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Families on Trial: The silent victims of crime speak out on film.

More families in the UK are faced with the trauma, stigma and financial challenges accompanying a close relative's arrest and sentence than anywhere in Europe. The UK prison population has risen by 30% in the last 10 years to 92,000.

The impact of the arrest and sentencing of a parent on children can be severe. Children of prisoners are three times more likely to suffer mental health problems than their peers. 160,000 children a year have a parent taken into custody, more than experience the divorce of a parent.

Now, a set of powerful short documentaries, voiced by real family members telling their own moving stories, gives a vivid insight into their lives and experiences.

Alan Hooker from Prisoners' Families and Friends Service (PFFS), a charity working to support families in this area, said:

"Families of prisoners are the 'silent victims' of crime. Arrest and imprisonment hugely disrupts family life. Children in the family are nearly always damaged psychologically by the experience. The films on the Families on Trial website show how different families struggle to cope with the effects of arrest and imprisonment. Despite the fact that the problems are well documented, there is no single statutory body providing support. Families often have no idea where to turn to for help and advice."

Prisoners' Families and Friends Service reaches out to those families, providing them with emotional support, information, advice and advocacy at a desperately low point in their lives.

Research shows that a prisoner who has a strong family unit to return to is less likely to re-offend. Those prisoners visited by a partner or family member have a 25% lower re-offending rate than those whose families do not support them. Sadly, one in four men and half of all women on remand receive no visits from their family.

Judge Chapple, from the Inner London Crown Court said:

"One of the saddest aspects of my job is the number of repeat offenders that I see in front of me. Often, these are individuals who have become isolated from their families and support networks; all too often they become trapped in a spiral of decline and despair."

All evidence suggests that offenders who continue to have contact with and support from their families are more likely to exit the criminal justice system and achieve a successful rehabilitation back into society. The pressure on offenders' families is often intense and so we must do all that we can to support them and ensure that the intrinsic role they play in rehabilitating their family members is recognised, appreciated and supported. Their role is vital - not only for their families' wellbeing – but also for the dramatic difference they can make to wider society by helping break the cycle of crime."

This project was funded by the Nationwide Foundation, It is a collaboration between PFFS and five other voluntary agencies – Storybook Dads, Castle Gate Family Trust, NIACRO, SHARP and Action for Prisoners' Families. The films and were produced by wiredvideo.net.

Notes for Editors

The films are freely available on <http://familiesontrial.org> which also hosts information about the issue along with contact details of organisations offering advice and help to prisoners' families.

All statistics quoted are taken from the Bromley Briefings available at the following site:
<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/>

For more information or to arrange interviews contact

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Raj Yagnik from wiredvideo.net (for stills and information on the making of the films and supporting materials.)
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Supporting Material:

Visits to the Swan centre, a drop-in centre for prisoners' families, can be arranged through Alan Hooker, who can also provide a DVD copy of the film.

Transcripts of interviews are available from Raj Yagnik, as are high resolution stills from the film shoot (– low resolution stills attached).

Quotes:

“I woke up one morning to two police officers at the front door, saying that (my son) had tried to commit suicide in jail, this was before his sentence, this was when he very first went in. A year and two months later he got bail, and I had to adapt my home again for him coming home and prepare young children for the fact that the police could call at any time to check that he was in his bed. The impact it had on the house... you can't really put it into words.” Mother

“(My wife) was given bail conditions that basically prevented her from leaving the house... it dragged on for 2 and a half years, it was a nightmare. I feel like the kids and I were punished every bit as much... you're completely under scrutiny at all times, you just try and hold on to what's left of your life.” Husband

“When he went into jail we weren't a proper family, it felt like I didn't have a brother... because missing someone, it feels like a broken piece, you just feel hurt inside.” Sister

“It does get easier, but there are still days that you cry – the youngest one said to me one night ‘you think you're the only one that cries, but lost my brother too... and I started to think, my God we're silent victims, serving a harder sentence than what they are inside’ Mother.