. [EDiC FSW] has let me know a lot of things that I wouldn't have known otherwise.

Shelley

Overlapping with some of the most pressing needs highlighted by men, women at HMP Low Newton referred to the practical help they needed like getting hold of phone numbers and in this example, access clothing:

“
[EDiC FSW] went over to reception herself to have a look through all these clothes to get something because she seen me in just these grey tracksuits, which are huge on me.

Sal

Contacting family and loved ones outside as soon as possible was very important. It was a task that was prioritised by the EDiC FSW and much appreciated by women and staff at HMP Low Newton:

“
Early on when I arrived my son was in hospital and he needed dental treatment, but they had to put him to sleep otherwise they wouldn't be able to do it, but they needed my consent. So, [EDiC FSW] has done everything, yes, she's contacted the hospital, she's told them that I'm happy and then she printed the documents, I signed them, and she sent them back. She didn't have to do it, but she's done everything for me.

Hayley

“
If you've got [EDiC FSW] in there, she can be ringing up your mum to say, 'She's here, she's safe' that took [EDiC FSW] five minutes, where it might take 24 hours to get something on your PINs. You are dealing with the immediacy of things and I think that's really important for the women when they first come in.

LN Staff Interview 1

The EDiC FSW at HMP Low Newton set up an initiative that provided women with toiletries and personalised items of clothing. Clothing and toiletries had more than just a functional value, they represented their non-prison identity and self-worth:

“
Especially in here, waking up and thinking, 'oh, I'm going to get in the shower and I'll do my hair, I might even straighten it today. Oh, I can put them new jeans on I've just got from the shop.' It's as if you've done sommat what you would do out there. Like, when you go shopping, it's lovely, even new underwear.

Chrystal

At HMP Low Newton, the EDiC FSW was also using personalised notecards to keep connections with loved ones on the outside alive. These carried great symbolical and emotional value:

“
They give you the message, you write it down... and then you can deliver it... and they can put it on the cell wall to get them through the first few days... I thought it would be appreciated but I had no idea... how much they loved them, like every woman I've given them to has stuck them straight on the wall and got very emotional about it.

(EDiC FSW at HMP Low Newton)

In our interviews we heard about the importance of women's wish to be heard and to be treated as fellow human beings. The EDiC FSW was able to build trust with women by being attentive and listening:

“
Most of all she listened to me. I just needed someone to talk to when I first came in. I needed to cry, I needed to let it all out and she was there for it. That's all I can ask for. And she couldn't have done anything better.

Sal

“
When I was low, I just wanted someone to talk to and someone to come to my door and just say, 'Are you all right?' and just have a normal conversation with rather than, 'What do you want for your tea?'

Chrystal



It not only mattered what the support worker helped with but how. Women placed importance on feeling understood, listened to, validated and cared for:

“
It was like a little guardian angel I saw because it was somebody who could do things for you that were out of your control. It's as if she cares about the girls who she works with. She does things for you that let you know you're important, that you do matter.

Chrystal

The interpersonal skills of the EDiC FSW and her work ethic contributed greatly to the success of EDiC during their first few days in custody. This, in turn not only helped women in acute crisis but also further down the line. Shelley, for example, told us that the support provided early on in her sentence helped her to settle into the prison environment better:

“
Just getting settled really. She's just been there and made sure that I'm all right. Like, 'Do you need a chat? Are you all right? Is there anything that you need us to chase up for you?' Not necessarily just family wise, but other things like forms or allocations. She's been a massive help in the first couple of weeks here.

Shelley

Relationships established during the early days could form the basis of more meaningful work to be continued later on. Although a good amount of practical and emotional issues could be resolved for women during their first two weeks in custody, there was a need for flexibility to carry on some case work where necessary. This was particularly relevant for mothers separated from their children and who used substances to block out the pain associated with this loss:

“
I mean for it being designed for the first two weeks. When you get in here your first couple of weeks your head's not with it. It takes you a long time to get settled and a lot of lasses maybe don't have contact with their kids. They come in here, they come off the drugs and then they want to rebuild relationships, where they might not do that in the first few weeks. So, I think for it just to be designed for the first few weeks, it should definitely be a little bit longer. Because it takes a lot of people time to get themselves straight and then to want to start changing stuff.

Shelley

From the EDiC FSW perspective:

“
Things drag on and it's hard when you get to that two-week point where really the way the project was designed is when I'm meant to drop away and, you know, legal issues at the moment drag on for weeks and weeks. Luckily, I've got a great team of family support workers in prison that I can refer women on to, but sometimes it's hard. Women have built up trust in me. I've got to know their families and supported them through a really emotional, crucial time and then for me to hand them over to someone else is difficult.

EDiC FSW

The EDiC FSW at HMP Low Newton was often required to spend a considerable amount of time with women in their first two weeks, to work with a complex set of needs, often related to their children, and to signpost them on to various sources of support elsewhere in the prison.



Impact of EDiC on women's mental health, self-harm, and suicidality

Based on the data we collected from the impact questionnaires, women at HMP Low Newton consistently reported lowered distress and confusion levels, increased feelings of connection and hope and the ability to 'cope better' following an intervention with the EDiC FSW.

All respondents reported feeling that left-behind-issues had been dealt with after interacting with the EDiC FSW. Women reported feeling a lot calmer (most used word) and thankful that the contact had been established with children, parents, partners, friends and relatives. A HMIP report on HMP Low Newton published in June 2021, highlighted that the EDiC project was a 'notable positive practice'¹³ (HMIP 2021: 14). It focused on the EDiC FSW's 'excellent individual and practical help to new arrivals to address their main worries and reduce the likelihood of self-harm' (HMIP 2021: 14). Within a multidisciplinary team of chaplaincy, mental health, family engagement and psychology staff, the HMIP report flagged that EDiC provided support to women to, 'manage their feelings and reduce the possibility of personal crisis' (HMIP 2021: 19).

Staff interviews delivered an insight into risks and vulnerabilities connected to self-harm or suicidality for women in the early days of custody:

“You've got the risk if you've got someone who's come into custody and they think their children are going to be taken off them permanently because they're in for 20 years, 30 years, and they have nothing to live for.

LN Staff Interview 4

One of our staff member interviewees emphasised that the risks were greater amongst particular sub-groups of women prisoners, and also highlighted that the period leading up to release was also a high-risk period for self-harm:

“Our young adults or care leavers are a vulnerable group, our foreign nationals, those who are due to get out the next week. You might think that someone getting out the next week would be ecstatic, but if they've got nowhere to go to, or return to an abusive relationship with domestic violence or sexual abuse or being forced to do sex work, that could be a trigger for self-harm.

LN Staff Interview 4

Understandings of self-harm amongst prison staff and prisoners in peer mentor roles were comprehensive and included taking into consideration individual motivations, meanings, and ways of self-harm:

“Self-harm is not just about cutting. It's isolation, it's not having a shower, it's not eating.

Listener/PID

“You've got different types of self-harm. You have those prisoners who might self-harm quite frequently, but low severity, so small scratches, using their nails or a piece of plastic, and they've been doing this for 20 years, 30 years as a way of coping with abuse, trauma, the death of their family at a young age. Now, just because they've come into custody doesn't mean that our processes for keeping them safe is going to prevent them self-harming. But it's sort of understanding that it may be their way of dealing with it, just making sure it doesn't escalate any further and it's done safely, and it is reviewed.

LN Staff Interview 4

According to one of the Listeners²² we interviewed, it was often a feeling of hopelessness and immense loss that would lead some women to self-harm:

“It doesn't matter if you've been in prison a million times, they still come in and say, 'well, I've got nothing. There's nothing now.' And that's the trigger for self-harm. We've known people who lost their pets, and to them that's their family, so they've self-harmed.

Listener/PID

The women in our sample spoke about their lives being defined by multiple and intersecting layers of harm and trauma caused by a range of factors including childhood criminal exploitation, sexual and domestic violence and abuse, coercive control, homelessness, unemployment, and substance and alcohol use over many years. Some women, including Lucy and Sal, told us they used narcotics to block out or dim the pain of past traumas and to regulate their emotions. Only after detoxing and drug treatment, did the full impact of their current situation hit home. For Lucy, who used cocaine and heroin to block out the pain of having children removed from her care, the process of withdrawal during the early days of custody was overwhelming and dangerous:

“It's hard, when you first come into prison and everyone's bombarding you with everything and you start thinking about things you wouldn't have thought about out there. You get on drugs out there, you haven't got the emotions out there. Then people start talking at you when you come in, you have to withdraw from the drugs, you have to deal with your emotions. It took me a week to get on to the dose that I was on out there. It was horrible. Shit. I didn't want to talk to no-one, my mind was all over. I started thinking about my little boy and my little girl that's adopted, and I ended up self-harming. It just got too much.

Lucy

²² Trained by the Samaritans, Listeners are prisoners who provide confidential and emotional support to their peers who are struggling to cope and might be feeling suicidal.

Lucy had been in and out of prison for eleven years. At the time of the interview, she had been sentenced to 23 months and this was her 10th prison sentence. In the extract above, she describes the first few days and weeks in custody as stressful, disorientating and painful. The staff members we interviewed were aware that early intervention was necessary to prevent an escalation of self-harm or suicidality and to reduce harm:

“
The first couple of days are the risky times of suicide and self-harm. You’ll get those people that self-harm for years or most of their lives because of past trauma, we’re not going to cure that in one night. But what we should be doing as a prison and as a criminal justice agency is minimising the trauma.

LN Staff Interview 3

We found that EDiC contributed towards mitigating against the risk of self-harm by reducing stress and worry about family and other left behind issues on the outside, as this staff member illustrates here:

“
Women might come in on the first night and have an ACCT open on them, but I think that the Early Days in Custody worker can bring you out of that quicker because you feel reassured with the support that you’ve been given is around your family.

LN Staff Interview 1

In an environment where some women thought mental health support was not readily available due to the prison requiring that, “you’ve got to put an app in for everything and you’re still waiting weeks to see someone” (Chrystal), the EDiC FSW catered directly to acute mental health needs. These were often related to external stressors of disconnection from loved ones and women feeling powerless:

“
When I first come in, I was having a bit of bother with me partner, not being able to get in touch with him, and she (EDiC FSW) contacted him and passed a message on to him from me, so I knew he was all right, he knew I was all right. And at that time, it’s definitely something that I needed. Because when you’re in here and you can’t pick up the phone and ring out, the wing staff aren’t going to do it for you. She (EDiC FSW) settled me mind.

Shelley

During restricted regimes, long hours of being locked up in a cell without association and with limited stimulation could induce boredom, leading to rumination, worry and restlessness. The EDiC FSW was able to respond to these situations:

“
When you’re behind the cell and you’ve got nothing, fair enough you’ve got the telly there, but it doesn’t stop you thinking of what you’ve been through. She went and got some activities, some colouring pens. It’s just the little things that mean the most to you. It keeps you busy, it keeps your mind focused.

Sal

Alongside situational stressors, some women were dealing with existing mental health issues and needed ongoing support. Apart from the EDiC FSW, there was often no immediate help offered to them, as Sal explains here:

“
A week after I’ve been in, I said to [EDiC FSW], ‘I’m feeling really low. I’m frightened I’m going to start harming myself. She went and informed the staff, and it was from then she was coming out on a regular basis to talk to me, sit there and listen to me. Because some of the officers don’t do that, they’re extremely busy and it is hard for them. But it just takes that one person to get behind the door and harm themselves because they are that low and there’s no one there for them.

Sal

Sal also credits her desistance from attempting suicide during the first few weeks of being in prison to the actions of the EDiC FSW. Sal emphasises in the extract below that a turning point for her was receiving support from the EDiC FSW to re-establish family ties alongside feeling that she was being listened to. The persistence of the EDiC FSW was also important:

“
I actually made a tie wrap because I was getting to the point, I thought I’m just going to string myself up. I’d half made it, but in the end I thought, ‘It’s not worth it. I’ve just got my family back.’ And because [EDiC FSW] was talking to me, and she was coming out and I was getting to speak to someone, and someone was finally listening. I ended up handing it [the tie wrap] over.

Sal

EDiC had a direct impact on Sal’s suicidal thoughts through intensive, empathetic and highly personalised support. Sometimes the EDiC FSW was seen as the only person who was able and willing to deliver this level of specialist support, a finding that also emerged in our research at HMP Durham.

²² Trained by the Samaritans, Listeners are prisoners who provide confidential and emotional support to their peers who are struggling to cope and might be feeling suicidal.

Organisational role of EDiC within HMP Low Newton

Within HMP Low Newton's multidisciplinary team EDiC closed a gap in early days service provision, thus from an operational perspective, made a significant difference to the safety of women:

“
Having someone who is literally just doing early days is really important because all our other family workers are also dealing with women who have been here for years and dealing with all the other ongoing stuff. When EDiC came into the establishment, the early days stuff was just bang, bang, bang, done, excellent. You knew she was safe, you knew her children were safe, you could breathe a sigh of relief because at least everybody's safe, everybody's looked after, everyone's got what they need. Now let's do everything else we've got to do. So, not having EDiC just puts pressure on everyone else.

LN, Staff Interview 1

Echoing our findings at HMP Durham, the EDiC FSW played an important role, acting as a bridge between the inside and the outside, and also as a conduit between different prison departments. When the EDiC post was vacant for period in year 3, a staff member reflected:

“
We can't wait to get the post refilled because I just think there is a void there. The peer mentors are great but it's good to have somebody to come back to you to take the actions that they can't. Because they can't just pick up the phone and ring a social worker...

LN, Staff Interview 2

Her role as a 'go-between' and her in-depth work with individual women provided vital knowledge that could be shared between departments, and ultimately keep women safe:

“
We started inviting [EDiC FSW] to the (Senior Management Meeting) because of the amount of information she knew of prisoners. What was happening in the background was totally different to what we knew. She was physically seeing them every day. In my role, I don't see every prisoner every day and I don't know them inside out, where she was getting to know them in those early days because you don't get many receptions a day. Now for me to get that level of information, I would have to go to the staff and they would say, well, I wasn't on yesterday, but so and so will tell you, he was on. That's wasted time and wasted resources.

LN, Staff Interview 4

Similar to findings from our male respondents, women reported that the EDiC FSW performed a vital role in the prison which they felt was not covered by anyone else:

“
You can ask an officer, but you have to ask quite a few times. But I understand they have a landing to look after. You might have to keep asking 'cause they might forget, or they might have to be doing like cell checks. Where [EDiC FSW], she goes out of her way to make sure that you know that it's done, and she always keeps you informed.

Chrystal

The EDiC FSW was perceived to be significantly different to prison officers, not only because of the work she did to connect families in the early days, but also because she was did not wear a uniform, and staff knew this mattered to the women:

“
Prisoners might have had bad experiences with people in uniforms. Having that independent person, it puts them on a relaxed footing and they're more open to talk.

LN, Staff Interview 4

There was recognition amongst senior staff members that the EDiC project was filling a void left open by operational staff who were increasingly too stretched and busy to support women's emotional needs. EDiC was viewed as vital by the women and prison staff we spoke to, but its delivery was completely reliant on external funding and this was not efficient:

“
Like anything in the public sector, we're always relying on charities to provide things for us, constantly. The issue is then trying to find funding, it's a full-time job getting funding for all of these third sector organisations who are trying to do amazing things.

LN, Staff Interview 1

Likewise, the senior staff members we interviewed were acutely aware of the value and importance of rolling out a trauma-informed approach across all the female estate, and yet there was recognition that under current prison funding arrangements, this was not achievable:

“
We've just got a lot of women who have massive issues, I mean 99.999% of all of our women have suffered extreme trauma, in all kinds of guises, there's no funding for any of those things at all really.

LN, Staff Interview 1

Given these conditions, it is unsurprising to find that we observed an over-reliance on EDiC to plug gaps and this sometimes led to FSWs feeling overstretched and frustrated by the system:

“
I'm putting fires out, but the minute I put one out there's one springing up. It's the whole criminal justice system. I've tried really hard to stay motivated and not get depressed but the whole system is a wreck.”

LN, EDiC FSW

Staff clearly recognised the crucial role EDiC played and offered suggestions to further anchor and refine the role at HMP Low Newton. This included a clear definition of departmental responsibilities and cooperation and communication between different services:

“
Make EDiC a statutory part of the prison and then it's not a grant funded or a charitably funded project, that actually it's part of the business model of a prison that you would have an Early Days in Custody family support worker.”

LN, Staff Interview 2

Summary of findings from HMP Low Newton

Our research in HMP Low Newton revealed that, like in HMP Durham, the first few days and weeks in custody could be extremely distressing and disorientating especially for women entering the gates for the first time.

Like their male counterparts, women told us that amongst their most pressing needs were practical ones, such as accessing a vape, sorting out medication, receiving clothes parcels and toiletries and accessing phone numbers. Again, like the men, women's practical needs were often closely connected to their emotional and mental well-being. For example, having access to personal clothes and toiletries helped women to feel cared for and settled and in turn, reduced feelings of anxiety and despair. Echoing our findings in HMP Durham, establishing contact with loved ones was of utmost importance to women, and vital to their mental health during the early days.

However, we uncovered important differences in men and women's support needs during the early days in custody and found that HMP Low Newton faced gender specific challenges when it came to delivering the EDiC project. Firstly, women are much more likely than men in prison to have family living many miles away from the establishment or have no family at all. This can mean women receive few if any visits which was certainly the case for some of the women in our research. Lacking support from family negatively impacted on women's coping strategies and their feelings of hope for the future. Secondly, the majority of women in prison have suffered harm and trauma throughout their lives and are more likely to arrive in prison with substance and alcohol issues. The women in our sample were no different and, along with the prison staff we interviewed, told us that the early days of custody were an especially high-risk period, where feelings of suicide and self-harm were commonplace. This was most notable for mothers who were separated from their children. For some of the mothers in our sample, withdrawal from drugs during the early days of custody opened up deep wounds of pain, guilt, shame, low self-worth and emptiness, that stemmed from having children removed from their care. The complexity of women's lives and family circumstances (for example, mothers having

children in care and/or being looked after by relatives) requires specialist family support from an EDiC FSW and delivered in a trauma informed and empathetic way.

Effects of EDiC on outside families and loved ones

As outlined earlier, engaging family members in research for this evaluation was challenging. We secured only three in-depth interviews, despite our best efforts.

Consequently, towards the end of year two we adapted our approach and created a short online questionnaire asking family members whose loved ones in prison had engaged with EDiC to tell us about the value of the project from their perspective²³. We also consulted secondary data collected by NEPACS, including the Visitors' Voices event (2020) which took place before EDiC was launched. We reflect on this combined data in this final section but are mindful that we cannot draw reliable conclusions given the small sample.

Families participating in Visitor Voices event pointed out several concerns relevant to our evaluation. For example, family members expressed concerns about the perceived risks that they felt their loved ones were exposed to in the early days of custody but felt 'voiceless' and 'powerless' and unable to access reliable and timely information. Family members highlighted they wanted to be able to discuss concerns with non-uniformed prison staff. They furthermore criticised the usefulness of phone lines provided by prisons for families to call in to the establishment for updates on their loved ones. Family members reported that the phone system could easily increase stress levels because there was often no response from the prison after messages were left on answer machines. Families felt they needed more information about the prison system and institutional and bureaucratic processes (NEPACS 2020). They did not feel involved in the process at all and expressed a wish "to be valued, rather than being seen as a nuisance" (NEPACS 2020: 4).

Similarly, the family members we interviewed pointed towards a significant gap in support within HMPPS for families. This gap was bridged by NEPACS and by EDiC in the early days. Our interviewees were women and each of them told us they were struggling to come to terms with the loss of their loved ones. They also found it challenging having to navigate the 'heavily bureaucratic criminal justice system' (Kinkaid et al. 2019: 4). One of our interviewees experienced "a lot of frustration in just negotiating the system" (Stella). Respondents who completed our online questionnaire told us that the most important issues they needed help with in the first two weeks were supporting their loved one's mental health, sending in a clothes parcel, and 'understanding the system'. They also reported getting no help or support from the prison. They found EDiC to be most helpful in providing the support they desperately needed in the early days, as described vividly by Jess:

“
EDiC have been my lifeline 'cause that day, I wanted to literally get in my car and just drive and drive and drive. I didn't want to be in this house. I was frightened of what”

was going to happen to us... I don't know what I would have done that day if I hadn't have rang. If it wasn't for NEPACS I wouldn't know anything. The information that I was given was spot on. It was everything I needed.

Jess

In times of acute communication breakdown between prisons and families the EDiC FSW was seen as the only 'lifeline' in crisis. A sudden cessation of contact with their loved ones could leave families feeling 'worried, anxious, scared, lost and alone'.²⁴ Despite the establishment of prison helplines for families, these were often unavailable or were not able to provide any information about their loved one for security reasons, or because helpline operators did not have direct access to prison wings. EDiC was described by family members as a crucial bridge when prison staff shortages and security measures had led to a drying up of communication between the inside and the outside:

“*For a mother to ring somewhere like that is bad enough, but then to be told, 'Oh, we can't speak to you, we can't pass any messages on. We can't tell you anything.' Which I understand for security reasons, but I just think there should be something for families, even just a letter with the information like what NEPACS emailed me, just something like that would have set me mind at rest. It was just literally, 'We can't speak to you, you have to wait until your son gets in touch', but I thought, 'What if me son didn't get in touch?*”

Jess

And similarly, from another mother, Stella, here:

“*There's no reassurance from the prison to say that they're going to be safe. That just doesn't get communicated at all.*”

Stella

The family members we spoke to felt that using the prison-provided helpline only exacerbated their distress:

“*The few times I did ring the Safer Custody Helpline I think it sort of backfired on him. I can only assume that they've maybe ridiculed him a little bit and said, 'Oh, your mummy's been on the phone.'*”

Stella

The EDiC helpline, in contrast, was described by family members as a positive experience. Our interviewees for example, emphasized the personal skills of the EDiC FSWs as important to the success of the helpline. Their professional and personal skill sets were praised, providing information

about prison structures and processes as well as being 'reliable', 'efficient', 'open-minded', 'relatable' and 'compassionate'. The EDiC project, and the EDiC FSW mattered greatly to families:

“*When this happens to you, you just feel like you're the only person in the world that this has happened to. But then when you speak to them, they're just so understanding and knowledgeable and they reassure you that this'll pass. You feel like you've got a kind of friend. I'm not afraid to talk to them about things. When you speak to EDiC they've just got all the facts and lots of experience with supporting families.*”

Jess

Supporting families from inside HMP Durham, the EDiC FSWs recounted phone conversations with relatives in emotional turmoil:

“*They will be very apologetic and say, '[EDiC FSW], I'm so sorry' and I say, 'Look, it's fine, I'll just stay on the other end of the telephone, I can't understand what you're telling me because you are so upset but that's fine, I can just sit here and then when you're ready, then you'll just continue the conversation.'*”

HMP Durham, EDiC FSW

Family members can feel shocked and isolated when a loved one is sent to prison. Some family members felt shame and described the EDiC FSWs as their only source of hope, support and contact during these first days and weeks of acute crisis. The EDiC FSWs were invariably the only source of emotional support family members on the outside had, which was vital to many:

“*The family, that's what really falls through the gaps. The women at the prison, if they're distressed, they know they can ring their alarm bell and someone at least will come, but a family sat at home not knowing what's happened or how their family member is doing, they have no support. They have no mental health team, no healthcare on site, they have nobody.*”

HMP Low Newton, EDiC FSW

Family members felt a profound lack of communication between the prison and themselves. For this reason, families were all the more grateful to have a contact in the prison who would be available, reliable, consistent and supportive to their needs:

“*People outside, they are very appreciative because they've got a contact point in the prison, they've got somebody who will help. [EDiC FSW] had flowers sent in and cards which shows their appreciation.*”

D, Staff Interview 2

²³ Administered by NEPACS.

²⁴ Family Online Questionnaires

Summary of findings for families

Family members and loved ones reaffirmed EDiC's role as 'a conduit', 'a bridge', and a 'safe connection' between their loved one in prison and the family. The EDiC FSWs delivered important practical, emotional and mental health support to families in distress and uncertainty, making them feel heard, understood, and included. EDiC also provided families with crucial information to help them navigate and understand the complexities of the prison system and to feel less helpless.

We recommend more in-depth and participatory research with family members who are using the EDiC service/helpline to further explore, scrutinise, and expand these findings. Further research is needed to better understand the impacts of the first two weeks of custody on children and family members²⁶.



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²⁶ See footnote 13.

Summary and Conclusion

Most individuals find themselves in a state of shock and crisis when they first enter the prison gates, whether this is their first time or not. We found that being supported to resolve practical difficulties and to help establish contact with family and loved ones on the outside as soon as possible was vital.

Doing so helps mental well-being and reduces the risks of self-harm and suicide during a particularly critical stage of the custodial journey. With the provision of specialist family support at its core, the EDiC project fulfils this vital role within prisons. The EDiC FSW was described by staff, prisoners and family members alike, as a 'messenger', a 'go-between', a 'conduit', performing a crucial role in helping to sustain familial relationships and making communication between prisoners and their loved ones more efficient and less bureaucratic. They also fulfil an important safeguarding role; working with Safer Custody and outside agencies to keep those inside and outside safe, including children. Relatedly, the FSW was also highlighted as a crucial link in the organisational structure of the prison- sharing vital knowledge about prisoners and their families and connecting across departments. Importantly, the EDiC FSW performed the role with empathy and care, taking the time to connect and listen to prisoners and their families. We found that there were important similarities between men and women in terms of their most pressing needs during the early days in custody. However, we found that there were important

differences too. Women's criminal activities are more often intertwined with past traumas and abusive relationships as well as more likely to present with substance use issues and poor mental health. Thus, as we have explored in this report, women are especially vulnerable to suicide and self-harm (APPG, 2022; Public Health England, 2018), and increasingly so as recorded cases of self-harm amongst the women's population continue to rise (MOJ, 2023). We have also highlighted that the first few days in custody are especially risky for mothers separated from their children (Baldwin, 2022). The EDiC project, therefore, plays an essential role in men and women's prisons, above anything else, it keeps men and women in custody safe.

Yet delivery of much needed family support services in prisons have been largely delegated externally to third sector organisations by HMPPS, and internally to prisoners such as PID workers. The current recruitment and retention crisis coupled with ongoing prison service budget cuts have forced these changes into place, subtracting from and redefining prison officer roles. Given their crucial role in prisons, we argue that there is an urgent need for more investment in prison-based family support in order to properly strengthen prisoner family ties and implement Lord Farmer's recommendations. In the meantime, EDiC plays a crucial role in this realisation, and its continuity will make a difference for those impacted by the shock and crisis of the early days in custody.

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Appendices

Appendix I: EDiC Prisoner first/post contact evaluation form

Pre- Project Engagement Evaluation Form: HMP Durham and HMP Low Newton

Outcomes which must be evaluated using the feedback form

- Impact of project on resident's feelings of distress and confusion in early days of custody.
- Impact of project on resident's feeling connected to/ supported by family members and loved ones.
- Impact of the project on resident's feeling able to cope with prison life and regime.
- Impact of the project on resident's feeling that left behind issues have been dealt with/resolved
- Impact of project on resident's well-being, especially hopes and thoughts for the future.

Resident ID _____

Distress:

On the scale 1-10 below (1 being not distressed and 10 being extremely distressed) how distressed do you feel at the present time?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Confusion:

On the scale 1-10 below (1 being extremely confused and 10 being not confused) how confused do you feel at the present time?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Connected to family and loved ones

On the scale 1-10 below (1 feeling not connected to family members and loved ones, and 10 feeling extremely well connected to family members and loved ones) how well connected do you feel to your family members and loved ones?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Able to cope with prison life and regime:

On the scale 1-10 below (1 being not able to cope and 10 being able to cope extremely well) do you feel able to cope with prison life and regime?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Left behind issues have been dealt with:

On the scale 1-10 below (1 being not dealt with and 10 being dealt with) do you feel that issues to do with home, your family and significant others are being dealt with?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Hopes and thoughts for the future:

On the scale 1-10 below (1 being not hopeful and 10 being extremely hopeful) how hopeful do you feel about the future?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1. Can you put into words how you are feeling on an emotional/ mental health level at this early stage of being in custody?

2. Since being in prison, what is your main concern?

3. What is the most important thing you want to get out of this support?

4. (if applicable) Thinking about what's achievable and thinking about your role as a parent, where do you want to be in two weeks' time?

Researchers from Durham University, Department of Sociology, are evaluating this project and may use the responses you have provided in the final report or in publications. NEPACS will share your responses but NOT your name. You will not be identified in any publications to do with this project. If you want to know more about the evaluation, please ask your NEPACS family support worker to provide you with an information sheet. If you want to contact the researchers, you will find our contact details on this document. Dr Kate O'Brien and Dr Christina Straub.



Durham
University

If nothing ever
changed



There would be no
butterflies