

Penalising Prisoners, Penalising Families:  
The Difficulties of Maintaining Contact With  
Prisoners Through Prison Visits

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by

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Title: Penalising Prisoners, Penalising Families: The Difficulties of Maintaining Contact With Prisoners Through Prison Visits.**

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This research considers the difficulties that are encountered when visiting a loved one or relative who is in prison. Early research in this area drew attention to the Prison Service's lack of consideration for families visiting prisons (see Matthews, 1983; 1989). Following the Woolf Report (1991) and subsequent reforms, commentators were optimistic that, at last, the Prison Service was starting to address issues relating to prisoners' families. However, much has happened within the prison system since this time - numbers in prison have increased, there has been a renewed emphasis on security, order and control in prison, and a requirement to reduce drug misuse amongst prisoners. The present study reviews the situation in view of these developments. Theoretically, this research draws upon recent feminist work to emerge from North America that focused on the 'hidden' implications of crime control policies for women outside the criminal justice process (see Miller, 1998; Danner, 1998; Massey et al, 1998). Prisoners' families constitute one group with whom this new approach is concerned. This latest feminist endeavour aims to change criminal justice policies and practices so as to lessen the costs to women and children. This aim also formed the rationale for the present study. A multi-method approach was employed. This included a survey of 133 prisons in England and Wales (a response rate of 67% was obtained) and interviews with thirty prison visitors at two prisons. Observational data was also collected at these two prisons. The findings suggest that prisoners' families continue to be ignored by a prison system that treats them as little more than a resource, removed from penal considerations yet entwined into policy when their assistance is required. A number of recommendations for changes to penal policy and practice designed to improve the situation for prisoners' families are proposed.

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# **SPECIAL NOTE**

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## Introduction

In its annual report for 1997/8, the Prison Service stated that it was now accommodating more prisoners than ever before (HM Prison Service, 1998a). At the time, the average prison population stood at 61,000. Recent statistics indicate that the prison population now stands at just under 65,000 (HM Prison Service, 2000). Furthermore, numbers in prison are likely to continue to rise. The present Home Secretary, Jack Straw, recently stated 'Unapologetically, our policies have led, and will lead, to more people going to prison' (*The Observer*, 24 September 2000: 11). An issue that is rarely acknowledged is that imprisonment has consequences for individuals other than those remanded or sentenced to a term in prison. As Landis & Danner (1990: 111-112) point out '... offenders do not exist as exclusive objects. They are connected in relationships with other people, a major portion of whom are women - mothers, wives, lovers, sisters and daughters'. It is now widely accepted that those left on the outside also suffer when a relative or loved one is imprisoned. As the prison population increases, so do the number of families who have to face the difficulties that come with imprisonment. As Danner (1998: 11) observes 'As politicians get tough on crime, it is women and children who do the time'. It is these women and children, known collectively as "prisoners' families", with whom the present study is concerned.

There are various justifications for addressing issues that concern prisoners' families. These range from the 'liberal humanism' viewpoint, which argues that a caring society supports those of its member who are suffering, to more pragmatic justifications concerning crime reduction (see Light, 1993). These justifications alone provide reason enough for studies that focus on prisoners' families. The present study, however, is informed by another rationale. This is feminist in origin. Recent feminist work emerging from North America draws attention to the 'hidden' or 'unexamined' implications of crime control policies for women outside the criminal justice process (see Danner, 1998; Massey et al, 1998). This work is inspired by a desire to change the direction of criminal justice policies and practices through bringing the voices of these women 'closer to the centre of policy-making' (Miller, 1998: xv). Prisoners' families constitute one group with whom this new approach is concerned. In keeping with this latest feminist endeavour, the overriding concern in this study was not only



to highlight the consequences for prisoners' families of penal policies and practices but also to move prisoners' families closer to the centre of consideration in the development of these policies and practices. With this objective in mind, a number of recommendations are presented that may improve the situation for prisoners' families.

Early research, conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, suggested that the Prison Service afforded little consideration to prisoners' families. This situation was reflected in the various definitions employed by commentators in reference to these families. Matthews (1983) described them as the 'forgotten victims of the penal system'. Several years later, she argued that the families of prisoners could 'still be accurately described as forgotten victims, suffering through no fault of their own from the normal operation of the penal system' (Matthews, 1989: 7). The present research set out to determine the extent to which this remains the case in view of the developments that have taken place within the Prison Service in the last decade. Following the Woolf Report (1991), commentators were optimistic that, at last, the Prison Service was starting to address the issue of prisoners and their families or 'family ties' as it is termed (see Light, 1993). Subsequent publications emerging from the Prison Service suggest that this optimism was well founded (see HM Prison Service, 1995a: 27). Findings from this study, however, indicate that the expressed commitment to family ties is little more than rhetoric. In reality, the Prison Service is far from committed to assisting prisoners to maintain their family ties. What this study has shown is that factors such as overcrowding and the obligation to address certain operational imperatives have undermined the expressed commitment to family ties. The evidence presented suggests that prisoners' families continue to be ignored by a penal system that treats them as little more than a resource, removed from penal considerations yet entwined into policy when their assistance is required.

In Chapter 1, consideration is first given to the characteristics of those individuals who constitute the prisoners' family. The discussion then moves on to explore the findings from early research into prisoners' families and the developments that have taken place within the prison system since this research was conducted. The chapter concludes with an overview of the various justifications for supporting prisoners' family ties. The rationale that informed the present study is also considered.

In Chapter 2, the methodology employed in the present study is discussed. The research aims, objectives and sources of information are outlined. The theoretical approach that informed the methods adopted in the present research, access, sampling, issues concerning research instruments, piloting and data collection are then explored. In the final section of this chapter, the related issues of reliability and validity are addressed.

In Chapter 3, the Prison Service's commitment to family ties is explored. It is argued that the Prison Service could be doing much more to assist prisoners in maintaining relationships with those on the outside. Evidence to support this argument is found in the discrepancy between prison policy and what actually occurs in practice. Further evidence is found in the extent to which the needs of families visiting prison are overlooked and often placed second to organisational imperatives. The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, visiting arrangements are examined. The extent to which prisons were performing according to policy and recommended standards in terms of minimum visiting entitlements and the scheduling of visits is explored. In the second section, the quality of visits is considered. The conditions under which visits take place and the provision and quality of facilities provided in visit rooms are examined. The provision of special visits that allow extended contact between prisoners and their families is also explored.

In Chapter 4, further evidence to suggest that the Prison Service is less than committed to family ties is presented. Two issues are considered. The first issue concerns provision made in recognition of the difficulties that visitors experience in travelling to/from prisons to visit. The second issue concerns the implications for prisoners' families of the procedure known as prisoner allocation.

In Chapter 5, the effect of recent developments within the Prison Service on visiting arrangements and procedures is examined. It is argued that the Prison Service has not wilfully neglected their obligations where family ties are concerned, rather that the need to address other obligations has detracted from efforts to assist prisoners in maintaining their family ties. Three issues are addressed. First, the effect of increased numbers in prison and overcrowding on visits is examined. Second, the influence of the policy known as Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) on prisoners' contact with

their families is considered. Finally, the extent to which establishments have managed to meet security demands and reduce the flow of drugs into prison whilst at the same time providing quality contact for prisoners and their families is explored.

Chapter 6 returns to the argument pursued in previous chapters, that despite the Prison Service's expressed commitment to family ties, the needs of families visiting prison continue to be neglected. This time the discussion focuses on those facilities, normally located outside the prison, known as Visitors' Centres. In this chapter, the difficulties and problems that prisoners' families experience in maintaining contact with prisoners are also reviewed. Particular attention is paid to the sacrifices that visitors make in terms of time and money in supporting the prisoner during his/her time in prison. It is argued the Prison Service might well find itself in crisis if prisoners' families were to withdraw their assistance.

In the concluding chapter, an overview of the present study and its main findings are presented. The discussion then moves on to consider a number of recommendations for changes in policy and practice that may improve the situation for prisoners' families.

## **1. PRISONERS' FAMILIES: WHAT HAS CHANGED?**

Research interest in prisoners' families has wavered in recent years. Following sporadic publications in the 1960s and 1970s, interest in the subject reached its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Various terms were coined. Prisoners' families were referred to as the 'forgotten victims' of the penal system who were themselves 'sentenced by association' and caught in a 'web of punishment' (Matthews, 1983; 1989; Blake, 1990; Coulter, 1991). These days only occasionally are studies that focus on issues concerning prisoners' families reported in academic journals and books. Is it the case then that those concerns raised a decade ago have since been addressed? This is the question with which the present study is primarily concerned. The findings from the early research into prisoners' families are explored below. The discussion then moves on to examine developments that have taken place within the prison system since this research was conducted. The various justifications for addressing issues that concern prisoners' families are then discussed. To begin, however, consideration is given to the characteristics of those individuals who constitute the "prisoners' family".

### **1.1 Prisoners' Families: The Relatively Unknown**

In this section, the question of which individuals constitute "prisoners' families" is addressed. The term strictly interpreted could be used to refer to any person (or group of persons) who is, in some way, related to a prisoner. In this study, the term is employed in reference to those individuals who are committed to supporting the prisoner throughout his/her time in prison and with whom the prisoner has a relationship or is related. To establish exactly who these individuals are, and their relation to the prisoner, is no easy task. This is largely due to the fact that there is no official data on prisoners' families. Commentators have often drawn attention to this absence of statistics. It has been argued that the situation reflects the low status that prisoners' families are afforded (Matthews, 1989). Indeed, it remains the case that there is no one statutory body or agency that is directly responsible for the families of prisoners (Codd, 1998). Fortunately, there is no shortage of data where prisoners are concerned. Examining official statistics on prisoners provides some assistance in

answering the question posed. Another useful information source in this respect is the National Prison Survey (1991).<sup>1</sup>

'Prisoners are overwhelmingly male' (Morgan, 1997: 1155). It is this fact more than anything else that defines the families of prisoners. The prison population at the end of March 2000 was 65,460 (White et al, 2000). The majority of the population were male: approximately 42,600 were sentenced adult male prisoners, 8,100 sentenced male young offenders and 10,800 male remand prisoners. In comparison, female prisoners remain very much in the minority, despite recent increases.<sup>2</sup> At the end of March 2000, the number of female prisoners was 3,393 (figure includes remand prisoners and sentenced young offenders), just over 5% of the total prison population (White et al, 2000). The National Prison Survey (1991) found that just under half (49%) of prisoners had been living with their spouse or partner prior to imprisonment. Nearly one quarter (23%) had been living with their parents or other adult relatives. The remainder (18%) had been living alone. Looking at these figures in conjunction with what is known about prisoners from official statistics one could surmise that the individuals who are most likely to be left behind when a prison sentence is imposed are women, specifically the partners and spouses of male prisoners.

It is not just that these women are left behind. Someone must assume the responsibilities that family members relinquish upon their imprisonment. Evidence suggests that more often than not it is women who take on this role. The National Prison Survey (1991) found that just under half (47%) of female prisoners and one third (32%) of male prisoners had dependent children living with them prior to their imprisonment. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of male prisoners indicated that at least one of their children was being cared for by their spouse or partner. This was the case for less than one-fifth (19%) of female prisoners. Children whose mother was imprisoned were most likely to be living with other relatives. As previous research has found these 'substitute carers' for children of imprisoned mothers are generally female, usually grandmothers, aunts or sisters of the prisoner (Catan, 1988; Richards & McWilliams, 1996; Caddle & Crisp, 1997). Hence, it is women, as opposed to men,

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<sup>1</sup> The National Prison Survey is based on the findings from interviews with prisoners conducted in January and February 1991. Interviews were carried out in all establishments in England and Wales. A one in ten sample of male prisoners and one in five sample of female prisoners were selected for interview. A response rate of 90% was achieved. The survey included both convicted and unconvicted prisoners.

<sup>2</sup> The female prison population increased by 7% (from 3,180 to 3,390) between March 1999 and March 2000 (White et al, 2000).

who are more often than not left with the responsibility for the emotional and economic needs of children when a man or a woman is imprisoned.

Prisoners' families as a subject area remains relatively under-researched. Those studies that have been carried out have tended to examine the experiences of what is arguably the 'typical' prisoners' family, that is partners and children of male prisoners (see Morris, 1965; Monger & Pendleton, 1977; Matthews, 1983; 1989; Shaw, 1987; 1992a; Smith, 1989; Peelo et al, 1991; Davies, 1992). In fact, this early research was criticised for adopting too narrow a focus. In response to these criticisms, subsequent researchers extended their enquiries to include the families of female and ethnic minority prisoners (see Catan, 1988; 1992; Woodrow, 1992; Amira, 1992; Light, 1994; Richards et al, 1995a; 1995b). More recent studies have looked more closely at subgroups, such as older partners of prisoners, partners of politically motivated prisoners and families of prisoners who have committed serious crimes (Codd, 1997; McEnvoy et al, 1999; Howarth & Rock, 2000). These studies have helped to highlight the fact that prisoners' families are *not* an homogenous group. However, one criticism that has not met with response is the enduring emphasis on prisoners' partners and children. Certain commentators have argued that in adopting this approach, research has failed to acknowledge the diverse nature of prisoners' family ties. As Paylor & Smith (1994: 131) point out 'relationships between prisoners and their families are often more complex than the tidy model of the nuclear family allows'.

The findings from the National Prison Survey (1991) confirm that prisoners' families as a group encompasses more than partners or spouses and children. Results revealed that parents and step-parents often constitute the prisoners' family. Just over one-quarter (27%) of prisoners, who had received a visit in the previous three months prior to interview (or since they had been in the particular prison), indicated that their most important visitors were their parents or step-parents. Smaller percentages indicated that their spouse or partner (16%), spouse and child together (14%) or boyfriend/girlfriend (11%) were their most important visitors. However, these figures disguise differences between prisoners. First, there were variations across age groups. Generally, the older the prisoner the less likely s/he was to state that their parents or step-parents were their most important visitors. Just over half (52%) of prisoners under 21 said that a parent or step-parent was their most important visitor. This was

the case in only 3% of prisoners aged fifty or over where most (32%) prisoners indicated that partners or spouses were their most important visitor.

Second, prisoners' marital circumstances influenced responses on who was the most important visitor. Those prisoners who were married or cohabiting were most likely to indicate that their spouses and partners were their most important visitors (42% and 34% respectively). The most important visitors for prisoners who were single were most likely to be parents or step-parents (44%). This was also the case for those prisoners who were divorced or separated. For this particular group of prisoners, the most important visitor tended to be spread across a wider range of people. For instance, 23% of divorced prisoners indicated that their parents or step-parents were their most important visitors, 21% said their friends were their most important visitor, 18% indicated that this person was their child alone and 13% said their boy or girl friend. The remainder (10%) said their most important visitor was their brother or sister. A similar pattern of responses was revealed for those prisoners who were separated from their respective partners or spouses.

There is more to be learnt about prisoners' families from data on prisoners. Official prison statistics show that minority ethnic groups are over-represented within the prison population. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that ethnic minorities are similarly represented in terms of prisoners' families. Latest figures indicate that 85.5% of male prisoners were white; 10.1% were black, 2.3% were South Asian and 1.9% belonged to Chinese or other ethnic groups (White et al, 2000).<sup>3</sup> For female prisoners, 86% were white, 11% were black, 0.8% were South Asian and 2% belonged to Chinese or other ethnic groups (White et al, 2000).<sup>4</sup> Latest statistics on the general population in England and Wales indicate an ethnic breakdown as follows: 94.9% were white, 1.5% were black, 2.8% were South Asian and 0.8% belonged to other ethnic groups (cited in White et al, 2000).<sup>5</sup> Prison statistics also reveal that a considerable proportion of the prison population from minority ethnic groups are foreign nationals (overall 28% of males and 50% of females) (White et al, 2000). This is a consequence of the arrest and detention of individuals who have been caught attempting to bring illegal drugs into Britain (Green, 1991). Previous research has

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<sup>3</sup> Information as reported at the end of March 2000. Relates to British Nationals only.

<sup>4</sup> Again, information relates to British Nationals only.

<sup>5</sup> Information on ethnic groups in the general population derived from the Labour Force Survey (1998).

noted the particular difficulties foreign nationals experience in maintaining links with their families abroad (see Richards et al. 1995a; 1995b).

Prisoners are also disproportionately working class (Morgan, 1997: 1161). The National Prison Survey (1991) found that 83% of male prisoners were from manual, partly skilled, or unskilled groups. This compares to 45% of the general male population. Again it is reasonable to assume that families of prisoners, like the prisoners themselves, are also most likely to be working class. Evidence from academic studies further substantiates the argument that prisoners' families come from relatively disadvantaged economic backgrounds. Smith (1989) estimated that between 85% to 90% of prisoners' households were dependent on social security income. Other studies support this estimate. Shaw (1987) reported that the majority of families included in his study were receiving social security benefits prior to imprisonment.<sup>6</sup> Peelo et al (1991) found that that over half of the partners of prisoners in their study were long-term income support claimants, a circumstance referred to as 'routine poverty'. McDermott & King (1992) also reported that a high proportion of the families they interviewed had been on income support at the time of arrest.

The question posed at the beginning of this section was 'Who are these individuals referred to collectively as prisoners' families?' The information on prisoners as examined above raises three salient points. The first is that, more often than not, it is women who are separated from a family member through imprisonment. This characteristic is determined by virtue of the fact that it is mostly men who are imprisoned. It is also the case that, for the most part, it is women who assume the responsibility for attending to family needs when a man or woman is imprisoned. The second point is that prisoners' families are not an homogenous group. Prisoners' families are 'typically' partners and spouses of male prisoners. However, other family members, such as parents or step-parents, also provide an important source of support for certain prisoners. Furthermore, there is not only diversity as regards the relationship between the prisoner and those who constitute his/her family. Other identifiable subgroups that cut across family relationships also exist. The final point that the above analysis raises is that prisoners' families, like prisoners themselves, are most likely to come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

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<sup>6</sup> Shaw (1987) interviewed twenty-two families of prisoners. Prior to the imprisonment, eighteen of these families were on social security benefits.



In the next section, the effects of imprisonment on the family are explored. As has been noted above, the relevant research has tended to concern itself with the effects of male imprisonment on partners or spouses and their children. Therefore, it is this particular group with whom the following discussion is primarily concerned.

## **1.2 Three Not-So-Easy Steps for Those Left Behind**

Smith (1989: 42) observed that imprisonment constitutes a ‘very real crisis for the family, and one which begins from the point of arrest and continues throughout sentence and even after released’. In this section, consideration is given to the difficulties that families experience when a relative or loved is imprisoned. Light (1993) grouped the adverse effects of imprisonment on families under three separate, but not mutually exclusive, categories. First, there are the immediate problems that arise when a person is imprisoned. Second, there are the difficulties that exist during the actual imprisonment. Third, there are those problems that families experience upon the release of the prisoner. In the following discussion, the findings from previous research on prisoners’ families are drawn together under three headings that roughly correspond to these three categories.

### ***1.2.1 Here One Minute, Gone The Next***

In this section, the initial problems that families encounter upon the imprisonment of a relative or loved one are explored. First and foremost there is the emotional upheaval. Davies (1992: 77) described the arrest and subsequent remand of a partner as ‘a life-disrupting event taking them (i.e. women) from the routine and pattern of a shared life . . . to a new world of loss and uncertainty’. Similarly, McDermott & King (1992: 55) described the remand phase as a ‘particularly stressful time for all concerned’. Participants in this study referred to their lives as having been ‘turned-upside-down’ or ‘held in suspension’ whilst they awaited trial.<sup>7</sup> The shock and emotional upset that usually accompanies remand in custody are not the only difficulties that families experience at this time. Remand in prison may also result in the disruption of financial arrangements. The financial implications of imprisonment for the family are explored

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<sup>7</sup> McDermott & King (1992) interviewed forty families over a period of eighteen months. In twenty-eight cases the main interviewee had a partner in prison. The remaining twelve had sons or brothers who were in prison. One quarter of the families interviewed were from minority ethnic backgrounds. Unfortunately, in their analysis, the researchers did not make a distinction between the subgroups as identified.

below. The discussion then moves on to consider two factors that often serve to exacerbate the difficulties that families encounter in the early stages of imprisonment - stigma and lack of information.

It is probably fair to surmise that it is not the case that all families face a financial struggle when a loved one is imprisoned. The extent to which financial concerns arise is largely dependent on the prisoners' role within the family prior to his/her imprisonment and individual circumstances. Many studies have detailed the financial implications of men's imprisonment for his family (Morris, 1965; Shaw, 1987; Peelo et al, 1991; Davies, 1992; McDermott & King, 1992; Peart & Asquith, 1992). What this research has shown is that those most likely to suffer financially are the partners or spouses of male prisoners with children. As Peart & Asquith (1992) observed, imprisonment for these individuals usually means poverty either from sudden loss of income or interruption to benefits. As has been pointed out above, it is likely to be the case that a prisoner and his/her family relied on social security benefits prior to imprisonment. It is pertinent, therefore, to explore, albeit briefly, the effect of imprisonment on prisoners' benefits and those of his/her family.

A prisoner has limited rights to benefits and these rights differ depending on whether the prisoner is on remand or sentenced. Advice to prisoners and their families with regard to social security benefits emphasises the importance of informing the appropriate agency immediately when a person is imprisoned. If that person was claiming benefits for both him/herself and a partner, the latter must make a new claim for benefits (NACRO, 1999). It is also the case that families who had not been receiving benefits prior to imprisonment may become eligible for certain benefits because of their change in circumstances (NACRO, 1999). Again, in order to obtain this assistance, the benefits agency must be contacted. Research has found that women often neglected to contact the relevant agency immediately their partner was imprisoned (Davies, 1992; McDermott & King, 1992). The reasons as to why were twofold. The individuals concerned were either unaware that they qualified for assistance or simply did not have the time or energy to negotiate with the relevant agencies. The end result is that families usually find themselves struggling financially in the early stages of imprisonment as benefit payments are withheld and/or delayed.

Research has noted that the situation is often particularly difficult for those women who had previously relied on their now imprisoned partner to deal with their joint financial affairs. Davies (1992) observed that the change in roles, in addition to the disruption in income, that came with imprisonment was disorientating for most of the women she interviewed. She also found that women who had previously depended financially on their partners often found themselves in debt following his imprisonment. Unbeknown to the women concerned, household bills had quite often been left unpaid. Peelo et al (1991) also described the 'web of inherited financial confusion' that women were left with when their partner was imprisoned. Both these studies drew attention to the 'financial crisis' that imprisonment brought to the individuals concerned. For others, however, assuming control of the household income was a positive experience. Davies (1992: 80) noted that for some women the necessity to take control of their finances was 'an empowering experience'. But, as is examined below, the fact that those left behind adjust and adapt to their new roles in order to survive often creates difficulties at a later date, when the prisoner is released (see Section 1.2.3).

The hardships experienced by prisoners' families are often exacerbated by the response of others to their situation. NIACRO (1994) found that the way in which prisoners' families responded to their situation was determined by a number of factors. One factor was the reaction of relatives, friends and the community. Various studies have found that prisoners' families often experience stigma a member is imprisoned. As Peart & Asquith (1992: 20) observed, partners of prisoners trying to cope with the immediate effects of imprisonment are doing so 'in the face of active and deliberate hostile behaviour and attitudes'. Research has documented the response that prisoners' families receive from welfare agency personnel. Smith (1989) found that families often met with a hostile and unsympathetic reception when attempting to organise their financial affairs. Similarly, Davies (1992) reported the social service benefit agency to be unhelpful and unsympathetic towards the women that she interviewed. Similar problems are encountered at the prison itself. Previous research has often found that prison officers were less than courteous towards visitors (Neate, 1990; Howard League, 1993; McDermott & King, 1992; Prison Reform Trust, 1997).

Stigma is not restricted to official quarters. Family, friends and neighbours may also react in a less than helpful manner. Research has noted how these individuals may simply avoid the family of the prisoner (Peart & Asquith, 1992). Others react in a more extreme manner. Shaw (1993) reported occasions whereby prisoners' families were victimised by their neighbours. Codd (1997) also cited instances where the women she interviewed were subjected to verbal abuse, harassment and victimisation from neighbours who knew that husbands or partners had been imprisoned. The response of others adds further stress to what is for many already a very stressful time. It also serves to isolate and deprive the individuals concerned of emotional and practical support at a time when it is most needed.

Isolation for prisoners' families also comes from the lack of information that is made available to them. Matthews (1983) found that prisons tended not to provide information about visits to families and where information was sent out it was not very comprehensive. Almost a decade later, McDermott & King (1992) reported similar findings. Their research revealed that families were often provided with little information regarding the rules and procedures surrounding visits. McDermott & King (1992: 57) commented '[i]n a world which is totally rule bound, and where rules, couched in a whole new lexicon, often seem petty and arbitrary, one might be forgiven for thinking that good communication and explanation would be a premium'. Their research found the opposite to be true. Other studies have substantiated this claim (Peart & Asquith, 1992; Smith, 1989; NACRO, 1994a; Codd, 1998). As Smith (1989: 56) pointed out, the families on the outside are left to 'grapple with an unknown and uncertain situation'. The lack of information that is made available to prisoners' families is not restricted to the visiting rules and regulations. As has already been mentioned, research has also found that families are often ill informed about the benefits to which they become entitled when one of their member is imprisoned (Smith, 1989; Davies, 1992).

The above discussion has focused on those immediate problems that come with imprisonment. It is not the case, however, that these difficulties evaporate over time. Certain difficulties persist throughout the prison sentence. Additional difficulties also materialise. In the next section, those difficulties that families encounter during imprisonment are explored.

### *1.2.2 Doing time*

To begin, the emotional upset that accompanies the knowledge that a loved one or relative has been sentenced to a term in prison is considered. The discussion then turns to the financial difficulties that families experience during the sentence. The practical and emotional problems encountered in relation to visiting the prison are then examined. Finally, the effects of imprisonment on the children of prisoners are explored.

Smith (1989: 52) found that the 'greatest shock of all' for families came at the point when a custodial sentence was passed. At this time, families were most commonly found to be in a state of disbelief, bewilderment and confusion. Smith (1989: 53) also drew attention to the 'deep sense of loss' that families often experienced immediately after sentencing. Indeed, it was quite common for her respondents to compare their feelings upon the imprisonment of a partner to those usually associated with bereavement. Peelo et al (1991) examined probation officers' accounts concerning their contact with partners of male prisoners who had been recently sentenced. These particular clients were often found to be 'in shock' and, on occasion, suffering from extreme stress, anxiety and even depression (Peelo et al, 1991: 319). For these women, the financial complications that accompanied the imprisonment of their partner formed an additional burden to the emotional turmoil experienced at the time of sentence.

Research has shown that prisoners' families continue to struggle financially throughout the prison sentence (Morris, 1965; Shaw, 1987; Peart & Asquith, 1992; Davies, 1992; Codd, 1997; McEvoy et al, 1999). Shaw (1987) argued that when a man is imprisoned for any length of time, his dependants take on the characteristics of a single-parent family. He drew attention to Philips' (1985) observations that '[p]overty permeates every aspect of single-parent family life . . . [t]he one-parent family is more likely to live in a condition of massive deprivation' and are over-represented in unemployment figures as 'society militates against them seeking employment' (cited in Shaw, 1987: 28). Davies (1992) also drew comparisons between single parent families and prisoners' families. She found that all the women she interviewed struggled on their income. Many went without in order to provide the

basic necessities for their children. Even so, the women concerned found it difficult to provide their children with the essentials. There are similarities in circumstances between single-parent families and partners of male prisoners with young children. However, it is arguable that this latter group are actually in a worse situation than the former due to the circumstances surrounding the 'absent father'. As Peart & Asquith (1992: 20) point out, prisoners' families not only have to bear responsibility for the home and family but also the "demands of the prisoners' themselves".

All convicted prisoners are obliged to work whilst in prison and are paid for this work. In the early 1990s, the average pay for sentenced prisoners was £2.46 per week (Ruxton, 1989).<sup>8</sup> From this money, prisoners must purchase phone cards, tobacco, food, batteries, stamps, toiletries and other items that they may require (Creighton & King, 1996). However, as prisoner wages are so low, their families often have to send them the additional cash to cover such necessities (NACRO, 1994c; McDermott & King, 1992). Furthermore, it is not only money that prisoners may require from their families. Prisoners are permitted to have certain personal possessions, such as radios, trainers, books, magazines and so on.<sup>9</sup> To have these possessions is no doubt beneficial to the prisoner. However, it is the prisoners' family who are often relied upon to provide such items. Indeed, research has found that women often deprive themselves in order to provide the prisoner with whatever s/he requests (McDermott & King, 1992; Codd, 1997).

The financial strain experienced by prisoners' families is often further exacerbated by the cost of visiting itself (Matthews, 1983; 1989; Davies, 1992; McDermott & King, 1992). Since 1971 there have been provisions in place to provide financial assistance to relatives visiting prisoners. Under the early system, close relatives on low incomes were reimbursed the cost of one visit a month. Only those persons visiting prisoners serving sentences of three months or more and remand prisoners, who had been in custody for over four weeks, were eligible for financial assistance. Social security offices administered these assisted visits. In 1988, the Prison Service itself took over

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<sup>8</sup> Following the Woolf Report (1991), prisoners pay levels were increased. Under present arrangements, prisoners are paid on average £6 per week (Livingston & Owen, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> Items that prisoners are permitted to have in their possession are listed in Standing Order 4(9) and include, amongst other things, at least six newspapers, a minimum of three books, music system, records/cassettes/compact discs and a typewriter. Following provisions introduced in 1995 under Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP), certain prisoners, subject to conditions, are now permitted to wear their own clothes, have their own bedding and have in their possession items other than those listed under Standing 4(9) such as electronic games (Livingston & Owen, 1999). IEP is examined in Section 1.3.

this role and introduced the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS) as it is now formally known. Early research argued that the financial assistance provided under the APVS was far from sufficient. Davies (1992) found contributions did not cover the full cost of prison visits. She drew attention to the additional expenditures that come from visiting with young children. McDermott & King (1992) highlighted the particular situation for those families visiting remand prisoners, the majority of whom had either daily or weekly visits. They pointed out that to have one assisted visit a month was not very much when visits took place so frequently.

Since early research was conducted, the APVS has been revised and extended. In 1991, new arrangements were implemented to allow families to apply for financial assistance immediately when a relative was detained in prison. At this time, visiting entitlements, that is the number of visits prisoners are permitted, were also increased.<sup>10</sup> For instance, sentenced prisoners who had previously been entitled to one visit a month were, under the new arrangements, permitted two visits a month. However, it was not until 1994 that the APVS was extended to cover the cost of this additional visit. Under the present arrangements, close relatives who fulfil the criteria can apply to have the travelling costs of two visits per month reimbursed.<sup>11</sup> It applies to visitors to all prisoners, remand and sentenced, and visitors can claim for assistance as soon as a prisoner is taken into custody. The APVS reimburses transport costs if travelling by train, bus or car. Meal allowances are provided to visitors under certain circumstances, as is the cost of overnight accommodation. The APVS also contributes towards other 'unavoidable' expenses (NACRO, 1997).

The point that prisoners' families are often not provided with information that would ease their difficulties has already been made (see Section 1.2.1). Research has found prisoners' families are also not provided with information about the APVS. Peart & Asquith (1991) reported that many of the families interviewed in their study did not know that the scheme existed. Similarly, Davies (1992) noted that the women she interviewed were not automatically informed about the scheme. All the women in this study learned about the APVS by chance from other visitors. Furthermore, the service

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<sup>10</sup> Both these changes came about as a result of the Woolf Report (1991). See Section 1.3.

<sup>11</sup> Conditions under which one qualifies for assistance from the APVS - must be a close relative of prisoner, or lived with the prisoner as his/her partner for at least four months prior to imprisonment. Must also be in receipt of Income Support, Family Credit, Disability Working Allowance, Jobseekers Allowance or on a low income (NACRO, 1997). Following modifications introduced in December 1998 same sex partners are now eligible to apply for assisted prison visits.

provided to visitors has also attracted criticism. It has been reported that visitors applying for financial assistance often encounter such problems as delays in payment, difficulties in contacting the relevant department by telephone and confusions relating to eligibility (Peart & Asquith, 1991; FPFSG, 1996; 1997).

It is not just the financial cost of visiting that creates difficulties for prisoners' families. Research has also drawn attention to the long, complex and arduous journeys that families endure in order to visit (Morris, 1965; Monger & Pendleton, 1977; Matthews, 1983; 1989; Davies, 1992; McDermott & King, 1992; Peart & Asquith, 1992). The National Prison Survey (1991) found that the average distance travelled by visitors was 62 miles. Nearly a quarter (23%) of prisoners indicated that their visitor spent 2½ hours or more travelling to the prison. In their study, McDermott & King (1992) reported that most visitors spent 3 hours, and on some occasions, more than 3 hours, travelling to the prison to visit. In this study, the average round trip for families took seven hours with not much more than a quarter of this time spent in the company of the prisoner. Certain commentators have recommended that prisoners serve their sentences in establishments as near as possible to their home areas so as to reduce the long journeys that visitors must endure in order to visit (Matthews, 1983; 1989; Light, 1992). Such an arrangement would also decrease the cost incurred through travelling to the prison and, thus, alleviate the financial strain imposed on prisoners' families. Others have called for a re-structuring of the prison estate so as to allow prisoners to be located in prisons closer to their homes (Morris, 1965; King & Morgan, 1980). Similarly, the Woolf Report (1991: para. 11.49) recommended that prisoners should be located in prisons 'sited within reasonable proximity to . . . the community . . . with which they have their closest links'. The extent to which this recommendation has been realised is considered below (see Section 1.3).

Up to this point, the discussion has focused on the financial implications of imprisonment for prisoners' families and the difficulties these families encounter in making the journey to the prison in order to visit. The discussion now turns to those problems experienced whilst at the prison itself. Research into prisoners' families has often highlighted lack of facilities for visitors outside the prison (Vercoe, 1968; Monger & Pendleton, 1977; Matthews, 1983; McDermott & King, 1992). As



McDermott & King (1992: 56) observed '[o]nce a visitor arrives at the prison there is a wait often of half an hour or more, usually outside and exposed to the vagaries of the British climate'. Upon entry to the prison, families come into contact with prison officers. As has been noted above, prisoner officers have been found to occasionally treat the families of prisoners in a less than appropriate manner. Prisoners' families must also undergo certain security procedures upon entry to the prison. Perhaps the most intrusive security procedure that visitors are subjected to is the searching. In their study, McDermott & King (1992: 62) observed both good and bad practice in relation to searching procedures - 'in a difficult area some staff manage to treat families with dignity and tact but others do not'. McDermott & King (1992) go on to cite instances where families visiting prison, when searched prior to the visit, were subjected to what was described as 'unnecessary humiliation'.

Having endured the journey to the prison, waited outside the prison and undergone the various security procedures, visitors eventually arrive in the visit room. Research has often criticised the poor conditions and lack of facilities that exist in visit rooms (Clarke et al. 1992; McDermott & King, 1992; NACRO, 1994c). McDermott & King (1992) found that facilities in visit rooms at local prisons were particularly poor with no crèches for children, no books and rarely toys. Similarly, NACRO (1994c: 9) reported that conditions in visit rooms at some prisons were 'squalid' and 'unwelcoming with furniture bolted to the floor'. This report also cited instances where visit rooms provided only one uni-sex toilet and no provision at all for children. Research has also found that the unpleasant surroundings in which visits take place serves to increase the pressure and anxiety associated with prison visiting (Peelo et al, 1991). This leads into the next issue addressed in this section, the emotional strain that comes with visiting a loved one or relative in prison.

Monger & Pendleton (1977: 8) observed the visit constitutes either 'a healing experience or a further trauma'. More recently, McEvoy et al (1999) explored the emotions that families associate with visiting someone in prison. The time before the visit was found to be a period of considerable anxiety. Prisoners' partners reported a range of physical and emotional symptoms including feeling ill, tired, nervous, intimidated, tense and irritable. Emotions during the visit were found to be more positive although it was also found that some of those physical and emotional

symptoms experienced prior to the visit carried over into the visit itself. McEvoy et al (1999: 189) also drew attention to the reluctance amongst their respondents to keep 'information about their domestic situation or children from the prisoner in order not to spoil the visit'. This supports findings from early research on prisoners' families. For instance, McDermott & King (1992) found that families were often reluctant to discuss their problems with the prisoner whilst on a visit. Similarly, Davies (1992) reported that the women she interviewed tended not to share their financial difficulties with their imprisoned partner. McEvoy et al (1999) also documented the 'emotional trough' experienced in the period following the visit. Many of the respondents in their study indicated that after their visit they felt upset, disappointed, unsettled and/or angry.

There are additional difficulties that prisoners' families must contend with during the sentence other than those considered above. Morris (1965: 292) found that following financial worries, the most frequently quoted problem amongst the women she interviewed was the 'management of children'. Much of the research conducted in the area of prisoners' families has focused on the effect of imprisonment on the children of prisoners (Shaw, 1987; 1992; Catan, 1988; 1992; Richards, 1992; Woodrow, 1992). Prior to moving on to the difficulties that families experience upon release of the prisoner, the main findings from these studies are considered.

Shaw (1987) was amongst the first to examine the effect of imprisonment on prisoners' children. He calculated that there were more than a hundred thousand children of imprisoned fathers in England and Wales in 1984.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, this figure is at best an estimate. Shaw did not include in his calculations those children whose mothers were in prison, nor those children with parents aged under 21. It is also important to note that Shaw's figure refers to children with imprisoned fathers rather than children who were separated from their father through imprisonment.<sup>13</sup> Shaw (1987) found that the imprisonment of a father often added further hardship to what were already disadvantaged children. He found prisoners' children to be

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<sup>12</sup> Shaw (1987) found that 415 adult men interviewed in prison in 1984 had produced more than 584 children. The number of children as calculated for the whole population was based on an estimate number of prisoners received into prison during the corresponding year, i.e. 75,000.

<sup>13</sup> Shaw included in his calculations children who did *not* live with their fathers prior to imprisonment. The National Prison Survey (1991) revealed that only one third of prisoners had dependent children living with them immediately prior to imprisonment. In this respect Shaw's figure is perhaps an over estimate in terms of how many children were directly affected by the imprisonment of their father.

socially, financially and educationally deprived. He described children running away from home when their father was imprisoned or truanting persistently from school. Other children were found to display disturbed behaviour upon the imprisonment of their fathers, to begin mixing with delinquent groups and even, in some cases, become involved in crime for the first time. Shaw (1987) also interviewed teachers and health visitors. Depression, bed wetting, lack of concentration and deep-seated unhappiness were found to be particularly evident amongst children of recently imprisoned fathers.

Shaw (1987: 3) described the children of imprisoned fathers as ‘the Cinderella of penology – unrecognised, abused by the system and ignored by those with power and influence’. In addressing what could be done to meet the needs of prisoners’ children, Shaw (1987) emphasised the importance of regular communication between the prisoners and their children. He argued that ‘visits should be seen as part of the right of the child to maintain a meaningful relationship with his [sic] father’ rather than the ‘right (or privilege) of an inmate to have a visit’ (Shaw, 1987: 76). Subsequent studies have reinforced Shaw’s (1987) findings in relation to the effect of imprisonment on the children of prisoners. For instance, Richards (1992) explored the psychological effect on children of separation from a parent through imprisonment. He also emphasised the need for regular contact between prisoners and children ‘in order to minimise the effects for children’ (Richards, 1992: 11). Other commentators have drawn attention specifically to the children of women prisoners (Catan, 1988; 1992; Woodrow, 1992). It has been argued that the situation for these children is much more serious than that of children of imprisoned fathers. Woodrow (1992), for example, pointed to the particular difficulties experienced by children visiting imprisoned mothers as they are more likely to be held in prison establishments a great distance from their home areas.

### ***1.2.3 Starting Over***

There are few studies that have examined the post-release experience of prisoners (see Wilkinson, 1988; Eaton, 1992; Morris et al, 1995). There are even fewer that have examined the experiences of the prisoners’ family in this respect. What is clear from the research that has been conducted is that release from prison does not necessarily mean that difficulties that prisoners’ families experience subside. Smith (1989: 57)

described the period approaching release as a time that is 'filled with seemingly contradictory emotions for the whole family'. McDermott & King (1992) described the period following release as a time of readjustment and reintegration. They observed that release often results in a crisis not only for the prisoner but also for the family. One of the problems for recently released prisoners and their partners is coming to terms with changes in their relationship that have taken place during the time they have been apart. As McDermott & King (1992: 70) point out, prisoners upon their release tend to 'expect their partners to continue in the more traditional and compliant roles they played before the sentence began' and, therefore, 'find it difficult to adapt to the women who have become used to exercising their own independence and responsibilities'.

In the above discussion, the main difficulties that families experience when a loved one or relative is imprisoned have been considered. The review of the literature informing this discussion raises four points. The first point has already been made. As is apparent from the above, studies that have focused on issues concerning prisoners' families are few and far between. Prisoners' families as a subject area, therefore, remains rather under-researched. The second point, again evident from the above discussion, is that much of the research was conducted prior to the early 1990s. As is outlined in the next section, much has changed within the prison system since this time. The third point is that a number of the studies referred to above are relatively small-scale or, in other words, based on rather small samples. For instance, Davies (1992) interviewed only eight women in examining the financial cost of men's imprisonment. The final point is that, with the exception of a few, previous studies in the area of prisoners' families have tended to be atheoretical.<sup>14</sup> Young (1994) identified four major approaches that dominated criminological thinking in the period during which many of the studies referred to above were conducted - left idealism; administrative criminology; right realism and left realism. Much of the research on prisoners' families was not informed by or located within any of these particular traditions.

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<sup>14</sup> Exceptions include those studies that explored the implications of women's imprisonment for their children (see Catan, 1988; 1992; Woodrow, 1992). These studies were informed by feminist concerns.

### **1.3 Forgotten Victims: What Progress?**

In January 1983, Matthews published the findings from her study on the experiences of prisoners' families. She argued that 'prison policies were causing victimisation by restricting contact between prisoners and their families to an unnecessary and inhumane degree' (cited in Matthews, 1989: 11). Hence, Matthews (1983) employed the term 'forgotten victims' to describe the families of prisoners. A number of recommendations for extending and improving prisoners' opportunities for contact with those on the outside that, if implemented, might serve to improve the lives of prisoners' families were proposed. Several years later, Matthews (1989) considered the response her recommendations had received. In noting the limited progress in terms of implementation, she concluded that prisoners' families could 'still be accurately described as forgotten victims, suffering through no fault of their own from the normal operation of the penal system' (Matthews, 1989: 7). In this section, the developments that have taken place within the prison system since Matthews (1989) made this observation are examined. The Woolf Report (1991) and the Government's response to the recommendations contained therein are explored. The discussion then moves on to consider other developments that have taken place in the last decade. The discussion focuses particularly on issues relevant to prisoners' contact with their families.

#### ***1.3.1 The Woolf Report***

Various adjectives could be used to describe the prison system in England and Wales in the early 1990s. 'Explosive' and 'unstable' are quite possibly two of the most apt. In April 1990 prisoners rioted at Strangeways, a local prison in Manchester. Disorder spread throughout the prison system as prisoners in other establishments followed suit.<sup>15</sup> These particular disturbances were by no means unprecedented but were considered, at the time, to be the worst and most serious in British penal history (Prison Reform Trust, 1991a; 1992). Disorder on a similar scale has not been seen since. Lord Justice Woolf was called upon to lead the inquiry into the disturbances. The Woolf Report was published in February 1991 and was met, by most, with

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<sup>15</sup> Major disturbances also occurred in Glen Parva (Young Offenders Institution and Remand Centre), Dartmoor (Category B training prison), Cardiff (local prison), Bristol (local prison) and Pucklechurch (Remand Centre). Lesser disturbances were also witnessed at a number of other prisons.

enthusiasm.<sup>16</sup> It has been referred to as the ‘most important and far-sighted document on the prison system since the Gladstone Report in 1895’ (Prison Reform Trust, 1991b: 1). Similarly, the then Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker described the Woolf Report as one of the most significant reports on the Prison Service ever to have been published (Home Office, 1991b).

The Woolf Report (1991) was a vast document. It contained over two hundred specific proposals, condensed into twelve main recommendations. Lord Justice Woolf concluded that there were three requirements that had to be met in order to achieve stability within the prison system - security, control and justice - and it was not just that these should exist, there also had to be a balance between the three.<sup>17</sup> The Woolf Report did not identify a ‘single cause to the riots’ (para. 9.23). There was a suggestion within the report, however, that the prison disturbances could be traced back to prisoners’ feelings of injustice. Injustice was a recurring theme in the evidence that prisoners presented to the inquiry. Factors such as poor conditions and unhappiness regarding transfers were identified as having contributed to this sense of injustice. The Woolf Report stated that ‘[i]f a proper level of justice is provided in prisons, then it is less likely that prisoners will behave in this way [i.e. riot]. Justice, therefore, contributes to the maintenance of security and control’ (para. 1.151). Woolf’s recommendations reflected his concern regarding the relationship between justice on the one hand, and security and control on the other.

As mentioned above, the Woolf Report (1991) contained twelve main recommendations. These were that there should be: closer co-operation between the different parts of the criminal justice system; a more visible and accountable leadership by the Director General of the Prison Service; increased responsibility for prison governors; an enhanced role for prison officers; a ‘compact’ or ‘contract’ for each prisoner setting out the prisoners’ expectations and responsibilities in the prison in which s/he is held; a national system of accredited standards with which each prison establishment would eventually be required to comply; a new Prison Rule stating that no establishment may exceed its Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA); an end to slopping out; better prospects for prisoners to maintain links with their families

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<sup>16</sup> The then Chief Inspector of Prisons, Judge Stephen Tumim also contributed to the final report.

<sup>17</sup> Security refers to the Prison Service’s obligation to prevent prisoners escaping from prison, control the obligation to prevent disruption amongst prisoners and justice the ‘obligation to treat them with humanity’ (Newburn, 1995: 33).

through more visits and home leaves and through being located in community prisons as close to their homes as possible; subdivision of prisons into smaller more manageable and secure units; separate conditions and lower security classification for remand prisoners, and finally improved standards of justice within prisons involving giving of reasons for decisions affecting prisoners, removal of the adjudicator role for the Board of Visitors and access to an independent complaints adjudicator (Woolf Report, 1991: para. 1.167 & 15.5). In addition to these main recommendations, the Woolf Report also presented a number of other more specific proposals. Particularly relevant here are those that concerned prisoners' contacts with those on the outside

The Woolf Report (1991) stated that an 'essential part of humane containment' was to enable 'inmates as far as possible, to stay in close and meaningful contact with their family' (para. 14.223). Several specific changes were proposed with this objective in mind. The Woolf Report (1991) advocated an increase in visit length and frequency and an extension of the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme to cover the cost of a second monthly visit. It further recommended the provision of satisfactory facilities for visits, including an adequate Visitors' Centre;<sup>18</sup> access to telephones for prisoners; a reduction in the censorship of letters; substantial increases in the number of home leaves granted and the introduction of private family visits, previously known as conjugal visits, for certain prisoners. The Woolf Report (1991) also acknowledged the importance of the relationship between an imprisoned parent and his/her children. It recommended the provision of play areas and toys for children in visit rooms and extended visits for imprisoned parents and their children. One final proposal relevant to prisoners' families concerned prisoners' pay. The Woolf Report (1991) found that prisoners were paid, on average, £2.65 per week and that this was considerably less than that paid to prisoners in other European countries. An increase to £8 per week average pay was recommended so as to bring Britain into line with prisons abroad. The Woolf Report (1991) also drew attention to the possibility that 'more realistic pay levels' would allow prisoners 'to set aside money in order to meet some of their obligations and requirements' (para. 14.163).

The Government responded positively to the Woolf Report. The then Home Secretary, Kenneth Baker announced upon its publication immediate reforms that

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<sup>18</sup> Visitors' Centres are buildings usually located outside the prison gates that provide, amongst other facilities, somewhere for visitors to wait before or after their visit.

corresponded to the proposed recommendations. A number of these reforms centred on prisoners' contact with their family. Home leave for prisoners in open prisons was to be increased from three to six times a year; routine censorship of letters was to be abolished in all except dispersal prisons; card phones were to be gradually introduced in all establishments; a second monthly visit for convicted prisoners was to be consolidated as a right rather than a privilege and remand prisoners who could not receive daily visits were to be allowed at least three visits lasting, if possible, an hour. Improvements to the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme were also announced. It was declared that all families would be eligible for assistance immediately a relative was detained in prison. Previously, only those persons visiting prisoners serving sentences of three months or more, or remand prisoners who had been in custody for four weeks were eligible for assisted visits.

The White Paper, *Custody, Care and Justice: The Way Ahead for the Prison Service* (Home Office, 1991a) subsequently endorsed the majority of the main proposals put forward in the Woolf Report. But the Government's commitment was not as wholehearted as some had hoped (Prison Reform Trust, 1991b; Shaw, 1992b). Woolf had emphasised that the reforms were a 'package . . . [to be] considered together if the necessary balance in our prison system is to be achieved' (para. 1.168). The White Paper did not act upon all the recommendations. Most significant was the rejection by the Government that there should be a new Prison Rule concerning Certified Normal Accommodation. Other proposed reforms were somewhat diluted in their final form. For instance, those regarding the introduction of accredited standards. The timetable for implementation was also quite vague. Furthermore, additional financial support for the implementation of the reforms was not forthcoming.

The White Paper was similarly cursory in response to certain recommendations concerning prisoners' family ties. It commented on the concept of community prisons stating that the Government intended to 'identify a number of existing and new local prisons which *might* be re-planned as multi-functional community prisons [emphasis added]' (para 5.16). Observers have argued that the White Paper portrayed a 'limited commitment to community prisons and a continuing preference for managing the prison estate as a whole, giving considerations of security, discipline and economy precedence over community links' (Roberts, 1994: 237). The White Paper was also



somewhat ambivalent in its response to those recommendations concerning certain visiting arrangements and facilities. For instance, it declared that the Prison Service would 'consider ways of increasing the provision of Visitors' Centres . . . consider the scope for increasing the length and informality of visits from particular members of the family . . . [and] encourage Governors to make provision for crèches . . . where space and resources permit' (para. 7.37). Where prisoners' pay was concerned, the White Paper declared – 'In the coming years the Government would wish to see increased pay levels. The initial aim would be to introduce a system which, when resources allowed, would provide an average weekly pay of about £8' (para. 7.30).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the Government did not endorse all Woolf's recommendations relating to prisoners' contacts with those on the outside. For instance, the proposal that there should be private visits for certain prisoners was rejected outright. Also, the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme was not extended to cover the second monthly visit that convicted prisoners were now permitted under reforms implemented earlier in the year.

Despite the setbacks, advocates for improving the situation of prisoners' families welcomed the reforms. For example, Light (1993: 328-329) argued that the improvements to visiting arrangements and home leave, the relaxation of censorship of mail and the introduction of payphones in establishments represented 'real improvements and . . . indicate that the Prison Service has started to take seriously the issue of prisoners and their families'. He also drew attention to other positive developments such as the creation within the Prison Service of a post exclusively concerned with family ties and the establishment of a Consultative Group on Family Ties. Indeed, it would seem to be the case that eventually some progress had been made along those lines as originally envisaged by Matthews (1983; 1989). At least five out of the eight main changes that Matthews (1983) initially recommended were either partially or fully implemented by the Government in response to the Woolf Report (1991).

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<sup>19</sup> Prisoners' pay levels were increased in late 1992. As outlined above, under present arrangements prisoners earn on average £6 per week (Livingston & Owen, 1999).

### ***1.3.2 Beyond Woolf: Security, Control and Other Matters***

Prior to the Woolf Report (1991), the prison system in England and Wales was considered, by many, to be in a state of crisis (see Evans 1980; Fitzgerald & Sim, 1982; Shaw 1992b). The causes of the crisis and the relationship between the various problems were subject to much debate. The rising prison population, overcrowding, poor prison conditions, industrial disputes by prison staff, prison disturbances, security lapses and lack of resources were all at some time or another, or in some way or another, identified as contributing to the crisis. The Woolf Report (1991) and the subsequent reforms created optimism that the problems that had beset the prison system in the previous two decades finally would be resolved. This optimism was, however, rather short lived.

Not long after the Woolf Report (1991) was published, two IRA suspects escaped from Brixton Prison. The same legislation that saw the implementation of many of the reforms recommended by Lord Justice Woolf, also saw the introduction of a series of measures aimed at improving security in prison. Security was subsequently placed firmly as number one on the priority list for the Prison Service when, a few years later, prisoners escaped from two high security prisons. In September 1994, six prisoners escaped from the Special Secure Unit at Whitemoor Prison. This was followed in January 1995 by the escape of three life sentence prisoners from another high security prison, Parkhurst. The corresponding enquiries led by Sir John Woodcock (1994) and Sir John Learmont (1995) emphasised security above all else. As Learmont (1995) pointed out '[t]he Prison Service must fulfil its primary function of keeping in custody those committed to its care' (para. 6.15). These reports were to have serious repercussions for the prison system. Only two years after their publication, Morgan (1997: 1185) observed: 'Both reports have already exercised sufficient influence seriously to increase the depth of imprisonment - levels of security, surveillance, and restriction, lack of autonomy, and so on - to which many prisoners are now subject'.

Where prisoners' families are concerned, these reports were significant in two respects. First, the increased emphasis on security that flowed from the Woodcock and Learmont Reports led to the implementation of additional security measures in relation to visits. These measures included, amongst others, more stringent and

consistent searching procedures for visitors; closer surveillance of visits; Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) monitoring; fixed furniture in visit rooms; and, in some cases, restrictions on play facilities for children in visit rooms. Second, both the Woodcock and Learmont Reports recommended the use of incentives as a control method in prison (para. 10.50 & para. 7). This ultimately resulted in the introduction of a national framework for incentives and earned privileges.

In July 1995, the Prison Service introduced its framework for incentives and earned privileges. Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) became fully operational in all establishments by the end of that year and remain in place to this day. The implementation of IEP formed part of the Prison Service's overall strategy for reducing violence, disorder and drug misuse in prisons (HM Prison Service, 1995b). Introducing the framework for IEP, the then Director General of the Prison Service, Derek Lewis stated:

Security must be our first priority, but prisons must be safe, well-disciplined and fair institutions. A properly structured system of privileges and incentives has a key role to play in achieving this goal. The new national framework will ensure that privileges are appropriate, have to be earned and are administered fairly.

(cited in HM Prison Service, 1996a: 26)

Under IEP prisoners earn certain privileges in return for good behaviour and performance. Each prisoner is, depending upon his/her behaviour, allocated to one of three regimes - basic, standard or enhanced. Prisoners on a basic regime are provided with the minimum legal requirement whereas prisoners on the higher regimes, such as standard and enhanced, receive additional privileges. The relevance of IEP to prisoners' family ties stems from the fact that one of the 'key earnable privileges' is extra and improved visits.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of visits as a privilege can be traced back to the Learmont Report (1995). It stated that '... additional visits, with frequency, duration and quality as variables, would be an excellent incentive to good behaviour' (para. 5.78). But to include visits as a privilege to be earned directly contradicted one of the basic principles of the Woolf Report (1991) that visits should be 'an entitlement - a right - not a privilege'.

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<sup>20</sup> There are six privileges that may be earned under IEP - access to private cash above the set minima, extra and improved visits, eligibility to participate in enhanced earning schemes, earned community visits, the opportunity to wear one's own clothes and time out of cell (HM Prison Service, 1996a: 26).

Security and control were not the only matters to concern the Prison Service at this time. An obligation to address the availability of drugs in prison, and the problems that accompanied drug use amongst prisoners, was another issue that required attention.<sup>21</sup> The Prison Service published its policy and strategy response to reducing the level of drug misuse in prison (HM Prison Service, 1995c).<sup>22</sup> Three strategies were pursued in order to tackle the problem - reduce the supply of drugs into prison, reduce the demand for drugs within prison and reduce the 'potential for damage to health of prisoners, staff and the wider community arising from the misuse of drugs' (HM Prison Service, 1995c: 2). The first strategy is particularly relevant to prisoners' families. The Prison Service (1995c: 12) maintained that most drugs entered prison through domestic visits. Various tactics were subsequently employed so as to stem the flow of drugs into prison via this alleged entry route, such as increased surveillance in visiting areas; deployment of 'sniffer' dogs and the imposition of closed visits for prisoners found guilty of drug offences. These measures, along with those implemented following the Woodcock and Learmont Reports, have led commentators to express concern as to the extent to which security considerations are adversely affecting prisoners' opportunities for quality contact with those on the outside (Prison Reform Trust, 1998).

Shaw (1995: 24) commented 'no-one would now pretend that the Woolf Report is the guiding instrument of the Prison Service, [t]o all intents and purposes the path of the reform which the Woolf Report set out has been abandoned'. The Woolf Report (1991) had emphasised the need for a balance between security, control and justice. According to Shaw (1995) this had not been achieved. Further support for this proposition is to be found in the restrictions on community and family contacts as implemented in 1994 - home leave was reduced by 40 per cent and entitlements to temporary release tightened. As Cavadino & Dignan (1997: 127) observe these developments 'aptly symbolised the rapid reassertion of security concerns in the prison policy despite Woolf's warning of a need for a proper balance security and control, on one hand, and humanity and justice, on the other'. The emphasis on

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<sup>21</sup> The focus on drugs in prison stemmed from the publication of the Government's drug strategy for society as a whole, *Tackling Drugs Together* (Home Office, 1995).

<sup>22</sup> The Prison Service recently published its latest drug strategy (HM Prison Service, 1998b). This renewed its commitment to improving security measures in relation to visits. Most controversial are those regulations implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1999 that provide the Prison Service with new powers to ban visitors caught or suspected of smuggling drugs into prison from visiting for at least three months.

security and control was not the only factor to threaten the progress that had flowed from the Woolf Report (1991).

In 1993, the then Home secretary under the Conservative Government, Michael Howard, declared that 'prison works'. This declaration along with subsequent legislation led to a further increase in the prison population and overcrowding, although not as serious as in previous times, again threatened the stability of the prison system. The problem was particularly acute in local prisons. In 1994, certain individual local prisons were reported as operating at more than 70% overcrowded (NACRO, 1994b). Another problem facing the Prison Service, at this time, was the strain imposed through limited financial resources. At the end of 1995, the Government announced that running costs should be cut by 13.5 per cent over the subsequent three years. At the time, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, expressed his concern at this situation. In his 1995-6 report, it was stated that the shortage in money in conjunction with the problems associated with overcrowding in prisons were 'doing real damage to all the progress that has been made over the past 4-5 years' (HMCIP, 1996: 2-3).

Following the reforms implemented in the wake of the Woolf Report (1991), certain commentators suggested that perhaps the Prison Service had at last started to take the issue of prisoners and their families seriously (Light, 1993). Clearly, there have been positive developments towards meeting the needs of prisoners' families. Those early, and ardent, research endeavours that demanded attention on behalf of these families must take some credit in providing the impetus for reform. However, subsequent developments, as outlined above, leave such a conclusion open to debate. The present research re-examines the position of prisoners' families in light of the changes that have taken place in the last ten years. The question addressed is to what extent is it the case that prisoners' families remain the 'forgotten victims of the penal system' (Matthews, 1983; 1989).

#### **1.4 Prisoners' Families: Why the Concern?**

There are various justifications for maintaining prisoners' family ties. These range from the 'liberal humanism' viewpoint, which argues that a caring society supports

those of its members who are suffering, to more pragmatic justifications concerning crime reduction (see Light, 1993). The latter are considered further below. The justifications for maintaining prisoners' family ties also provide reason for studies that address issues relating to prisoners' families. One final justification is explored with this in mind. This is feminist in origin.

#### ***1.4.1 The Pragmatic Benefits***

Light (1993) identifies three pragmatic justifications for maintaining prisoners' family ties. The first concerns maintaining order in prison. Light (1993: 325) points out that 'many prison disturbances can be traced to disruption or the fear of disruption to visits'. Indeed, the recommendations as proposed in the Woolf Report (1991) lend credence to this argument. Light (1993: 326) further points out that 'improving provisions for family ties can reduce tension, frustration and despair amongst prisoners, making prisons not only easier to run, but also able to operate more positive regimes'. Similarly, Shaw (1990: 35) explains that 'maximising contact between prisoners and their relations is an important way of reducing institutional tension'. The second justification for maintaining prisoners' family ties is linked to crime reduction. Light (1993) draws attention to the role that a prisoners' family plays in the rehabilitative process. He points to research that has shown that prisoners who manage to sustain family relationships during their time in prison are less likely to re-offend upon release (see Holt & Miller, 1972; Ditchfield, 1994). The third, and final, justification also concerns crime reduction. Light (1993: 326) comments that 'those who suffer the most are all too often the children of an imprisoned parent'. He argues that improving provision for prisoners to maintain their family ties may reduce the likelihood that the prisoners' children will themselves offend in later life.

#### ***1.4.2 A Feminist Rationale***

Light's (1993) justifications alone provide reason enough for studies that focus on issues that concern prisoners' families. The present study identifies another reason. As pointed out above, this is feminist in origin. Since the feminist endeavour within criminology commenced in the early 1980s, there has been an increasing amount of research conducted on women in the criminal justice system. These studies have

focused on women as offenders, victims of crime and workers within the criminal justice system (see Walklate, 2001). Recently, there has been a change in focus stemming from North America. This new approach concerns itself with the 'hidden' or 'unexamined' implications of criminal justice policies for women *outside* the criminal justice process (see Danner, 1998; Massey et al, 1998). It centres, amongst other issues, on 'women and children whose lives have been affected by the men they love or indirectly hurt by policies designed to control people other than themselves' (Miller, 1998: xv). This approach is particularly applicable to prisoners' families. As outlined above, those who are left behind when a person is imprisoned are more often than not women. Also, it is mostly women who assume the responsibility for attending to family needs when a man or woman is imprisoned. These women are outside the criminal justice process, yet their lives are affected by criminal justice policies. This latest feminist endeavour is primarily concerned with bringing 'those voices previously ignored or marginalized . . . closer to the centre of policy making' (Miller, 1998: xv). This concern also informed the present study, which focuses specifically on penal policies and practices. The aim was to try to make a difference for those women who more often than not constitute the prisoners' family, through moving them closer to the centre of consideration in the development of these policies and practices. With this objective in mind, the findings from this study were utilised in order to generate a number of recommendations (see Section 7.2).

## **1.5 Conclusion**

This chapter opened with a consideration of the characteristics of those individuals known collectively as "prisoners' families". The discussion then moved on to consider the findings from previous research on prisoners' families. The difficulties that families face upon the imprisonment of a loved one or relative were explored. The developments that have taken place within the prison system in the time since this research was conducted were then outlined. The chapter concluded with an examination of the various justifications for maintaining prisoners' family ties. As outlined above, the present study was influenced by feminist concerns. This, in turn, influenced how the research was conducted. This is considered further in the next chapter, which details the research methods employed in the present study.

## 2. RESEARCH AIMS AND METHODS

In this chapter, the research aims, objectives and sources of information are outlined. The discussion then turns to the theoretical approach that informed the methodology adopted in conducting the present research. Following on from this, access and sampling are discussed and issues concerning research instruments, piloting and data collection explored. In the final section, the issues of reliability and validity are addressed.

### 2.1 Research Aims & Objectives

The aims of the present study were:

1. to explore the extent to which the Prison Service is committed to assisting prisoners in maintaining their family ties through prison visits;<sup>1</sup>
2. to consider the effect of recent developments within the Prison Service on visiting arrangements and procedures;
3. to assess the extent to which Visitors' Centres function as a resource for visitors and how their role may be developed;
4. to explore the problems and difficulties that visitors face in maintaining contact with prisoners throughout their sentence.

A number of specific objectives relating to each of the above four aims were developed. These are outlined below.

*Aim 1 - the Prison Service's commitment to family ties:*

- to determine whether establishments were operating according to prison rules, regulations and recommended standards in terms of visiting arrangements;
- to explore the way in which policy informing visiting arrangements has been translated into practice;

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<sup>1</sup> There exist various methods through which prisoners maintain contact with their families. Visits are the *primary* mechanism through which prisoners maintain contact with their families and constitute the most important form of contact for prisoners (Wozniak & McAllister, 1992).



- to explore visitors' views on visiting arrangements;<sup>2</sup>
- to examine the provision of special visits;
- to assess the conditions in which visits take place;
- to explore the provision and quality of facilities in visit rooms for visitors;
- to assess the difficulties visitors experience in travelling to/from prisons to visit;
- to examine provisions for assisting visitors in travelling to/from prisons to visit;
- to assess the level and relevance of information provided to visitors regarding visits;
- to document visitors' views on having prisoners located in prisons that are closer to their homes.

*Aim 2 - the effect of recent developments on visiting arrangements and procedures:*

- to assess the impact of increased numbers in prison and overcrowding on visiting arrangements;
- to assess the impact of increased numbers in prison and overcrowding on the quality of visits;
- to explore the effect of the Incentives and Earned Privileges scheme on visiting arrangements;
- to consider the effect of security requirements on the quality of visits.

*Aim 3 - the role of Visitors' Centres:*

- to examine the provision of Visitors' Centres;
- to explore the role that Visitors' Centres play in the visiting process;
- to consider the relationship between a prison and its Visitors' Centre;
- to consider the way in which Visitors' Centres may help in meeting the needs of visitors.

*Aim 4 - the problems and difficulties for visitors:*

- to examine the sacrifices that visitors make in maintaining contact with prisoners;

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this, and subsequent chapters, the terms 'visitor' and 'prisoners' family' are used interchangeably.

- to assess the pressure that visitors experience in providing financially for the prisoner during his/her sentence;
- to explore the extent to which visitors are relied upon to provide prisoners with personal property and other items.

## **2.2 Sources of Information**

In order to achieve the aims and objectives as outlined above, data was collected from three main sources. First, a self-completion questionnaire was forwarded to all prisons in England and Wales (133 at the time). This formed the postal survey from hereon referred to as the prison visiting survey.<sup>3</sup> Eighty-nine of the 133 questionnaires were returned: a response rate of 67%. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate their employment status within the prison.<sup>4</sup> Most (N=36; 40%) questionnaires were completed by prison governors;<sup>5</sup> just over one quarter (N=23; 26%) were completed by Senior Officers and just under one fifth (17; 19%) by Principal Officers. Prison Officers completed four questionnaires. Various other prison personnel completed the remaining questionnaires.<sup>6</sup>

Second, semi-structured interviews with individuals visiting someone in prison were conducted. Thirty interviews in total were conducted at two separate prisons. Both were adult male prisons, one a Category B referred to from hereon as Prison 'A' and the other a Category C referred to from hereon as Prison 'B'. Interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. All interviews, with one exception, were taped and subsequently transcribed.

Third, observation was also conducted at the two prisons at which interviews were conducted. For reasons outlined below, observation was restricted to outside the prison gate. The role adopted was one of participant-as-observer (Gold, 1958). Observation was, therefore, overt and involved some degree of participation in the social world of the visitor.

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<sup>3</sup> The Prison Visiting Survey was conducted in June 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Three respondents neglected to provide this information.

<sup>5</sup> In most cases, lower grade governors, i.e. grades IV or V, completed questionnaires. Governor Grades I or II completed questionnaires on only two occasions.

<sup>6</sup> The remaining questionnaires (N=6) were completed either by Visitors' Centre staff (manager or co-ordinator), administrative personnel, probation officers or psychology assistants.

### **2.3 Theory Informing Method**

Theoretically, the present study may be located in the feminist tradition within criminology. Sociologists have often contemplated what is and is not 'feminist research' (see Kelly, 1978; Roberts, 1981; Stanley & Wise, 1979; 1983). Gelsthorpe (1990: 90-94) identified four main issues around which these discussions have tended to revolve - the choice of topic, the research process, the relationship between the 'researcher' and the 'researched', and a 'concern to record the subjective experiences of doing research'. In the following discussion, consideration is given to the way in which debates on these four issues informed the present research.

Where the first issue is concerned, it has been noted that feminist research concerns itself with topics that are 'relevant and sympathetic to women' (Gelsthorpe, 1990: 90). In terms of subject matter, the present research is feminist. As pointed out in Chapter 1, it is women who more often than not constitute the prisoners' family. Furthermore, it is mostly women who assume responsibility for attending to the emotional and economic needs of children when a man or a woman is imprisoned. The overriding concern in the present study was to try to make a difference for these women. A series of recommendations are presented with this objective in mind (see Section 7.2). The present study is, therefore, 'relevant and sympathetic to women' (Gelsthorpe, 1990: 90). The choice of topic influenced the research methodology which leads into the second issue, the research process.

Gelsthorpe & Morris (1988: 103) observed that there exist certain 'methodological preferences within feminism'. For instance, Reinharz (1979) voiced her support for qualitative work as 'it better reflects the nature of human and, therefore, women's experiences' (cited in Gelsthorpe, 1990: 90). Also, Oakley (1981) argued against positivist, quantitative methods, such as the formal questionnaire and the structured interview, as these serve to objectify and exploit women. Feminist preferences for a particular methodological approach informed the present research. For example, semi-structured interviews were conducted, as opposed to structured interviews. However, as outlined above, the present research also employed a quantitative method, the structured questionnaire. It could be argued that to employ such a research method is

to contradict feminist advice on how research should be conducted. However, it is possible to adopt a quantitative methodology within a feminist approach. This is demonstrated most aptly in Kelly's (1990) account of her experiences as a feminist involved in research on sexual violence. She argued that 'the question you are seeking to answer . . . will point to using certain methods' (Kelly, 1990: 114). This was exactly the situation where the present research was concerned. To meet the aims and objectives as set necessitated the use of a quantitative method.

The third issue raised in discussions on feminist research is the relationship between the 'researcher' and the 'researched'. Gelsthorpe (1990: 91) pointed out that feminist researchers reject the hierarchical relationship that traditionally exists between the researcher and the researched. As Stanley & Wise (1983: 170) argue this relationship is 'obscene because it treats people as mere objects, there for the researcher to do research on.' Feminist researchers prefer instead to engage with their subjects through discussing issues, answering their questions and remaining flexible with regard to where the research is conducted (Oakley, 1981; Kelly, 1990). These guidelines were adhered to in conducting interviews in the present study. For instance, where interviewees were keen to discuss issues that were perhaps not so relevant to the present study they were encouraged to do so.<sup>7</sup> Also, it was found that many interviewees were ill informed about the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS). Information and application forms were offered to interviewees on occasion that this was found to be the case. Similarly, where interviewees asked questions concerning the visiting procedures or arrangements at the particular prison, attempts were made to provide them with the information that was required.<sup>8</sup> At all times, the interviewees were treated in a way that was non-exploitative and sensitive to their situation.

The final issue, 'a concern to record the subjective experiences of doing research' was also addressed in the present study. Gelsthorpe (1990: 93) described this process, referred to as 'reflexivity', as 'integral to a feminist approach to research'. It means 'viewing the researcher's involvement in and experiences of the research as both problematic and valid' (Gelsthorpe, 1990: 105). The experiences in conducting the

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to point out that in no way was there an attempt to counsel the interviewees. The role adopted was one of sympathetic listener.

<sup>8</sup> Other visitors were often called upon to provide this information. Visitors' Centre staff were also consulted where necessary.

present research were both noted and reflected upon as the research progressed.

## **2.4 Accessing Information Sources**

In this section, the procedures involved in gaining access to the required information are discussed. Consideration is given to negotiations with the relevant ‘gatekeepers’ that is ‘those individuals in an organisation that have the power to grant or withhold access to people or situations for the purposes of the research’ (Burgess, 1984: 48). The problems encountered in obtaining access are also outlined. To begin, access in relation to the prison visiting survey is examined. The discussion then moves on to explore the way in which access to relevant interviewees was obtained. Finally, access to observational data is considered.

### ***2.4.1 Access: The Prison Visiting Survey***

Access in relation to the prison visiting survey raised the question - from whom should permission to conduct the survey be obtained? There were potentially two formal gatekeepers in this respect - Prison Headquarters and individual prison governors. Essentially, the decision that had to be made was whether to consult with Prison Headquarters. Under the current management structure much of the responsibility and authority for the day-to-day running of prisons actually lies with individual governors.<sup>9</sup> It could be argued, therefore, that governors occupy a sufficiently autonomous position to authorise or veto participation in research of this kind. Two additional considerations informed the above decision.

The first consideration raised the issue of data validity. It was felt that if Prison Headquarters were to have been involved the information provided by individual establishments might have been biased. Respondents, aware that the prison authorities may be privy to the data, might well have been tempted to be more positive in their accounts. Having said this, it was also possible that obtaining approval from Prison Headquarters to conduct the survey may have secured a higher response rate. In this instance, it was felt that the risk of a low response rate should be run in the interests of

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<sup>9</sup> As introduced following the establishment of the Prison Service as an Executive Agency in April 1993.

valid data. The second consideration concerned the influence that Prison Headquarters, if involved, may have had over proceedings. In order to consent to the survey, there may have been an insistence that certain questions were included, excluded or a certain approach adopted. Access may even have been denied.

For these reasons, it was decided that Prison Headquarters should not be consulted and permission to conduct the survey obtained at governor level only. Prison Headquarters actually became aware of the research as it progressed. No concern was expressed on their behalf with regard to the survey. On the contrary, an interest was voiced in the data to be collected. The questionnaires were sent direct to the "Governor's Office" at the appropriate address with a covering letter requesting access to the required information. The decision as to whether or not to complete the questionnaire was, therefore, left entirely up to the governor at each individual prison.

In eight out of 133 cases, the invitation to participate in the research was declined outright.<sup>10</sup> Respondents generally voiced their regret at not being able to complete the questionnaire. Others were not so amenable. Research saturation was clearly an issue. A prison psychologist at one prison explained: 'We receive numerous requests of a similar kind on a daily basis and thus are not in a position to respond to each and every one of them'. Similarly, a governor for a Young Offenders Institution commented: ' . . . we are inundated with requests'. On a few occasions, the fact that Prison Headquarters had not approved the survey explained the reluctance to complete the questionnaire. The individuals concerned requested confirmation that prison authorities had sanctioned data collection. As this could not be provided, attempts to elicit the required response were not pursued. Only one governor objected to the research. He explained ' . . . frankly I am uncertain that knowing all the information you wish to collect would necessarily be of benefit to any governor, or to the Prison Service at large'. This clearly was not the view at Prison Headquarters. As mentioned above, Prison Headquarters were interested in the information that was to be collated. However, it was felt that an attempt to convince the particular governor as to the merits of the research would be unwelcome and probably pointless. No further

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<sup>10</sup> No correspondence at all was received from thirty-three prisons. This was despite efforts to encourage a response via letter and/or telephone contact. The remaining three questionnaires were 'returned to sender'. It transpired that these prisons had recently closed down.

correspondence was entered into with the individual concerned.

#### ***2.4.2 Accessing Interviewees***

Having considered access in relation to the prison visiting survey, the discussion now turns to how access was gained to the second information source, interviews with prisoners' families. As has been noted earlier, there exists no statutory body or agency that is directly responsible for this particular section of the community (see Section 1.1). In the absence of a readily available sampling frame from which to work, other methods of accessing the relevant sample had to be considered. Three possible methods were identified - access via prisoners, access via voluntary organisations that cater to the needs of prisoners' families and access at prisons themselves. This latter method would involve approaching individuals who were visiting someone in prison, outside the prison gates, either before or after their visit.

The first approach was dismissed as impractical as it would have involved negotiations with too many different gatekeepers. First, prison governors would have to be consulted in order to gain access to a sample of prisoners. Access to families would then have to be negotiated with individual prisoners. Finally, consent to interview would have to be obtained from the families themselves. Accessing prisoners' families via relevant voluntary organisations was also discounted. Preliminary enquiries revealed that such organisations were actually few and far between in the geographical region in which research was located. Also, those organisations that did exist in the area were relatively small. It was felt, therefore, that these organisations might have provided access to only a limited number of potential interviewees. Another possible drawback was that these organisations might have been in contact with certain individuals and not others. There was a risk, therefore, that the resulting sample would be less than representative of the population as a whole.

Turning now to the third method of access, as outlined above, this involved approaching individuals who were visiting someone in prison actually at the prison itself, either before or after their visit. This was the method employed in the present study. It was preferred over and above the other methods as discussed for four

reasons. First, it was felt that it would allow a certain amount of flexibility as to where and when interviews could take place. Second, it was viewed as more convenient as access would not have to be negotiated with a number of different gatekeepers. Third, it was anticipated that this method would facilitate access to sufficient numbers of the relevant population. Finally, it was hoped that through employing this method at a number of different prisons a more representative sample would be obtained. In practice, however, this method of accessing interviewees presented a series of problems.

Initially, interviews at a local prison were attempted but this particular prison did not have a Visitors' Centre.<sup>11</sup> The only option, therefore, was to wait outside the prison on those days that visiting took place and approach visitors either before they went into the prison or as they left. It was found, however, that it was nearly impossible to obtain and conduct interviews in this way. Visitors tended not to wait outside the prison itself, preferring to spend their time before the visit in the waiting area provided by the prison, just inside the gate. Visitors were also anxious to leave quickly after their visit had finished which further diminished the opportunity to approach them. When it was possible to identify and speak to visitors, approaches were, more often than not, met with suspicion and reluctance to participate. Even where consent to interview was obtained, conducting an interview exposed to the elements, on a busy road, was found to be far from ideal. Further endeavours to obtain interviews at this prison were abandoned after a short time.

Interviews were eventually conducted at two other prisons. Both these prisons had Visitors' Centres. This was advantageous as the Visitors' Centres could be used not only as a means to accessing visitors but also as somewhere sheltered in which to conduct the interviews themselves. Despite this, difficulties with access were encountered. These can be grouped under two headings - negotiating with gatekeepers and limited opportunities for interview.

In order to use Visitors' Centres in the above way, permission from the appropriate gatekeepers, in this case Visitors' Centre co-ordinators, was required. This was readily

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<sup>11</sup> As outlined in Chapter 1, Visitors' Centres are buildings usually located outside the prison gates that provide, amongst other facilities, somewhere for visitors to wait before or after their visit.



granted by the co-ordinator for the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'B'. However, negotiating access was not so straightforward at the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A'. At the initial meeting, the co-ordinator was provided with a copy of the interview schedule. She requested the inclusion of certain, additional questions.<sup>12</sup> But the co-ordinator's influence went beyond merely requesting changes to the schedule. Initially, the co-ordinator insisted that she should approach visitors on my behalf. Her reasons for insisting upon this arrangement stemmed from a desire to safeguard the visitors and were, therefore, understandable. As far as the research was concerned, however, this approach was not particularly helpful for three reasons.

First, it restricted access. It was felt that it would have been inappropriate to approach visitors without the co-ordinator's consent, so when she was not available interviews did not take place. Unfortunately, the co-ordinator was quite often absent. She also tended to arrive after visitors had gone across for their visit meaning that the opportunity to conduct interviews had been missed. On other occasions, the co-ordinator was simply too busy to approach visitors on my behalf. Second, it left little or no control over sampling. There was also a concern that the co-ordinator might be tempted to be overly selective, perhaps, choosing those visitors with whom she was particularly friendly or those visitors who she thought might be less critical. Although having said this, there was no evidence to suggest that the co-ordinator adopted such a strategy. Finally, it was felt that the arrangement actually put visitors in an unfair position, as those approached by the co-ordinator might have felt obliged to participate.

After a period of time an alternative approach was negotiated with the co-ordinator. It was suggested that posters, bearing the co-ordinator's signature, could be displayed on notice boards in the Visitors' Centre informing visitors that the research was taking place and advising them that they may be approached and asked if they wish to participate (see Appendix 5). The co-ordinator considered this an acceptable alternative to the prior arrangement and, consequently, removed her involvement in the selection of interviewees. A similar poster was also used to facilitate access to interviewees at the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'B'.

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<sup>12</sup> The co-ordinator suggested that a general question concerning visitors' view on drugs be included (see Question 58).

Turning now to the second group of difficulties - limited opportunities for interview. Similar difficulties were encountered at both Prison 'A' and Prison 'B'. The opportunities for accessing interviewees were restricted in three respects.

First, Visitors' Centres did not provide access to as many potential interviewees as had been anticipated since certain visitors did not frequent the Visitors' Centres. This was not so much of a problem at Prison 'A' where all visitors to the prison were required to report to the Visitors' Centre at some point prior to their visit. However, at Prison 'B' there was no such requirement. Also, at both prisons, there was a tendency for visitors with their own transport to wait in their cars rather than in the Visitors' Centre. Accessing these particular individuals was no easy task.

Second, there was limited time available in which to obtain and complete interviews. The Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A' opened at 1 p.m. and visits commenced at 2 p.m. This meant there was only an hour in which to conduct interviews. On occasion, there was even less time as the Visitors' Centre sometimes opened later than at the advertised time. The Visitors' Centre at Prison 'B' was open for longer prior to the beginning of visits.<sup>13</sup> However, visitors tended to make their way over to the prison on average approximately 30 minutes (sometimes earlier) before visits were actually scheduled to begin. The reasons as to why this was the case are explored in Chapter 6 (see Section 6.1.3). So, at this prison there was also limited time in which to conduct interviews. Accessing potential interviewees after the visit was also attempted. However, it was found that visitors tended to leave immediately after their visit. So, opportunities for interview at this time were also limited. Due to limited time available in which to conduct interviews, the most that could ever be achieved on any particular day was one interview. The time available to conduct interviews was further constrained by the fact that visits did not take place every day. For instance, at Prison 'B' there were no visits on a Tuesday or Thursday.

The third way in which opportunities to conduct interviews were limited was that there were certain visitors who could not participate in the research. A few visitors were approached who were visiting the prison for the first time. These particular

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<sup>13</sup> On weekdays the Visitors' Centre opened at 12.30 p.m. Visits began at 2.15 p.m. On the weekend, the Visitors' Centre opened at 12 p.m. and visits began at 1.15 p.m.

individuals were not in a position to answer the questions included in the interview schedule and were, therefore, not interviewed.

The difficulties encountered in relation to access as discussed above resulted in a sample that was much smaller than originally anticipated. This issue is re-visited in the discussion on sampling below (see Section 2.5). In the next section, access in relation to the final information source is considered, data collected via observation.

### ***2.4.3 Accessing Observational Data***

As outlined above, observation took place at the two prisons at which interviews were conducted (see Section 2.2). Indeed, the fact that particular difficulties were encountered in accessing interviewees actually meant that more observational data was collected than perhaps would otherwise have been the case. Prior to turning to issues relating to access, it is necessary to first consider exactly what aspects of the visiting process were observed and why.

Observation did not extend beyond the prison gate. Two considerations informed the decision to restrict observation in this way. First, there were the ethical considerations. It was felt that to observe the visit itself would have been intrusive and insensitive and that what privacy prisoners and their visitors had during visits should be respected. Second, there were the more pragmatic considerations. To observe visits could have led to complications in conducting interviews. Visitors were bound to notice that the individual soliciting interviews in the Visitors' Centre was also present in the visit room during their visit. They could then have assumed that she was in some way connected to the prison. This situation may have influenced the validity of response. For instance, visitors, wary that information may be passed to prison personnel, may have been inclined to be less frank in expressing their views. Also, the situation may have restricted access to interview data. Visitors, not wishing to converse with someone considered to be part of the prison, may have been more likely to refuse a request for an interview.

In order to access the relevant observational data there had to be some degree of participation in the social world of the visitor. This raised the question of what role

should be adopted. This issue is addressed below. Specific difficulties encountered in accessing observational data are then considered.

Gold (1958) identified four ideal typical field roles - the complete participant, the participant-as-observer, the observer-as-participant and the complete observer. The role adopted in the present study was one of participant-as-observer. Burgess (1984: 81) described this role as involving situations 'where the researcher participates as well as observes by developing relationships with informants'. Where this research was concerned, this meant travelling to/from the prison as a visitor, using the facilities available to visitors, and waiting with visitors prior to their visits. The informants, in this case, were visitors and Visitors' Centre staff. Another key feature of the participant-as-observer role is that it is overt. As Roy (1970) noted 'the participant-as-observer not only makes no secret of his [sic] investigation; he [sic] makes it known that research is his [sic] overriding interest. He [sic] is there to observe' (cited in Burgess, 1984: 81). In the present study, the reasons for my presence were made clear to individuals, such as visitors and Visitors' Centre staff, at the point of contact. It was felt that a purely covert approach, such as that encompassed when a complete observer role is adopted, would have been unethical. There were also practical considerations informing the decision as to which role should be adopted. For instance, a covert role would have prevented the conducting of interviews with visitors.

In practice, commentators have noted that the role adopted in conducting observational research is not as distinct as Gold's (1958) classifications may lead one to believe. For instance, Burgess (1984: 84) described how a 'researcher cannot merely choose to adopt one role that is adhered to throughout a project but that several roles are developed throughout an investigation'. Similarly, Adler (1985: 27) noted that most observational research involves a 'delicate combination of overt and covert roles'. In conducting the present research, there were occasions when the observation was less than overt. For instance, it was possible that not all visitors were fully aware that their actions and interactions were under observation. This also applied to Visitors' Centre staff. It was also possible that certain visitors were not aware of the fact that the person with whom they came into contact was actually a researcher. This was most likely the case at one Visitors' Centre where a specific role within the social setting

was adopted. This was one of volunteer assisting in the running of the Visitors' Centre. Adopting this role allowed a certain vantage point from which to observe, albeit on the fringes, the social group under investigation. It also facilitated informal discussion with Visitors' Centre staff. However, to help out as a volunteer did present certain problems with regard to data collection. This point is explored further in Section 2.7.3.

It was felt that there was acceptance and integration into the social group with whom the present study was concerned. This assisted in the collation of observational data. However, there were certain difficulties encountered with regard to access. It was felt that, on occasion, observation was altering the behaviour of the group. For example, it was noted that conversation was sometimes less open than perhaps it may have been otherwise. Lowered voices or sudden subject changes were also observed. It was difficult to attribute these responses to my presence or to some other external factor. Indeed, whispered conversations seemed to the norm, particularly in one Visitors' Centre. Where it was felt that observation was having an adverse effect on interactions, it was discontinued.

## **2.5 Sampling**

In this section, the sampling techniques employed in relation to each of the three methods employed in the present research are considered. The characteristics of samples obtained are also presented where applicable.

### ***2.5.1 Sampling Prisons***

To conduct the prison visiting survey required a list of all prisons in England and Wales. The Prison Service provided this information. This list would have formed the sampling frame for the survey had sampling been an issue. In this case, it was not considered necessary to embark on a sampling exercise. The population size was manageable in survey terms. It was felt also that to survey only a sample of prisons would be unwise considering the low response rate that often accompanies a postal survey. Sampling was set aside and all prisons establishments in England and Wales

received a copy of the questionnaire (133 at the time). Before turning to the characteristics of those prisons for which information was provided via the prison visiting survey, it is necessary to digress for a moment to explore the way in which the prison estate is structured. The different types of prisons that exist within the prison system are outlined below.<sup>14</sup>

The prison estate is structured on the basis that there are different categories and types of prisoner and that these different prisoners should be held in separate establishments. There are different prisons for male and female prisoners. Male prisons are further differentiated into those that hold adult males and those that hold young offenders (under 21s).<sup>15</sup> Prisons are additionally divided by function, the two main types being local prisons and training prisons. There are also separate establishments for male young offenders on remand referred to as remand centres. Local prisons, so-called because of their proximity to local towns or cities, hold remand prisoners and recently sentenced prisoners. It is in these local prisons that prisoners begin their time in prison. Shortly after sentencing most prisoners are categorised and then allocated to a training establishment.<sup>16</sup> Training prisons for female prisoners and male young offenders can be either open or closed. These subdivisions reflect the level of security that these institutions are able to provide. Training prisons for sentenced adult male prisoners are also differentiated according to security level. Dispersal prisons are of the highest security, followed by Category B and then Category C prisons. Category D (or open) prisons provide the lowest security conditions for sentenced adult male prisoners.

The above analysis indicates that, in theory, there are at least eleven different types of establishment comprising the prison estate. In practice, however, it is not so easy to delineate between different prisons. Morgan (1997) observed that it has become increasingly common for establishments to have multiple functions. For instance, an adult male establishment may have an additional but separate unit for female prisoners.

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<sup>14</sup> Information on the different types of establishment that comprise the prison estate was compiled with reference to two sources - Creighton & King (1996) and Morgan (1997).

<sup>15</sup> The female estate is not differentiated according to age. Female young offenders are held in prisons with adult offenders.

<sup>16</sup> One exception here is where a prisoner is serving a relatively short sentence and there is not enough time to allocate them elsewhere (Creighton & King, 1996).

This presents particular problems in terms of comparing findings across different types of prison.

The prison visiting survey revealed that a number of prisons did indeed have more than one function.<sup>17</sup> For the purposes of analysis, those prisons with more than one role were categorised according to their primary function.<sup>18</sup> Table 2.1 provides a breakdown of the different types of prison about which information was provided via the survey.

**Table 2.1 Different Types of Prison in the Achieved Sample**

		N	%
<b>Male Prisons:</b>	Local	23	26
	Dispersal	4	5
	Category B	7	8
	Category C	27	30
	Adult Open	6	7
	Closed YOI	8	9
	Open YOI	2	2
	Remand Centre	5	6
<b>Female Prisons:</b>	Local	2	2
	Closed	3	3
	Open	2	2
<b>Total</b>		89	100

In order to determine the extent to which the achieved sample was representative of the surveyed population the above categories were collapsed into four - local, closed, open or remand centre.<sup>19</sup> This was the preferred method of establishing representativeness as within these particular categories the difficulties encountered in categorising multi-functional prisons were, in most cases, avoided. For instance, a prison that was both an adult male Category C prison and a closed Young Offenders Institution (YOI) had a general function that was categorised as closed. Table 2.2 shows the results of a

<sup>17</sup> The prison visiting survey required respondents to indicate type of prison on the front of the questionnaire.

<sup>18</sup> The prison visiting survey itself was conducted in June 1997. Therefore, the primary function was taken as that as indicated in the Prison Service Annual Reports and Accounts for the corresponding year i.e. 1997 to 1998. Where the required information was unavailable, the annual report for the previous year was consulted.

<sup>19</sup> Dispersal, Category B and Category C prisons were classified as 'closed'. Category D prisons were classified as 'open'.



comparison between the achieved sample and the surveyed population in terms of main prison type.

**Table 2.2 Main Types of Prison by Achieved Sample and Surveyed Population**

	Achieved Sample		Surveyed Population	
	N	%	N	%
<b>Local</b>	25	<b>28</b>	41	<b>31</b>
<b>Closed</b>	49	<b>55</b>	68	<b>51</b>
<b>Open</b>	10	<b>11</b>	16	<b>12</b>
<b>Remand Centre</b>	5	<b>6</b>	8	<b>6</b>
<b>Total</b>	89	<b>100</b>	133	<b>100</b>

The above figures suggest that the achieved sample was relatively representative. Its composition in terms of prison type reflected the surveyed population.

Before turning to the next section, it is necessary to mention two points concerning the analysis of the survey data.<sup>20</sup> First, sample size restricted the examination of relationships between certain variables. For instance, low numbers of remand centres and open prisons represented in the achieved sample meant that statistical tests of significance had to be restricted to closed and local prisons only. Examining the differences between male and female prisons was similarly restricted. The second point concerns the discovery that a small number of prisons (N=5) had two visit rooms. Unfortunately, the questionnaire as designed did not make allowance for this possibility. In these cases, the information provided by respondents was not always clearly attributed to either one visit room or another. For instance, respondents were asked whether or not the visit room provided certain facilities. Distinct responses relating information on each separate visit room at the prison were not always provided. Due to these difficulties in interpretation, those prisons with more than one visit room were excluded from certain analyses.

<sup>20</sup> Data was analysed using SPSS.



### ***2.5.2 Sampling Interviewees***

There were two stages of sampling in relation to interviews. The first stage involved the selection of the prisons at which visitors may be approached for interview. The second stage involved the selection of interviewees themselves. The sampling techniques employed at each stage are discussed below. Sample characteristics are then explored.

It was felt that interviews should be conducted at more than one prison. As has been noted elsewhere, prisoners' families are not an homogenous group (see Section 1.1). To restrict interviews to only one establishment would be to ignore this diversity. Establishments were initially grouped according to type of prisoner.<sup>21</sup> Five prisons were selected one from each identified group. This selection process was informed by three factors. The first factor was that no two prisons should perform the same function.<sup>22</sup> This strategy was employed so as to reduce possible sample bias. The second and third factors were time taken to travel to the prison and associated costs. Ultimately, those prisons that demanded least in terms of resources were chosen. On the basis of these criteria, the five establishments selected were as follows - an open female prison, an adult male local prison, an adult male Category B prison, an adult male Category C prison and a closed Young Offenders' Institution (YOI).

As outlined above, interviews were first attempted at the adult male local prison. Following the difficulties encountered in accessing interviewees, it was decided that fieldwork should be restricted to those prisons with Visitors' Centres. However, enquiries revealed that only two of the selected prisons actually had a Visitors' Centre - the adult male Category B prison and the adult male Category C prison. It was decided that interviews should commence at these two prisons and, when completed, the options for conducting further interviews at additional prisons reviewed. The goal was to conduct at least twenty interviews at each prison. Due to difficulties with access, it took much longer to achieve this aim than was initially anticipated. In the end, fifteen interviews were completed at each of the two prisons. Approximately

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<sup>21</sup> Five groups were identified - female prisoners, adult male prisoners, young offenders, long-term prisoners and remand prisoners.

<sup>22</sup> For instance, not more than one local prison, Category C prison, Category B prison, open prison and so on.

twelve weeks was spent soliciting interviews at the two prisons.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, after this period of time, it was not possible to conduct further research at any additional prisons, as was the original intention, due to time constraints.

In the second stage of sampling, selecting a sample of interviewees, a mixture of opportunity and snowball sampling techniques were employed. With the exception of those few interviewees selected by the co-ordinator at the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A', all interviewees were approached as and when they entered the Visitors Centre. Those visitors who agreed to be interviewed were asked after the interview if there was any other person with whom they were acquainted who might also be interested in taking part in the research. A small number of interviews were obtained using this method. There was also an element of judgement sampling. For ethical reasons, those individuals who seemed particularly anxious or emotionally overwrought were not approached. Certain individuals sent very clear signals that an approach would be unwelcome. The wishes of these visitors were respected.

The sampling techniques employed resulted in a certain bias with respect to which particular visitors were interviewed. Early arrivals at the Visitors' Centre were more likely to be interviewed than were those visitors who arrived later. This could account for the high number of interviewees who indicated that they had their own transport (see Section 4.1.2). Similarly, frequent visitors were also more likely to be interviewed. This perhaps explains the fact that most interviewees were visiting a prisoner who was on an enhanced regime (see Section 5.2.3).<sup>24</sup>

As outlined above, thirty interviews in total were completed. All interviewees with one exception were women. In terms of ethnicity, the majority (N=28) of interviewees were White. The remaining two interviewees identified their ethnic origin as Asian. Table 2.3 shows that interviewees were most commonly (N=13; 43%) aged between 31 to 40 and that most (N=22; 73%) were visiting their partner, spouse or boyfriend.

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<sup>23</sup> This time was not equally divided between the two prisons. Approximately seven weeks was spent negotiating access and conducting fieldwork at Prison 'A' and five weeks at Prison 'B'.

<sup>24</sup> As outlined in Chapter 1, one of the privileges awarded to prisoners under IEP is extra visits (see Section 1.3.2).

**Table 2.3 Interviewees: Age by Relationship to Prisoner**

	Partner/Spouse /Girlfriend	Parent <sup>25</sup>	Sister	Friend <sup>26</sup>	Total	
	N	N	N	N	N	%
16 to 20	1	-	-	-	1	3
21 to 30	6	-	-	-	6	20
31 to 40	9	1	1	2	13	43
41 to 50	3	1	-	-	4	13
51 to 60	3	2	-	-	5	16
60 +	-	1	-	-	1	3
Total N (%)	22 (73)	5 (17)	1 (3)	2 (7)	30	100

Five (17%) interviewees had been visiting the prisoner for less than one year. Twelve (40%) interviewees had been visiting the prisoner for 1 year or more but less than 3 years. Nine (30%) interviewees had been visiting the prisoner for 3 years or more but less than 5 years. Four (13%) interviews had been visiting the prisoner for 5 years or more. These figures reflect the length of time particular interviewees had been visiting the particular prisoner. This does not necessarily correspond to how long the prisoner had actually been in prison. Interviews revealed that a number of interviewees did not know the prisoner prior to his imprisonment. These individuals had only become acquainted with the prisoner whilst he was in prison.

For most interviewees, this was their first experience as a prison visitor. Eighteen interviewees had not visited the prisoner on any other occasion he had been in prison or visited anyone else in prison.<sup>27</sup> The remaining interviewees had either visited the prisoner during a previous term of imprisonment or visited someone else in prison. Those other prisoners visited by the interviewee tended to be friends rather than relatives. Four interviewees had visited another relative in prison.<sup>28</sup> Only four interviewees had no children. Twenty interviewees had at least one child under the age

<sup>25</sup> Two interviewees were visiting an adopted or fostered son.

<sup>26</sup> In one case, the interviewee described herself as a 'friend', however, as the interview progressed it became obvious that she was clearly more than just a friend to the prisoner. In the other case, the interviewee was only a friend to the prisoner. However, it was revealed that she was actually the main visitor to the prisoner.

<sup>27</sup> That is not to say that prisoners had not been in prison on a previous occasion. A number had but this was previous to when the interviewee knew him.

<sup>28</sup> One interviewee had visited her now ex-partner in prison. Another interviewee had visited her mother and brothers in prison. The final interviewee had visited her brother and stepfather in prison.

of 16. The remaining interviewees had older (aged 16 or over) children.

### ***2.5.3 Sampling Observational Data***

Burgess (1982: 76) noted that ‘sampling in field research involves the selection of a research site, time, events and people’. For reasons outlined below, sampling along these lines was not particularly relevant to the present research.

The selection of a research site usually involves two stages of sampling. First, the location at which the fieldwork is conducted requires consideration. This raises the question of why choose one location over another? In the present study, fieldwork was conducted at two locations - the Visitors’ Centre at Prison ‘A’ and the Visitors’ Centre at Prison ‘B’. The sampling procedure involved in the selection of these prisons has already been outlined (see Section 2.5.2). The second stage involves sampling at the research site itself. As Burgess (1982: 60) points out, a research site may consist of ‘numerous subsites’. However, this was not the case in the present research. There was only one setting in which observation was conducted at each respective research site - the Visitors’ Centre. Sampling for different ‘subsites’ was, therefore, unnecessary.

There was also no need to sample for time or events. Visitors’ Centres were open on specific days and between set times. All events of interest to the present study occurred on these days and between these times. During the course of the fieldwork, observation was conducted on every day the Visitors’ Centres were open and over a period of time corresponding to opening times. Sampling in terms of people was more applicable to the present study. In the research setting, there were two main groups of people - visitors and Visitors’ Centre staff. Interactions both between and within these two groups were observed as and when they occurred.

## **2.6 Research Instruments & Piloting**

There were two research instruments designed for the purposes of the present research - the questionnaire for the prison visiting survey and the schedule for interviews with visitors. A brief description of each instrument is provided below. The piloting of the

respective research instruments is also considered.

### ***2.6.1 The Survey Questionnaire***

The prison visiting survey consisted of a structured questionnaire comprised primarily of closed questions (see Appendix 1). It was divided into seven sections. The first section required respondents to indicate the times at which visiting to the prison took place and the length and frequency of visits. This information was required separately for convicted and unconvicted prisoners. The remaining sections in the questionnaire concerned: transport to/from the prison; the visit room; facilities in the visit room; supervision of visits; special visiting arrangements and waiting arrangements for visitors. The questionnaire was not piloted since it was not possible to do so. As outlined above, all prisons were included in the survey. There was, therefore, no sample upon which the questionnaire could be tested.

### ***2.6.2 The Interview Schedule***

The interview schedule was semi-structured (see Appendix 2). The reasons as to why a structured questionnaire format was rejected as a research method have already been considered (see Section 2.3). The decision to adopt a semi-structured rather than purely unstructured approach was influenced by two factors. First, it was anticipated that there might be limited time available in which to conduct the interviews. Second, there were certain questions that needed to be asked of all interviewees. The semi-structured approach facilitated this, whilst at the same time allowed the interviewees to talk freely about their experiences. The interview schedule consisted of eight different sections: visiting history, travelling to/from the prison, visiting arrangements, quality of visits, the importance of keeping in touch, the cost of keeping in touch, security issues, and children and prison visiting. General background information, such as age and ethnicity, was also collected. Pilot interviews were conducted with two individuals who had in the past visited their partner in prison.

## **2.7 Data Collection**

In this section, the issues raised in collecting data from the various information sources are considered. The collection of data from prisons through the prison visiting survey is examined first. The discussion then turns to interviews with visitors. Finally, the collection of observational data is considered.

### ***2.7.1 Data Collection: The Survey***

The arguments against employing postal questionnaires as a method of data collection are well documented. Newell (1995) expounds what is ubiquitous pessimism as regards this particular research method. A response rate of less than 50 per cent for most postal surveys is estimated. A concern as regards the standard of information provided by respondents is also expressed. Newell (1995: 96) points out that respondents' answers may be 'incomplete, illegible or incomprehensible'. In conducting the prison visiting survey, various strategies were adopted to increase the likelihood of a high response rate and good quality data. These strategies are considered below.

First, a covering letter and a stamped self-addressed envelope were included with each questionnaire. The covering letter contained an explanation with regard to research aims, an outline of the issues addressed within the questionnaire, an indication as to completion time and clear instructions as to what was required of respondents (see Appendix 3). The questionnaire itself was carefully presented in the hope that a well-presented questionnaire would encourage well-presented responses. The questionnaire also had to allow for easy and quick completion. With this in mind it was designed to be user-friendly. Closed questions were preferred to the more time-consuming open questions and the number of questions kept to a minimum. Unambiguous, simple and uncomplicated wording was used and a contact number provided so that respondents could seek clarification if required. The different sections within the questionnaire were colour coded to allow respondents to skip quickly over those sections that were not relevant. Instructions as to how to complete the questionnaire were provided in the covering letter and on the front of the instrument itself. This allowed for the fact that

the covering letter may have become detached from the questionnaire. Instructions throughout the questionnaire were clear and distinct from the questions.

An additional strategy to ensure a high response rate was employed. Also enclosed with the questionnaire was an acknowledgement slip that required recipients to provide the name and contact number of the person to whom the questionnaire had been forwarded.<sup>29</sup> It was requested that this be returned immediately in the smaller stamped self-addressed envelope also provided. This strategy was employed in order to avoid the questionnaire becoming 'lost' within the prison. A completed acknowledgement slip provided a contact point in the event that the questionnaire was not returned within the required time.<sup>30</sup> Where the acknowledgement slip had been returned, questionnaires were followed up by telephone. Although this strategy was quite effective, not all recipients obliged by returning the acknowledgement slip. On these occasions, non-returns were followed up via a letter (see Appendix 4). The difficulty in relying on written correspondence was that in the absence of an acknowledgement slip there was no way of knowing to whom the questionnaire had been forwarded for completion. Where this was the case, follow-up letters were addressed to the "Governor's Office". The person opening the correspondence was then relied upon to forward the letters on to the individual who had received the questionnaire. This could account for the fact that letters elicited the subsequent return of only a small number of questionnaires.

### ***2.7.2 Data Collection: Interviews***

Before data collection could begin, the decision of whether or not to tape record the interviews had to be made. Where interviews are not taped, written notes need to be taken throughout the interview, or made afterwards from memory. Commentators are somewhat divided in their advice on this particular issue. Bouma & Atkinson (1995) voice their support for note taking. They point to the adverse effect taping of interviews may have on an individual's willingness to participate in the research. Most commentators, however, advocate the use of a tape recorder (see Burgess, 1984:

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<sup>29</sup> Questionnaires were sent to the governor for reasons as outlined in Section 2.4.1. In the covering letter that accompanied the questionnaire it was suggested that it be passed on to whomever was most appropriately placed to provide the requested information.

<sup>30</sup> Prisons were contacted approximately ten days after the initial questionnaire had been distributed.

120). In this research, it was decided that interviews should be taped whenever possible. Three considerations influenced this decision.

The first consideration was concerned with obtaining valid data. A taped interview provides a comprehensive and accurate account of interviewees' responses. This may not have been the case if written notes had been relied upon. Also, to tape the interviews facilitates interaction with the interviewee. As Whyte (1982: 118) observed:

... a good interviewer cannot be passive ... he [sic] must reflect upon what is being said, ask himself [sic] what each statement means and how he [sic] can best encourage the informant to clarify a certain point or give detail on an item only hinted at.

The second consideration that influenced the decision to tape interviews was a concern to adhere to feminist guidelines. It was felt that to take notes during the interview might have encouraged a hierarchical relationship between the 'researcher' and the 'researched'. As has been pointed out, feminist researchers reject such a relationship and prefer instead to engage their subjects through discussing issues that concern them and answering their questions (Oakley, 1981). It was hoped that taping of interviews might assist in facilitating such conversation. The third consideration was the time factor. As noted above, there was limited time available in which to conduct interviews. To tape the interviews was preferred as the less time consuming method.

Before interviews commenced, there were certain points that were covered with each respective interviewee. First, their consent to interview was verified. In obtaining consent it was emphasised to interviewees that they were under no obligation to participate in the research and could stop the interview at any time. Interviewees were also informed that they did not have to answer any questions they did not wish to answer. Second, all interviewees were assured that interviews were confidential and anonymous.<sup>31</sup> It was stressed that the research was in no way connected to the prison or the Visitors' Centre and nothing the interviewee revealed during the interview would be discussed with any person related to the prison or the Visitors' Centre. Third, interviewees were invited to ask questions about the research, the answers to

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<sup>31</sup> In the writing-up of results all interviewees are provided with a pseudonym in order to preserve their anonymity.



which were readily provided. Finally, the issue of taping the interview was raised. The request to tape was made explicitly to each interviewee. It was made very clear that taping was not a requirement and that the tape recorder could be switched off at any point during the interview if the interviewee so desired. Only one interviewee declined the request to tape the interview. On this occasion, responses were noted during the interview.

The decision as to where the interview should take place was left entirely up to the interviewee. At the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'B', the co-ordinator permitted the use of his private office in which to conduct interviews. Interviewees were asked whether they would like to move into the office or remain in the main seating area in the Visitors' Centre. At the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A', a private office in which to conduct interviews was not made available. Nevertheless, interviewees were asked whether they would like to remain where they were seated or move to a different part of the Visitors' Centre where there was perhaps slightly more privacy. Despite this, interviews, on occasion, took place in less than ideal surroundings.

Privacy was one problem, particularly in the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'B'. All interviews at this prison were carried out in the waiting areas within the Visitors' Centre. It was observed that a small number of interviewees clearly felt uncomfortable speaking about their experiences when others were quite obviously listening to the conversation that was taking place. On these occasions, a move to another part of the Visitors' Centre where there was perhaps more privacy was suggested to the interviewee. The situation was particularly difficult when Visitors' Centre and/or prison staff were present in the Visitors' Centre. Where possible, interviews were conducted in an area within the Visitors' Centre not frequented by staff. Another problem was that interviews were prone to interruption. A child demanding attention was a common distraction. Where it was sensed that an interviewee wished to attend to other matters, s/he was encouraged to do so. The limited time in which the interview had to take place was also a problem. Interviewees had to leave the Visitors' Centre at a certain time to go across for their visit. Not wishing to disrupt visits, it was felt necessary, on occasion, to rush interviews. However, the preferred approach when time was running short was to discontinue the interview and complete it at another

time, perhaps after the visit or even on another day.

The circumstances in which interviews were conducted raises questions with regard to the validity and reliability of the data obtained. It must be said, however, that in only a small number of cases were the difficulties with data collection as outlined detrimental to proceedings. It was felt that, on the whole, interviewees were more than willing to share their views and speak candidly about their experiences.

### ***2.7.3 Collecting Observational Data***

Burgess (1982: 193) identified three questions that require consideration in the collection of observational data - 'what data to select and record, when to record it, and how to record it'. In the following discussion, these questions are considered with reference to the present study.

First, what data should be collected? Burgess (1982: 192) suggested that field notes should include 'a chronological description of events, details of informants and conversations'. Similarly, Whyte (1984: 118) identified two headings under which data may be recorded - 'the identification of relationships within the social setting and a description of events and situations which took place'. These guidelines informed the collection of data in the present study.<sup>32</sup> The different relationships between informants, events and situations observed at each of the two prisons are too many to list here. The following is a typical extract from the relevant field notes. This provides some insight into the data collected through participant observation:

Wednesday 11/11/98 - I arrived at the prison at about 12.15 p.m. As usual a group of visitors (about 4/5) had already arrived and formed an orderly queue outside the Visitors' Centre . . . the volunteer arrived just after 12.30 p.m. and opened the Visitors' Centre. I have noticed that some of the volunteers wear a HM Prison Badge. This volunteer was also wearing one . . . I've never met this volunteer before, an older man, perhaps in his 60s. All the other volunteers I've met so far have been women. This particular volunteer was not particularly friendly when I introduced myself and explained why I was there.

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<sup>32</sup> Burgess (1984) notes that fieldworkers occasionally develop observation sheets or schedules in order to guide their recording of data. Such instruments were not used in the present research. Field notes were largely descriptive and there was no need to ensure consistency between different observers.

Having considered what data was collected, the discussion now moves on to consider when and how data was recorded.

Lofland & Lofland (1984: 63) point out that it is common practice to 'write field notes only at the end of a period of observation'. This was the preferred approach in conducting the present research. Full notes were not taken during participant observation but completed afterwards from memory. The reason for this was that it was simply not practical to write notes whilst in the field. For instance, as has already been mentioned, the role of volunteer was adopted in one Visitors' Centre. To take notes whilst at the same time attend to the duties required from a volunteer was impossible. Sitting quietly in the Visitors' Centre and taking notes as events unfolded attracted suspicious glances from those visitors who were not fully informed about the research. This also deterred efforts to make notes whilst in the field. The reliance on memory raises the issue of validity. In defence of the data obtained, it must be pointed out that field notes were attended to immediately after departing the prison and always on the same day that the observation had taken place. The recording of data was, therefore, a continuous and systematic exercise. Also, key words or phrases were noted whenever possible whilst in the field so as to facilitate recall from memory.

## **2.8 Reliability & Validity**

In this section, the issues of reliability and validity are addressed. The first issue, reliability, refers to the extent to which findings are stable and consistent over time. Research is considered to be reliable when the same results are produced each time it is repeated under similar conditions (Reber, 1985: 636). In terms of the present study, it was not possible to test the stability of findings. For instance, it was simply not practical to interview visitors on more than the one occasion. However, consistency was addressed wherever possible. For example, inconsistencies during the course of an interview were questioned and interviewees asked for clarification. The second issue, validity, concerns the extent to which the research accurately measures what it claims to measure (Reber, 1985: 808). The strategies adopted in the present research in order to achieve validity are considered below.

The issue of validity has already been touched upon at various points throughout this chapter. For instance, a concern to obtain data that was valid influenced the decision as to whether or not to consult with Prison Headquarters when conducting the prison visiting survey. This concern also played a role in the decision as to whether or not to tape record interviews. Similarly, interviews were conducted in areas that were not within hearing of other visitors and/or Visitors' Centre staff. This was to ensure that interviewees were not inhibited in expressing their views thereby increasing the likelihood that data was valid. The issue of validity was also addressed in another respect. The idea of 'methodological triangulation' informed the present study (Denzin, 1970).<sup>33</sup> Denzin (1970) identified two forms of methodological triangulation, between-method and within-method. Both are relevant to the present study.

Within-method triangulation involves the use of different strategies within one research method. In the present research, an example of within-method triangulation is found in the questionnaire that formed the prison visiting survey. The questionnaire comprised of mainly structured questions. There were, however, a number of open questions that generated qualitative data. The information obtained from this type of question was used to check the information obtained from the more structured, or closed, questions. Thus, it was possible to determine the extent to which responses were valid and accurate. Any discrepancies were identified and steps taken to resolve them.<sup>34</sup>

Between-method triangulation involves the use of a combination of different methods in order to pursue a particular line of enquiry (Burgess, 1984: 156). This was exactly the approach adopted in the present study. As outlined above, three methods were employed - the prison visiting survey, interviews with visitors and observation. Adopting this multiple method approach balances the strengths and weaknesses of differing methods. More importantly in terms of validity, this approach allows the information obtained from one source to be checked against the information obtained from another. The information provided via interviews with visitors was used to validate certain data obtained via the prison visiting survey. Similarly, information

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<sup>33</sup> Denzin (1970) actually identified three other types of triangulation - data triangulation, investigator triangulation and theory triangulation. Methodological triangulation is most relevant to the present study, and is, therefore, given the most attention in the above discussion.

<sup>34</sup> Where possible, the respondent was contacted and clarification obtained.

collected via observational research was used to validate the data obtained through interviews with visitors. The ability to check data in this way meant that the resulting data, and, therefore, research findings were much more valid than otherwise may have been the case.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

At the beginning of this chapter, four research aims were identified. In the next four chapters, the research findings relating to each of these aims are presented. In Chapters 3 and 4, the first aim is addressed – the extent to which the Prison Service is committed to assisting prisoners in maintaining their family ties through visits. In Chapter 5, the effect of recent developments within the Prison Service on visiting arrangements and procedures is explored. In Chapter 6, the extent to which Visitors' Centres function as a resource for visitors is considered. Results relating to the final aim are touched upon in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. The main findings are, however, drawn together in Chapter 6.

### 3. PRISON POLICY: RHETORIC AND REALITY I

One of the Prison Service's fundamental aims is to prepare prisoners for their return to the community. It has been stated that 'much of the Service's work with prisoners contributes to this aim, in particular offending behaviour programmes and *the maintenance of family ties*' (HM Prison Service, 1995b: 6). The Prison Service often expounds its commitment to family ties in this manner. Is this a real or actual commitment? The evidence examined in this chapter suggests that the expressed commitment to family ties is nothing more than rhetoric. In reality, the Prison Service is far from committed to this cause. Support for this argument is to be found in the discrepancy between prison policy and what actually occurs in practice. Further support is found in the extent to which the needs of families visiting prison continue to be overlooked and placed second to organisational imperatives. The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, visiting entitlements and schedules are discussed. In the second section, the quality of visits is considered. The environment in which visits take place and facilities provided for visitors in visit rooms are examined. Special visiting arrangements are also explored.

#### 3.1 Visiting Arrangements

In this section, visiting arrangements are examined in the search for evidence of a commitment to family ties. Fundamental to this commitment is the amount of contact permitted between prisoners and their families. This is examined with particular reference to minimum visiting entitlements. The analysis is based on the premise that a prison operating according to minimum visiting entitlements is, at least in one respect, fulfilling an obligation to prisoners and their families. Having examined the relevant policy and explored the extent to which prisons were performing according to that policy, the discussion moves on to examine the reality of the situation, the amount of contact prisoners *actually* have with their visitors. Visiting schedules are then examined. Again the relevant policy is outlined and the extent to which establishments were operating according to that policy explored. Visitors' views on the scheduling of visits are then considered.

### ***3.1.1 Minimum Visiting Entitlements***

The primary mechanism through which a prisoner maintains contact with his/her significant others is the prison visit. Other methods of communication are permitted but it is the visit that is most important to the prisoner (Wozniak & McAllister, 1992). But a prisoner is not provided with unlimited access to his/her family. Restrictions are placed on who can visit, when a visit can take place and under what conditions. How much contact a prisoner has with his/her family is determined by how many visits a prisoner is allowed and how long these visits last. To begin, the various rules and regulations that govern prisoners' contact with those on the outside are explored. Another factor that influences how much contact a prisoner has with his/her family is regime level as dictated by a policy known as Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP). Arrangements under IEP are then outlined. Results from the prison visiting survey are reviewed so as to determine the extent to which prisons were providing prisoners with the minimum visiting entitlement. How prisons were operating in practice is then examined with reference to the information collected via interviews with visitors.

The rules and regulations that control life in prison are far from straightforward. Close examination reveals a certain ambiguity and even contradiction. The language in which the relevant documents are written is a contributory factor. Also relevant is the fact that various rules and regulations are derived not from one definitive source but from various sources. Before turning to that which concerns prison visits, it is necessary for contextual reasons to touch upon the legislative framework that informs prison operations.

Prison administration is primarily governed by the Prison Act 1952. Broadly speaking the provisions contained within this Act do little more than bestow upon the Home Secretary personal responsibility for the operation of the prison system. This allows him/her to 'make rules for the regulation and management of prisons . . . and for the classification, treatment, employment, discipline and control of persons required to be detained therein' (s 47). These rules, referred to generally as Prison Rules (recently amended in 1999), are statutory in nature and form the 'meat' of prison law (Livingston & Owen, 1999: 6). Pertinent to this discussion is Zellick's observation that those rules

regarding prisoners' communications with the outside world are 'rules of a discretionary nature' (Zellick, 1981). Examining those rules relating to personal visits, that is visits from family and friends, one can see there is much that remains unsaid. Prison Rule 35(1) states that an *unconvicted* prisoner 'may receive as many visits as he [sic] wishes within such limits and subject to such conditions as the Secretary of State may direct'. Similarly, Prison Rule 35(2b) states that a *convicted* prisoner is 'entitled to receive a visit twice in every period of four weeks, but only once in every such period if the Secretary of State so directs'. Additional information concerning personal visits is contained within Standing Orders. Standing Orders operate alongside the Prison Act 1952 and Prison Rules and contain much more detail about life in prison. However, Standing Orders have no legal status. Livingston & Owen (1999: 21) describe them as 'no more than non-statutory guidance to those charged with managing the prison system'. Despite this, failure to follow administrative procedures contained therein may lead to judicial review.<sup>1</sup> So prisons, although not legally bound to do so, *should* be operating according to Standing Orders. The extent to which this was actually the case will be examined in due course. First, it is necessary to examine exactly what Standing Orders say about visits from family and friends.

Standing Order 5 (Communications) outlines the basic minimum allowance of visits to which a prisoner is entitled. How much contact a prisoner is allowed with his/her family varies according to the status of the prisoner, that is whether s/he is convicted or unconvicted. Standing Order 5A(3) states that visits to *convicted* prisoners should take place as frequently as circumstances permit and should last as long as is possible. The minimum, however, to which such prisoners are entitled, is a visit lasting at least 30 minutes every two weeks. But this can be reduced under certain circumstances to one visit every four weeks lasting not less 30 minutes. Such circumstances arise when it is impracticable to provide the original due to the 'number of inmates and staff and physical resources'. Including this additional clause anticipates the difficulties that may be experienced by prisons operating with limited resources. It allows prisons to function below the recommended level without reproach. Standing Order 5A(4) continues in a similar vein, stating that *unconvicted* prisoners are allowed a total

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<sup>1</sup> Judicial review has been described as 'perhaps the most important safeguard of prisoners' legal rights' (Leech, 1995: 310). A prisoner may apply for a judicial review only after pursuing all internal avenues of appeal. The case is reviewed in the High Court. The decision resulting in the review is examined so as to ascertain that it was proper and lawful and that in making the decision correct procedure was followed.



visiting time of at least 1½ hours per week and that each prisoner should be allowed a visit on at least three days a week. Standing Order 5A(4A) further states that where visits to such prisoners take place three times a week, visits should last at least 1 hour. Again this can be reduced under those circumstances as outlined above.

According to these regulations those establishments that are not restricted due to resource limitations should be providing convicted prisoners *at least* 1 hour visiting time per month and unconvicted prisoners *at least* 1½ hours of visiting time per week. This is the minimum to which prisoners are entitled.<sup>2</sup> Prior to moving on to examine the extent to which prisons were providing prisoners with these minimum visiting entitlements, it is necessary to digress in order to consider a recent policy change which has had a significant impact on visiting arrangements. It is pertinent to this particular study as alongside prison rules and regulations it also determines how much contact a prisoner has with his/her family.

The Prison Service introduced a new national framework for Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) in 1995. Previous to the implementation of IEP, the most a prisoner could expect was the minimum visiting time to which s/he was entitled under prison rules and regulations. It could be argued that even expecting this was somewhat optimistic since as outlined above prisons were, and still are, permitted to operate below the stated minimum under certain circumstances. What is significant about IEP is that it offers prisoners the opportunity for contact over and above the minimum visiting entitlements.

As outlined in Chapter 1, under IEP prisoners can earn certain privileges in return for good behaviour and performance. Such privileges include extra or improved visits and earned community visits.<sup>3</sup> The reverse side to this policy is that those prisoners who do not behave accordingly will find themselves on what is known as a basic regime. A prisoner on basic will be provided with the 'minimum level of facilities to which s/he is entitled by law and good practice, regardless of behaviour and performance, unless

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<sup>2</sup> In the case of *unconvicted* prisoners it must be acknowledged that Standing Orders do not refer to that which these prisoners are entitled but that to which prisoners are 'allowed' i.e. 1½ hours visiting time per week. For the sake of convenience, this allowance will be referred to as an entitlement throughout this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> Community visits are also known as town visits. These visits typically involve day release from the prison allowing the prisoner and his/her family to spend the day together under normal conditions.

removed under the discipline system' (HM Prison Service, 1996a: 26). The next regime level is known as standard. A prisoner on standard will receive more than a prisoner on basic, but not as much as a prisoner on the highest regime level that is enhanced. On enhanced, a prisoner is 'eligible for additional privileges depending on their behaviour and performance' (HM Prison Service, 1996a: 26). Amongst these additional privileges is improved and additional contact with family and friends.

Here another factor influencing contact between a prisoner and his/her family is revealed, whether the prisoner is on a basic, standard or enhanced regime. As has already been mentioned, contact also varies according to prisoner status, that is whether convicted or unconvicted. It is important that visiting arrangements are considered in such a way so as to reflect these differences. What is of concern here is the extent to which prisons were providing prisoners with the minimum number and length of visits to which they are entitled under Standing Order 5. Until recently the Prison Service itself monitored the extent to which prisons were operating according to minimum visiting entitlements. The background to this endeavour is briefly examined below.

The Prison Service was established as an Executive Agency on 1 April 1993. Agency status conferred an obligation to clearly define and state its aims and objectives. Under this obligation the Prison Service identified six principal goals (see HM Prison Service, 1993a). The Prison Service's performance in relation to these goals was to be measured according to certain Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

The Prison Service recognised as one goal the responsibility of 'helping prisoners to prepare for their return to the community' (HM Prison Service, 1993a: para. 2.1). The success in achieving this priority was to be measured by monitoring the 'proportion of prisoners held in establishments where prisoners had the opportunity to exceed the minimum visiting entitlement' (HM Prison Service, 1993a: para. 2.2). The minimum entitlement for *convicted* prisoners being one visit on reception and then two visits every 28 days lasting at least 30 minutes each. The minimum entitlement for *unconvicted* prisoners being a visit every day (Monday to Saturday) for a minimum of 15 minutes each or a minimum of three visits a week totalling at least 1½ hours. This

KPI was achieved two years later allowing the Prison Service to state in its annual report for 1994-95 that ‘*all* prisoners now had the opportunity to exceed the minimum visiting entitlement’ (HM Prison Service, 1996a: 15). The target for the following year was altered slightly to include a reference to Incentives and Earned Privileges. The revised target was that ‘all prisoners should have the opportunity to exceed the minimum visiting entitlements, subject to qualifying under the earned incentives scheme’ (HM Prison Service, 1997a: 13). The Prison Service also achieved this target reporting that during 1995-96 that ‘*all* prisoners had the opportunity to exceed the minimum entitlements’ (HM Prison Service, 1997a: 27). Minimum visiting entitlements are no longer monitored. A new KPI was introduced for 1996-97. The Prison Service’s success in helping prisoners prepare for their return to the community is now measured by monitoring the number of prisoners completing offending behaviour programmes. The original target for minimum visiting entitlements had been achieved for two consecutive years and, therefore, according to the Prison Service, no longer merited attention (HM Prison, 1997a: 27).

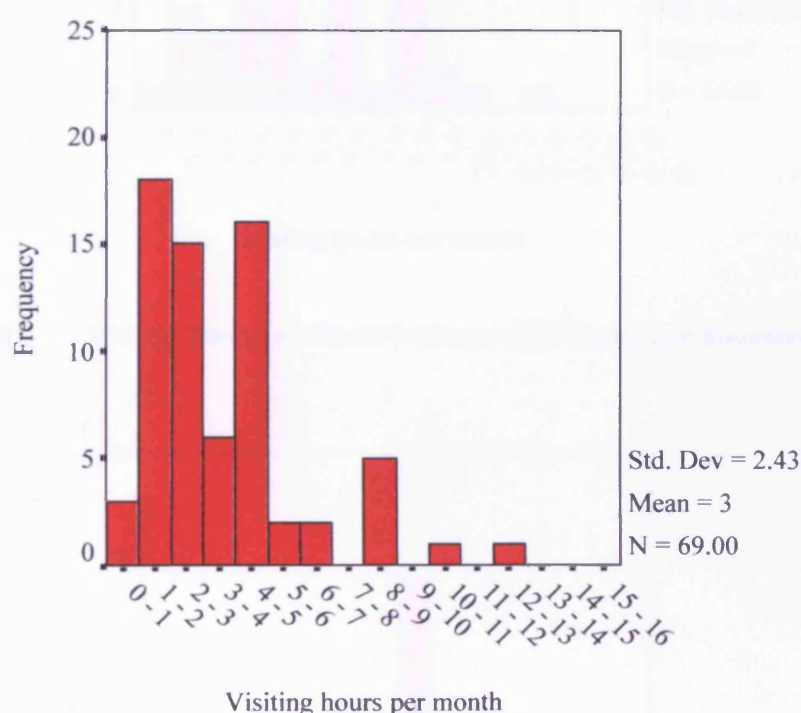
It could be argued that the very fact that the Prison Service elected to include a KPI relating to minimum visiting entitlements is evidence in itself of a commitment to family ties. On a more cynical note, it could also be said that minimum visiting entitlements provided a convenient, easily achieved performance measure. In fact, the corresponding KPI has been described as ‘woefully inadequate as a serious measure of achievement in relation to the goals’ (McDermott & King, 1995: 253). It is notable that no KPI was included that required prisons to look at facilities in visit rooms or special visiting arrangements for children or even the proximity of the prisoner to that community with which s/he has the closest links. Returning to the matter at hand, the Prison Service found that all prisoners were given the *opportunity* to exceed minimum visiting entitlements but does this mean that prisoners were *actually receiving* the minimum to which they were entitled? The discussion now turns to the results from this study. The extent to which prisons were, in reality, operating according to minimum visiting entitlements is examined.

In order to determine the extent to which minimum visiting entitlements were being met, the visiting times *per month* for convicted prisoners and *per week* for unconvicted

prisoners were calculated.<sup>4</sup> The visiting arrangements to convicted and unconvicted prisoners on basic, standard and enhanced regime levels are examined.<sup>5</sup>

Examining the visiting times for *convicted* prisoners on a basic regime, it can be seen from Figure 3.1 that nearly all the prisons (N=67; 96%) for which information was available were operating according to the minimum visiting entitlement. Only three prisons (Leicester, Belmarsh, Dorchester) were not providing convicted prisoners on a basic regime with the minimum visiting entitlement of 1 hour visiting time per month. Two prisons provided one visit per month which lasted less than 1 hour and the other prison provided one visit every two weeks (i.e. two visits a month) lasting less than 30 minutes.

**Figure 3.1 Visiting Times per Month for Convicted Prisoners on Basic Regime**

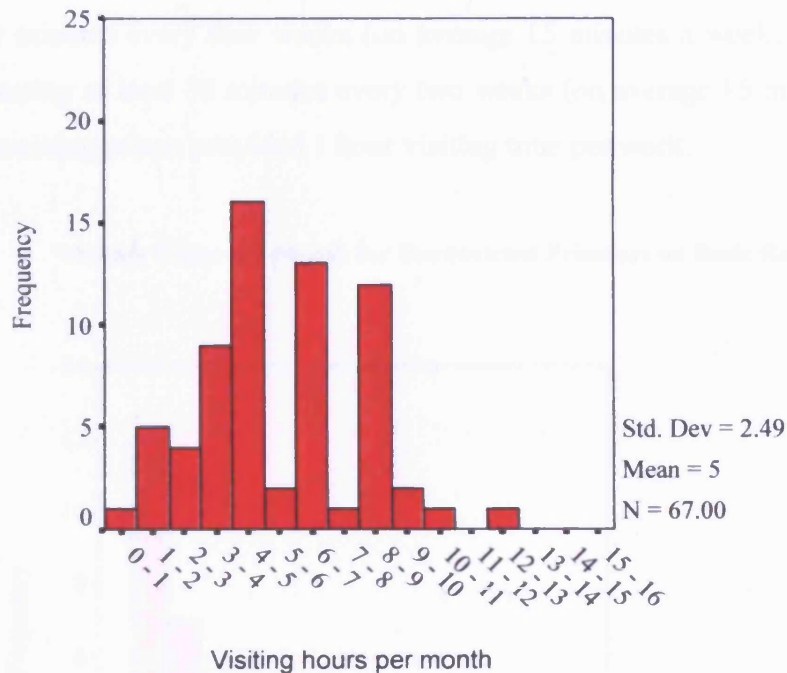


<sup>4</sup> This calculation was based on the information provided by prisons on visit length and frequency. For example, if visits lasted 1 hour or more, but less than 1 ½ hours and took place once every two weeks, then visits lasted *at least* 1 hour, averaged over two weeks this is 30 minutes per week. If visits lasted a ½ hour or more, but less than 1 hour and took place four times a week, then visits lasted *at least* ½ hour, a total visiting time of 2 hours per week.

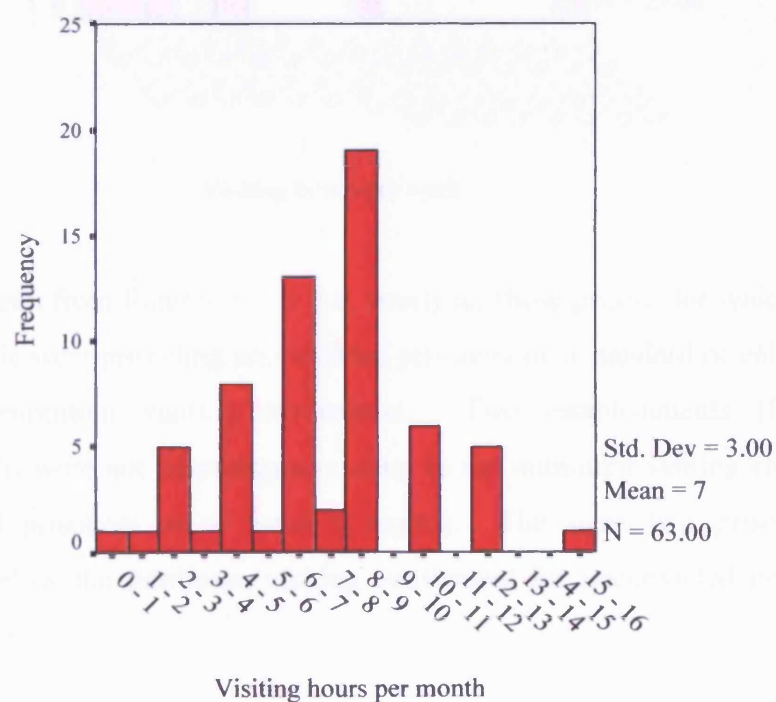
<sup>5</sup> Data revealed that not all prisons were operating according to three regime levels - basic, standard and enhanced. Some prisons had additional regime levels, others had less than three regime levels. Only those prisons that had three levels of regime were included in any comparative analysis (N= 80).

As can be seen from Figures 3.2 & 3.3, at all but one prison (Dorchester) convicted prisoners on standard and enhanced regimes were receiving at least 1 hour or more than 1 hour visiting time per month.

**Figure 3.2 Visiting Times per Month for Convicted Prisoners on Standard Regime**

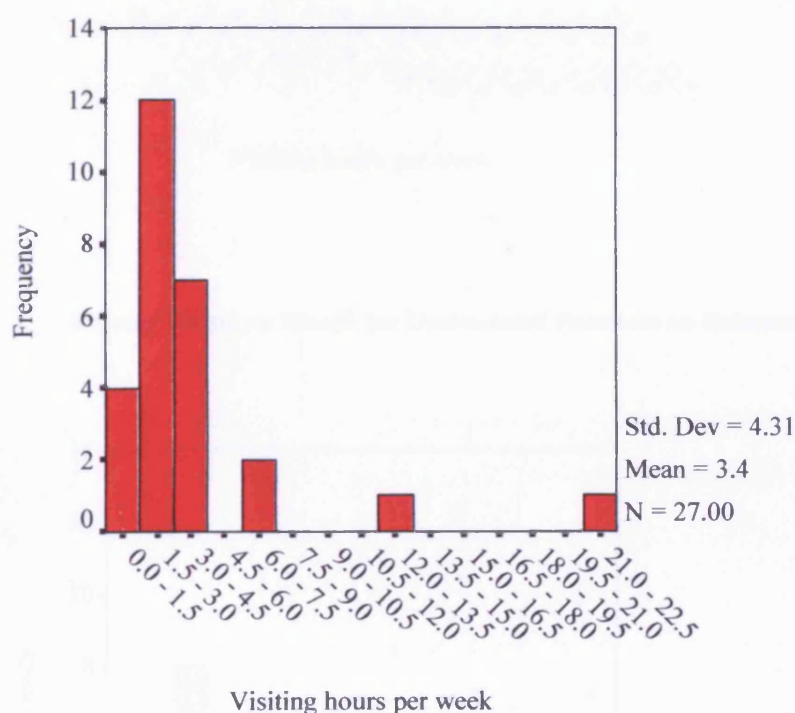


**Figure 3.3 Visiting Times per Month for Convicted Prisoners on Enhanced Regime**



Turning now to the visiting times for *unconvicted* prisoners on a basic regime. As can be seen from Figure 3.4, the majority (N=23; 85%) of prisons for which information was available were operating according to the minimum visiting entitlement. Only four (15%) establishments (Dorchester, Wandsworth, Holme House, Eastwood Park) were not providing unconvicted prisoners on a basic regime with the minimum visiting entitlement of 1½ hours visiting time per week. One prison provided one visit lasting at least 30 minutes every four weeks (on average 15 minutes a week); two provided one visit lasting at least 30 minutes every two weeks (on average 15 minutes a week) and the remaining prison provided 1 hour visiting time per week.

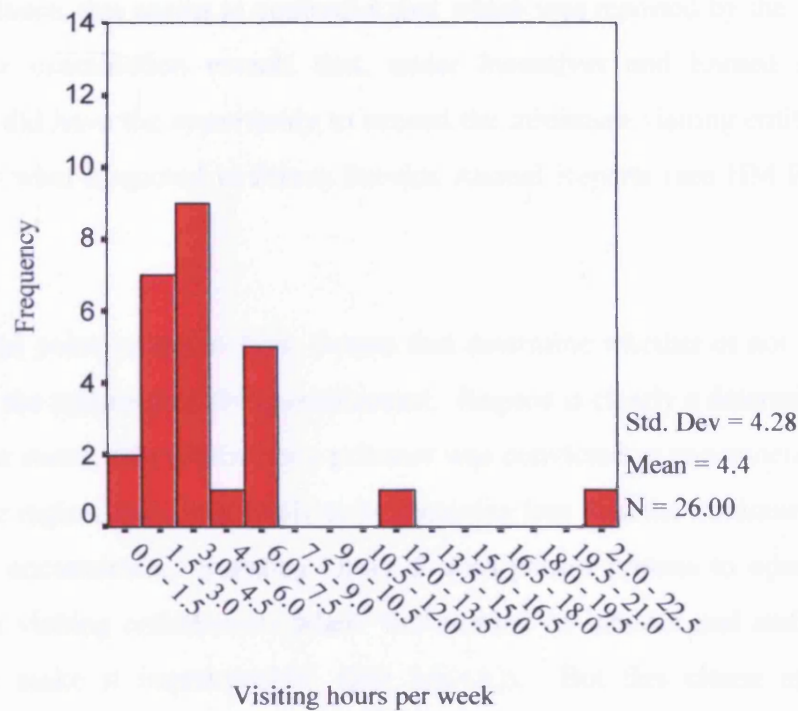
**Figure 3.4 Visiting Times per Month for Unconvicted Prisoners on Basic Regime**



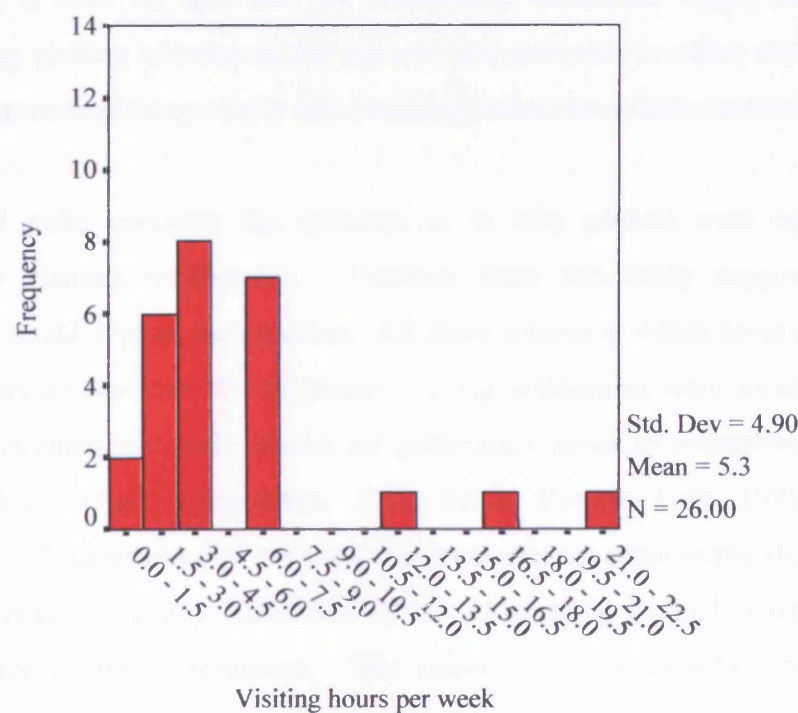
As can be seen from Figures 3.5 & 3.6, nearly all those prisons for which information was available were providing unconvicted prisoners on a standard or enhanced regime with the minimum visiting entitlement. Two establishments (Dorchester & Wandsworth) were not operating according to the minimum visiting entitlements for unconvicted prisoners on a standard regime. The same two prisons were also operating below the minimum visiting entitlement for unconvicted prisoners on an enhanced regime.



**Figure 3.5 Visiting Times per Month for Unconvicted Prisoners on Standard Regime**



**Figure 3.6 Visiting Times per Month for Unconvicted Prisoners on Enhanced Regime**



Four points can be raised from the above findings. First, not all prisoners were actually receiving the minimum visiting entitlement as outlined in Standing Order 5. At first glance, this seems to contradict that which was reported by the Prison Service but closer examination reveals that, under Incentives and Earned Privileges, *all* prisoners did have the *opportunity* to exceed the minimum visiting entitlements. This is exactly what is quoted in Prison Service Annual Reports (see HM Prison Service, 1997a).

The second point relates to those factors that determine whether or not prisoners were receiving the minimum visiting entitlement. Regime is clearly a determining factor, as is prisoner status, that is whether a prisoner was convicted or unconvicted. A prisoner on a basic regime was most likely to be receiving less than the minimum, especially if s/he was unconvicted. Standing Order 5 does permit prisons to operate below the minimum visiting entitlements when 'the number of inmates and staff and physical resources make it impracticable' (SO 5A(4A)). But this clause applies only to *convicted* prisoner entitlements. Standing Order 5 does not explicitly state that the minimum allowance for *unconvicted* prisoners of 1½ hours per week can be reduced under these circumstances. Those prisons operating below this minimum for unconvicted prisoners are therefore, quite possibly, in breach of Standing Order 5. However, it must be said that the information contained within Standing Orders concerning visiting allowances for unconvicted prisoners is rather ambiguous. This prevents us stating categorically that Standing Orders have been contravened.

The third point concerns the question as to why prisons were operating below minimum visiting entitlements. Findings from this study suggest that limited resources could explain the situation. All those prisons at which some or all prisoners were receiving less than the minimum visiting entitlement were local prisons. It is well documented that such prisons are particularly prone to overcrowding (NACRO, 1994b; Penal Affairs Consortium, 1995; Prison Reform Trust, 1995). The Chief Inspector of Prisons has also observed that local prisons consistently show the 'highest level of over-occupancy' (HMCIP, 1998). Operating beyond maximum capacity would indeed stretch resources. The impact that overcrowding has on visiting arrangements is further explored in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.1).



The final point relates to the number of prisoners who are receiving less than the minimum visiting entitlement. Although only a relatively small percentage of prisons were not providing the minimum visiting entitlements, the actual number of prisoners involved could potentially be quite high. Estimating the actual proportion of prisoners not receiving the minimum visiting entitlement is difficult as the number of prisoners on each regime can vary widely from one prison to the next (Liebling et al, 1999; Prison Reform Trust, 1998). Liebling et al (1999) found that at one particular prison 40 per cent of prisoners were on the basic regime. If this happened to be one of the prisons operating below the minimum visiting entitlements for those on this regime and this was a relatively large prison, then there would be a significant number of prisoners receiving less than the minimum at just this one prison.

Whether or not prisons were meeting minimum visiting entitlements as outlined in Standing Order 5 (Communications) has been examined. Results were quite promising, with prisons generally performing quite well in this respect, although the above caveat should be borne in mind. Another measure of performance is the extent to which prisons were operating according to recommended standards.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the Woolf Report (1991) recommended that official and ultimately enforceable standards relating to the operation of the Prison Service should be introduced so as to halt the steady decline in prison conditions (para. 1.167 & 15.5). An Operating Standards document was published in April 1994 but it did not take the form envisaged by Lord Justice Woolf. The standards were based on the information contained within Prison Rules, Standing Orders and other relevant documents. Prisons were merely 'expected to work towards [these standards] over time'. The publication offered no guarantee that all standards would be met in every establishment at any particular time. It was further emphasised that the standards contained within were not entitlements. Standards were 'conditional upon prisoner compliance with the obligations placed upon them'. Nor was the Prison Service legally bound to meet standards. One may question, therefore, the rationale behind Operating Standards. It is explained that listing standards provides 'an agreed basis to assess the performance of individual prisons and the Service as a whole' (HM Prison Service, 1994: 2). This is exactly one of the aims of this particular chapter. Standards

are not provided for every aspect relating to prisoners' contact with the outside world but minimum visiting entitlements are credited with a mention.

Operating Standards recommend a minimum visiting entitlement greater than that outlined in Standing Orders (SOs). Standards Q2 & Q3 outline the minimum visiting entitlements as follows:

Unconvicted prisoners may receive a minimum of three hours of visits per week, including at least one weekend visit. There should be the opportunity for a visit of not less than 30 minutes.

Convicted prisoners may receive a minimum of one visit every two weeks, including at least one weekend visit every four weeks. There should be an opportunity for a visit of not less than one hour.

Standard Q2 differs from that which is contained within Standing Order 5 regarding the minimum visiting entitlement for *unconvicted* prisoners. The national standard to be met for unconvicted prisoners is a minimum entitlement of 3 hours visiting time per week. This is more than that to which such prisoners are permitted under Standing Orders, that is 1½ hours per week. The standard for *convicted* prisoners is slightly ambiguous, although it implies that the minimum entitlement for such prisoners is at least 1 hour visiting time every two weeks (or 2 hours per month). As with unconvicted prisoners, the national standard to be met for convicted prisoners is more than that which is contained within SOs. Under SOs convicted prisoners are entitled to 1 hour visiting time per month.

The extent to which prisons were providing prisoners with minimum visiting entitlements, as contained in Standing Orders, has already been examined. The extent to which prisons were performing in relation to recommended standards is explored below. As before, visiting times to convicted and unconvicted prisoners on basic, standard and enhanced regime levels are examined in turn.

The minimum visiting entitlement which establishments are encouraged to meet for *convicted* prisoners is 2 hours visiting time per month (see Standard Q3 above). At just over two thirds (N=48; 70%) of those prisons for which information was available, convicted prisoners on a basic regime were receiving at least 2 hours or more than 2

hours visiting time per month (see Figure 3.1). Again, the situation improved with regime level. The majority (N=61; 91%) of establishments provided convicted prisoners on a standard regime with at least 2 hours or more than 2 hours visiting time per month (see Figure 3.2). And those prisoners on the highest regime level were most likely to be receiving the recommended minimum visiting entitlement. Nearly all establishments (N=61; 97%) for which information was available indicated that convicted prisoners on the enhanced regime were receiving at least 2 hours or more than 2 hours visiting time per month (see Figure 3.3).

The minimum visiting entitlement which establishments were encouraged to meet for *unconvicted* prisoners is 3 hours visiting time per week (see Standard Q2 above). At just over two fifths (N=11; 41%) of those prisons for which information was available unconvicted prisoners on a basic regime were receiving at least 3 hours or more than 3 hours visiting time per week (see Figure 3.4). The situation improved with regime level. Nearly two thirds (N=17; 65%) of prisons indicated that unconvicted prisoners on a standard regime were receiving at least 3 hours or more than 3 hours visiting time per week (see Figure 3.5). Unconvicted prisoners on an enhanced regime were most likely to be receiving the recommended minimum visiting entitlement. At just over two thirds (N=18; 69%) of prisons such prisoners were receiving at least 3 hours or more than 3 hours visiting time per week (see Figure 3.6).

More prisons failed to meet the minimum visiting entitlements as recommended by operating standards than failed to meet minimum visiting entitlements as outlined in Standing Order 5. This is hardly surprising considering the increased contact recommended by the former. Calculating the average visiting times per week for unconvicted prisoners and per month for convicted prisoners reveals that prisons were generally operating above standards (and beyond those minimum visiting entitlements as recommended in SOs). Unconvicted prisoners were allowed an average 3.4 hours visiting time per week on basic, 4.4 hours visiting time per week on standard and 5.3 hours visiting time per week on enhanced. Convicted prisoners were allowed an average 3.1 hours per month on basic, 5.1 hours per month on standard and 6.9 hours per month on enhanced.

The above findings are based on the prison visiting survey in which individual prisons provided information on the length and frequency of visits to different groups of prisoner. It can be assumed that this information reflected visiting policy at the various prisons included in the sample. This being the case, results would suggest a certain commitment to family ties at least at policy level.<sup>6</sup> The crucial question, of course, is how this policy translates into practice. Thirty visitors were interviewed with a view to establishing to what extent the reality of prison visiting corresponds to policy as outlined.

Visitors were asked about the frequency and length of their visits. Four visitors found it difficult to answer the question 'How often do you visit?' For instance, one visitor said '*Whenever I can, whenever I can get*', another replied '*Sometimes every week, sometimes every fortnight*'. Twenty-six visitors were able to indicate how often they visited: slightly more than half (N=14; 54%) indicated that they visited once a week and just under a third (N=8; 31%) visited twice a month. Two of the remaining four visitors visited once a month, another visited three times a month and the remaining visitor six times a month.

Examining the frequency of interviewees' visits reveals how many visits a prisoner receives over a certain period of time. It is evidence of the commitment amongst visitors to supporting those members of their family who are in prison. Examining how often interviewees visit does not, however, reveal how many visits a particular prison is allowing its prisoners. A prisoner may be permitted six visits a month but his/her partner may, for whatever reason, only visit him/her three times a month. In order to determine how much contact prisons were providing prisoners one must first establish how many visits prisoners were actually allowed. Interviewees were asked 'Do you visit on every possible occasion?' The majority of interviewees indicated that they did indeed visit on every possible occasion. However, upon further investigation it was discovered that this was not the case.<sup>7</sup> Interviewees were also asked what

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<sup>6</sup> How prisons can be committed to family ties whilst at the same operate a system of incentives and earned privileges which means that certain prisoners will receive less contact with their families compared to other prisoners is examined in Section 5.2. The situation is especially significant where less contact translates as that which is below the minimum to which the prisoner is 'entitled'.

<sup>7</sup> The corresponding question tended to be misinterpreted by interviewees. The information required from interviewees was whether they visited on every occasion that the prisoner was allowed a visit. Interviewees responded by saying that they did visit on every possible occasion, meaning whenever it was possible for *them* to visit. In later interviews, this question was extended to include an additional prompt 'Do you visit on every possible occasion, in other words, on every occasion that the prisoner is allowed a visit?'

regime, that is basic, standard or enhanced, the prisoner was on and what this allowed him/her in terms of visits. A number of visitors indicated that the prisoner was allowed a certain number of visits per month but they visited on fewer occasions. An examination of responses to the question concerning regime level revealed how many visits the individual prisons were actually allowing prisoners.

The number of visits prisoners were permitted varied between the two prisons at which visitors were interviewed. It also varied according to regime. Prisoners on an enhanced regime were allowed six visits a month at Prison 'A' and four visits a month at Prison 'B'. Prisoners on a standard regime were allowed four visits a month at Prison 'A' and three visits a month at Prison 'B'. At both prisons, prisoners on a basic regime were allowed two visits a month. Visit length also varied between prisons.<sup>8</sup> However, it did not seem to vary according to regime. Visits lasted the same length of time whether prisoners were on basic, standard or enhanced. The influence regime has on the frequency and length of visits is examined in greater depth in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.2).

At both those prisons where interviews took place there was only one visiting session on any particular visiting day.<sup>9</sup> At Prison 'A' this session lasted 2¼ hours with visits taking place between 2.00 to 4.15 p.m. on every day except Monday. At Prison 'B' visits lasted just over 1½ hours (2.15 to 3.50 p.m.) on weekdays (Monday, Wednesday and Friday only) and 2 hours 15 minutes, (1.15 to 3.30 p.m.) on Saturday and Sunday.<sup>10</sup> Interviewees were asked 'How long do visits last?' Most interviewees initially reported that visits lasted a length of time that roughly corresponded to official visiting times. However, further questioning revealed that the information provided by certain interviewees related to the time put aside by the prison during which time visits would take place not the *actual* length of visits, that is the amount of time visitors spent with the prisoner. Visits taking place from 2.00 until 4.15 p.m. did not necessarily mean that visitors spent just over 2 hours with the prisoner. This was the case at both prisons. Visiting procedure provided an explanation as to why there existed a discrepancy between official visiting times and actual visit length.

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<sup>8</sup> Data collected via observation and interviews with visitors.

<sup>9</sup> A session is a period of visiting time that takes place in the morning or afternoon or evening.

<sup>10</sup> Data collected via observation and informal interviews with Visitors' Centre staff.

Initially, only five interviewees indicated that visits lasted a length of time that did not correspond to the advertised visiting times. One visitor was exceptional in that her visits were shorter through choice. She explained that her adopted son had '*a little bit of problem with crowds*' and, therefore, preferred to finish the visit early so he could leave the visit room before the other prisoners gathered to return to prison wings at the scheduled finishing time. The remaining four visitors reported that their visits lasted less than the visiting times would suggest but this was not through choice. Two visitors interviewed at Prison 'A' stated that visits lasted less than two hours. These visitors explained that delays in the visiting procedure meant that visits did not start at the designated time:

*[Visits last] about an hour and a half, once you get in. You loose half-an-hour . . . that always happens to me. Once I was the second one in, I was waiting for about forty-five minutes for him. Happens all the time. I bet it happens today as well.*

(Tina)

*Visits are supposed to last two hours but by the time you've got in there, and they've [i.e. the prisoners] been called out you normally only get about an hour and a half.*

(Jackie)

Two visitors to Prison 'B' provided similar responses. Both stated that their visits normally lasted less than 2 hours. Again it was claimed that the visiting procedure was at fault:

*. . . visits start at quarter past one, by the time you've got in its like quarter to two by the time they're down its two o'clock, you have to be out by half past three.*

(Karen)

*You don't get the two hours. By the time you got in and every thing . . . about an hour and twenty, fifteen minutes it is sometimes. It depends when he comes out, because they have to call him down once we're in there.*

(Helen)

So there was an expectation amongst these visitors that the visit will start at a certain time allowing them so much time with the prisoner when in actual fact the visit started later meaning less time spent in the company of the prisoner. This was due to visiting procedure.

The visiting procedure varied slightly at each prison but the same general principal applied - 'first come, first served'. Upon arrival at each prison, visitors collected or were assigned a number. This number corresponded to when a visitor would be called through for his/her visit. Once called, a visitor must undergo certain security procedures before s/he finally gets to the visit room. Upon arrival in the visit room, the visitor then waits for the prisoner to arrive for the visit. The visitor who arrives first collects or is assigned number one and is in the visit room before everyone else. A visitor who arrives slightly later gets a higher number, will wait longer to be called and, hence, arrive later into the visit room. This processing of visitors at the two sample prisons began round about the time when visits were actually scheduled to start. For this reason a certain number of visitors were sure to lose visiting time, especially if it happened to be a particularly busy visiting day.<sup>11</sup> It is possible that those visitors who reported that visits lasted less than the stated times were consistently amongst the last visitors to be processed. This would explain their response to the question concerning visit length. From their point of view visits lasted as long as they were with the prisoner. Due to procedure, such visitors were not in the company of the prisoner for the total time during which visiting took place at each prison.

When asked about visit length a few interviewees did allude to delays in the visiting procedure. One visitor to Prison 'A' when asked about the length of visits responded '*It depends on what sort of time you get in there, roughly two hours*' (Lisa). Comments included '*. . . they're not very quick at bringing them [i.e. the prisoners] out*' (Wendy) and '*I try and get in for 2 o'clock, so I can get my full visit*' (Sam). Further evidence of a discrepancy between stated visiting times and actual length of visits was revealed later on in the interview when visitors were asked about disruptions to their visit.

A delayed start was the most common (N=15; 50%) disruption to visits reported by interviewees. In the majority of instances, this delayed start was a consequence of the visiting procedure. As one visitor stated '*Sometimes there's a long wait going through and you lose some of your visit*' (Brenda). Another visitor explained:

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<sup>11</sup> Weekends were particularly busy visiting days at both prisons.

*. . . you know that visits go from 2 to quarter past 4, well, if there's a long list, and you're low down the list, you might not get in to see the person 'til quarter to 3, 3 o'clock, so you don't get your full visit, you only get what's left*

(John)

Visitors also reported that visits did not start on time due to a delay between them arriving in the visits room and the arrival of the prisoner - *'They didn't call him. I was the second [person] into the visiting room and he didn't come until about ten people had come . . . '* (Wendy).

The expectation that a visit would last a certain length of time only to find that this was not case led to disappointment and annoyance amongst visitors. Interviewees were not asked how delays in the visiting procedure affected their visit. One can speculate that unless there was a conscious effort not to - as was the case in one instance *'I don't let anything upset my visit'* (Val) - visitors would in such circumstances arrive in the visit room far from relaxed. So not only were visitors provided with less than the expected amount of contact with the prisoner, the quality of contact was also impaired.

At this stage then the difference between Prison Service rhetoric on family ties and practice begins to emerge. Interviews with visitors revealed that the *actual* length of visits does not necessarily correspond to that indicated by a particular prison. Visit length as indicated by prisons was used in the calculation of visiting times. This leaves the finding that prisons were more often than not operating above minimum visiting entitlements open to dispute. There exists a discrepancy between what policy indicates should be the case and that which operates in practice. It would appear also that when it comes to visiting procedure there is little consideration for the visitors. If anything visiting the prison is made all the more difficult by prison administration. This argument is developed further in the following section. At this point, we move away from the amount of contact permitted between a prisoner and his/her family to examine visiting schedules, the times at and days on which visits take place.



### ***3.1.2 Visiting Schedules***

The extent to which prisons are committed to family ties may also be explored by examining visiting schedules. It may be the case that visits are arranged according to what is convenient for efficient prison administration. Or perhaps it is the case that visits are arranged in such a way as to make it easier for those individuals who visit family members. The latter would indicate that the prison system is demonstrating a certain awareness that in turn has led to consideration as regards the circumstances of those who visit. It would indicate a commitment to family ties. First, Prison Service policy regarding the scheduling of visits is outlined and the extent to which prisons were performing according to this policy examined. Then, visitors' views on visiting schedules are explored.

Standing Order 5 (Communications) states that prisoners should be allowed the opportunity to have weekend visits. How often these visits should take place varies according to whether a particular prisoner is convicted or unconvicted. Unconvicted prisoners should have the opportunity for a visit on a Saturday or Sunday at least once a fortnight and convicted prisoners should have at least one visit on either a Saturday or Sunday during every four week period. Weekend visits are also referred to in Operating Standards. Such visits are recognised as 'especially important as many visitors may not be able to visit during the week' (HM Prison Service, 1994: 40). Here it is recommended that unconvicted prisoners receive more frequent weekend visits than that allowed under Standing Order 5. Standard Q2 implies that such prisoners should be allowed at least one weekend visit per week. But the standard for convicted prisoners conforms to that which is contained within Standing Order 5.

The prison visiting survey required respondents to provide information on the scheduling of visits, that is between what times and on what days visiting took place. Separate visiting schedules were obtained for unconvicted and convicted prisoners. An examination of this information will reveal if prisons were indeed providing prisoners with the opportunity for weekend visits as is required under Standing Order 5 and recommended by Operating Standards.

All but one (N=88) prison provided an outline of visiting times. This information indicated that at least one visiting session took place on either a Saturday or Sunday at *all* prisons. In fact, the majority of prisons had visits on both Saturday and Sunday. At eighty-one (92%) prisons, visits to *convicted* prisoners took place on a Saturday and Sunday. At nearly two-thirds (N=20; 63%) of prisons, visits to *unconvicted* prisoners took place on a Saturday and Sunday. Unfortunately, it is not possible to arrive at a firm conclusion regarding the extent to which prisons were, in this instance, operating according to Standing Orders or complying with Operating Standards. One cannot glean from the information provided the frequency with which individual prisoners were provided with weekend visits. The information provided indicates only at what prisons weekend visits were available.

Operating Standards suggests further recommendations regarding visiting schedules. For *unconvicted* prisoners:

Visits should be available for at least two sessions per day, at least six days per week, for a total of at least six hours per day, unless a regular assessment of demand dictates otherwise.

For *convicted* prisoners:

Visits should be available for at least two sessions per day, at least four days per week, including weekends. A total of not less than six hours per day should be provided, unless a regular assessment of demand dictates otherwise.

Operating Standards also recommend that evening visits should be provided for both convicted and unconvicted prisoners. The Prisons Inspectorate has also commented on evening visits. In the 1992/93 report, the then Chief Inspector of Prisons, Judge Tumim, suggested that evening visits should be widely available so as to 'improv[e] access for visitors who work during the day and reduc[e] the interruptions to inmate's working day' (HMCIP, 1993: para. 3.73).

Data was examined in order to establish the extent to which prisons were achieving these standards. The number of sessions at prisons tended to vary from one day to the next. A particular prison could have three visiting sessions on six days of the week

and only one session on the remaining day. The total number of visiting sessions prisons were providing per week for convicted and unconvicted prisoners was calculated. This was compared to that which standards recommend prisons should be providing.

For *unconvicted* prisoners, Operating Standards recommend that there should be two visiting sessions per day on at least six days. Over half (N=19; 59%) of those prisons holding unconvicted prisoners were providing these prisoners with less than twelve sessions per week. The average number of visiting sessions provided per week was 9.7. The number of visiting sessions ranged from four to sixteen with prisons most commonly providing either six or twelve visiting sessions per week. For *convicted* prisoners, Operating Standards recommend that there should be two sessions per day on at least four days per week. Over two thirds (N=61; 69%) of those prisons holding convicted prisoners were providing these prisoners with less than the recommended eight sessions per week. In fact, prisons were providing on average 6.7 sessions per week for convicted prisoners. The number of visiting sessions ranged from two to seventeen and prisons most commonly provided convicted prisoners with seven visiting sessions per week.

Further analysis revealed that, although not significant, there was a difference between the type of prison and number of visiting sessions provided to *convicted* prisoners per week.<sup>12</sup> Local prisons were more likely to be providing eight or more sessions per week to convicted prisoners when compared to closed prisons. Twenty-five local prisons provided the information required for the appropriate calculation, just over half (N=14; 56%) provided eight or more visiting sessions per week for convicted prisoners. Only nine (19%) of those closed prisons for which information was available (N=47) provided eight or more visiting sessions per week for convicted prisoners. That local prisons were performing well in this respect is easily explained. Local prisons, unlike closed prisons, hold convicted *and* unconvicted prisoners. It is quite likely that the scheduling of visits to convicted prisoners was benefiting from the scheduling of visits to unconvicted prisoners. Rather than having separate schedules

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<sup>12</sup> Analysis based on two main types of prison only, i.e. local and closed. For reasons see Chapter 2.

for each type of prisoner, visits to convicted and unconvicted prisoners take place at the same time.

Turning now to when visits took place. Operating standards do not specify when sessions should take place other than to state that evening visits should be provided. Only a small percentage (N=8; 9%) of those prisons for which information was available (N=88) provided evening visits. All these establishments were male prisons. Five such prisons also held unconvicted prisoners.<sup>13</sup> All but one also provided evening visits for these particular prisoners. Results revealed that prisons generally favoured afternoon visiting sessions. Visiting schedules showed that visits to convicted prisoners were most likely to take place in the 'afternoon only' on every day of the week. Further analysis revealed a distinct difference between those prisons operating according to the recommended standard in relation to visiting sessions and those prisons that were not. At those prisons providing the recommended standard for convicted prisoners, eight or more visiting sessions per week, visits were most likely to take place in the 'morning *and* afternoon'. At those prisons operating below the recommended standard, visits were most likely to take place in the 'afternoon only'.

Visiting schedules for *unconvicted* prisoners revealed similar patterns. On most days, visits to unconvicted prisoners were most likely to take place in the 'afternoon only'. Visiting to unconvicted prisoners did, however, take place more frequently on 'mornings *and* afternoons' compared to convicted prisoners. Again, a distinct difference was revealed between those prisons operating according to the recommended standard in relation to visiting sessions and those prisons that were not. At those prisons operating according to the recommended standard for unconvicted prisoners, twelve or more visiting sessions per week, visits were most likely to take place in the 'morning *and* afternoon'. At those prisons operating below recommended standard, visits were most likely to take place in the 'afternoon only'. Having examined data from the prison survey concerning how prisons schedule visits, the discussion now moves on to address the issue from the visitors' perspective.

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<sup>13</sup> All local prisons

When visits take place is particularly important to visitors. It is the visitors that must make the appropriate arrangements to be at the prison at the allotted time. Convenient visiting times make it much easier for families and friends to visit. Visits that are scheduled to take place at times that do not suit visitors make visiting difficult, even impossible. The slightest change in the scheduling of visits can make all the difference to a group of visitors. However, it is important to bear in mind that what is suitable for one visitor may not be so for another. Weekend visits would be convenient for those individuals who work during the week or those who wish to bring children to visit but would prefer them not to miss school. Such visits would not be so convenient for those who rely on public transport that tends to be irregularly timetabled and more expensive at the weekend. Visits should be scheduled, therefore, in such a way as to allow for these differing circumstances. Visitors' views regarding visiting times at the two prisons where interviews were conducted are examined below. The extent to which visiting times were convenient to visitors is explored.

Responses at both Prison 'A' and Prison 'B' were more or less equally divided on the question 'Do visiting times at this prison allow you to visit whenever it suits you best?' Exactly half (N=15; 50%) of interviewees indicated that visiting times allowed them to visit whenever it suited them best. Just under half (N=13; 43%) indicated that visiting times did not allow them to visit whenever it suited them best. For one interviewee, the suitability of visiting times varied '*... it depends on when I'm working*' (Eileen). The remaining interviewee responded '*It doesn't matter to me because I don't work*' (Sue).

Both prisons at which interviews were conducted provided afternoon visiting sessions only. At Prison 'A' visits took place every afternoon, except on a Monday when there were no visits. At Prison 'B' visits took place every afternoon, except on a Tuesday and Thursday. Over half (N=16; 57%) of interviewees suggested changes to these visiting times that would make visiting easier. Two fifths (N=7; 44%) indicated that morning visits would make visiting easier. Other less common suggestions were that there should be evening visits (N=2; 13%); that visits should take place on additional days (N=2; 13%) and that visits should start earlier (N=1; 6%). Two interviewees simply stated that visiting hours should be increased. The remaining two interviewees

suggested changes to visiting times that involved modifying the visiting procedure. Both recommended a more flexible system with visits taking place for an extended period during which time one could turn up at a previously appointed time. As one interviewee explains:

*At other prisons I've heard that they have visits from ten in the morning to four in the afternoon, you still get a 2 hour visit, but you make an appointment . . . and have your visit then. I think it would be a lot easier, a bit more flexible*

(Angie)

Such a system would reduce the waiting that is involved in visiting the particular prison. Waiting prior to a visit and how it relates to visiting procedure is explored further in Chapter 6 (see Section 6.1.3). It is worth mentioning that a number of interviewees responded to the above questions concerning visiting times by referring to the problems endured as a result of visiting procedure. This demonstrates the dissatisfaction amongst visitors with the way that visits were organised at the two prisons where interviews were conducted.

Examining the reasons for the suggested changes to visiting times reveals that interviewees were finding it difficult to fulfil their various commitments. The majority indicated that extended visiting hours as outlined would make it easier to visit and at the same time fulfil their commitment to work. Interviewees took time off work to visit. As one interviewee explains '*. . . I have to take time off work to come here . . . my other brothers might come and see him but they have to take time off work*' (Jaz). For this particular interviewee morning visits would allow her to visit without missing work. There was also an implication that morning visits would also allow her brothers to visit the prisoner. In this case, the way in which visits were scheduled was limiting this particular prisoner to contact with certain family members and not others. Another visitor indicated that work commitments meant that she could not visit at the specified times during the week and, therefore, had no choice but to visit on the weekend. At this particular prison one weekend visit was the equivalent to two weekday visits.<sup>14</sup> There was no difference in length between weekday and weekend

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<sup>14</sup> Visitors to this prison had to submit two weekday Visiting Orders if s/he wished to visit on a weekend.

visits. So this interviewee had less contact with her boyfriend because she chose not to take time off work. She was in her words '*losing out*' (Jackie).

Difficulties with child-care was another common reason for suggested changes to visiting times. As one interviewee pointed out, visiting times during the week coincide with school finishing time - '*Morning visits wouldn't interfere with children's school . . . picking them up from school*' (Cath). Another interviewee also mentioned children in relation to possible changes to visiting times. In this case, morning visits were also preferred but not for the same reason as identified above. This particular interviewee had a child of pre-school age. She describes the difficulties experienced in finding someone to look after her child for the whole day:

*It would be good to have morning visits, because at least then you come in the morning get your visit done and you go home and then you've got the whole day . . . I start off at half-past-eleven in the morning and my day don't finish until about six o'clock. It's an all day thing and it's hard to find baby sitters for my son, it's awkward.*

(Alison)

Two interviewees explained how changes to the visiting schedule would allow more contact between themselves and the prisoner. Denise lived 226 miles from the prison and could only make the long journey to see her son once a month. She would visit with him one afternoon, stay over and visit again the following afternoon. Denise indicated that she would like to see morning visits introduced, as this would allow her to visit in the morning as well as the afternoon on the second day, thus making her journey more worthwhile. Another visitor to Prison 'B' felt that visits should take place on every weekday. The reason being that '*. . . it would even it out to give everybody a chance to come and get an early visit*' (Karen). This interviewee is referring to the visiting procedure that results in long waits prior to visiting and loss of visiting time if one happens to arrive later than most (see Section 3.1.1). One final interviewee explained her reason for the suggested change to visiting times. Mandy would have liked visits to start earlier so as to allow her to have lunch with her husband. That sharing a meal with the person who is imprisoned is significant to visitors was emphasised by other visitors in response to a different question (see Section 3.2.4).

The above findings indicate that with regard to visiting schedules establishments were operating according to Standing Order 5. At all prisons it was possible to visit on either a Saturday or a Sunday. Prisons were not performing so well in relation to Operating Standards. The recommended number of visiting sessions per week for convicted and unconvicted prisoners was not being provided. Evening visits were available in only a small percentage of prisons (N=8; 9%). Of course, there may be little demand for visits to take place at this time. Interviews revealed that evening visits would make visiting easier for only a small number of visitors. Prisons tended to provide afternoon visits only. This was also the situation at the two sample prisons. Over half of the interviewees felt the visiting schedule could be changed so as to make visiting easier, the most popular suggestion being morning visits. Changes to the scheduling of visits would relieve the difficulties experienced by visitors in fulfilling their various commitments to work, their children and the prisoner. Changes would also ease the restrictions on contact with the prisoner experienced by certain interviewees.

### ***3.1.3 Visiting Arrangements: The Reality***

Throughout the above analysis, evidence has been presented that calls into question the Prison Service's commitment to family ties. At policy level, prisons were generally performing quite well. Prisons were also performing quite well in relation to Operating Standards. Findings relating to how visiting arrangements operated in practice were not so encouraging. Information provided by interviewees largely discredited those conclusions reached concerning minimum visiting entitlements. In reality visits were much shorter than policy would lead us to believe. Evidence was also revealed that supported the premise that prisoners' families are extended little recognition regarding their circumstances. Organisational considerations seem to take priority over the needs of those visiting the prison. This much was evident from interviewees' accounts relating their experiences of visiting procedures and scheduling of visits. In the following section, the discussion turns to the quality of contact as determined by the environment in which visits take place and the facilities provided for visitors in the visit room.



### **3.2 Quality of Visits**

The amount of contact a prisoner has with his/her family as a factor influencing the maintenance of family ties has been discussed above. In this section, it is argued that a prison that acknowledges the importance of family ties will recognise not only the amount of contact between a prisoner and his/her family as important but also the quality of that contact. Quality is determined by the conditions under which the visit takes place. The visiting environment has been described as one of the most influential factors affecting the potential benefits of the prison visit (Player & Jenkins, 1994: 147). Also relevant are the facilities provided to visitors by the prison. As Owens (1991) observes:

Visiting facilities when poorly provided serve to stigmatise and degrade visitors, family members and children. This may have a strongly negative effect in situations which are already laden with the stress of separation.

(cited in NACROa, 1994: 22)

A visit that takes place in uncomfortable surroundings provides contact but the benefits of this contact may be lost. The willingness on behalf of families and friends to visit also may be eroded. The following discussion examines the circumstances and environment in which visits take place drawing on that information provided by prisons and the interviews conducted with visitors. To begin, the information gleaned from the prison visiting survey concerning conditions in visit rooms is explored. Survey findings with regard to the facilities provided in visit rooms are then outlined. The discussion then moves on to visitors' views on conditions and facilities in visit rooms. The final section turns to special visiting arrangements. The provision of special visits, and the benefits these visits provide for prisoners and their families, is examined.

#### **3.2.1 Visit Rooms**

The visit room is the area within the prison where visits between prisoners and their families take place. It has been described as 'one of the most important places within any prison' (Clarke et al 1992: 119). Standing Order 5 (24) states that:

Visits should take place under the most humane conditions possible . . . in open visiting rooms, with both inmate and visitors seated at a table and the inmate and visitors should be permitted to embrace.

Conditions within visit rooms have been harshly criticised in the past. Clarke et al (1992: 123) described visit rooms as 'poorly equipped and ill-designed with most of the loveable characteristics of a mainline railway buffet'. McDermott & King (1992: 101) were similarly scathing in their analysis describing visit rooms as 'neither inviting nor comfortable. [w]alls, still painted in drab institutional colours are bare except for official signs which communicate basic information about prison rules and the penalties for infringing them'. The Prisons Inspectorate has also consistently drawn attention to the poor conditions under which visits take place. In the report for 1992/3, it was stated that visit rooms were 'too often cramped, shabby, dirty, poorly decorated, smoky' (HMCIP, 1993: para. 3.71).

In order to gain some insight into the conditions in visit rooms, the prison visiting survey included a question that asked respondents if the visit room (or rooms) at the prison could be described as 'family friendly'.<sup>15</sup> Obviously responses to such a question will be subjective. Respondents were left to define for themselves what was or was not 'family friendly'. It is important to bear in mind that one respondent's idea of a 'family friendly' room may not correspond to that of other respondents or those who use the visit room, that is prisoners and their families.

The visit room(s) at three-quarters (N=67; 75%) of prisons were described as 'family friendly'. At less than one fifth (N=16; 18%) of prisons the description of family friendly was not applicable to the visits room(s). Five (6%) respondents indicated 'yes and no' when asked if the visits room(s) at the prison could be described as family friendly. These visit rooms were identified as having family friendly *and* not so family friendly characteristics. The remaining prison had two visit rooms, one for convicted prisoners and another for remand prisoners. The respondent indicated that the visit room for convicted prisoners could be described as family friendly but that the visit room for remand prisoners could not.

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<sup>15</sup> Reference will be made to visit room or rooms in this section as five prisons provided information on more than one visit room.

It is important to bear in mind that certain prisons prefer prisoners to have visits outside the prison. These visits are known as town visits.<sup>16</sup> Where prisons encourage town visits the conditions (and facilities) for visits inside the prison for visitors may be under developed. Having said this, no prison indicated that this was the case. Nor was there a statistically significant relationship between whether or not a visit room was considered family friendly and the provision of town visits.<sup>17</sup> Another circumstance that may, to a certain extent, excuse conditions in the visit room is where prisoners and visitors are not confined to the visit room during the visit. Visits took place outside the confines of the visit room at only seven prisons. At five of these prisons the visit room(s) was considered to be family friendly.

There was no statistically significant relationship between type of prison and whether or not the visit room was considered to be family friendly.<sup>18</sup> There was, however, a tendency for local prisons to have visit rooms that were described as not so family friendly. There was little difference between male and female prisons. Visit rooms at female prisons were only slightly more likely to be described as family friendly.<sup>19</sup>

Having indicated whether or not the visit room(s) was family friendly, respondents were then asked to explain their answers.<sup>20</sup> Over half (59%) of responses explaining why visit rooms were considered to be family friendly referred to the facilities provided for the family. Respondents outlined various facilities provided in the visit room(s) for children (35% of responses). The visit room in one prison provided the following - *'A children's play area . . . Play workers come in to help keep children occupied during visits; nappies and baby food are available for purchase . . . high chairs/small children chairs area available'* (Highdown). Respondents also

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<sup>16</sup> Town visits are also known as community visits or external community visits (ECV).

<sup>17</sup> Analysis includes those prisons with one visit room only and does not include those prisons identified as having family friendly *and* not so family friendly characteristics (N=79). Nearly three-quarters (N=29; 74%) of those prisons that provided town visits had a visit room that was considered to be family friendly. Only a slightly smaller percentage (N=35; 70%) of those prisons that did *not* provide town visits had a visit room that was considered to be family friendly.

<sup>18</sup> Analysis includes those prisons with one visit room only and does not include those prisons identified as having family friendly *and* not so family friendly characteristics (N=79). The visit room at just under one third (N=7; 30%) of local prisons was described as not so family friendly. Just over one fifth (N=2; 22%) of visit rooms at open prisons were similarly described. Closed prisons were most likely to have family friendly visit rooms. Only five (12%) of visit rooms at closed prisons were described as not so family friendly.

<sup>19</sup> Again, analysis includes those prisons with one visit room only and does not include those prisons identified as having family friendly *and* not so family friendly characteristics (N=79). Five out of six (83%) female prisons were described as having a family friendly visit room compared to fifty-nine out of seventy-three (81%) male prisons.

<sup>20</sup> The following analysis is based on the number of responses, as opposed to number of prisons, as some respondents provided more than one answer to that question regarding why and/or why not visit rooms were considered to be family friendly.

commented on the availability of refreshment facilities in visit rooms (24% of responses). It was also common for respondents to draw attention to the furnishings and/or decor in visit rooms (11% of responses). Furniture in visit rooms was described as non-regimental or not standard issue and/or chairs were comfortable and easy. The decor was family friendly in that there would be plants or flowers on tables and/or pictures or posters on the walls. Respondents also commented on the atmosphere in the visit rooms (9% of responses). This was described as informal; relaxed; not intimidating; not oppressive and/or pleasant. One respondent stated *'inmates/detainees and their families can relax in this visits room without feeling intimidated'* (Haslar).

Other less common responses referred to the contact between prisoners and visitors, the layout of visit room and staffing. It was felt that the contact permitted between prisoners and visitors contributed to family friendly visit rooms (7% of responses). Respondents explained that there were no barriers separating prisoners from their visitors, that close contact was possible and/or the movement of children was unrestricted. Respondents also commented on the layout of visit rooms (7% of responses). Visit rooms were well laid out; open plan; spacious and/or not overcrowded.

The final group of responses referred to prison staff (6% of responses). One respondent commented on the good relations between staff and visitors. Other respondents described the staff in the visit room(s) as friendly and/or professional. Also included in this category were responses referring to the presence of staff in the visit rooms. One respondent explained that there was *'minimum staff presence'* in the visit room. Similarly, another respondent explained that the *'remote supervision by staff using cameras'* contributed to a family friendly visit room.

The most common response to the question of why visits rooms were *not* considered to be family friendly was to refer to the cramped or crowded conditions in visit rooms (36% of responses). Comments included - *'Too many visits [leading to] overcrowding, though mainly on Friday, Saturday and Sunday'* (Glen Parva); *'Because of the volume of prisoners it is difficult to make it family friendly'*

(Liverpool); *'Not enough room to get the family round the table'* (Pentonville); *'Conditions are very cramped'* (Swinfen Hall). Five out of the nine prisons that identified crowded or cramped conditions as existing in the visit room(s) were actually local prisons.<sup>21</sup> Another common theme to emerge was the inadequacy or lack of facilities for visitors in visit rooms (25% of responses). Security issues also contributed to not so family friendly visit rooms (21% of responses). At one prison facilities in the visit room were actually restricted for security reasons - *'In the interests of security [there are] no toilets'* (Dorchester). Respondents also commented on the limited and/or lack of contact permitted between prisoners and visitors for security reasons. At one prison there was *'a barrier between visitors and prisoners'* (Reading). One respondent stated that *'security awareness does restrict family openness'* (Cardiff). Another respondent commented - *'The inmate and their visitor can not be trusted'* (Stoke Heath). One might expect these prisons to have a high security classification. This was not the case.<sup>22</sup> The impact security considerations have on visits are considered further in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.3). In certain cases, the visiting environment was generally unsuitable (18% of responses). Visit rooms were described as - *'Sparse area, cold environment'* (visit room for remand prisoners at Leeds) or *'Large, barn like room, echoing when empty, old workshop'* (Canterbury). At one prison visits took place in what was actually the prison dining room. This particular visit room was *'uncarpeted [with] dining room furniture'* (Askham Grange).

The evidence seems to suggest that according to the prisons, the majority have visit rooms that allow prisoners and their families to benefit as much as possible from contact provided via the prison visit. Such visit rooms are reported to provide specific facilities for visitors, comfortable surroundings and security measures that are not too intrusive. But a quarter (N= 22; 25%) of those prisons included in the sample identified the visit room (or rooms) as having some not so 'family friendly' characteristics. The cramped and overcrowded conditions in which visits took place were thought most likely to lead to the not so 'family friendly' visit room. Local prisons were particularly prone to overcrowding in visit rooms. This is not a surprising result. Research has shown that such prisons tend to operate above their

<sup>21</sup> This includes one prison that was a male remand centre and female local (Low Newton). Both visit rooms at this prison were described as 'too small'.

<sup>22</sup> Of those six prisons where security issues were identified as contributing to a not so 'family friendly' visit room - two were local prisons, one was a remand centre, one was a dispersal prison, one was a Category C training prison, one was YO1 (closed).

maximum capacity (NACRO, 1994a; Penal Affairs Consortium, 1995; Prison Reform Trust, 1995; HMCIP, 1998). Thus, at local prisons, not only is the amount of contact affected by overcrowding at local prisons, so is the quality of contact. It was interesting that other types of prisons also identified cramped and overcrowded conditions in the visit room to be a problem. Pressure due to the number of prisoners being held in establishments could explain this result. The increased demand for visits under Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) must also contribute to this situation. Indeed the Chief Inspector of Prisons in his 1995/6 report commented '[s]ome prisons lack the facilities required to provide the increased numbers of visits that are part of the Enhanced Regimes' (HMCIP, 1996: 25). Not only are there more prisoners in prison than ever before, there are more prisoners being allowed, or awarded, more visits than ever before. These issues are explored further in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.1 & 5.2).

The following section turns to that characteristic most often identified by prisons as contributing to a 'family friendly' visiting environment, facilities for visitors. The extent to which prisons were providing facilities in visit rooms for visitors is explored.

### ***3.2.2 Provision of Facilities for Visitors***

Operating Standard Q9 states that the visits area should provide 'facilities which reflect the social nature of visits, and provide for the needs of families and children' (HM Prison Service, 1994: 42). In meeting these needs, it is recommended that certain facilities be provided such as refreshments, waiting area, toilets, supervised play area, baby changing area, and access to a pay phone. It is also recommended that facilities should 'promote an informal and relaxed atmosphere' and that the visiting area be kept 'clean and well decorated' (HM Prison Service, 1994: 42). The following discussion examines the provision of refreshment facilities and play areas (supervised and unsupervised) in visit rooms.<sup>23</sup>

At the majority (N=71; 85%) of prisons there was a canteen providing refreshments in the visit room. At thirteen prisons (15%) there was no canteen in the visit room and

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<sup>23</sup> Analysis does not include those five prisons with more than one visit room. For reasons see Chapter 2.

only vending machines were provided. All visit rooms had either canteen or vending machine facilities. But canteens were not always open during all visiting hours. This was the case at eleven prisons (16%).<sup>24</sup> Staffing problems due to a lack of volunteers was the most commonly quoted reason for limiting opening hours. In most cases (N=8; 73%) alternative arrangements were in place for those occasions when the canteen was unavailable. At all but one prison, the alternative arrangement took the form of a vending machine. One prison also provided the children with free juice when the canteen was closed. At the remaining prison, prisoners were allowed to buy their own food and take it to the visit. No further detail was provided about this arrangement.<sup>25</sup> Three out of the eleven visit rooms, where the canteen was not always open, did not provide alternative arrangements when the canteen was unavailable. Visitors (and prisoners) to these prisons did not have access to any refreshments at all during those times when the canteen was closed. No statistically significant relationship was found to exist between the provision of refreshment facilities and prison type.<sup>26</sup>

Turning now to those facilities provided for children in visit rooms. The arguments for the provision of facilities for children are similar to those outlined in relation to special visits (see Section 3.2.4). Research has often pointed to the importance of contact between children and their imprisoned parents in reducing the detrimental effects of imprisonment on prisoners' children (Shaw, 1987; 1992a; Richards, 1992). Providing facilities for children in visit rooms promotes contact through normalising the visit environment and making the visit a more enjoyable experience. As Clarke et al (1992: 120) point out '[a]dults make a choice about visiting prisons, children do not; anything that makes the visit easier and happier for them . . . should be done'. As outlined in Chapter 1, the Woolf Report (1991) also drew attention to the experiences of children visiting prison. It recommended that play areas and toys for children be provided in visiting areas (para. 11.70 & 14.23). The provision of facilities for children in the visit room is also beneficial to adult visitors. Crèches or play areas entertain children who would otherwise be disrupting the visit. Such facilities,

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<sup>24</sup> An additional four prisons indicated that the canteen was not open during all visiting hours. At these prisons the canteen was actually available every visiting time but closed early in order to allow volunteers/staff to clean up, cash up etc. These cases were not included in any further analysis.

<sup>25</sup> For example, it is not known whether this arrangement took place during all visiting times or just when the canteen was closed.

<sup>26</sup> All (N=10) open prisons that responded to the survey and the majority (N=20; 80%, N=39; 81%) of local and closed prisons provided refreshment facilities in the visit room.

therefore, allow parents, and other visitors, time together to discuss what needs to be discussed without distraction or interruption (Clarke et al, 1992: 120).

As is also outlined in Chapter 1, the Government, in response to the Woolf Report (1991), declared that prisons would be encouraged to 'make provision for crèches for the children of visitors where space and resources permit' (Home Office, 1991a: para. 7.37). A subsequent Prison Service Annual Report stated that progress had been made along these lines. It was alleged that 'visit rooms had continued to be improved across the estate, with 100 of them possessing crèches or play areas' (HM Prison Service, 1995a: 27). Incidentally, there has been no further reference to family contacts and, hence, facilities in visit rooms, since this particular report. What once constituted at least one page in Prison Service Annual Reports has in subsequent reports been reduced to a paragraph referring to the success in meeting the Key Performance Indicator for visiting entitlements (see Section 3.1). The most recent report does not even include this. The provision of facilities for children in visit rooms is examined below. The extent to which prisons have met the recommendations proposed in the Woolf Report (1991) is explored.

Over three-quarters (N=65; 77%) of prisons did have a play area in the visit room.<sup>27</sup> But play areas were not always open. At the majority (N=52; 80%) of prisons play areas were always open. This was not always the case (N=12; 19%).<sup>28</sup> Staffing problems was the most common reason for the limited opening hours. Alternative provisions when the play area was unavailable were provided at only two prisons. At both prisons there was the opportunity to watch television; one also provided playmats. Just over half (N=36; 55%) of those prisons with play areas indicated that these were supervised. At a number (N=10; 15%) of prisons the play area was only occasionally supervised. For example, one prison provided a play area that was supervised at weekends only. Another prison provided such a facility only on those days when special transport was provided for visitors. At nineteen out of sixty-five (29%) prisons, the play areas were not supervised at any time.

Although not statistically significant, there were differences between different types of

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<sup>27</sup> Five prisons had more than one visit room. Again, these prisons were not included in any further analysis.

<sup>28</sup> One prison did not provide any information on availability of play area.



prison.<sup>29</sup> Open prisons were most likely to have no play area (N=4; 40%). A relatively high percentage (N=13; 28%) of closed prisons were also without a play area. Only two (9%) local prisons were without a play area. There was a distinct difference in the provision of play areas between male and female prisons. Male prisons were more likely to provide a supervised play area for children (N=35; 46%) than female prisons. The majority of (N=4; 57%) female prisons provided a play area but this was most likely to be unsupervised.

Play facilities during visits are not the only facility that can be provided at prisons for the benefit of visiting children and their parents. Access to a baby-changing facility during the visit should also be provided. Visitors may have no choice but to have their young children accompany them on a visit. Other visitors may choose to bring young children so as to maintain the relationship between them and their imprisoned parent. Either way provision should be made for visitors and their children. At nearly all prisons visitors did have access to a baby-changing facility during visits (N=82; 92%). Respondents were also asked where this facility was located. The reason behind asking this particular question was to establish whether or not the facility was attached to the visit room. Unfortunately, respondents did not provide sufficient detail as regards the whereabouts of baby-changing facilities. How accessible these facilities were for visitors, therefore, remains unknown.

To take account of the fact that facility provision is forever changing, prisons were also asked if there were any plans to improve childcare and play facilities. Just under one third (N=26; 29%) of prisons planned to improve these facilities. Twenty-four prisons provided further information about the planned improvements.

At a number (N=7; 29%) of prisons there were plans to introduce play or crèche facilities in the visit room. All these prisons had previously indicated that there was no such facility in the visit room or rooms. But respondents' comments revealed that facilities were not certain to be introduced. For instance, one prison was '*currently investigating the possibilities of developing crèche facilities*' (Ranby). At another, plans to introduce a play area in a visit room were only '*under discussion*' (Leeds).

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<sup>29</sup> Analysis does not include those five prisons with more than one visit room.

Another prison stated '*a play area may be introduced in the visit room*'. Whether facilities will actually be introduced is, therefore, open to question. Where facilities were to be introduced not all children were to benefit. One prison intended to open a play area and provide a television for children (Wormwood Scrubs). At this prison there was an enhanced visit room for prisoners on the enhanced regime and a normal visit room for all other prisoners. Plans to introduce facilities as outlined referred to the enhanced visit room only.

Respondents also (N=7; 29%) outlined improvements to *existing* play and childcare facilities. This finding suggests that facilities, where provided, tended to be less than adequate. At one prison there were plans to '*upgrade the children's play area*' (Holme House). At another prison there were plans to provide a '*larger play area away from the main visits room*' (Moorland). At the remaining prisons, improvements concerned the increased provision of supervised play areas or crèche facilities. At one such prison the supervised play area in the visit room was not always available due to lack of volunteers to run the facility. This prison planned to recruit more volunteers in order to prevent limited access to this facility.

At a number of prisons (N=5; 21%) planned improvements were much more extensive. Visit rooms were due to be extended and refurbished, facilities were due to be revamped or upgraded. Two prisons outlined plans for a whole new visit room. As regards the remaining prisons (N=5) respondents outlined other improvements in various areas of child-care and play facilities. Here we find evidence of a much more progressive attitude to children visiting prison. At two prisons, there were plans to extend the special visiting arrangements for children already in operation at the particular prisons. One respondent commented that the prison was '*always looking for new ideas*'. Face painting for children was one idea that had been recently introduced at this particular prison (Springhill). Another respondent outlined the usefulness of the booked visiting system in operation at the prison when planning child-care - '*The pre-booked system is enquiring as to the ages of children coming [to visit] so that child-care can be pre planned to suit age-range*' (Wayland). At the remaining prison there were plans to create a '*special baby-changing room*' (Risley).

Responses to the question concerning planned improvements suggest that facilities currently provided for children are far from satisfactory. Even where facilities are provided, quality seems to be lacking. Findings also suggest that identified improvements are only possibilities as opposed to certainties. There was some evidence of good practice. Using the booked visit system to plan suitable child-care is a particularly good idea. It is one that other prisons could benefit from incorporating into visiting procedure. Booked visits systems are examined further in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.1.3.).

These findings demonstrate that prisons were performing quite well in achieving Standard Q9. Canteens were provided in the visit room at the majority of prisons and where these were not provided a vending machine was available. Facilities for children, especially in the form of supervised play areas, were slightly less likely to be provided in the visit rooms. Female prisons did not provide the same standard of facilities as those prisons holding male prisoners. It is unfortunate that facilities although provided were not always available for use. This is most likely due to the volunteer basis upon which these facilities tend to operate. It is promising that a number of prisons did plan to improve play and child-care facilities. Although, the fact that just under one third (N=26; 29%) of prisons identified improvements to be introduced indicates just how much room there is for improvement.

Examining that information provided by prisons provides some insight into conditions in the visit room and the facilities provided. Findings suggest that circumstances for families visiting prisons may have improved since early research conducted in this area (Clarke et al, 1992; McDermott & King, 1992). However, the above results merely indicate the extent to which facilities were provided. The quality of facilities is another issue. Whether facilities actually meet visitors' needs is a question as yet unanswered. In order to consider this, it is necessary to examine the views of visitors who spend time in the visit room and use the available facilities.

### ***3.2.3 Visitors' Views on Conditions and Facilities***

In this section, visitors' views regarding conditions in the visit rooms and facilities

provided are explored. This reveals the extent to which visitors' needs are actually being met. Visitors' views regarding the conditions and facilities provided at the two sample prisons are examined separately. Visitors also provided information regarding the conditions and facilities provided at other prisons. This is also examined.

Just over half (N=8; 53%) of those visitors to Prison 'A' were critical of the conditions and/or facilities in the visit room. Three interviewees were complimentary in certain respects but felt that there was room for improvement. The remaining four interviewees were completely satisfied with the facilities and conditions in the visit room and indicated that there were no improvements that they would like to see introduced. These interviewees differed from those more critical interviewees in one respect - none had young children who accompanied them on the visit.

Six interviewees were dissatisfied with the facilities provided for children in the visit room. A supervised play area (or crèche) was provided for children in the visits room at Prison 'A' but only on two of the six visiting days. Interviewees felt that the availability of this facility should be extended. As one interviewee pointed out:

*When one of the volunteers goes over and they'll do some activities for the kids, now when it's a day like that it's fine, otherwise there's nothing. And you don't bring too much with you on the visits for them to play with because of the searching when you go through*

(Sam)

Another interviewee described facilities for children as 'Awful . . . rotten. There's nowhere for them to play. There is a crèche, I think it's two days a week, but it's not always on' (Angie). Interviewees were also dissatisfied with the quality of the facilities provided for children. One interviewee explained that 'There's nothing at all for children of his age, he's in between a baby and an older child . . .' (Jackie). Jackie had one child aged 1½ years. This particular interviewee felt that there should be a television provided for older children. Another interviewee was unhappy with the arrangements for play facilities in the visit room:

*They've got a play area for the children, twice a week, but they can't be with their father because it's in a separate room and they're [i.e. the prisoners] not allowed out there . . . I think it should all be in the one [i.e. room] so they [i.e.*

*the prisoners] can sit down and cuddle them . . . a joint thing, rather than separate*

(Cath)

Interviewee accounts also provided justification for the provision of adequate facilities for children visiting the prison. As one interviewee explained:

*. . . a play area [allows] you to send the kids off to play, so you could have a chat with your husband and not have to keep saying shut-up, behave, sit-down, do this, do that. Also, the kids annoy other visitors. They're running around and people get angry . . .*

(Paula)

Paula was not the only visitor to identify the benefits of a play area in the visit room for children. Angie described how the only way to occupy her children when the play area was unavailable was to '*sit and give them sweets . . . feed them with rubbish to try and keep them happy*'. Another visitor knew that her 2 ½ year old '*. . . will be driving everyone [i.e. in the visit room] bonkers*' (Tina). Tina was visiting on a day when the crèche would not be available. Older children for whom no provision was made at this particular prison also caused problems. In the words of one interviewee, '*. . . they get fed-up*'.

Interviewees (N=5) were also aggrieved by the lack of space in the visit room at Prison 'A'. The visit room was described as '*cramped*' and '*crowded*'. One interviewee described the visits room as being on occasion '*like a madhouse*' (Angie). Interviewees drew attention to the problems this caused during visits. Crowded conditions led to a lack of privacy due to the proximity to other visitors. As one interviewee commented:

*. . . you find you can't talk about personal matters because this person behind you is sitting two-foot away, you're always conscious that people are over hearing . . . it makes it very tense.*

(Paula)

The lack of space coupled with the furnishings in the visit room caused concern for young children:

*The tables are so small . . . if I've got my stepdaughter and her [own daughter] sitting at a table . . . if you've got food and a drink and something to play with,*

*you know, so she can play with Daddy, it's probably really trivial, but if you've got hot coffee sitting in your lap . . . it is only a small room for thirty tables*

(Lisa)

Another interviewee stated '*. . .there's not a lot of room over there and the tables are of a height where the babies can hang their heads on*' (Angie) .

Over half (N=9; 60%) of visitors to Prison 'B' were satisfied to some extent with the conditions and facilities provided in the visit room. Such visitors were complimentary but suggested possible improvements. Five visitors were completely dissatisfied. Only one visitor was content with the conditions/facilities provided in the visit room (Debbie). This particular interviewee did not have much experience in visiting prisons. Her friend had been in one other prison for three weeks previous to being moved to Prison 'B'. This was only her second visit to Prison 'B'.

Interviewees were most dissatisfied with the refreshment facilities provided in the visit room at Prison 'B'. There was no canteen as such in this visit room. Instead, there were vending machines providing hot and cold drinks. Sandwiches were available. As one interviewee explained – '*sometimes there's a lady selling sandwiches*'. Interviewees were unhappy with both of these facilities. Interviewees felt that the sandwiches were too expensive - '*£1, at least, for two rounds of bread with cheese in it . . . it's terrible*' (Nikki). Another interviewee described the prices as '*extortionate*' (Jill). Also refreshments were not always available due to faulty machines and it was not uncommon for interviewees to have no access to refreshments during visits:

*. . . the drinks machines are always broken. The first week I came, one drinks machine was broken, that was a nuisance because all the cans were in there . . . the next week I came the two machines were out of order, well you can imagine the chaos*

(Sue)

Interviewees lost money through using the vending machines - '*I've lost pounds in there, in that drinks machine*' (Ann); '*You're always losing money in machines*' (Pat). The fact that the machines were not always working properly was not the only problem experienced by interviewees:

*The drinks machines in there drive everybody mad, you have to wait for them to heat up, half the time they're not working . . . you queue for ages, and there's only two machines . . . you can't get no change, you have to bring it with you*

(Nikki)

Change for the vending machines was the most commonly identified problem experienced by visitors. As one interviewee explains:

*. . . no one's ever got enough change. They put a pound coin in the vending machine and it uses up all the change, the next person has got to use the exact change. I remember, I had all pound coins, no small change, I couldn't get a drink*

(Jane)

Interviewees were also unhappy about the quality and cost of refreshments obtained from the vending machines. One interviewee described refreshment facilities in the visit room as '*rubbish . . . you can't get a decent cup of coffee or anything . . . the vending machine is so expensive and 40p for a bag of crisps*' (Karen). Interviewees felt that there should be a canteen in the visit room, or at least a machine that provides visitors with change for the vending machines.

Interviewees at Prison 'B' also expressed dissatisfaction as regards the facilities provided for children. Criticisms were similar to those expressed by visitors to Prison 'A'. Interviewees were unhappy that the crèche facility for children was not always available:

*I've been times when I've brought all three of mine and they've been completely bored because the facilities for them haven't been open so they've had to sit at the table not being able to do anything because if they run around they get told off.*

(Ann)

Another interviewee felt that the crèche facility provided was not good enough – '*They have a small crèche, but there's nothing in it . . . the kids run about disrupting your visit*' (Alison). Another interviewee felt that facilities should also be provided for older children. She described how her child was too old for the facility provided in the visit room (Lynn). This particular interviewee felt that a television should be provided for the older children visiting the prison.

Previous research has shown that prisoners often base their evaluations not on universally accepted criteria but on that which is to be expected given their previous experience (King & McDermott, 1995: 261). This particular research also found this to be the case for visitors. Interviewees quite often referred to their experiences of visiting other prisons in their answers. This was especially so when discussing conditions and facilities provided for visitors at prisons.

Two visitors to Prison 'A' compared the condition/facilities in the visits room to that of other prisons. Both interviewees had visited various prisons in the past. This allowed visitors to comment in relative terms about the conditions/facilities in the visiting room at Prison 'A'. As one interviewee commented *'Not too bad, I've been in worse'* (Mandy). The other interviewee described quite graphically the visits room at another prison visited on a previous occasion:

*[That prison is] a hideous place, absolutely horrible. A great big huge visiting room, which is so impersonal and the seats are bolted to the floor and the tables are bolted to the floor and the prisoner has to sit on one seat, the coloured seat, which is a horrible system. Compared to that it's really nice and comfortable [i.e. at Prison 'A'].*

(John)

Nine visitors to Prison 'B' also mentioned their experiences of visiting other prisons. The majority of these visitors had encountered better refreshment facilities in the visit rooms at other prisons. As one interviewee explains: *'At Lincoln . . . they've got a WRVS, like a canteen, you go up and they make your drinks there and then'* (Nikki). Similarly another interviewee stated *' . . . the facilities that they've got over in the main visiting part are absolutely rubbish compared to what the WRVS does'* (Karen). Interviewees had also visited prisons with worse visiting conditions than that encountered at Prison 'B'.

*It was dreadful, in Hull . . . it's like you know like you see on the old films where prisoners sit at a bench and there's a little table across and they're all in a long line and every one sits together, next door to each other and you're crammed up and the kiddies are behind, they've got to stand-up. It was terrible in there. That was Hull when he [her son] was fifteen. I never ever want to go to a place like that again.*

(Pat)



Another interviewee felt that Prison 'B' was *'not too bad compared to the other one [i.e. prison]. Here he can sit with us, it doesn't matter where he sits, in Ranby, you have to sit in a particular seat, not allowed to touch him whatever'* (Jaz). Another interviewee also commented on the restrictions on the contact permitted between her and the prisoner at a previous prison *'... imagine a smaller version of a table tennis table with a bar in the middle, so you can't even like have a cuddle without getting a bar in your ribs ...'* (Wendy).

If there is one area where one would hope to discover evidence of a genuine commitment to family ties, it is in the provision of special visits. Special visits are those visits that allow prisoners increased quality of contact with their family. Special visiting arrangements are examined in the following section.

### ***3.2.4 Special Visiting Arrangements***

Before moving on to examine special visiting arrangements, it is important to define what is meant by a special visit. Special visits take place in addition to those visits that take place every week at the prison but do not include those visits that take place outside the prison or accumulated visits. Special visits attempt to normalise the contact between prisoners and their closest relations and generally fall into one of two categories. There are those that are known as 'family day visits' or 'family visits'.<sup>30</sup> These visits allow for extended contact between prisoners and their families and may also take place under different conditions than ordinary visits. For instance, the prisoner and his/her family may be able to share a meal together or the visit may take place in another part of the prison. There are also those special visits that focus on the relationship between the prisoner and his/her children, such as those provided at HMP Holloway.

The Holloway Project as it is known was founded in 1991. It was informed by Shaw's (1987; 1989) argument that it is a child's right to maintain a 'meaningful relationship with his/her imprisoned parents under dignified conditions' and that visits should 'not just be viewed as the right (or privilege) of the prisoners' (cited in Lloyd, 1992a: 3). A

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<sup>30</sup> Not to be confused with 'private family visits', previously known as conjugal visits, as referred to in the Woolf Report (1991).

joint initiative run by the prison and Save the Children, the scheme aims to provide quality contact for children and imprisoned parents. The atmosphere is informal. Children and their parents are not confined to the visit room but have access to other areas of the prison such as the gym and pool. The visits take place regularly every other weekend. Above all, the visits are designed to be a positive experience for the children. Lloyd (1992a) reviewed the special visiting arrangements offered by Holloway and found that all parties involved considered them to be a success. She concluded that 'extended visits ought to be seen as one vital component in a contact programme which safeguards the rights of prisoners' children' (Lloyd, 1992a: 53).

No reference is made to special visiting arrangements in Prison Rules, so there is no policy against which prison performance can be measured. Operating Standards recommend that provision should be made for special visits but only under certain circumstances. Standard Q4 states that:

Special visits should be authorised in order to make arrangements for private or business affairs after conviction where it is necessary for the conduct of legal proceedings; where it is necessary for the welfare of the prisoner or the prisoner's family or where the prisoner is seriously ill.

(HM Prison Service, 1994: 41)

Special visits as outlined in Operating Standards do not equate to those that form the focus of this enquiry. More relevant are the special visiting arrangements referred to in the Woolf Report (1991). It recommended that special visits such as those provided at HMP Holloway should be made more widely available to female *and* male prisoners. Further support for the provision of special visits stems from the evidence that suggests adequate contact between an imprisoned parent and his/her children may help address the detrimental effects imprisonment has on the children (Shaw, 1987; 1992a; Richards, 1992). Lloyd (1992a: 3) also cites research from the USA, Australia and New Zealand that points to the important role extended visits from children to imprisoned parents has in preventing family breakdown and other post-release problems. The provision of special visits is explored below. The extent to which Woolf's recommendation has been fulfilled is examined. Visitors' experiences of special visiting arrangements are also explored.

Special visits were not widely available to prisoners and their families. Only one quarter (N=22; 25%) of prisons provided *regular* special visits i.e. once in every so many months. Female prisoners were slightly more likely than male prisoners to be provided with regular special visits with two out of the seven (29%) female only prisons providing regular special visits compared to eighteen out of eighty (23%) male only prisons. At those two prisons holding male and female prisoners, regular special visits were open to the female prisoners but not male prisoners. Provision of special visits also varied according to prison type. Local prisons were the least likely to provide regular special visits. Only two out of the twenty-five (8%) local prisons that responded to the survey provided regular special visits. Closed prisons were most likely to provide regular special visits. Fifteen out of those forty-eight (31%) closed prisons that responded to the survey provided regular special visits. Two out of ten (20%) open prisons provided regular special visits. Respondents were asked to describe special visiting arrangements. The special visiting arrangements in operation at various prisons are outlined below.

Nine (41%) of the twenty-two prisons provided special visits that focused on the relationship between prisoners and their children.<sup>31</sup> This particular type of special visit was more likely to be available to female prisoners compared to male prisoners. One prison, a female local and male remand centre allowed such 'parent/child visits' for *'female inmates in order to allow them to play with and spend over two hours with their children'*. These visits would take place once a month. However, these special visits were only available to the female prisoners in this prison that held both male and female prisoners. This was also the case at another prison, a female local and male Category C training prison. At this prison, 'child visits' were available to female prisoners but there was no such arrangement for male prisoners. Such child visits would take place once every three weeks. Two prisons held only female prisoners. At these prisons 'children only' visits took place once a month. The remaining five prisons that had regular special visits for prisoners and their children were all male only establishments. Such visits were described as 'Fathers Day visits', 'father and child visits' or 'children's visits'. At one Category C training prison father and child visits took place once or twice a month depending on staff availability. Visits would

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<sup>31</sup> Respondents to the prison visiting survey were not particularly forthcoming about the nature of these visits. The available information implies that visits involved the prisoner and his/her children only i.e. that no other adult was present.

be approximately 1½ hours in length allowing the children to *'spend the time with their father playing in the visit room'*. At another male establishment, a Category C training and adult open prison, regular father and child visits were available. These visits allowed prisoners to play with and spend 'quality time' with their children. Visits at this prison took place once or twice a year. The remaining three male prisons did not provide great detail regarding special visiting arrangements. At two of these prisons father and child visits took place once a month. At the remaining prison, children's visits took place twice a year.

At the remaining thirteen prisons special visits, variously described as 'family days', 'family visits' or 'all day' visits, were provided. Not all prisons were particularly forthcoming as regards what these particular visits involved but from the information that was provided, it was possible to identify certain common characteristics about these special visits. They tended to last longer allowing for increased contact between the prisoner and his/her family; the prisoner and his/her family could have a meal together and the visit would often take place in a different part of the prison, for example, on the wing of the prison. The frequency of special visits varied from prison to prison. At one prison 'all-day' visits took place every week. At another prison 'family meals' took place only twice a year. On occasion, special visits were open only to life sentence prisoners. These, as one prison referred to, 'lifer days' had all the characteristics of special visits as described but tended to take place less frequently, perhaps only once or twice a year. One prison, a Category B training prison, provided 'enhanced visits'. Enhanced visits started at 10 a.m. and ended at 4 p.m. during which time the prisoners and their families would have lunch together. Participants were not confined to the visit room during such a visit but could *'move outside onto the sports field'*. Prisoners were permitted a maximum of two such visits during the summer months. However, as the name would suggest such visits were only available to those prisoners on an enhanced regime. There was an information element to certain special visits. At one Category B training prison, visitors were given talks about the regime in the prison, presentations, and the opportunity to meet the staff and visit a cell. Such information-based visits tended to take place only once or twice a year.

This examination of special visiting arrangements does not inspire confidence in the Prison Service's alleged commitment to family ties. The above findings reveal that special visits were not widely available to prisoners and their families. Furthermore, it is quite unlikely that special visits will be more widely available in the future. Only two prisons indicated that there were plans to introduce special visiting arrangements.<sup>32</sup> The recommendation regarding special visiting arrangements, as proposed in the Woolf Report (1991), appears not to have been acted upon. The above findings do not reveal why this is the case. Unfortunately, respondents to the prison visiting survey were not asked why special visits were not provided. It could be argued that, perhaps, there is no demand for these visits. But it is difficult to believe that there are not enough interested prisoners in any particular prison to credit arrangements being put in place. One must also consider the children who have a right to contact with the absent parent (Shaw, 1987; 1989). To concede, contact is provided via ordinary visits. But surely contact under normalised conditions, such as that contact potentially provided on special visits, is more likely to strengthen the relationship between a child and his/her imprisoned parent. Consequently, the likelihood that the child will suffer those detrimental long-term effects that usually accompany separation from a parent through imprisonment is diminished (see Richards, 1992).

Where special visiting arrangements were in place, the visits themselves varied from one prison to the next. Special visits ranged from those that focused on the relationship between the prisoner and his/her children to those that aimed to provide families with an insight into prison life. The frequency of special visits also varied from once a week to once a month and even on occasion to once a year. Even the associated terminology is diverse. Special visits, similar in structure and format, were referred to quite differently. The irregularity with which these visits are provided and the lack of consistency between prisons as to what these visits involve most likely stems from the fact that prisons are not provided with any guidelines on the subject. Another interesting finding was that special visiting arrangements were not always open to all prisoners within a particular prison. At only two out of the twenty-two (9%) prisons

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<sup>32</sup> At one closed female prison special visits were due to be introduced 'if and when' more staff were made available. At the other prison, the introduction of such visits was dependent on funding – 'Provided funding can be found, extended/family day visits may be introduced for those prisoners on the enhanced regime'.

providing regular special visits were special visits open to all prisoners. Type of prisoner was relevant. For instance, certain special visits were available to only the female population in the prison or only those serving long sentences. The overriding factor in determining to whom special visits were or were not available was actually regime level, that is basic, standard or enhanced. This is examined further in the Chapter 5 (see Section 5.2.).

To conclude on a positive note - there seems to be evidence of good practice at certain individual prisons. Female prisons seem especially committed to helping prisoners maintain a relationship with their children. The way in which special visits operate in practice is examined below. The discussion is based on visitors' experiences of special visits. Visitors' views regarding the benefits special visits provide are also examined.

Only those interviewees who had children who regularly accompanied them on a visit were asked about special visits (N= 20).<sup>33</sup> Interviewees were asked if they had ever been on a special visit such as a family day visit and whether or not the visit had been helpful or beneficial. Only nine of the interviewees to whom this question was relevant had been on a family day visit. All interviewees were visitors to Prison 'A'.<sup>34</sup> There were no special visiting arrangements in place at Prison 'B'. Seven of the nine interviewees were positive about those special visits in operation at Prison 'A'. Interviewees described the visits as '*brilliant*' and '*really good*'. All such interviewees agreed that the visits were helpful/beneficial to the children and the prisoner. The remaining interviewees were unhappy with special visiting arrangements and felt that the visits had not been helpful or beneficial.

Visitors' considered the family day visits to be beneficial for two reasons. For one these visits allowed their children increased contact with their father. Second, the contact provided was under more normal conditions than ordinary visits. As one visitor explained:

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<sup>33</sup> This question did not apply to four interviewees to Prison 'A' and six interviewees to Prison 'B'. Four interviewees had no children; five interviewees had children who were older, no longer lived at home and, therefore, did not regularly accompany them on visits; the remaining interviewee had a daughter aged 16 who did not accompany her on visits.

<sup>34</sup> Family day visits took place twice a year at this prison.

*They [i.e. the prisoners] get a chance to cook your dinner for you, and I think they feel better because they feel like they're doing something for you, there are things for the kids to do and because you've got all day as well you can relax. They [i.e. the prisoners] can play games with the kids. The atmosphere is a lot better in there as well. Even the prison officers seem to be a bit more relaxed around you, they tend to get involved a bit*

(Jackie)

Other interviewees echoed this interviewee's feelings regarding family day visits. The visits were particularly significant to one visitor: *'It's a good day, plus he can cook the West Indian chicken . . . I miss that, I really miss his cooking. That's important, because I can't cook it like he can and the girls really enjoy it'* (Lisa). Another interviewee described how *' . . . if there are any decent musicians on the wing, they sometimes get a hand up and we have a bit of a singsong'* (Paula). Only two interviewees felt that the special visits were not beneficial or helpful. Both these interviewees had older children when compared to those interviewees who were more positive about the special visits provided at Prison 'A'.<sup>35</sup> One interviewee explained her answer:

*It [i.e. family day visit] was awful; I have never been so bored in my life. We couldn't wait to go home. We just sat in there all day, and it was boiling hot day, nothing to do. They provided a buffet lunch which was very nice, but we thought perhaps that we might be allowed maybe a film or a walk, not out around here, but inside and around but no, we sat in the visit room the whole of the time. Somebody did come in and give us a little talk. I mean, we set off from home at 3 o'clock in the morning to get here for the right time. It was awful. My son never told us again when there was another one because he was bored to tears as well. There's only so much you can say, really. Even if we'd been able to have a game of darts or pool or something like that, but there was nothing, nothing at all.*

(Denise)

This particular interviewee's comments highlight the fact the prisoners' families are not an homogenous group. Different families have different needs. Special visiting arrangements at this particular prison do not take this into account. Prisons have been criticised elsewhere for their lack of consideration for older children visiting the prison (see Section 3.2.3).

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<sup>35</sup>Mandy had three children aged 20, 16, and 9. Denise visited her son in prison. His teenage sister accompanied her on the visit.

Interview data provides further support for the survey finding that special visiting arrangements vary between prisons. What interviews convey that the survey does not are the benefits that these visits afford prisoners and their families. A convincing argument for special visits to be made more widely available is presented. To do so would be to recognise the position of those who are relied upon to support the prisoner, that is, his/her family.

### ***3.2.5 Attention to Quality – What Evidence?***

Interviews with visitors graphically demonstrate that what is good on paper can be terrible in practice. Examining the data from the prison visiting survey one might tentatively conclude that most prisons were providing satisfactory conditions for visits and appropriate facilities for visitors. Information provided by visitors contradicts these results. Interviewees criticised the conditions and facilities at the two sample prisons and other prisons visited on previous occasions. Visitors' accounts emphasise the fact that it is not enough merely to provide facilities. The quality of facilities must also be considered. The extent to which the facilities provided are meeting the needs of those visiting the prison is an issue that seems to have been overlooked. Interviewees' accounts also highlighted the impact poor conditions and inadequate facilities can have on the quality of contact. Special visiting arrangements were also examined in the search for evidence of a commitment to family ties. Results were disappointing. Only a quarter (N=22; 25%) of prisons provided special visits to prisoners and their families. The above findings provide further evidence to suggest that in reality the Prison Service could be doing more to fulfil its commitment to family ties.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

In the introduction to this chapter, the question - Is the Prison Service actually committed to family ties was posed? Throughout this chapter, evidence has been presented that revealed a discrepancy between policy and practice. It is this discrepancy that casts doubt upon the Prison Service's commitment to family ties. This was exemplified most aptly in the analysis concerning minimum visiting arrangements. Furthermore, the evidence presented also suggests that, although



prisons appear to be doing much to support prisoners' families, this is not actually the case. The reality of the situation is that prisoners' families continue to be ignored and their needs often placed second to organisational priorities. The next chapter continues in a similar vein. Two issues are addressed - the difficulties that prison location presents to visitors and prisoner allocation.

#### **4. PRISON POLICY: RHETORIC AND REALITY II**

In this chapter, further evidence is presented that suggests the Prison Service's expressed commitment to family ties is little more than rhetoric. The commitment to family ties is examined with reference to two factors. The first factor is provision made in recognition of the difficulties visitors experience in travelling to/from the prison. The second factor concerns that procedure known as prisoner allocation. Where this factor is concerned, the commitment to family ties is considered with reference to the priority afforded to a prisoner's home area in determining where s/he will serve his/her sentence. The chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, prison accessibility and the difficulties visitors experience in travelling to/from prisons are explored. The steps taken by the Prison Service towards alleviating these difficulties are then examined. In the second section, consideration is given to prisoner allocation. The policy informing this procedure is reviewed. The implications of allocation decisions for prisoners' families are then considered. Visitors' views on having the prisoner located in a prison that was close to their home are also explored.

##### **4.1 Prison Accessibility**

Previous research has often noted the inaccessible nature of prisons. For instance, Monger & Pendleton (1977: 9) observed 'it is as if they [i.e. prisons] were built at the furthest point from public transport'. The difficulties that this inaccessibility causes to visitors have also been well documented (Morris, 1965; Matthews, 1983; 1989; Davies, 1992; McDermott & King, 1992; Peart & Asquith, 1992). The present study re-examines prison accessibility and the difficulties visitors experience in travelling to prisons in order to visit. What steps the Prison Service has taken towards addressing these difficulties are also explored. Three areas are considered - special transport for visitors, assisted prison visits and information for visitors. The findings from this analysis further reveal the extent to which the Prison Service is actually committed to family ties.

#### ***4.1.1 How Accessible?***

In this section, the extent to which prisons are accessible to visitors is explored. To begin, data obtained from the prison visiting survey is considered. Respondents were asked whether or not the location of the prison presented problems for visitors who did not have their own transport. Where location did present problems, respondents were asked why this was the case. The situation at the two prisons at which interviews with visitors were conducted is then explored. This analysis draws upon information from two sources - interviews conducted with visitors and observation.

At just under half (N=41; 46%) of prisons, location did present problems for those visitors who did not have their own transport. One respondent answered yes and no in response to the question concerning the prison location. This particular prison held male and female prisoners.<sup>1</sup> Information from this prison indicated that the location of the prison was a problem for those visitors without their own transport visiting female prisoners but not so for those visiting male prisoners. At the time of this study, there were only a small number of prisons holding female prisoners spread throughout the country.<sup>2</sup> Female prisoners were, therefore, more likely, in comparison to male prisoners, to be located in a prison that was a considerable distance from their home area. It is this distance that contributes to the difficulties experienced by visitors to female prisoners. Further analysis revealed the extent to which accessibility varied with type of prison.<sup>3</sup> The location of five out of seven (71%) female prisons presented difficulties for those without their own transport compared to thirty-five out of eighty-one (43%) male prisons. Examining the situation at closed, open and local prisons revealed similar differences. Closed prisons were more likely than not to be sited in a location that presented problems to those visitors who did not have their own transport (N=30; 63%), as were open prisons (N=6; 60%). A lesser percentage (N=4; 16%) of local prisons indicated that this was the case. This finding reflects the fact that local prisons tend to be located in close proximity to towns and cities.

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<sup>1</sup> This prison was essentially two prisons on one site – a male Category C training prison and female local prison.

<sup>2</sup> There were twelve main prisons for female prisoners in England and Wales. Additional accommodation was provided in a further three prisons. These particular prisons held male and female prisoners (HM Prison Service, 1998a).

<sup>3</sup> Statistical test for significance was not possible due to the low number of respondents. Analysis does not include that prison where respondent answered yes and no in response to the question concerning prison location.

Turning now to the reasons why the location of prisons caused problems for visitors without their own transport. A small number of respondents explained that the prison had a large catchment area. Another prison was described as a national resource.<sup>4</sup> All respondents, however, indicated that the prison was located in a remote area that was distant from the nearest centre of population and not easily accessed using public transport. Transport to these prisons was described as irregular, limited, indirect and, on occasion, non-existent. Travelling to these prisons meant that visitors without their own transport had to get a taxi or walk from the bus or train station located in the nearest town or village to the prison. At one prison, visitors had no option but to walk, as there were no buses or taxis from the nearest train station. This limited accessibility explains the various difficulties encountered by visitors in travelling to and from these prisons. Before turning to the specific difficulties visitors experienced, the accessibility of the two prisons at which interviews were conducted is explored. The evidence presented further substantiates the inaccessibility of closed prisons.

Prison 'A' and Prison 'B' were typical of closed prisons in that both were located in quite remote areas. Prison 'A' was situated approximately 4 miles from the nearest village. Prison 'B' approximately 2 miles from the nearest village. Public transport to both prisons was limited. Although these prisons were on a bus route, the service was irregular and tended not to correspond to visiting times. Only one visitor to each prison used the bus service. The visitor to Prison 'B' was fortunate as a bus service operated between the prison and the city where she lived. The visitor to Prison 'A' chose to rely on the bus for financial reasons. She would arrive at the train station and get a taxi to the bus station, then a bus to the prison. This was cheaper than a taxi direct to the prison from the train station. Although less expensive, travelling to this prison via this route did have one drawback, the visitor would arrive at the prison only a short time before visits began and, as discussed earlier, this in itself created problems (see Section 3.1.1). The remaining visitors to both prisons, who were without their own transport, would get the train or bus to the nearest village and then a taxi to the prison. To travel to Prison 'A' by taxi from the train station cost £8 return.<sup>5</sup> The same journey by taxi to Prison 'B' cost £7 return. In both cases, the provision of special

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<sup>4</sup> This particular prison was, and still is, a unique establishment within the English Penal System. It provides a psychiatrically orientated, therapeutic regime for the treatment of individuals who have particular psychosocial difficulties (see Lewis et al, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> A reduced fare available to prison visitors. Taxi owners in the area had agreed this reduced rate for prison visitors travelling to/from the prison from the train station. The journey would ordinarily cost £11 return.

transport operating between the nearest village and the prison would have significantly reduced travelling costs for those visitors who relied on public transport. As outlined below, the expenses that came with making the journey to the prison was a particular problem for visitors to these prisons.

Informal interviews with Visitors' Centre staff revealed that special transport was provided for visitors at one of the sample prisons, Prison 'A'. A local taxi firm supplied a bus to transport visitors between the train station and the prison. The Prison Service funded this service and it was free of charge to visitors. This service was available on Saturdays only. Further enquiries revealed that this particular service was not operating effectively. It was said to be unreliable in that the bus would quite often fail to show at the train station. Visitors then had no choice but to get a taxi to the prison. None of the visitors interviewed at this particular prison used, or even mentioned, this special transport. It is certainly possible that visitors did not know that such transport was available. It was noted that there were no posters or leaflets on the subject in the Visitors' Centre. It is encouraging that this prison had taken steps so visitors would not have to endure expensive taxi fares but unfortunate that visitors were not benefiting from the service provided. Having said this, the service must have been used to some extent or it would have been withdrawn. This is assuming, of course, that the prison was aware of the situation. This particular case demonstrates the importance of communication between the prison and its visitors. It also highlights the need for monitoring so as to ensure that services and facilities that are designed to assist visitors are operating effectively.

The above findings reveal that certain prisons are inaccessible to visitors, particularly those visitors who do not have their own transport. This inaccessibility generally originated from the remote sites on which prisons were located. Closed and open prisons especially tended to be located in areas that were distant from population centres and not easily reached by public transport. This was exactly the situation at the two prisons where interviews were conducted. At these prisons, visitors who were without their own transport had little choice other than to pay an expensive taxi fare to get to/from the prison. In the next section, the particular difficulties that visitors experience in travelling to/from prisons in order to visit are explored.

#### ***4.1.2 Difficulties for Visitors***

Information regarding the difficulties encountered by visitors in travelling to/from the prison was gleaned from two sources. The visiting survey included a question requiring respondents to outline the difficulties resulting from the inaccessibility of prisons. Visitors were also asked about their experiences of travelling to/from prisons 'A' and 'B'. Findings from both the survey and the interviews conducted with visitors are outlined below.

Those prisons identified as sited in a location that was inaccessible to visitors without their own transport were asked to outline the problems this created for visitors. The most common response was to identify cost of travelling as a difficulty (39% of responses).<sup>6</sup> Although general cost of travelling was highlighted, the majority of responses indicated that expensive taxi fares was the main difficulty experienced by visitors. This is explained by the fact that visitors had to resort to getting taxis to those prisons where public transport to the prison from the train or bus station was unavailable or limited. In order to get from the train station to one Category C training prison, visitors had to get a taxi costing '*£10 each way*'. Another prison, a closed female prison, was located 20 miles from the train station with no buses running from the station to the prison. Visitors to this prison had to '*take a taxi at £20 each way*'. The next most common response (28% of responses) after cost was to identify difficulties stemming from a reliance on public transport, for example, making connections and/or waiting before or after visits for buses/trains. Long journey times was also recognised as a difficulty experienced by visitors (19% of responses). Additional difficulties experienced by visitors as identified by prisons included having to walk to the prison, travelling with young children and finding taxis.

Despite the locations and relative inaccessibility of the two sample prisons, the majority (N=23; 73%) of interviewees indicated that difficulties were not experienced in travelling to these particular prisons. Only five out of the thirty visitors interviewed indicated that difficulties were experienced and a further two indicated that difficulties were sometimes experienced. Examining the way in which visitors travelled to the prison provides an explanation for these findings. Most (N=20; 67%) interviewees

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<sup>6</sup> Respondents tended to provide more than one answer in response to the question regarding the difficulties caused to visitors. So percentages were calculated according to the total number of responses, rather than number of respondents.

travelled to the prison by car.<sup>7</sup> The remainder relied on public transport. Indeed, four out of seven interviewees who experienced or sometimes experienced difficulties travelled to the prison by public transport. Interviewees identified two specific, but not unrelated, problems - long journey times and expense. As one interviewee explained:

*Getting back I have to catch two trains . . . I'm back late because when I get out of here there's not one [i.e. a train] until half-past-five . . . I don't get to Derby [i.e. home] until about eight, there's a stop, there's not a straight through connection I have to stop at Leicester and get on another train . . .*

(Helen)

Another interviewee travelled for 4 hours on public transport to reach the prison upon leaving her home. She made this journey, a round trip of 8 hours, once a week for a visit that lasted about 2 hours. One interviewee commented in response to the question 'Do you experience any difficulties travelling to the prison?' - '*Not really, but it is a long day*' (Tina). Tina travelled for 4 to 5 hours on public transport in order to get to the prison to visit her partner. Tina also visited once a week. She reported that her visits usually only lasted 1½ hours.<sup>8</sup> Another interviewee, who visited his son in prison did not rely on public transport but it took him 4½ hours to get to the prison due to the distance between the prison and his home. He explained: '*It's a long distance nearly 250 miles, which means we can get here only once a month really*' (John). Interviewees also commented on the expense of travelling to the prison. One interviewee explained that it cost her just over £45 (including the cost of a taxi from train station to the prison) in travelling expenses every time she visited her boyfriend in prison. She visited her boyfriend once every two weeks.

Clearly, there are two issues here that particularly concern visitors - the time it takes to get to the prison and the expense involved. Interviewees were actually asked how long it took them to reach the prison upon leaving their home and also to estimate how much the journey cost in total. Their responses are explored below.

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<sup>7</sup> This may not be representative of all visitors travelling to each prison. Interviews were conducted before visiting commenced. Those visitors arriving early to the prison were, therefore, more likely to be interviewed. Visitors preferred to get to the prison as early as possible due to visiting procedure. Visitors with cars have more control over when to arrive at prison and one can speculate would, therefore, arrive earlier.

<sup>8</sup> Interviewees did provide contradictory information regarding the length of visits. Explanations as to why were considered in Section 3.1.1.

Not one visitor reported that it took less than ½ hour to reach the prison upon leaving their home. Just over two-fifths (N=13; 43%) travelled for more than ½ hour but less than 1½ hours. Twelve (40%) interviewees travelled for 1½ hours or more but less than 2½ hours to get to the prison. Two of the remaining five interviewees travelled for 3½ hours or more but less than 4½ hours to reach the prison and three travelled for 4½ hours or more. These results reflect the transport used and distance travelled. Those visitors who travelled for more than 3½ hours either lived a great distance from the prison and/or relied on public transport. It is important to bear in mind that these figures refer to only one part of the journey. Visitors must also make their way home after the visit. Indeed, more than one interviewee drew attention to the length of time it took to make the journey to the prison *and* return home again. One interviewee quite aptly described her weekly visit as an '*all day event*'.

The cost of travelling ranged from less than £5 up to £60. Unsurprisingly, those visitors relying on public transport tended to pay more than those with their own transport. Those travelling by car spent on average, £13.24 per visit on travel. For those relying on public transport the average cost per visit was just over £27. These figures somewhat disguise individual expenditure. Five interviewees spent over £45 on travel every time they visited.<sup>9</sup>

There are additional financial costs to visiting besides travelling expenses. Visitors can choose to bring their own refreshments for the journey to/from the prison. However, visitors are usually not permitted to bring food and drink with them into the visiting area within the prison. Visitors must pay for refreshments required by themselves and the prisoner during a visit (that is assuming that a facility is provided). Visitors interviewed in this study were asked to outline the additional expenditure a visit to the prison usually incurred. Eighteen out of thirty interviewees spent approximately £5 or less on refreshments and snacks each time they visited. Six interviewees spent between £5 and £10. Five interviewees reported spending more than £10 per visit. Unsurprisingly, it was those visitors who were accompanied on the visit by their children who tended to spend more on refreshments. As one interviewee pointed out '*You need it [i.e. extra money] for the kids*'. The remaining interviewee

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<sup>9</sup> Four of these visitors travelled by public transport.



would bring £100 with her every time she visited.<sup>10</sup> This particular visitor required this money for overnight accommodation. Once a month, Denise completed a round trip of just over 450 miles to visit her son. Staying overnight allowed her to visit her son twice, once on the day she travelled and once on the following day before commencing her journey home.

Visitors' accounts largely substantiated the findings of the survey. Those visitors without their own transport experienced difficulties travelling to/from the prison similar to those identified by respondents to the prison visiting survey. The two main difficulties were the time it took to travel to/from the prison and the expense involved. This finding largely reflects what is reported in the literature. For instance, Peart & Asquith (1992: 18) described the cost incurred through visiting as 'prohibitively high both in financial and time terms'. This quite aptly describes the situation for certain visitors interviewed in the present study. The National Prison Survey (1991) also reported on the particular difficulties visitors encountered in travelling to/from the prison. It found that the most common difficulties experienced by visitors, as identified by prisoners, were difficult journeys and financial problems, as was found to be the case in the present study. Where there exists a discrepancy between findings is in the length of time taken to travel to the prison. The National Prison Survey (1991) found that 23% of visitors spent 2½ hours or more travelling to the prison. In the present study, 16% of interviewees reported having travelled for 2½ hours or more. It does not necessarily follow that the situation has improved for prison visitors in the time since the National Prison Survey (1991) was conducted. Results from the present research were biased by the fact that most interviewees did not rely on public transport.<sup>11</sup>

The difficult and expensive journeys endured by visitors demonstrate their commitment to prisoners. This is explored further in Chapter 6. Where there is little that can be done about the actual location of prisons, there are ways in which the problems visitors experience in travelling to/from the prison may be alleviated. The financial cost of visiting could be addressed. Even taking one basic example, the cost of refreshments at the prison, the above results suggest that there is little consideration

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<sup>10</sup> This figure includes money required for travelling expenses.

<sup>11</sup> This is a methodological consequence rather than evidence to suggest that prisoners' families tend to have their own transport (see Chapter 2).

given to the situation of the visitor. Interviewees estimated spending anything up to £15 on refreshments on any one visiting day. Interviewees also reported that refreshments provided in the visit room were overpriced, or as one interviewee put it - 'extortionate'. The following section continues in a similar vein. Initiatives developed in recognition of the difficulties encountered by visitors are explored.

#### ***4.1.3 Addressing the Difficulties Experienced by Visitors***

The above findings demonstrate that a significant number of prisons are inaccessible to visitors without their own transport. In this section, the extent to which these establishments were taking steps to alleviate the difficulties experienced by visitors, as a result of this inaccessibility is explored. As McDermott & King (1992: 59) point out, there is 'much that [can] be done to make the final stages of the journey more convenient and less expensive'. One example of what can be done is the provision of special transport for visitors. Such transport removes the reliance on taxis thereby drastically reducing the expense endured by visitors travelling to/from the prison. The extent to which prisons were providing such transport is examined. Another initiative that aims to relieve the financial strain endured by prison visitors is the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS). An examination of the APVS leads into a discussion concerning the provision of information to visitors.

Information gleaned from the prison visiting survey revealed that only twenty-five (28%) establishments provided special transport to/from the prison for visitors. But then it is important to bear in mind that special transport for visitors is perhaps not as crucial at some prisons compared to others. Where there is a particular need for special transport, however, is at those prisons sited in inaccessible locations. It is at these prisons that visitors without their own transport are most likely to experience difficulties travelling to/from the prison. Further analysis revealed that special transport was not always provided at those prisons sited in inaccessible locations. Just over half (N=21; 51%) of these prisons provided special transport. The remainder (N=20; 49%) were not served by any special transport at all.

Furthermore, where special transport was provided it was not *always* available to visitors. Information was available for twenty-eight different forms of transport. Just

over one third (N=10; 36%) were provided on a weekly basis. One quarter (N=7; 25%) were provided more than once a week. Five (18%) were provided once a month and one twice a month. In only four (14%) instances was special transport available at times that roughly corresponded to when visiting at the prison actually took place. Special transport was available at one prison every afternoon visit. Special transport was not, however, provided to visitors attending the morning visiting sessions. At another prison, special transport was provided prior to every visit. Whether this transport was also available after visits was not indicated. Only one prison provided special transport prior to and after *every* visit.

Respondents to the prison visiting survey were also asked to indicate who provided this special transport for visitors. Information was available for twenty-four prisons about thirty-one different forms of such transport.<sup>12</sup> Results raised two points. One is the extent to which other organisations and agencies were relied upon to provide special transport for visitors. The Probation Service provided just over one third (N=11; 35%) of transport, a voluntary organisation, Help and Advice Line for Offenders Wives (HALOW) provided just under one fifth (N=6; 19%) and private companies provided just over a quarter (N=8; 26%). Unfortunately, respondents did not elaborate on the funding arrangements for transport provided by private companies so it is not possible to state what organisation or agency provided the service on these occasions. The second point relates to what is appropriate transport. In the cases already mentioned, buses or coaches were used as transport. Where the special transport was provided by the prison establishments themselves (N=6; 19%) prison buses or minibuses were generally used to transport visitors. However, at one prison, a prison van was used for this purpose. Research has shown it is not unusual for individuals to feel stigmatised upon the imprisonment of a family member (Peart & Asquith, 1992; Codd, 1997). Surely to transport visitors in this manner is to reinforce these feelings.

The above results demonstrate that it is clearly the case that individual prisons could be doing more where special transport for visitors is concerned. Of course, prisons are not under any obligation to provide special transport for their visitors. There is no corresponding Operating Standard to which prisons should be adhering. Another way

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<sup>12</sup> At eighteen prisons one form of transport was provided for visitors. At five prisons two forms of transport were available. At one prison three different forms of transport were available to prison visitors.

in which the prison system, as a whole, has endeavoured to address the difficulties experienced by visitors in travelling to/from prison is via the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS). As is outlined in Chapter 1, the APVS provides financial assistance for prison visitors on low incomes.<sup>13</sup> Under the present scheme close relatives who fulfil the criteria can apply to have the travelling costs of two visits per month reimbursed.<sup>14</sup> It applies to visitors to all prisoners, remand and sentenced, and visitors can claim for assistance as soon as a prisoner is taken into custody. The discussion now turns to visitors' experiences in relation to the APVS. Two issues are addressed. The first is the extent to which visitors were informed about the APVS and their eligibility for assistance. The second issue concerns visitors' experiences in claiming back expenses from APVS.

Of most concern was the finding that interviewees were generally ill informed about the APVS. Four interviewees knew nothing at all about the scheme. One interviewee who had been visiting her husband in prison for 14 months did not know she could claim back her expenses. When it was suggested that she get in touch with the APVS, she said *'it's hardly worth it'* as her husband was due for release in a few weeks. Another six interviewees knew about the APVS but did not know how the system operated or were uncertain about their eligibility. As one interviewee queried, *'Can you claim back if you are on the social?'* (Karen). Another interviewee said *'I was thinking about it [i.e. applying to APVS] . . . but I don't know how to go about it, there's not much information'* (Jane). Another interviewee used to claim back her travelling expenses when her husband was at a different prison but thought that, since he was moved to Prison 'A', she was no longer eligible for assistance. Most of those interviewees who were unsure or knew nothing about the APVS had been visiting for more than one year. So visiting for only a short time does not explain the notable lack of knowledge amongst visitors about the APVS. There was also a difference between prisons. Eight out of ten of those interviewees who knew nothing about or were uncertain about the scheme were visitors to Prison 'B'. This was despite that fact that a poster was displayed in the Visitors' Centre. Visitors to Prison 'A' were much more

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<sup>13</sup> Since 1971 close relatives of prisoners have been provided with financial assistance with the cost of visiting. Under the early scheme certain visitors could apply for travelling expenses to be reimbursed for one visit a month. Only those visiting prisoners serving sentences of three months or more and remand prisoners, who had been in custody for over four weeks, were eligible for financial assistance. The scheme was extended in 1991.

<sup>14</sup> Conditions under which one qualifies for assistance from the APVS - must be a close relative of prisoner, or lived with the prisoner as his/her partner for at least four months prior to imprisonment. Must also be in receipt of Income Support, Family Credit, Disability Working Allowance, Jobseekers Allowance or on a low income (NACRO, 1997). Policy regarding eligibility was revised in December 1998 to allow for applications by same sex partners.

knowledgeable about the scheme but no information about the APVS was displayed in the Visitors' Centre. One explanation for this is information sharing between visitors. This is explored further in Chapter 6.

A number of interviewees (N=12) indicated that they were not eligible to apply for financial assistance under the APVS. Considering the lack of knowledge amongst visitors about the APVS, it is entirely possible that some interviewees were misinformed or unaware of their eligibility. One interviewee explained *'I'm only his common-law wife'*. She and the prisoner had seven children together all aged under 16. Based on the information provided it is quite likely that this particular visitor was in fact eligible for financial assistance under the APVS.

Of the remaining two interviewees who were not claiming financial assistance, one planned to apply to the APVS as advised by her boyfriend - *'... he said I should claim it'* (Sam). Another interviewee was not interested in what she described as handouts:

*I have heard of them, but to tell you the truth I don't want anything from them. I know some people need the help but I'll cope myself, I've got a job so I pay for everything myself. I don't really want no handouts off anyone. That's just my feeling.*

(Alison)

Only six interviewees were actually claiming back travelling expenses from the APVS.

In its early days, the APVS attracted a certain degree of criticism (Peart & Asquith, 1992). Criticisms have recently resurfaced (FPFSG, 1996; 1997). Visitors claiming for assisted visits have encountered various difficulties stemming from a poor standard of service. Most difficulties concern the arbitrariness of the procedure involved in claiming for expenses. In order to make a claim, the appropriate forms must be obtained and completed, visiting orders photocopied and proof of travel secured. Visitors have experienced problems in obtaining APVS forms and contacting the relevant department by telephone. Further complaints have centred on the delays in payment and decisions as regards eligibility for assistance. The extent to which visitors interviewed in this study experienced similar difficulties is explored below.

Interviewees were asked about their experiences in claiming back expenses from the APVS. Most interviewees who were claiming back their expenses did not experience any problems with the APVS. In fact, interviewees were quite complimentary of the service provided. As one interviewee pointed out '*. . . they've [i.e. APVS] always been very good*' (Lisa). Another interviewee was quite positive about the scheme but, at the same time, did have some criticisms:

*. . . I've had to telephone a couple of times, and Birmingham can be a nightmare to get through to, but by and large, no, they've been very good. As long as you get the form filled in correctly and once you're on the scheme it's not a problem. They do take some time, I sent a claim in last Wednesday and I won't hear from them now for about fourteen days. You've got to pay your money out first, which I suppose for some people can be a bit of nuisance . . .*

(Sue)

Only one interviewee was completely negative about the APVS. This interviewee had also experienced difficulties contacting those in charge of the APVS. She explains '*You can never get hold of them on the telephone*' (Val).

On the basis of the data from the prison visiting survey and interviews, it can be seen that prison staff (that is respondents to the prison visiting survey) and visitors agreed that one of the main difficulties encountered by visitors in travelling to and from prison was cost. The APVS aims to relieve the financial strain incurred through visiting. The scheme was initially criticised for providing a poor standard of service. The above evidence suggests that standards have improved. The problem remains, however, that information about APVS is not filtering through to those for whom the service is meant. Not all visitors were aware that financial assistance was available. Those that did know were ill informed as regards to how the system operated. Previous research has shown that prisoners tend to come from low-income households (Smith, 1989; Peelo et al, 1991). The cost of imprisonment endured by families is also well documented (Matthews, 1983; McDermott & King, 1992; Davis, 1992). Individuals should be provided with accurate information regarding APVS as soon as a member of their family is imprisoned. Prisoners' families should at least have the choice as to whether or not to apply for financial assistance.

The fact the visitors were not informed about the APVS supports previous research that has pointed to the distinct lack of information provided to the prisoners' families about visiting arrangements (Matthews, 1983; Smith 1989; Peart & Asquith, 1992; McDermott & King, 1992; Codd, 1998). Information provided at prisons has been described as 'scant, proscriptive and impersonal' (NACRO, 1994a: 21). Uncertainty as to what is involved in visiting the prison exacerbates the stresses experienced by prisoners' families. This is especially the case for those individuals who have never before visited a prison. Visiting a prison for the first time can be a daunting prospect. A first time visitor not only has to deal with visiting the prison itself, s/he also has to come to terms with seeing her/his loved one in that prison. Not knowing what to expect, visitors may construct the worst possible scenarios as to what will happen when they arrive at the prison. Even what may seem like trivial information such as where to go upon arrival at the prison may cause concern. Providing visitors with information can ease these anxieties.

It is not that this information is unavailable. Various organisations produce useful booklets and leaflets.<sup>15</sup> These publications provide general information on prison visiting but specific rules and procedures surrounding visits vary from one prison to the next and even from one visit to the next (McDermott & King, 1992; Codd, 1998). It is important, therefore, that individual prisons provide their own information. Prisons are not obliged to do so under Prison Rules or Standing Orders. However, Operating Standards do state that prisons should publish and display a 'local policy statement' outlining visiting arrangements. This statement should be:

... made available to prisoners and visitors ... include all information which applies locally such as visiting times, location and travel, facilities for visitors, arrangements for extended, accumulated official and special visits, arrangements for handing in property, and items visitors may bring into the establishment and the name and telephone number of any 'family ties officers'. It should also set out the assisted visits scheme.

(HM Prison Service, 1994: 40)

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<sup>15</sup> The National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) produces a booklet entitled 'Outside Help'. The Howard League produces a Visitors Information Pack. The Prisoner's Information Book published by the Prison Reform Trust contains information relevant to visitors. The Federation for Prisoners' Families Support Groups (FPFSG) also produces A National Directory for Prisoners Families that contains contact details for relevant organisations and information on visiting arrangements for all prisons in England and Wales.

The majority of prisons that responded to the prison visiting survey indicated that information was provided to visitors (N=84; 96%). The corresponding question asked specifically about information regarding transport to/from prison as opposed to information about visiting arrangements in general. It would be inappropriate, therefore, to conclude that prisons were operating according to standards. However, at both those prisons where interviews were conducted booklets were produced about visiting arrangements. One interviewee to Prison 'B' outlined the information it contained:

*Visiting times, what you can and can't do, how to book, the telephone number, instructions on how to get here, buses, trains, not times and stuff, but where you can get the information from. It was actually very useful.*

(Wendy)

The information Prison 'A' provided was not thought as useful to visitors. As one interviewee explained *'It [i.e. the booklet] wasn't really on how to get here or anything, it was more to do with what the prison was like and what he [i.e. the prisoner] will be doing'* (Jackie). Less than one quarter (N=7; 23%) of interviewees actually received the booklets described above. Where visitors had received the information, it had been provided via the prisoner. The fact that information is not reaching those for whom it is meant defeats the purpose behind producing such literature. Furthermore, findings from the prison visiting survey revealed that at the majority (N= 70; 83%) of prisons, information relevant to visitors was provided via the prisoner.<sup>16</sup>

Visitors were generally left to their own devices to find out what visiting the prison involved. As one interviewee pointed out:

*I didn't get no information pack or leaflets . . . nothing. How long it [i.e. visit] was, what time it started, I had to find all that myself by phoning them [i.e. the prison] and asking them.*

(Alison)

One interviewee commented – *'You're just left to it'* (Jen). Another interviewee explained *'Well, you sort of sniff about . . . you find out what you need to know. Generally speaking, if you want information about anything you have to ask'* (John).

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<sup>16</sup> Other methods employed by prisons in order to distribute information to visitors included by telephone: (N=57; 68%); via leaflets in the Visitors' Centres (N=36; 43%) and/or prison waiting room (N=26; 31%); in poster form (N=21; 25%) and leaflets on request only (N=19; 23%).



It was also quite common for visitors to ring the prison for information. There was, however, a certain dissatisfaction amongst visitors as to the usefulness of that which was provided. One interviewee, when asked if she was provided with everything she needed to know upon ringing the prison, replied '*No, not really*'. Inadequate information resulted in visitors arriving at the prison ill prepared. Two visitors, upon visiting the prison for the first time, did not know to bring identification. One such visitor was turned away from her visit as a result. Both visitors had contacted the prison prior to their visit but had not been informed of this regulation. Other visitors, unsure of visiting arrangements, either spoke to other visitors or relied on the prisoner for information, who in turn relied on other prisoners. Information regarding visiting arrangements was also on occasion sought from volunteers and staff employed in the Visitors' Centre. Visitors' Centres and their role in the visiting process are explored in Chapter 6.

Dissemination of information to visitors remains rather haphazard. Findings from the survey of prison visiting revealed that the most common method of distribution was via the prisoner. Evidence from interviews would suggest that this is ineffective. There are two possible explanations as to why visiting information was not finding its way to those who would find it most useful. It could be that the prisoner is being provided with the information but is not passing it on to his/her visitors or that the prison is providing the information to some prisoners and not others. Either way a more effective method should be employed. What is more, where information was provided, it tended to be inadequate. Clearly prisons need to be doing more in terms of providing their visitors with relevant and precise information. One way this could be achieved is through the appointment of Family Contact Development Officers (FCDOs).<sup>17</sup> In their 1995/6 report, the Inspectorate of Prisons stated that FCDOs should be introduced into every prison. Their responsibilities were outlined as

. . . improvement of all aspects of family contact, including visit facilities, co-ordinating of involved voluntary organisations, preparing and updating information sheets for families, linking with family support groups and training prison staff to develop their awareness of the needs of prisoners' families.

(HMCIP, 1996: 25)

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<sup>17</sup> The concept of Family Contact Development Officers, also known as Dedicated Visits Officers originated within the Scottish Prison Service.

The prison visiting survey included a question that asked if a FCDO or similar was employed in the particular prison. Although various answers were provided in response to this, and related questions, not one respondent was able to state categorically that a FCDO was employed at the prison.

#### ***4.1.4 Committing to Accessibility***

In the introduction to the chapter, it was argued that a Prison Service that is actually committed to encouraging contact between prisoners and their families is one that addresses the difficulties visitors experience in travelling to/from the prison to visit. The evidence presented above indicates that at a local level, in other words, at individual prisons, the needs of visitors are far from recognised. Two initiatives were explored. One was the provision of special transport. It was found that special transport was provided at only some of those prisons that were located in inaccessible locations. Furthermore, even where this transport was available, it was only occasionally provided. The second initiative examined in the above analysis was the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS). One could argue that, in providing this service, the Prison Service is assisting prisoners and their families to maintain contact. Indeed, the APVS was found to be operating quite well. However, visitors were not at all well informed about the scheme. In fact, information for visitors about visiting arrangements in general was found to be scarce and inappropriate. In this respect, individual prisons were not performing according to standards and, therefore, failing to meet their obligations to family ties. In the next section, another factor that exacerbates the difficulties visitors experience in travelling to/from the prison to visit is considered, the distance between the prison in which a prisoner is housed and his/her home area.

#### **4.2 Prisoner Allocation**

Where prisoners serve their sentence is a crucial factor in determining contact between a prisoner and his/her family. As Livingston & Owen (1999: 212) pointed out 'location of prisons plays a large part in determining how substantial contact will be, as the further away a prisoner is detained from his [sic] family the more difficult it will be to maintain contact'. Sometimes a prisoner will serve his/her whole sentence in a

local prison.<sup>18</sup> It is usually the case, however, that a prisoner upon reaching a certain point in his/her sentence will be moved on to another prison. This move to another prison is considered the 'most crucial decision made by the Prison Service not only for the prisoner . . . for the family also' (McDermott & King, 1995: 277). The policy informing this decision is explored below. The implications of allocation decisions for visitors are then considered. Finally, visitors' views on having the prisoner located in prisons that are close to their homes are examined.

#### **4.2.1 Allocation Policy**

As outlined in Chapter 2, the prison estate is structured on the basis that there are different categories and types of prisoner and that these different prisoners should be held in separate establishments. It is this arrangement that mitigates against the possibility that prisoners will serve their sentence in that prison which is closest to his/her home. As has already been mentioned, prisoners begin their time in a local prison and are usually moved shortly after sentencing to another prison. This transfer is known as allocation.

The relevant procedures vary slightly according to prisoner type, male or female.<sup>19</sup> Unless a woman is considered a Category A prisoner, she will be allocated to either 'open' or 'closed' conditions. This decision is based on security and control considerations. Allocation, thereafter, depends on a number of factors, including home area.<sup>20</sup> The procedure for adult male prisoners is more complex. Essentially, there are two distinct issues to be addressed in relation to adult male prisoners. First, there is categorisation. This involves deciding on the security level under which the prisoner should be detained. As the *Manual on Sentence Management and Planning* sets out - 'Prisoners must be categorised objectively according to the likelihood that they will seek to escape and the risk they would pose should an escape succeed' (para. 7.1.3). Adult male prisoners are categorised as either Category A, Category B, Category C or Category D. After a decision has been reached concerning security classification, the second issue is addressed, that is allocation. The following priorities

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<sup>18</sup> Local prisons are so-called because of their proximity to local towns or cities.

<sup>19</sup> Allocation procedures are again different for young offenders and life sentence prisoners (see Livingston & Owen, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> Other factors include age, current offence and sentence, medical requirements, whether there is a history of local authority care, time left to serve, any outstanding appeal, likelihood of escape or abscondence, and whether detained under Immigration Act 1971 (Livingston & Owen, 1999: 146).

are taken into consideration in determining allocation – the needs of security, the needs of control, available space in prisons and the needs of the individual prisoner (cited in Creighton & King, 1996). The overriding factor in allocation decisions is security category. However, there is a requirement that other factors are also taken into consideration. One such additional factor is the prisoner's home area or that of his/her likely visitors.<sup>21</sup>

It is security considerations that ultimately determine where prisoners serve their sentence. As Operating Standard C2 states '[p]risoners should be allocated in accordance with their security categorisation to the most appropriate establishment that can meet their needs' (HM Prison Service, 1994). At a policy level, prison authorities are supposed to take into account prisoners' home areas in making allocation decisions. In practice, however, there is no guarantee that prisoners will be allocated accordingly. As Matthews (1989: 11) pointed out '[n]earness to home receives the lowest priority. For most prisoners it is not a factor in where they are sent and no one would dream of involving prisoners families in allocation decisions'. More recently, McDermott & King (1992: 59) explained that '[i]n practice a prisoner is normally allocated within an administrative region but, once considerations of security and available spaces have been taken into account, close to home it is not'. Clarke et al (1992: 117) also drew attention to 'tension between the recognition of maintaining such [family] ties as easily as possible and the need to make satisfactory arrangements for the custody of large numbers of prisoners'. The end result is that prisoners often find themselves allocated to a prison that is a great distance from the home areas. Research into prisoners' families has found this to be the case (Matthews, 1983; 1989; Light, 1992).

Certain commentators have called for a re-structuring of the prison estate so as to facilitate the allocation of prisoners to prisons close to their homes. Morris (1965) advocated the reorganisation of prisons on a regional basis. King & Morgan (1980: 38-9) argued that 'prisoners should generally be held in the establishment closest to their community ties so as to maximise their opportunity to maintain family and other links'. To facilitate this, they called for a 'normalisation of the prison system' that

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<sup>21</sup> Other factors include prisoners likely conduct, suitability for particular type of accommodation, medical and/or psychiatric needs, need for offence related behavioural programmes, educational or training needs, and any restrictions on allocation agreed with local authorities (Livingston & Owen, 1999: 128).

involved training prisons becoming more like multi-functional local prisons (King & Morgan, 1980: 122-3). A decade later the Lord Justice Woolf also recommended that prisoners should be located in prisons 'sited within reasonable proximity to and having close connections with the community . . . [with which] they have their closest links' (Woolf, 1991: para. 11.49). In order to achieve this objective, Woolf (1991) proposed the concept of 'community prisons'. These were described as

. . . prisons near to the main centres of population . . . with the facilities and accommodation capable of holding most prisoners throughout most of their sentence or they could be arranged in clusters of separate prisons within a locality through which the prisoner could progress.

(Woolf, 1991: para 11.49)

As noted elsewhere, the Government's response to this particular recommendation was considered to be less than wholehearted (Roberts, 1994). The White Paper that documented the Government's response to the Woolf Report alluded to the possibility that certain prisons 'might be re-planned as multi-functional community prisons' (Home Office, 1991a: para 5.16). The Prison Service did, in principle, accept the cluster approach to prisons as advocated by Woolf (HM Prison Service, 1995b). However, the pressure of an increasing prison population hindered progress along these lines (Penal Affairs Consortium, 1994). Despite this, it has been noted that multiple function prisons have increased in number in recent times (Morgan, 1997). Indeed, this observation has been substantiated in the present research (see Chapter 2). It remains the case, however, that many prisoners serve their sentence in a prison that is not within close proximity to their home areas. Recent research reports that 40% of adult males and nearly 70% of women prisoners are not housed in their home regions (Prison Reform Trust, 1998).

#### ***4.2.2 Close to Home?***

The present research did not set out to examine how allocation decisions operate in practice. However, information on the distance travelled to visit as estimated by visitors does provide some insight into prisoners' proximity to their home areas. The National Prison Survey (1991) found the most important visitor to just under a third (30%) of prisoners travelled more than 60 miles to visit. This research revealed similar results - just over a quarter (N=8; 27%) of visitors lived within 20 miles or less

of the prison. An equal number of interviewees lived between 21 to 40 miles of the prison. Four (13%) interviewees travelled 41 to 60 miles. The remaining ten (33%) interviewees travelled more than 60 miles.<sup>22</sup>

Whether the visitors interviewed in this study came from that community with which the prisoner had the closest links is another matter. The National Prison Survey (1991) specifically asked about prisoners' most important visitor. This research did not explore the relationship between the prisoner and his visitors beyond asking whom the interviewee visited in prison. Although, it is thought that, in most cases, the individual interviewed was the prisoners' most important visitor. To determine the extent to which prisoners' home areas were taken into consideration in allocating prisoners to certain prisons would require further inquiry into prisoner backgrounds and familial relationships. In the next section, visitors' views on having the prisoner located in a prison that was closer to home are considered.

#### ***4.2.3 Visitors' Views on Proximity***

Visitors were asked 'Is this prison the closest prison to your home?' The majority (N=24; 80%) indicated that the prison in which the prisoner was currently held was *not* the closest prison to their home. This was to be expected. It could be surmised that, in many cases, there would be a local prison closer to a visitor's home than that prison in which the prisoner was being held.<sup>23</sup> Those interviewees (N=24) that indicated that the prisoner was not located in the closest prison to their home were asked how they would feel if he was moved to a prison closer to their home.

Nearly half (N=14; 47%) of interviewees indicated that they would prefer for the prisoner to be moved to a prison closer to their home. Interviewees said it would be '*wonderful*', that it would be '*a lot better*' or that they would be a '*much happier*'. Reasons for this preference included '*... for the travelling more than anything*' and that '*it would be cheaper*'. One interviewee explained that it would also be much better for the prisoner:

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<sup>22</sup> Three interviewees travelled 61 to 80 miles; two travelled 81 to 100 miles; five travelled more than 100 miles to get to the prison. Two of the latter interviewees actually travelled more than 200 miles to get to the prison.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, a few visitors actually referred to a local prison in their response. As one interviewee pointed out '*... we've got a prison down the road in the town centre*' (Lisa).

*Great for him as well. I know anyway they [i.e. the prisoners] don't like being stuck away from home if there is a prison next to their home it's a lot easier for their families going to see them.*

(Alison)

The remaining interviewees, however, were not so convinced that moving the prisoner to a prison closer to their home was a good idea. Five interviewees admitted that it would indeed be much easier for them if the prisoner was located in a prison closer to their home, but expressed concern as to whether it would be better for the prisoner. Three interviewees expressed a preference for the prisoner to remain in the prison he was in at present, despite the distance it was from their home. The remaining two interviewees expressed no preference with regard to where the prisoner was housed.

Interviewees did explain their responses. Rather than comment on their own circumstances, interviewees referred to the prisoners' situation. Interviewees commented on the prison that was closest to their homes. One interviewee explained '*I don't like the prisons that are closer, so I'm happier with him here*' (Mel). A similar response was received from another interviewee:

*It would be easier, but the nearest prison to Stoke, I think is Stafford and Stafford is awful from what I've heard . . . I rather he be here and OK with being here, than in Stafford to please me.*

(Wendy)

Interviewees also explained that the prison in which the prisoner was currently being held was better for him than other prisons. One interviewee explained that the prison closest to her home '*isn't so good for them inside*' (Sam). Another interviewee described his son as being in '*the right place at the right time*' (John). Interviewees referred to the benefits the prisoner gained from education courses offered by the particular prison:

*I would rather him be here because he can do his woodwork craft course and he's doing business studies and a couple of other things and they don't have it at the other place.*

(Lisa)

*Well, I like him to go where he's happy, because he likes to do his woodwork, so as long as he can do his woodwork and he's happy I don't care how far I have to travel.*

(Eileen)

Interviewees commented that the prisoner was quite happy in the prison in which he was presently located. As one interviewee explained '*. . . he [i.e. the prisoner] doesn't mind it here though it's alright. He likes it here*' (Helen). Another interviewee remarked '*He's quite happy . . . He's much better here*' (Sue).

Two interviewees explained quite succinctly why prisoners should be considered above that which could be considered best for the visitor. One interviewee explained '*He's the one behind the bars not me. I can cope with the travelling*'. Similarly, another interviewee explained '*The thing is at the end of the day it's them that's locked behind those bars, it's them you've got to consider*'.

Interviewees' views on the location of the prisoner were surprising. When asked about where the prisoner should be located, one would have expected overwhelming support from visitors for him to be moved closer to his/her home area so as to relieve the difficulties encountered upon travelling to/from the prison. This was not found to be the case. Instead, there was self-sacrifice, a willingness to surrender the time and money in order to visit the prisoner. As far as certain visitors were concerned, their circumstances were unimportant when compared to the welfare of the prisoner. The attitudes expressed are further testament to the commitment families have to those who are on the inside.

#### ***4.2.4 Committing to Proximity***

In the above analysis, the Prison Service's commitment to family ties was examined with reference to allocation procedure. At a policy level there is a requirement that prisoners' home areas are taken into consideration in deciding where a prisoner will serve his/her sentence. This indicates a certain commitment to family ties. The important question is, however, the way in which this policy operates in practice. From the above results, it is not possible to arrive at a definite conclusion in this regard. It was found that there were visitors who travelled a great distance to visit. Two interviewees travelled over 200 miles to visit their sons in prison. However, on these occasions, the respective prison may have been the only one suitable for the prisoner considering his status and security requirements.<sup>24</sup> Assuming this was the

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<sup>24</sup> This was quite likely the case. The prison in question was one of only three prisons known as Main Centres designed for adult male life sentence prisoners in the early stages of their sentence (Livingston & Owen, 1999: 145).



case, it is the way in which the prison estate is structured that is preventing the allocation of prisoners to establishments that are within reasonable proximity of their home areas. A re-organisation along those lines as advocated by Woolf (1991) is, therefore, necessary if the Prison Service is to truly meet its obligations to family ties. Interviewees' views on the location of the prisoner provided support for allocating prisoners to prisons close to their visitors' homes. Interviews with visitors also revealed their commitment to supporting prisoners.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, further evidence has been presented that calls into question the Prison Service's expressed commitment to family ties. This is exemplified most aptly in the lack of consideration for the difficulties visitors encounter in travelling to/from the prison to visit. Another theme has also emerged. This concerns the relationship between prisoners and their families. What has been revealed is the level of sacrifice and dedication amongst families when it comes to supporting the prisoner. This issue is re-visited at a later stage. In the next chapter, the reasons for the Prison Service's limited commitment to family ties as presented in this, and the previous chapter, are considered. It is argued that this is not a wilful neglect but that different organisational priorities have impacted on the ability of individual establishments to respond to prisoners' families and their needs.

## **5. FAMILY TIES: A WILFUL NEGLECT?**

In the previous two chapters, it has been argued that the Prison Service's expressed commitment to family ties is little more than rhetoric; that in reality the needs of families visiting prison remain marginalized or simply ignored. In this chapter, consideration is given to the extent to which this is a wilful neglect. The Prison Service has had to respond to various demands in recent times: to manage an increasing prison population; to maintain order and control; to respond to an increased emphasis on security and to reduce drug misuse amongst prisoners. It is argued that establishments have not intentionally neglected their responsibilities in relation to family ties but that circumstances and the obligation to address certain operational imperatives have undermined their commitment in this respect. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, the impact of increased numbers in prison on visiting arrangements and procedures is explored. In the second section, the influence of the policy known as Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) on prisoners' opportunities for contact with their families is considered. In the final section, the extent to which establishments have managed to meet security demands and reduce the likelihood that drugs enter prisons, whilst at the same time provide quality contact for prisoners and their families, is examined.

### **5.1 Family Ties for the Ever Increasing Prison Population**

In this section, the possibility that difficulties in providing for an increasing prison population are adversely affecting prisoners' contact with their families is considered. This is explored on two levels. First, the relationship between overcrowding in prison and the extent of contact prisoners have with their families is examined. Second, consideration is given to the extent to which prisons are meeting the demand for visits given the rise in demand created by increased numbers in prison. To begin, the present situation with regard to the prison population is reviewed.

#### ***5.1.1 The Prison Numbers Game***

During the last two decades, there is one word that has often been used in both media and academic accounts to describe the penal situation in England and Wales, and that word is 'crisis' (see Evans, 1980; Shaw, 1992b; Cavadino & Dignan, 1997). Amongst

those factors that have been implicated as contributing to this 'crisis' are the high prison population and overcrowding. The present, and predicted, size of the prison population and the related problem of overcrowding are explored below.

The prison population in England and Wales has increased rapidly in the last decade. Following a slight decrease in the early nineties it reached unprecedented levels in 1997 when the average prison population stood at 61,100 following a dramatic 10,000 increase over two years (Home Office, 1998b). This prompted the Prison Service to declare in its annual report that it was now accommodating more prisoners than ever before (HM Prison Service, 1998a). The population presently stands at just under 65,000 (HM Prison Service, 2000).<sup>1</sup> Projections based on long term trends estimate a prison population of 82,800 by 2005 (Home Office, 1998a). An analysis of the reasons as to why the prison population has expanded so dramatically in recent times is largely beyond the scope of the present study. What is of concern in this research is the extent to which prisons manage to preserve the family ties of this ever-increasing prisoner population. Before turning to this issue, a problem inextricably linked to increased numbers in prison is considered, that is overcrowding.

Increased numbers in prisons becomes problematic when prisons themselves become overcrowded. In his evidence to the Woolf enquiry, the then Director General stated:

. . . the life and work of the Prison Service has, for the last 20 years, been distorted by the problems of overcrowding. That single factor has dominated prisoners' lives, it has produced often intolerable pressure on the staff, and as a consequence it has soured industrial relations. It has skewed managerial effort and it has diverted managerial effort away from positive developments. The removal of overcrowding is in my view, an indispensable pre-condition of sustained and universal improvement in prison conditions.

(Woolf Report, 1991: para. 11.135)

As outlined in Chapter 1, the Woolf Report recommended the introduction of a Prison Rule stating that no establishment hold more prisoners than its Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA).<sup>2</sup> The Government, however, rejected this proposal. Following a slight respite in the early 1990s, overcrowding, although not as serious as

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<sup>1</sup> The prison population was reported at 64,172 on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2000 (HM Prison Service, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> The CNA is the 'number of prisoners the system is designed to accommodate without overcrowding (that is without prisoners having to share cells designed for one)' (Cavadino & Dignan, 1997: 120).

that experienced in previous times, returned. In 1993, the then Government renewed its emphasis on law and order policies. This led to an increase in the prison population that, in turn, led to overcrowding. The problem was particularly acute in local prisons. In 1994, local prisons were operating at an average 18% above their official maximum capacities (Penal Affairs Consortium, 1995). The situation was much more serious at certain individual local prisons, some of which were reported at more than 70 per cent overcrowded (NACRO, 1994b).<sup>3</sup> In 1995, the average population (including police cells) was 800 more than the CNA but for local prisons the average was approximately 2,400 above the CNA (Home Office, 1996). In order to alleviate overcrowding, the Prison Service has continued with the building programme it began in the early 1980s. Despite this, recent statistics reveal that the prison system as a whole remains overcrowded. The prison population at the end of March 2000 was 2,230 (4%) higher than the CNA of 63,230 (White et al, 2000).

Prison overcrowding has many adverse effects where prisoners are concerned. These have been well-documented elsewhere and will not be repeated here (see NACRO, 1994b; Cavadino & Dignan, 1997). Overcrowding also impinges on the lives of prisoners' families. As outlined in the previous chapter, it influences the decision as to where a prisoner will serve his/her sentence. Recently it was reported that there had been an increase in complaints from visitors about prisoners being located long distances from their homes (Family Ties Consultative Group, 1999). Shortage of prison space was given as the reason for this practice. Another consequence of prison overcrowding that concerns prisoners' families is its impact on visits. The present study has already drawn attention to those provisions contained within Standing Orders that permit prisons to operate below the minimum visiting entitlements when resources are stretched. Indeed, it was found that local prisons, which, as noted above, are particularly prone to overcrowding, were more likely than closed prisons to be operating below minimum visiting entitlements (see Section 3.1.1). This in itself suggests that overcrowding may be undermining the Prison Service's ability to assist prisoners to maintain contact with their families. The relationship between overcrowding and how much contact a prisoner has with his/her family is explored further in the following section.

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<sup>3</sup> On 4<sup>th</sup> March 1994, Leicester prison with a CNA of 194 was holding 344 prisoners, and was therefore 77 per cent overcrowded. Shrewsbury with a CNA of 168 was holding 289 prisoners, 72 per cent overcrowded (NACRO, 1994b).

### ***5.1.2 Overcrowding & Quantity of Contact***

The analysis outlined here is based on the premise that prison overcrowding leads to less overall visiting time for prisoners. Visiting times at prisons that were overcrowded were compared to those at prisons that were not. That a significant difference exists would suggest that overcrowding is adversely affecting the contact that prisoners are permitted to have with their families

In order to conduct the appropriate analysis, it was necessary to first identify those prisons that were operating beyond their maximum capacity, or, in other words, those prisons that were overcrowded. This was achieved through examining the difference between baseline Certified Normal Accommodation (CNA) and prisoner population figures for individual prisons. Baseline CNA indicates the total number of prisoners a particular establishment is certified to accommodate.<sup>4</sup> Essentially, a prison is considered overcrowded when its population exceeds its baseline CNA. It is important, however, to bear in mind that baseline CNA figures provide only an indication where prison accommodation is concerned, as not all accommodation that is theoretically available will actually be in commission. Unfortunately, figures that more accurately measure how many prisoners a prison can accommodate are not readily available. The Prison Service publishes CNAs and corresponding prisoner populations in its Annual Reports and Accounts. The average baseline CNA is provided for every prison, as is the average prisoner population. The particular figures used in this instance correspond to when the prison visiting survey was conducted, that is April 1997 to March 1998 (HM Prison Service, 1998a).

Examination of the relevant figures revealed that, for certain prisons, the average prison population was significantly higher than the average baseline CNA whereas, for other prisons, the average prison populations were equal to or only marginally higher than the average baseline CNA.<sup>5</sup> In order to conduct the analysis, it was important to distinguish between prisons that were overcrowded and prisons that were not. It was decided that where there existed only slight differences between the average prisoner

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<sup>4</sup> Baseline Certified Normal Accommodation does not include punishment cells, segregation units, health care cells or rooms in training prisons and young offenders' institutions that are *not* routinely used to house long stay prisoners (HM Prison Service, 1998a: 55).

<sup>5</sup> For instance, for one prison the average prisoner population was 389 and the average baseline CNA was 388 (HM Prison Service, 1998a).

population and CNA, the prisons in question should not be considered overcrowded, as the associated effects of overcrowding were less likely to be in evidence. For the purposes of this analysis, therefore, only those prisons with average prisoner populations significantly higher, that is 10 or more, than their average baseline CNAs were classified as overcrowded.

Prior to turning to the appropriate analysis, it is worthwhile briefly exploring what the above figures reveal in relation to prison overcrowding. An indication as to the extent to which prisons were overcrowded was provided. Over half (N=45; 51%) of prisons that responded to the survey were, according to the above calculation, operating above their maximum capacity.<sup>6</sup> Further analysis also revealed that certain prisons were more likely to be overcrowded in comparison to others. Just over three-quarters (N=19; 76%) of local prisons were operating above their CNA, compared to less than half (N=22; 48%) of closed prisons.<sup>7</sup> This finding confirms what previous research has often observed - that local prisons consistently bear the brunt of overcrowding within the prison system (NACRO, 1994b; Penal Affairs Consortium, 1995; Prison Reform Trust, 1995).

Returning to the matter at hand, having distinguished between those prisons that were overcrowded and those that were not, one can now move on to examine differences between how much contact was provided to prisoners. Visiting times, as previously calculated, were used to indicate how much contact was provided to prisoners (see Section 3.1.1).<sup>8</sup> These were categorised as low, medium or high.<sup>9</sup> As outlined in Chapter 3, how much contact a prisoner is permitted to have with his/her visitors varies according to two factors. First, a prisoner's status, that is, whether s/he is convicted or unconvicted. Where this factor is concerned, the analysis outlined here was based on visiting times to convicted prisoners only. It was not possible to compare visiting times for unconvicted prisoners due to low numbers.<sup>10</sup> The second, factor that influences how much contact a prisoner has with his/her visitors is regime

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<sup>6</sup> Information was unavailable for four prisons. Baseline Certified Normal Accommodation and average prisoner populations figures for these prisons were not provided in a comparable form.

<sup>7</sup> Statistically significant at  $p < .05$ ; d.f. = 1; value = 5.269 ( $\chi^2$ );  $n = 71$ . Due to low numbers it was not possible to include open prisons or Remand Centres in this analysis.

<sup>8</sup> As outlined previously, visiting times were calculated with reference to the information provided by prisons on visit length and frequency. For example, if visits lasted 30 minutes or more but less than 1 hour and took place four times a week, then visits lasted at least 30 minutes, a total visiting time of 2 hours per week.

<sup>9</sup> Categories were based on percentile groups with each group containing approximately an equal number of cases. For convicted prisoners, 3.5 hours per month or less was categorised as low and 7.5 hours per month or more was categorised as high.

<sup>10</sup> The relevant information was available for only twenty-six cases.

level under Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP), that is, basic, standard and enhanced. Three corresponding analyses were, therefore, conducted. In each case, the difference between visiting times at those prisons that were overcrowded and those prisons that were operating within their maximum capacity was explored.<sup>11</sup>

The results revealed that overcrowded prisons tended not to provide less visiting time to prisoners. For convicted prisoners on basic regimes, no statistically significant difference was found to exist between visiting times at overcrowded prisons and prisons operating within their CNA. Similarly, no significant difference was found to exist between visiting times for convicted prisoners on enhanced regimes at overcrowded prisons and those prisons operating within their CNA. Only for convicted prisoners on a standard regime was there a statistically significant difference between visiting times.<sup>12</sup> Just over one fifth (21%) of those prisons operating within their CNA (N=29) were providing low visiting times, that is 3.5 hours or less per month, to convicted prisoners on a standard regime. Nearly two-fifths (N=13; 39%) of overcrowded prisons (N=34) were providing low visiting times to convicted prisoners on a standard regime. Just under two-fifths (N=11; 38%) of prisons operating within their CNA were providing these prisoners with high visiting times, that is 7.5 hours or more per month. Only four (12%) overcrowded prisons were providing these prisoners with high visiting times. Visiting times were also averaged across regime and comparisons made between prisons.<sup>13</sup> Again no significant difference in visiting times was found between those prisons that were overcrowded and those prisons that were not.

The above results provide only limited support for the argument that overcrowding in prison is impacting on the amount of contact provided to prisoners. The problem is, however, that it does not necessarily follow that this was not the case. The visiting times employed in the above analyses correspond to policy, in other words, the amount of contact prisoners are *supposed* to have with their visitors. As has been pointed out elsewhere, these times are not an accurate measure with regard to how much contact prisoners actually have with their families (see Section 3.1.1).

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<sup>11</sup> Only those prisons with three regime levels were included in this analysis.

<sup>12</sup> Significant at  $< .05$ ; d.f. = 2; value = 6.351 ( $\chi^2$ ); n = 63.

<sup>13</sup> For instance, where a prison that provided 2 hours per month to prisoners on a basic regime, 3 hours per month to prisoners on a standard regime and 4.5 hours per month to prisoners on an enhanced regime, the average visiting time was calculated as 3.2 hours per month.

Interviews revealed that in practice visitors tend to be allowed less time with the prisoner than official visiting times would lead us to believe. It follows, therefore, that visitors to prisons that are overcrowded could well be provided with less contact with prisoners. To confirm whether this was the case would require an analysis that focused on the actual amount of contact provided to prisoners and their visitors. Unfortunately, the prison visiting survey did not include questions about visiting as it operated in practice, so it was not possible to conduct this analysis.

### ***5.1.3 Responding to an Increased Demand***

In the following discussion, the extent to which prisons were managing to meet the demand for visits is considered. This is explored with reference to two factors. The first factor is overcrowding in visit rooms. Where this factor is concerned, overcrowding in the visit room is taken as an indication that a prison was finding it difficult to meet the demand for visits. The factor concerns those measures that establishments may employ on occasion that demand exceeds their ability to provide the required number of visits. The extent to which prisons have employed such measures is explored. The impact these measures have on visiting arrangements is also discussed.

As has been previously outlined, the environment in which a visit takes place determines quality of contact (see Section 3.2). The present study has already found that overcrowding in visit rooms is detrimental to quality. Overcrowded conditions were identified as most likely to result in a visit room that was not ‘family friendly’. Visitors also explained how overcrowded conditions in visit rooms disrupted their visits. It follows, therefore, that the quality of contact between prisoners and their families is diminished on occasion that visit rooms are overcrowded. Respondents to the prison visiting survey were asked whether visit rooms were ever overcrowded. Just over two-fifths (N=38; 43%) of respondents indicated that there was overcrowding in the visit rooms.<sup>14</sup> This indicates the extent of the problem. It also serves to indicate the extent to which prisons were struggling to meet the demand for visits. Over half (N=50; 56%) of respondents indicated that there no was

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<sup>14</sup> Information missing for one prison.



overcrowding in visit rooms. It does not follow, however, that the establishments in question were not experiencing difficulties in meeting the demand for visits.

Visiting arrangements may have been altered to accommodate the demand for visits. It could be that prisons were providing prisoners with shorter and/or less visits. This hypothesis was tested. No statistically significant relationship was found between the visiting times and overcrowding in the visit room. It could also be the case that prisons had re-scheduled visits to allow more visits to take place. This possibility was also explored. Again, no relationship was found between the number of visiting sessions and overcrowding in visit rooms. Another possibility is that the prisons in question had taken steps to meet the demand for visits and/or control overcrowding in the visit room.

The prison visiting survey included questions concerning measures that may be implemented if prisons were experiencing difficulties in meeting the demand for visits. Respondents were asked about occasions where visiting sessions were cut short or interrupted in order to allow more visits to take place on a particular day or over a particular period of time. These measures impact on the amount of contact provided to prisoners. Another response is to have an over spill area within the prison where visits can take place when the visit room is operating at maximum capacity. This particular response does not impact on the amount of contact a prisoner has with his/her family. But where the visit room is unavailable, visits take place in areas that are without the appropriate facilities and conditions. On these occasions, it is the quality of contact that is forfeited.

Only small numbers of prisons employed either method - at only ten (11%) prisons had visits ever been cut short due to the number of prisoners and visitors requiring a visit;<sup>15</sup> only eleven (14%) prisons had ever split visits<sup>16</sup> and at only twelve (13%) prisons had visits taken place in another part of the prison due to overcrowding in the

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<sup>15</sup> Respondents also indicated that visits were cut short for other reasons. Visits would be cut short for security/disciplinary reasons such as drug trafficking, fighting, passing of unauthorised articles, being abusive to staff and other unacceptable behaviour by prisoners or visitors. A late start also resulted in visits being cut short. Visits started late due to reasons such as having to wait for staff who have other duties to perform; prisoners unavailable when required for visit; late arrival of visitors or incidents on the wing.

<sup>16</sup> In this context to split a visit means to divide a visiting session into two visiting sessions to allow more visits to take place over a certain period of time. This definition was mistakenly not provided in the questionnaire. A number of respondents were unfamiliar with the terminology and, therefore, did not understand the question. One could surmise that the practice of splitting visits takes place at more prisons than the above results suggest. Nine respondents did not answer the question concerning split visits.

visit room. The frequency with which these measures were employed varied according to the particular measure. Split visiting was most often employed. Four prisons split visits all the time or frequently.<sup>17</sup> Visits being cut short and visiting taking place in another part of the prison occurred only occasionally or very rarely.<sup>18</sup> All measures were most likely to be employed at those times when visits were in most demand such as at weekends and/or on special occasions like Christmas, New Year, Bank Holidays etc. Overall, one third (N=29; 33%) of those prisons that responded to this survey were employing *at least* one of the measures examined.<sup>19</sup> Further evidence to suggest that prisons were experiencing difficulties in meeting the demand for visits was revealed when prisons were asked if there were other ways of preventing overcrowding in the visits room in operation at the prison. By far the most common response was to indicate that a booked visit system had been introduced.

Just over two-fifths (N=36; 41%) of prisons indicated that a booked visit system was in operation.<sup>20</sup> A further four prisons indicated that a booked visit system was soon to be introduced or currently being introduced. Essentially, a booked visit system operates so as to restrict the number of visits that can take place to that which a visit room can accommodate, thus preventing overcrowding. Systems vary from prison to prison but the same general principles apply. Visitors must pre-book visits either by telephone or in person at the prison. This is recorded either manually or on a computer system and when the visit room capacity is reached no more visits are booked. Before booked visits were introduced, visiting arrangements were much more liberal. Visitors could arrive at the prison, whenever there was a visiting session, and as long as a valid Visiting Order was produced, were allowed into the prison to see the prisoner. There was no requirement to contact the prison prior to visiting.

The relationship between overcrowding in the visit room and the provision of a booked visit system was explored. A statistically significant relationship was found to exist between overcrowding in the visit room and whether or not prisons were

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<sup>17</sup> Two prisons split visits all the time i.e. every visiting day. Two prisons split visits frequently: one every visiting day except Sunday (6 out of 7 visiting days); the other every weekend and Wednesdays (3 out of 7 visiting days). Three prisons occasionally split visits. The remaining four prisons split visits only very rarely.

<sup>18</sup> At no prisons were visits cut short all the time or even frequently due to the number of prisoners and visitors requiring a visit. Similarly, at no prisons did visits take place in another part of the prison all the time or frequently.

<sup>19</sup> Three prisons were employing more than one measure. At one prison visits were split and took place in a different part of the prison. At another prisons visit were split and cut short. At the final prison visits were split, cut short and took place in a different part of the prison.

<sup>20</sup> Not all prisons used a booked visits system all the time for all prisoners. Two prisons used it for convicted prisoners only. One prison operated a booked visits system for midweek visits only and another for weekend visits only.

operating a booked visit system.<sup>21</sup> Those prisons with overcrowded visit rooms were less likely to have introduced a booked visit system. Three quarters (N=29; 76%) of prisons with overcrowded visit rooms did not operate a booked visit system. Over half (N=27; 56%) of those prisons where overcrowding in the visit room was not identified as a problem did operate a booked visit system. These results revealed the extent to which booked visit systems were operating effectively in reducing overcrowding in visit rooms. More importantly, the results suggest that even where overcrowding in the visit room was not a problem, prisons were experiencing difficulties in meeting the demand for visits.

The booked visit system was not without its problems. Eight (22%) of those prisons that were operating a booked visit system indicated that problems had been experienced. The most common problem was that visitors could not always book a visit for a time that most suited them. This indicates that prisons continue to find it difficult to meet the demand for visits, as was the case previous to the introduction of booked visits. At one prison the demand for visits on the days when special transport was provided to the prison was such that bookings for visits often had to be refused (Swaleside). Another prison stated that *'Perhaps inmates due a visit will not have one when their visitors find it most suitable'* (Stoke Heath). Similarly, at another prison it was said that *'Visitors may not always be able to book on a particular day'* (Everthorpe). Despite these difficulties, one respondent volunteered the information that visitors preferred the new system – *'Visitors may have to come on an alternative day to the first choice. All reports indicate that this is much preferred to having a visit cut short because of overcrowding'* (Deerbolt). Visitors' experiences in relation to booked visits are explored further below.

The above findings suggest that prisons were struggling to meet the demand for visits, and this in turn was impacting on contact between prisoners and their families. Visit rooms were overcrowded and, where this was not the case, the prisons concerned had taken steps to avoid it. The extent to which prisons split visits, cut visits short and introduced other measures such as booked visits demonstrates that prisons were finding it difficult to provide sufficient places for visits. The above findings also suggest that in responding to overcrowding in visit rooms a new set of problems have

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<sup>21</sup> Statistically significant at < .05; d.f. = 1; value = 9.24 ( $\chi^2$ ); n = 86.

materialised, not for the prison, or even the prisoner, but for the visitor. Visitors interviewed in this study were asked about booked visits. Before turning to the information as provided by visitors, it is important to first briefly outline the systems in place for booked visits at the two prisons at which interviews were conducted.

Both prisons operated a booked visits system. At Prison 'A' visitors could book their visits either by telephone or in person at the prison, as long as the appropriate documentation was provided.<sup>22</sup> A booking clerk was employed at Prison 'A'. The booking clerk was based in the Visitors' Centre and it was her responsibility to take bookings for visits from visitors in person and by telephone. Employed on a part time basis, she would start work at about 1.30 p.m. and finish at 4.30 p.m. (approximately). Visits could only be booked between these times. The booking clerk was only employed to work weekdays. At the weekends, uniformed prison staff were employed to take the bookings for visits. The system differed at Prison 'B'. Unlike Prison 'A', the Visitors' Centre was not involved in the booked visits system. Visitors had to ring the prison in order to book a visit at Prison 'B'. This was the only booking method available. There was no facility whereby visitors were able to book a visit in person whilst at the prison.

Visitors were asked about problems experienced when booking visits. Over half (N=17; 57%) of the thirty visitors interviewed indicated that problems had been experienced. Three interviewees had also experienced problems in booking a visit at a different prison. The problems identified fell into three categories - problems stemming from the booking of visits by telephone; confusions concerning the actual booking and difficulties in booking a visit on the preferred day. These categories were not mutually exclusive and one problem often contributed to another.

Difficulty in contacting the prison by telephone was most often identified as a problem. As one interviewee explained:

*. . . The phone system is pretty crap. Sometimes they're down and although the phone is ringing at your end, it's not plugged in here, if someone doesn't turn up for their duty to plug the phone in . . .*

(Lisa)

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<sup>22</sup> To book a visit requires that a visitor present his/her Visiting Order (VO). VOs are given to the prisoner by the prison. The prisoner must then send the VO to the person from whom they wish to receive a visit.

Interviewees also lamented the fact that it normally took several attempts to get through to the prison:

*I swear they just unplug the phone, there was times I sit on the phone for hours trying to book a visit just kept pressing re-dial, re-dial and it's engaged, it's engaged, it's engaged, then it's just dead saying this number is not available, especially at this place. It always says this number is not available or there is a fault in the line, try again later. It is hard to book a visit. They're not prompt at all in picking up the phone.*

(Alison)

*Sometimes it can take up to about ten to fifteen minutes to get through [on the telephone], and you just have to keep pressing re-dial . . . that can be quite a nightmare and sometimes they turn the phones off, as well.*

(Ann)

Other comments included that the telephone lines were '*. . . always engaged*' (Debbie), '*. . . engaged for about three-quarters of an hour*' (Karen) and, on occasion, '*. . . temporarily out of order*' (Nikki). Three interviewees also mentioned the limited time period in which it was possible to book a visit. One interviewee explained: '*You can only ring at certain times, which is a bit awkward*' (Jackie). Another interviewee had to ring from work on her break. The fact that the telephone lines tended to be engaged did not help the situation. Difficulties in booking a visit by telephone were more acute at Prison 'B'. That visitors to Prison 'A' had an alternative option that was to book whilst at the prison attending a visit probably explains this difference between prisons.

Interviewees also reported that bookings had on occasion been inaccurately recorded. Visits were booked for the wrong day and even for the wrong prisoner. On two occasions interviewees reported that confusions regarding booked visits resulted in the visitor being turned away from the prison:

*. . . it happened a couple of times . . . I booked a visit beforehand, got the details down . . . my parents turn up there [i.e. at the prison] and they pleaded because they'd come so far, can we go and see him, and they said no, your visit's not booked in and then there was a failure on the computer, it's happened twice . . . but they [i.e. the prison] go we can't do anything . . . and they just turned us away.*

(Jaz)

*That has happened to me quite a few times actually . . . you come all the way here and you get refused entry, and you know what day you've booked and when I've got here they say well your name's not down . . . it's their mistake . . . and you can't get in and you've got to travel the whole way back*

(Tina)

On another occasion, the latter interviewee arrived at the prison only to find that her visit had been double booked - *'I booked a visit once and someone else had booked a visit, they'd booked it first and I'd booked it afterwards . . . so I was turned away'*. Another interviewee had been booked in to see the wrong person, but was lucky enough to get in to see her boyfriend. However, by the time the confusion had been resolved, the visiting session was nearly finished. This particular interviewee expressed her dissatisfaction as follows:

*Well, I weren't very happy about it really because to me when I booked it everything was fine I was coming as normal. It meant me travelling all this way and spending all that money, just to have half-an-hour of visiting time*

(Ann)

On none of the above occasions were interviewees reimbursed the travelling costs incurred in travelling to the prison for a visit that ultimately did not take place.

The final difficulty experienced by interviewees was that it was not always possible to book a visit on the preferred day. This particular difficulty was linked to those problems experienced in attempting to book a visit by telephone. As one interviewee explains:

*When you're booking it [i.e. the visit] and you can't get through that day, you try it the next day, they say it's been booked and then you say well if you had picked up the phone when I was trying to get through I might have been able to come.*

(Alison)

Another interviewee in referring to the difficulties experienced in booking a visit by telephone commented *' . . . half the time it causes problems and then if you do get through it's fully booked then you've wasted all that time on the telephone'* (Jill). This problem seemed to be most likely to occur on the weekends. As one interviewee explained *'You need to book quite a bit in advance to stand a chance, especially at the weekends, they seem to fill up quite quickly'* (Wendy). This particular interviewee

had, in the past, telephoned the prison to book a visit but been unable to do so as visits were fully booked.

From the prison's perspective the booked visit system could be considered a success. The above findings suggest that it does reduce overcrowding in visit rooms. Examining the system from the visitors' perspective, however, one could arrive at the opposite conclusion. It would seem that in addressing the problem of overcrowding in visit rooms, prisons have created difficulties for the visitors. The difficulties experienced by visitors would be greatly diminished if booking systems were to be reviewed and improved. The above findings also provide further evidence to suggest that prisons are not meeting the demand for visits. This is demonstrated in the difficulties that visitors experienced in attempting to book visits for certain days. One possible solution to the problem is to extend visiting hours on those days when demand is greatest. This, in association with a booked visits system that provided a better service to visitors, could go a long way to benefiting all those concerned.

#### ***5.1.4 An Increasing Prison Population: The Impact Reviewed***

The evidence examined above suggests that increased numbers in prison is undermining the ability to maintain prisoners' family ties. It seems that overcrowding in prison is not so much the problem, however, as the demand for visits. Prisons appear to be struggling to meet the demand for visits and this, in turn, is impacting on contact between prisoners and their significant others. The demand for visits has meant that prisons have had to implement measures to control it. One such measure is booked visits. It was found that booked visits created particular difficulties for visitors. This was perhaps not the intention. It was, after all, organisational imperatives that led to the implementation of booked visits. However, the above findings also suggest that the way in which this measure operates is exacerbating the difficulties that visitors experience with visits. This is an area over which individual prisons do have some control. In this respect, therefore, prisons are neglecting visitors' needs. It is important to acknowledge that the demand for visits cannot be traced back to the increased numbers in prison alone. The arrangements introduced under Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) must also be acknowledged as a contributing factor. It is difficult to measure demand resulting from IEP. Privileges

vary from prison to prison, as do the number of prisoners on each regime (Liebling et al, 1999). The way in which IEP operates in relation to visits is explored in the next section.

## **5.2 The Impact of Incentives and Earned Privileges**

A number of commentators have suggested that the policy known as Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) was introduced in response to what has been labelled the 'control crisis' that was alleged to have occurred in prisons in the early 1990s (Cavadino & Dignan, 1997; Morgan, 1997). Whether or not this was the case is not particularly relevant to this research, nor is the extent to which IEP has been effective in achieving its aims. What is of interest in this research is the impact this policy has had on prisoners' opportunities for contact with their visitors. The way in which IEP operates in terms of visiting arrangements is examined. IEP is then explored from the perspective of the visitor. To begin, however, the rationale informing the introduction of IEP is outlined.

### ***5.2.1 Incentives & Privileges: The Rationale***

As outlined in Chapter 1, the introduction of a framework of incentives and earned privileges was identified as a priority in the Prison Service Corporate Plan for 1995-1998 (HM Prison Service, 1995b). Its implementation formed part of an overall strategy aimed at reducing violence, disorder and drug misuse in prisons. IEP was subsequently introduced in July 1995.

The Prison Service's Annual Report and Accounts for 1994/5 detailed the rationale informing the introduction of IEP (HM Prison Service, 1996a: 26-27). Three aims were identified. First, IEP aimed to 'ensure privileges are earned by prisoners through good behaviour and performance and removed if prisoners fail to maintain acceptable standards' (HM Prison Service, 1996a: 26). Second, IEP aimed to 'encourage responsible behaviour, hard work and other constructive behaviour' amongst prisoners while at the same time encouraging prisoners' progress through the prison system. Finally, IEP aimed to 'create a more disciplined, better controlled environment and safer environment for prisoners and staff'. The mechanics of the system upon which



IEP is based have already been outlined in earlier chapters (see Sections 1.3.2 & 3.1.1). To reiterate, there are six privileges that prisoners may earn – access to private cash above the set minima, extra and improved visits, eligibility to participate in enhanced earning schemes, earned community visits, the opportunity to wear one's own clothes and time out of cell (HM Prison Service, 1996a: 26). Access to these privileges varies according to a prisoner's regime that is, in turn, determined by their behaviour. Guidelines for implementation recommended three regime levels - basic, standard and enhanced (HM Prison Service, 1996a: 26). It is the difference between these regime levels that is explored in the following section.

### ***5.2.2 The Difference Between Regimes***

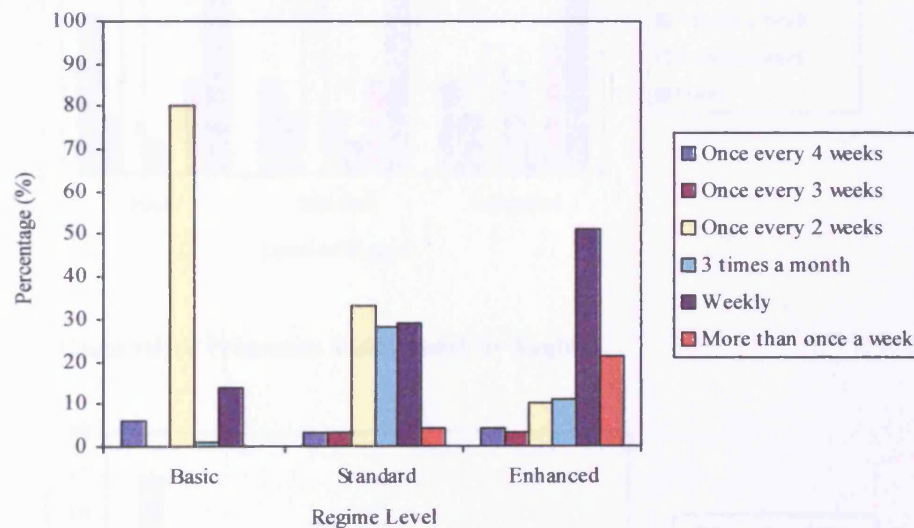
In the following discussion, prisoner's opportunities for extra and improved contact as provided under Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) is considered. The relationship between the amount of contact provided via visits and regime level is examined. The way in which IEP operates in relation to special visits and town visits is then explored.

It has already been shown that the amount of contact a prisoner has through visits varies according to regime level. In a previous chapter, visiting times were calculated so as to determine whether or not prisons were operating according to minimum visiting entitlements (see Section 3.1.1). Visiting times were calculated for convicted and unconvicted prisoners on each regime level - basic, standard and enhanced. Comparing the average visiting times revealed a distinct difference between regimes. This was the case for unconvicted *and* convicted prisoners. Unconvicted prisoners were allowed an average 3.4 hours visiting time per week on basic; 4.4 hours on standard and 5.3 hours on enhanced. Convicted prisoners were allowed an average 3.1 hours per month on basic; 5.1 hours on standard and 6.9 hours on enhanced. These figures demonstrate the difference between regimes. What these figures do not demonstrate is where this difference lies. Are prisoners on higher regimes provided with more visits or longer visits or more visits *and* longer visits?

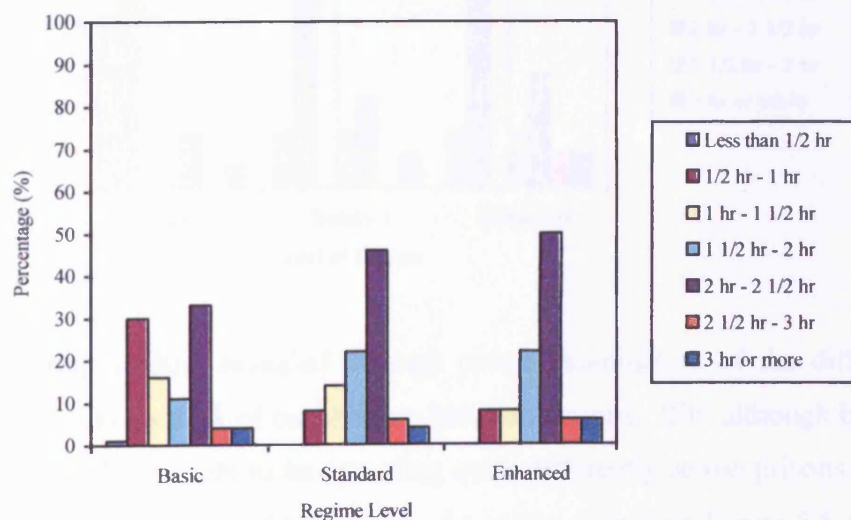
Contact via the prison visit is determined by two factors - the number of visits a prisoner is permitted and the length of these visits. The number of visits permitted over a certain period of time, for instance one month, provides the visit frequency.

Examining the length and frequency of visits revealed that the difference between regimes was quite distinct for convicted prisoners but not so obvious for unconvicted prisoners. Figures 5.1 & 5.2 show that convicted prisoners on the higher regimes were being provided with more frequent and longer visits. Those on the highest regime, enhanced, were most likely to have one visit a week or more. Convicted prisoners on the lowest regime, basic, were most likely to have one visit every two weeks. Visit length increased the higher the regime, but not to the same extent as visit frequency. On all regime levels, visits were most likely to last 2 hours or more, but less than 2 ½ hours.

**Figure 5.1** Convicted Prisoners: Frequency of Visits by Regime

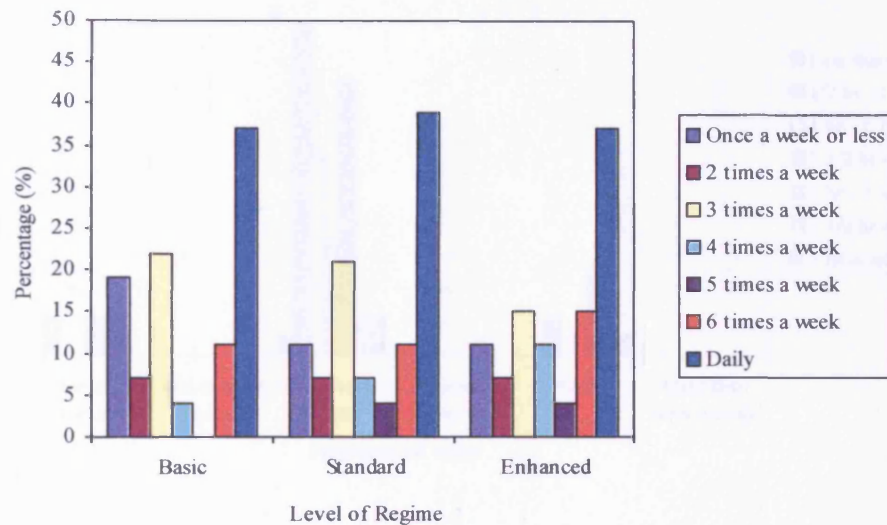


**Figure 5.2** Convicted Prisoners: Visit Length by Regime

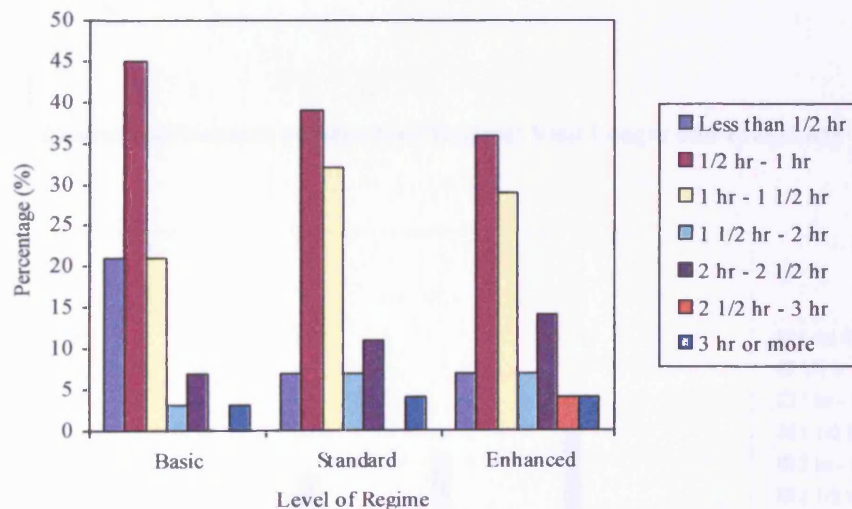


Figures 5.3 & 5.4 show that the situation was quite different for unconvicted prisoners. There was no real difference between regimes as regards the frequency of visits. There was, however, a slight increase in visit length with regime. The higher the regime, the more likely it was that visits lasted an hour or more.

**Figure 5.3 Unconvicted Prisoners: Frequency of Visits by Regime**



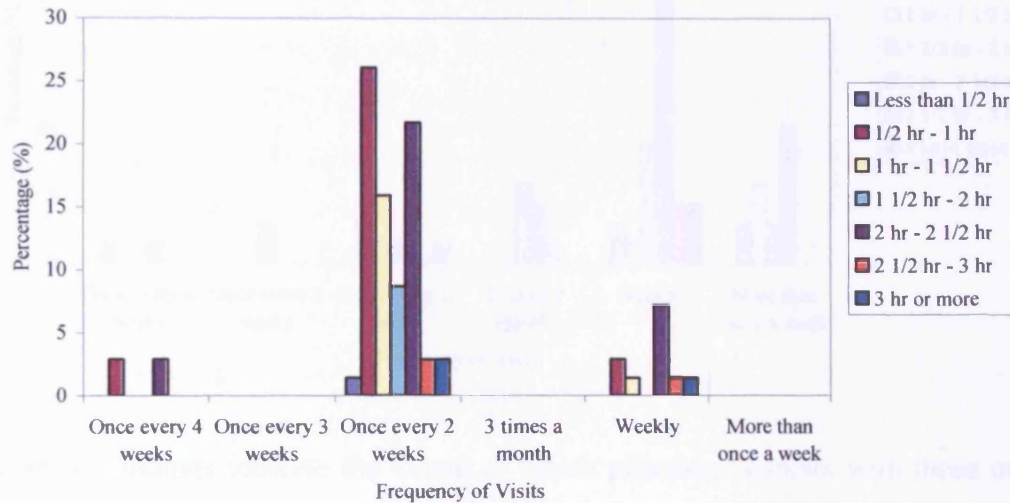
**Figure 5.4 Unconvicted Prisoners: Visit Length by Regime**



Another interesting finding revealed through closer examination of the differences between regimes was the lack of consistency between prisons. IEP, although based on a national framework, appears to be operating quite differently across prisons when it comes to visits awarded for good behaviour. As can be seen from Figure 5.5, visits to

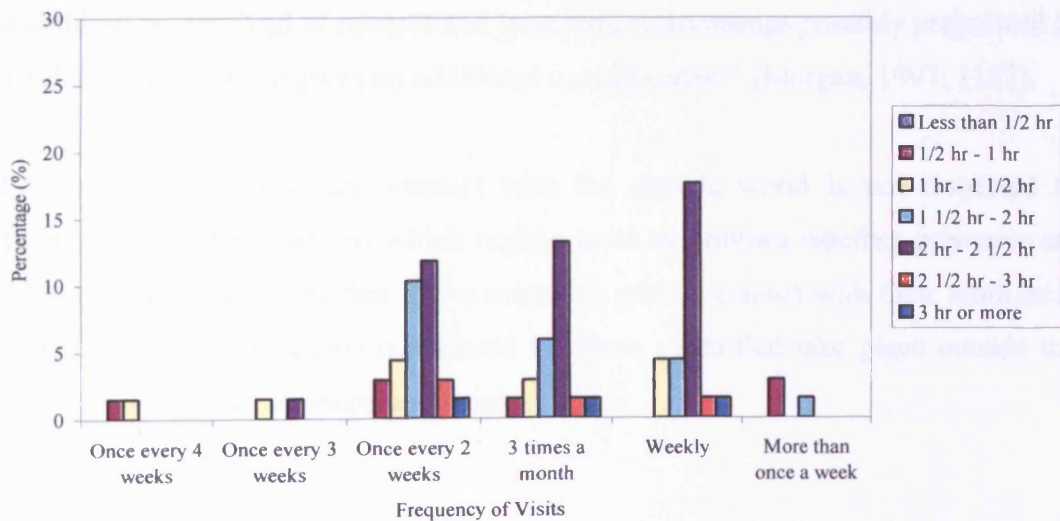
convicted prisoners on basic ranged from those that lasted at least ½ hour and took place once a month to those that took place weekly and lasted 3 hours or more.

**Figure 5.5** Convicted Prisoners on Basic Regime: Visit Length and Frequency



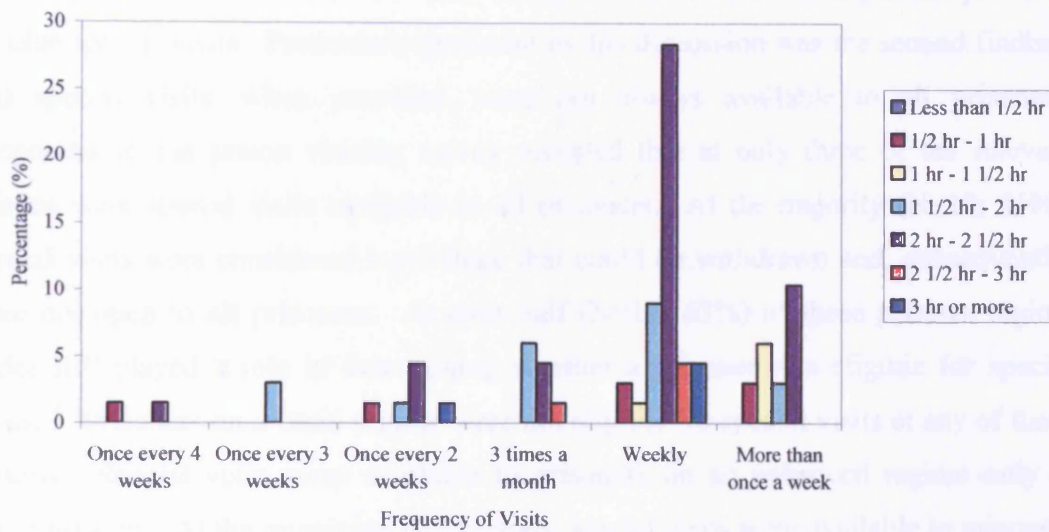
Figures 5.6 & 5.7 show that similar differences existed across prisons for standard and enhanced regime levels.

**Figure 5.6** Convicted Prisoners on Standard Regime: Visit Length and Frequency





**Figure 5.7** Convicted Prisoners on Enhanced Regime: Visit Length and Frequency



The above findings indicate the extent to which prisoners' contact with those on the outside is determined by IEP. Merely examining the difference between regimes demonstrates the extent to which this is the case. It could be argued that the decision to provide extra visits as a privilege contradicts a commitment to family ties. What is more, this arrangement may be theoretically flawed. Morgan (1997) raised this point. He questioned the sense in introducing a system that means a prisoner must earn extra and improved quality visits when research (Ditchfield, 1994) has shown that the quantity and quality of prisoners' relationships with their significant others is the best predictor of future offending. He went on to ask - 'why should prisoners' partners and children be deprived of contact and long term relationships possibly prejudiced in order that prison staff be given an additional control carrot?' (Morgan, 1997: 1187).

IEP's influence on prisoners' contact with the outside world is not restricted to ordinary visits. The extent to which regime level determines whether prisoners are provided with special visits that allow extended, quality contact with their families is explored below. This is also considered for those visits that take place outside the prison, known as town or community visits.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> A typical town visit involves day release from the prison allowing the prisoner and his/her family to spend the day together under normal conditions.

Special visiting arrangements have already been examined (see Section 3.2.4). As has been outlined, the results were significant in two respects. It was found that special visits were not widely available – only one quarter (N=22; 25%) of prisons provided *regular* special visits. Particularly pertinent to this discussion was the second finding, that special visits, when provided, were not always available to all prisoners. Responses to the prison visiting survey revealed that at only three of the relevant prisons were special visits available to all prisoners. At the majority (N=19; 86%), special visits were considered a privilege that could be withdrawn and, consequently, were not open to all prisoners. At over half (N=12; 63%) of these prisons, regime under IEP played a role in determining whether a prisoner was eligible for special visits.<sup>24</sup> Prisoners on a basic regime were not eligible for special visits at any of these prisons. Special visits were available to prisoners on an enhanced regime only at seven prisons. At the remaining five prisons, special visits were available to prisoners on a standard *or* enhanced regime.

Information collected via the prison visiting survey revealed whether or not prisons were providing prisoners with town visits. Just under half (N=39; 44%) of prisons provided town visits. Unsurprisingly, the provision of town visits was restricted to certain types of prison. Higher security prisons, that is, Dispersal and Category B prisons, did not provide prisoners with the opportunity for town visits. All those prisons holding prisoners in open conditions did provide town visits (N=10). Nearly all (N=36; 92%) prisons that provided town visits indicated that these visits were not open to all prisoners. Only three (8%) prisons indicated that town visits were open to all prisoners.<sup>25</sup> Thirty-two out of the thirty-six prisons that indicated that town visits were not open to all prisoners, provided information concerning whether or not regime was amongst the criteria in determining prisoners' eligibility for town visits. At only four prisons (13%) was regime not a consideration in determining which prisoners were eligible for town visits. At the majority (N=28; 88%) regime was amongst the criteria in considering which prisoners were eligible for town visits. At eight (29%) prisons, town visits were available to prisoners on a standard *and* an enhanced regime only. However, at over two thirds (N=18; 68%) town visits were available only to

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<sup>24</sup> Regime was not amongst the criteria in determining the eligibility for special visits at the remaining seven prisons. At these prisons, special visits were only available to certain types of prisoner. For instance at one prison, special visits were available to female prisoners only, at another these visits were only available to life sentence prisoners.

<sup>25</sup> One Category C resettlement prison (Kirklevington Grange); one Category C prison (Wayland) and an adult open prison (Leyhill).

those prisoners on an enhanced regime. At only one prison, an open Young Offender's Institution (Thorn Cross), was town visits available to prisoners on all three regimes. In this case, the arrangement was that enhanced prisoners had regular town visits whereas prisoners on basic and standard regimes had town visits on only their last two visits.

The above findings further demonstrate the extent to which prisoners' contact with those on the outside is influenced by IEP. The decision regarding who can and cannot have a town visit is largely dictated by regime level. What is of particular concern, however, is the influence of IEP on special visiting arrangements. Special visits have been shown to be particularly important to families, especially the children (Lloyd, 1992a). This research has also revealed the benefits these visits provide to those on the outside (see Section 3.2.4). However, these visits would appear to be available only to those prisoners who have been deemed by the prison as worthy. This contradicts Shaw's (1987) argument that it is the right of the child to maintain a meaningful relationship, not the right (or privilege) of the prisoner. In fact, as has been outlined, it was this argument that formed the rationale that eventually led to the introduction of special visiting arrangements. In the next section, one aspect of the arrangements introduced under IEP that does not appear to have been given much consideration is explored - the consequences for the prisoners' family.

### ***5.2.3 IEP: The Visitors' Perspective***

As has been shown, IEP rewards prisoners for good behaviour through providing extra, as opposed to longer, visits. But in order for the prisoner to be actually rewarded for his/her good behaviour, visitors must visit on those occasions when extra visits are provided. The issue addressed in this section is the extent to which the circumstances of those who are required to oblige when prisoners are rewarded these extra visits are considered. IEP is examined from the visitors' perspective. To begin, visitors' views on the visit length and frequency are explored. Visitors' views and experiences of visiting arrangements under IEP are then considered. The final section explores the extent to which visitors were able to meet the obligations that this particular policy places upon them.

Interviewees were not so much concerned about the frequency of visits as the length of visits. Only seventeen of the thirty interviewees expressed an opinion on the frequency of visits. Over half (59%) of interviewees were either satisfied with the frequency of visits (N=4; 24%) or indicated that they would prefer not to have more frequent visits (N=6; 35%). The main reason for these responses were that interviewees could not manage more frequent visits either due to the extra expense that would be incurred or other commitments. As one interviewee points out ‘ . . . if you’re allowed more visits you [can] come more often but it’s whether you’re able to come or not, that’s the thing, with work and everything’ (Debbie). Two fifths (N=7; 41%) of interviewees expressed a preference for more frequent visits. All except one such interviewees indicated that difficulties were not experienced in travelling to and from the prison. The interviewee that did experience difficulties only visited her husband once in every two weeks.

Interviewees were asked their views on the length of visits. Twenty-eight interviewees provided such information. Three-fifths (N=17; 61%) of interviewees were dissatisfied at the length of visits. All such interviewees would have preferred visits to be longer. One interviewee, who visited her boyfriend in Prison ‘B’, was satisfied with the length of weekend visits but would have preferred longer visits during the week. Just under one third (N=9; 32%) of interviewees were satisfied with the visit length. As one interviewee commented ‘*They’re quite good actually*’ (Alison). Only one interviewee felt that visits should be shorter because ‘*you get halfway through the visits and you’ve said everything . . . you sit there for about an hour just trying to think of something to say*’ (Nikki). The remaining interviewee replied that her adopted son could not cope with longer visits.<sup>26</sup>

Four visitors explained why visits should, in their opinion, be longer. Two visitors mentioned the visiting procedure and how this impinged on visiting time. One such visitor described how, the last time she visited, there were two visitors who had a visit that only lasted half-an-hour. These visitors had arrived later than most and were, therefore, amongst the last to have their visit. The interviewee described this situation as:

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<sup>26</sup> This particular interviewee had previously indicated that her adopted son had mental health problems.



*. . . ridiculous . . . if your husband's in there and then he wants his other family to come up on another visit, if you're getting one visit a month and you're only in there half-an-hour, it's not on really is it?*

(Karen)

The remaining interviewees felt that visits should be longer because the time spent with the prisoner passed too quickly. As one visitor explained '*. . . sometimes the time goes that quick, that as soon as you sit down and talk a little bit, it's time to go again*' (Ann).

So interviewees were generally dissatisfied with the length of visits at the two prisons where interviews took place. In addition to this, a number of interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with the length of visits at other prisons. Six of those visitors who commented on visit length mentioned that they had visited, or knew someone else who had visited, a different prison where visits were much shorter. One interviewee commented when asked about the length of visits at Prison 'A'- '*. . . I think we do pretty good, compared to other prisons*' (Cath). Another interviewee visited her nephew in a prison where visits lasted only half-an-hour:

*. . . I go and see my nephew as well and you only get half-an-hour, he's in prison, it's about an hour-and-a-half drive to there and you're only in there half-an-hour . . . By the time you get in there, sit down, your half-hour is up.*

(Jane)

Another interviewee described how visits lasted only an hour or fifty minutes at the prison where her boyfriend was held before he was moved to Prison 'B' (Debbie). Debbie also knew about visiting another prison as her boyfriend's brother was also in prison. According to Debbie, visits to this particular prison (a Category D) only lasted twenty-five minutes. The remaining visitors reported similar experiences:

*. . . to me they seem good because I've only ever been to Milton Keynes, which is remand, and we had half-an-hour if you were lucky, and I'd travel all day for that.*

(Lisa)

*When he was at Belmarsh he only had half-an-hour, I still went every week, a lot farther than this. This is very different than most places. Some places are dreadful.*

(Sue)

*Winson Green was terrible. That was only for half an hour . . . even when he was convicted and he went on this special wing for convicted prisoners, it was still half-an-hour.*

(Alison)

The above findings suggest that it is visit length and not frequency that matters to most visitors. Three-fifths (N=17; 61%) of those visitors interviewed would have preferred longer visits. Yet, as outlined above, that which controls prisoners' contact with their families, IEP, tends to revolve around frequency of visits. Those prisoners displaying good behaviour are more likely to be rewarded with more visits, as opposed to longer visits. This another instance where the situation of the visitor, hence the family, is not considered. Providing prisoners with more frequent visits may even strain relationships. A prisoner may expect his/her relatives to visit on every occasion that s/he has a visit, but this may not always be possible. As outlined earlier, travelling to/from the prison to visit creates particular difficulties for visitors (see Section 4.1.2).

Visitors were asked about their experiences of and views on IEP. Only four out of the thirty interviewees indicated that during the time the prisoner had been at the particular prison, he had been knocked down to a lower regime. This does not serve to indicate how often prisoners are moved down the regimes because, as has been explained elsewhere, the interview sample was biased in that most interviewees were visiting prisoners on enhanced regimes.<sup>27</sup> If the interview sample had included more visitors to those prisoners on the lower regimes no doubt the numbers indicating that the prisoner had been moved down a regime would have been higher. Prisoners' movement up or down regimes is a separate issue. What was of particular interest in this research was how interviewees felt when the prisoner was placed on a lower regime and the extra visits awarded under IEP subsequently removed. The differences between regimes in this respect have already been outlined (see Section 5.2.2). One interviewee whose son had, on occasion, been moved down to a lower regime was rather philosophical when asked how he felt when this happened: *'We didn't lose out . . . he lost out'* (John). This particular interviewee, a father visiting his son, was only able to visit his son once a month due to the distance between the prison and his home.

So, in actual fact, the interviewee did not, to use his words, *'lose out'*. Other interviewees were less than happy when the prisoner had been placed on a lower

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<sup>27</sup> Explanations as to why this was the case were explored in Chapter 2.

regime. One interviewee felt *'awful'* (Angie). Another explained how she lost her visit as well as the prisoner (Tina). The remaining interviewee expressed a similar opinion: *'It's not nice because I'm suffering as well and my child's suffering not seeing him [i.e. the prisoner] regularly'* (Alison). This particular interviewee went to say that she was *'not at all happy'* with the regimes system. She explained: *'I don't think it's right . . . everyone is in there for a crime, I think everyone should be treated the same. I don't think they should say basic, enhanced etc.'*

Interviewee accounts highlight an issue that prison authorities seem to have overlooked in implementing IEP, the prisoner is not the only individual to suffer when moved to a lower regime. Indeed, the situation is often worse for the visitor. S/he has no control over how the prisoner conducts him/herself and, indeed, will have done nothing wrong, yet contact with the prisoner is diminished. So, again, we have another instance where the circumstances of the visitor take second place to the prison (or perhaps more appropriately prisoner) management considerations. Examining the visitors' role in IEP raises another issue, the extent to which prisoners are *actually* rewarded for their good behaviour. Whether interviewees were visiting on every occasion a prisoner was allowed a visit is examined below. The reasons why interviewees did not visit on every occasion are also explored.

Information from the two sample prisons supported that which is already known regarding the difference between basic, standard and enhanced regimes. Those prisoners on higher regimes were provided with more, as opposed to longer, visits (see Section 5.2.2). Comparing how often interviewees visited the prisoner, and the number of visits the prisoner was provided as determined by regime, revealed that not all interviewees visited on every occasion the prisoner was provided with a visit. This information was available for only half of interviewees (N=15).<sup>28</sup> More than two-thirds (N=11; 67%) of interviewees included in this analysis did not visit on every occasion. In most cases, these interviewees were visiting a prisoner who was on an enhanced regime (N=8). Two interviewees were visiting a prisoner on standard and one a prisoner on basic. Seven of the relevant interviewees explained why it was not possible to visit the prisoner on every occasion s/he was provided with a visit.<sup>29</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> It was not possible to establish from the information provided by the remaining interviewees whether or not the visitors were attending all visits that were permitted to the particular prisoners.

<sup>29</sup> Information unavailable for four visitors. For explanation see Section 3.1.1.

most common response was to indicate that the prisoner had other visitors. This is one advantage that an extra visit under IEP offers to prisoners. Extra visits may not be what most visitors prefer but these visits do present prisoners with the opportunity to maintain a relationship with a wider circle of family and friends on the outside than otherwise would be possible. As one interviewee explains *'We're quite lucky because he's on enhanced . . . so he gets 6 Visiting Orders a month, so one week I can come once and the next week twice or I can give the VO to a friend to come at the weekends'* (Lisa). Of the remaining interviewees, one explained that it was too expensive to visit on every occasion her husband was provided with a visit; another explained that the distance between the prison and his home was too great to visit more frequently. The final interviewee was unable to visit on every occasion due to work commitments.

Extra visits are not the only privilege a prisoner can earn under IEP but for those prisoners with contacts on the outside surely it is the one that presents the most important, and therefore the greatest, incentive. IEP is advantageous for a prisoner with many potential visitors but what about a prisoner who has few visitors and/or visitors who cannot visit on every occasion? Surely in the latter cases the incentive is removed. IEP does not, therefore, operate equally for all prisoners. The impact this has on the IEP's effectiveness in controlling certain prisoners' behaviour is a concern that lies beyond the scope of the present study. Suffice to say it is an issue that deserves further enquiry.

#### ***5.2.4 IEP: The Impact Reviewed***

The above findings reveal the extent to which prisoners' contact with their families is dominated by the policy known as Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP). IEP was implemented with a view to reducing violence, disorder and drug use amongst prisoners (HM Prison Service, 1995b). In attempting to achieve these operational imperatives, the Prison Service has introduced a policy that contradicts its expressed commitment to family ties. IEP relies on families to fill an obligation crucial to effective policy operation. Essentially, it takes advantage of their commitment to the prisoner. What is more, the mechanics according to which IEP operates does not take into account their situation. As outlined above, extra visits are awarded under IEP, whereas a significant number of visitors would prefer longer visits. More importantly,

the Prison Service has ignored the consequences for the prisoners' family where IEP is concerned. It has overlooked the fact that it is not just the prisoners who are punished when privilege visits are withdrawn. Partners, children and other relatives are also deprived of contact with the prisoner and are, therefore, similarly penalized.

### **5.3 Security on Visits**

Prison visiting is very much a different experience nowadays when compared to that of the early nineties (Prison Reform Trust, 1998). An unprecedented emphasis on security in conjunction with a concern regarding drug use amongst prisoners has led to what is arguably a more stringently controlled visiting environment. Developments have provoked certain commentators to voice their concern regarding the balance between prisoners' opportunities for quality contact and the need to ensure that prisoners are kept in prison and contraband kept out (Prison Reform Trust, 1998). Prior to examining the evidence relevant to this argument, changes to visiting procedure and environment as implemented in recent times are outlined. Following on from this, security measures that visitors encounter prior to the visit and during the actual visit itself are explored. In each case, current security provisions are considered and visitors' experiences of security measures examined.

#### ***5.3.1 The Emphasis on Security***

The increase in emphasis on security in prison can be traced back to two reports – the Woodcock Report (1994) and the Learmont Report (1995). These reports followed enquiries into the prison escapes from two high security prisons that occurred in September 1994 and January 1995. The Learmont Report (1995) in particular centred on security surrounding visits.<sup>30</sup> The modifications to visits that followed on from this report are summarised below.

The Learmont Report (1995) recommended various measures aimed at reducing the flow of 'illicit items . . . into prisons that probably arrive through social visits' (para. 4.16). For visitors entering the prison, more stringent and consistent searching

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<sup>30</sup> The Woodcock Report (1994) also put forward recommendations concerning security on visits. These were largely endorsed by Sir John Learmont in his subsequent report.

procedures were recommended, as were the more frequent and effective use of X-ray machines and metal detecting machinery, and restrictions on what visitors should be permitted to bring into the visiting area (para. 7.44-47). Changes in how visits were conducted were also recommended - visitors who chose to use the toilet facilities during a visit should be searched before and after visits to the toilet and the visiting area covered by Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) (para. 7.48-49). Changes to the visit room layout and furnishings were also recommended - 'Visit rooms should have fixed furniture and a formal and observable layout' (para: 2.35). The Learmont Report further proposed that closed visits be made available in all secure establishments and imposed when there existed 'reasonable grounds for suspicion' (para. 4.26-28). Restrictions on family visits and play facilities for children were also recommended for certain establishments (para. 2.47 & 2.50). Although not all recommendations were intended for implementation in all prisons, the increased emphasis on improved security procedures pertaining to visits has spread throughout the prison system (Morgan, 1997: 1185). In a recent annual report, the Prison Service stated that it had responded to all, and implemented the majority of, those recommendations contained within the Learmont Report (and the Woodcock Report) (HM Prison Service, 1999b: 21).

Concomitant to considering the recommendations contained within the Learmont Report (1995), the Prison Service was also devising a strategic response to another issue, drugs in prison. The Prison Service planned to reduce illegal drug use in prison. Three strategies were proposed with this in mind – to reduce the supply of drugs into prison, to reduce the demand for drugs within prison and to reduce the 'potential for damage to health of prisoners, staff and the wider community arising from the misuse of drugs' (HM Prison Service, 1995c: 2). The first strategy is particularly pertinent to this research. The Prison Service maintained that most drugs enter the prison via domestic visits (1995c: 12). Various tactics were proposed so as to thwart this alleged entry route. 'Sniffer' dogs were to be deployed, closed visits imposed on prisoners found guilty of drug offences; machines introduced that can 'sniff' drugs contact by visitors and prisoners, and closer supervision by prison officers in the visit room. Other proposals supported the recommendations already contained within the Learmont Report (1995). Arranging and providing furniture that would make it more difficult to pass drugs to the prisoner was identified as an appropriate measure, as was

CCTV use in the visit room. In its Corporate Plan for 1995 to 1998 the Prison Service asserted its commitment to these and other strategies designed to reduce drug misuse in prison (HM Prison Service, 1995b).<sup>31</sup>

The present study is not concerned with the extent to which the Prison Service has been successful in achieving its objective to reduce the level of drug misuse in prison. What is of concern in this research is the extent to which prisons are managing to provide prisoners with appropriate contact with their families, whilst at the same time meeting security needs. The following discussion examines the security measures that presently surround visits, visitors' views on security procedures and the impact these have on contact. Security measures encountered prior to and during the visit are explored.

### ***5.3.2 Security Prior to the Visit***

Visitors are required to undergo various security checks prior to entering the prison. There is, however, one security measure that has in the past attracted particular controversy and that is searching. Research suggests visitors often find searching procedures bewildering (Prison Reform Trust, 1998). Concern has also been raised about the intrusive nature of security checks (Howard League, 1994). McDermott & King cite instances where families visiting prison when searched prior to the visit were subjected to what was described as 'unnecessary humiliation' (1995: 279). Searches conducted on small children have especially attracted criticism. The argument here is not that searching procedures be abandoned. It is possible after all that their existence serves to reduce the pressure on visitors to smuggle illicit items, such as drugs, into prison. What is important is that searches be conducted in an appropriate manner, so as not to cause upset that then carries over into the visit and thus disrupts contact between the prisoner and his/her family.

Any visitor entering the prison may be required to undergo a search, including children and even babies. This is permitted under Prison Rule 71 (1).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> As outlined in Chapter 1, the Prison Service recently published its latest drug strategy '*Tackling Drugs in Prison*' (HM Prison Service, 1998b). This renewed its commitment to improving security measures in relation to visits.

<sup>32</sup> Prison Rules 1999. Prison Rules 1964 86 (1).

Any person or vehicle entering or leaving a prison may be stopped, examined and searched. Any such search of a person shall be carried out in as seemly a manner as is consistent with discovering anything concealed.

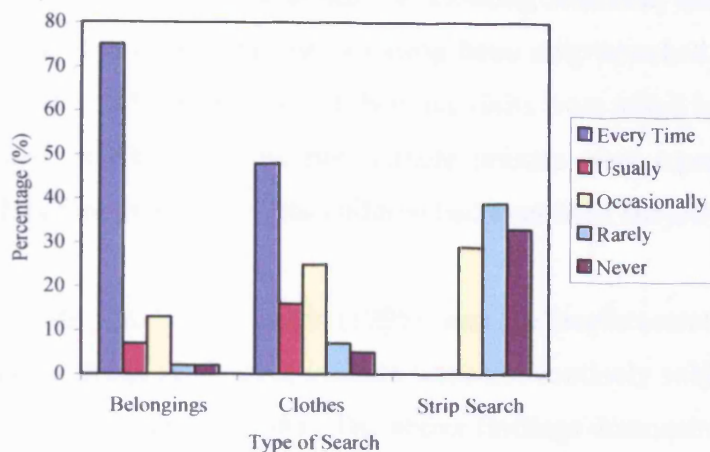
If a visitor declines to be searched, a closed visit may be imposed or the visit not be permitted to take place at all. Where a visit takes place under closed conditions, direct contact between the prisoner and his/her visitor is prevented or at the very least limited. Searching usually takes the form of a rubdown search but under certain circumstances visitors may be subjected to a more intrusive searching procedure. The prison can ask a visitor for permission to conduct a strip search where there exists reasonable suspicion that s/he is in possession of unauthorised items, such as firearms or drugs. On occasion that a strip search is required, the police must be called to attend. Where police officers cannot attend, prison officers can proceed with the search. Where a visitor does not consent to a strip search, or any search for that matter, and where reasonable suspicion exists, 'reasonable force' can be applied (cited in Creighton & King, 1996: 130). Also, provisions under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) Section 24 (6) and (7) permit the arrest a visitor by a prison officer where there are grounds to suspect that s/he are guilty of, or about to commit, an arrestable offence. Prison officers, therefore, have vested in them considerable power in relation to searching procedures. The extensive nature of this power serves to complicate the relationship between prison officers and visitors. This issue is explored further below.

Prior to examining visitors' views on searching procedures, the extent to which prisons actually employed searching as a security measure is explored. Included in the prison visiting survey were questions on how often visitors to the prison were subjected to different searches, namely, belongings search, clothing search (in other words a rubdown search) and strip search.

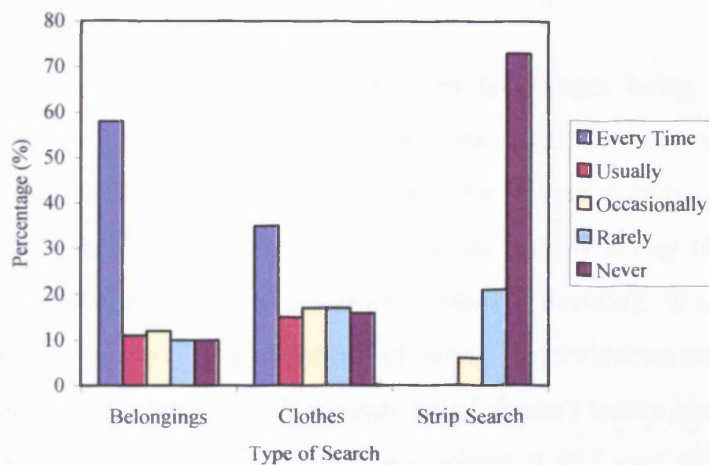
As can be seen from Figures 5.8 & 5.9, adult visitors and children were most likely to have their belongings and clothing searched prior to every visit while strip searches were employed less frequently. Strip searches were most likely to take place rarely where adult visitors were concerned (N=27; 39%) and never (N=46; 73%) where children were concerned.



**Figure 5.8 Adult Visitors: Search Type by Frequency**



**Figure 5.9 Children: Search Type by Frequency**



Searching procedures were found to operate quite consistently throughout the prison system, although there was a slight difference between the higher and lower security prisons. All four dispersal prisons responding to the survey searched visitors' belongings and clothing before every visit.<sup>33</sup> The lower security open prisons were most likely to conduct these searches only occasionally. There appeared to be no relationship between the frequency with which strip searches were employed and prison type, although strip searches were slightly more likely to occur at local prisons in comparison to other prisons.<sup>34</sup> Interviewee accounts regarding how often different

<sup>33</sup> Dispersal prisons are designed to hold those prisoners considered most likely to escape i.e. those classified as Category A, and are therefore the most physically secure prisons in the prison system.

<sup>34</sup> Due to low numbers it was not possible to subject these figures to a statistical test of significance.

types of searches were conducted supported survey findings.<sup>35</sup> All interviewees indicated that rubdown searches, i.e. clothing searched, took place before every visit. Only one interviewee had on occasion been strip-searched. Those interviewees who had children who accompanied them on visits were asked how often the children were searched. Children to the two sample prisons were reported as having a rubdown search before every visit. No children had ever been subjected to a strip search.

Prior to the Learmont Report (1995), and the implementation of strategies to reduce the use of drugs in prisons, visitors were not routinely subjected to a rubdown search (Prison Reform Trust, 1998). The above findings demonstrate the increased frequency with which visitors are now being searched in this way. Having examined the frequency and type of searches that visitors were required to undergo, visitors' views on how these searches were conducted are considered.

Interviewees were asked 'How do you feel about being searched?' Interviewees' feelings on being searched can be described as both accepting and indifferent. Responses included '*I know why they do it, and I know they've got to do it, so it doesn't bother me*' (Paula); '*Not bothered, they're doing their job . . .*' (Cath); '*Fine it's prison rules*' (Val); '*It's got to be done*' (Brenda); '*It doesn't bother me, it's just one of them things . . . procedure*' (Karen). Interviewees explained why the searching did not concern them - '*It [i.e. searching] doesn't worry me. I haven't got anything to be concerned about. I would worry about it if I was trying to smuggle things in*' (John). The phrase '*I haven't got anything to hide*' was reiterated by several interviewees. Another interviewee explained why search procedures did not concern her - '*If you start getting agitated about it [i.e. the searching] they [i.e. the prison officers] get annoyed and it destroys your visit, so what's the point?*' (Sue). As another interviewee explained: '*The thing is you're there, you know you've got to go through the system, you can't say I don't like that bit because you've got to through it anyway. They're not going to change it just for you*' (Jane). A small number of interviewees (N=5) expressed a certain unhappiness with regard to the searching procedure. Interviewees described how searches made them feel '*uncomfortable*' and

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<sup>35</sup> The frequency with which belongings were searched did not apply. At both prisons where interviews were conducted visitors were not permitted to bring personal belongings into the visit room. As one interviewee explained '*You can't take your handbag in. all you can take in is your change, a handkerchief and your identification*'. Visitors were required to deposit their belongings in lockers prior to the visit.

'nervous'. Another interviewee felt that sometimes the searches were '*a bit intrusive*'. One interviewee described her experience as follows:

*. . . you've got to stand there and be searched which is really undignified and your kids have got to be searched and you've got to queue and then you've got to go in and wind down and you got to be happy and smiling for when he [i.e. the prisoner] comes through the door*

(Jill)

Interviewees were also asked 'How do the children react to being searched?'<sup>36</sup> This particular question inspired much more empathic responses. Interviewees described not only how the children reacted to being searched but also how they as parents felt about their children being searched prior to the visit. According to interviewees, children tended to react well to being searched - '*Not really bothered, they don't take much notice, really*' (Cath); '*Not bothered. They take it in their stride*' (Mandy); '*They [i.e. the prison officers] just sort of mildly tickle them [i.e. the children]. She's used to it, she takes off her coat now and holds her arms out . . . she's fine*' (Lisa). One interviewee reported how her children thought the searching was '*quite good fun*' (Jaz). Despite this, and although not directly asked, a number (N=4) of interviewees voiced their objection to searching procedures in relation to children, especially the very young. As one interviewee explained - '*I object to having to take the baby's nappy off. I don't think that's right*' (Angie). Another interviewee commented:

*I think sometimes they go too far with the children. They're not so bad with him [i.e. her son] now but when he was a baby and I was having to bring the pushchair and everything. They used to make me take him out of the pushchair even if he was asleep, which would wake him up and they'd be checking all round the pushchair the odd time they'd check inside his nappy, and I don't think that's right at all. I mean, it's not fair on them when they're asleep, it's not fair anyway . . .*

(Jackie)

Only three interviewees reported that their children had not reacted well to the searching procedures. One interviewee explained '*They [i.e. the children] don't like it. Children do not like it. They accept it, but they do not like it*' (Paula). Another interviewee described how the searches scared her children at first. Another simply said that her children had reacted '*badly*' to being searched.

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<sup>36</sup> This question was only asked of those interviewees who had children whom accompanied them on a visit (N=20).

To a large extent feelings towards searching procedures are dependent on the interaction between the searched, that is the visitors, and those conducting the search, that is the prisoner officers. McDermott & King describe prison officers as the 'human face of the prison to those on the outside', the interaction between them and visitors constituting 'an impression of extraordinary power' (1995: 279). The extent of this power has already been recounted above and will not be repeated here. One area that has, in the past, attracted criticism is prison officers' attitudes towards visitors. The tendency amongst staff to treat visitors as little more than criminals has been documented on more than one occasion (Neate, 1990; Howard League, 1993; McDermott & King, 1992; Prison Reform Trust, 1997). Visitors interviewed as part of the present study were also asked about their feelings towards the prison officers.

Interviewees' responses to the question concerning prison officers were varied. Most visitors seemed to have a good relationship with the prison staff. As one visitor explained *'The ones I have spoken to are always very polite and provided any information I need . . . they are very helpful. I think we've done a lot of good work together'* (Mary). Another interviewee commented *'The prison officers here have always been polite, friendly, interested. There are some that we know by name and they know us by name and they talk to us'* (John). Others found no reason for complaint – *'They're [i.e. the prison officers] fine'* (Lynn); *'They're O.K., friendly enough'* (Cath). Mutual respect was emphasised by certain interviewees. As one interviewee pointed out *'I treat them with respect and would expect them to treat me the same. I treat them like I would treat you or anybody else'* (Sue). Similarly another interviewee responded *'You're alright with them, they're alright with you'* (Angie). Certain interviewees had mixed feelings towards the prison officers with whom they had come into contact. One interviewee explained *' . . . there's a lot of things you could tell them to better themselves'* (Mel). Only three interviewees had negative experiences to relate concerning their interactions with prison officers. As one interviewee explained:

*It's not us [i.e. the visitors] that are in there, but they [i.e. the prison officers] feel that just because we're visiting them that we are them and it's not true. I think it's like if they've got a problem with who we're going to visit, they tend to take it out on us and I don't think that's right at all*

(Jackie)

Another interview expressed similar sentiments *'A lot of them [i.e. the prison officers] treat the visitors like they're the criminals, they treat you like a criminal, they think because they're in there you're in the wrong as well, so that is the attitude of a lot of them'* (Nikki). The final interviewee to respond negatively to the question concerning prison officers related her experience from the previous week:

*I had a bad experience the other weekend. I'd brought some stuff up and I was told he couldn't have it because it wasn't on a property list and I said to him [i.e. the prison officer] what is a property list, and he said don't you know? I said if you haven't told me or there's no notices how am I supposed to know. I said the person I'm visiting doesn't even know about property lists so how do I know? He was really nasty.*

(Karen)

The items that Karen wanted to provide for her boyfriend were *'A flannel and some socks'*. She went on to comment on the 'petty' and 'pathetic' rules and regulations that one had to contend with when visiting a prison. Interviewees often alluded to their experiences relating to certain rules and regulations. This particular issue is re-visited below (see Section 5.3.2).

Up to this point the discussion has centred on searching procedures. It is important to bear in mind that searches are not the only security measure that visitors encounter prior to a visit. Responses to the prison visiting survey revealed the extent to which additional measures have been incorporated into visiting procedures. The majority (N=65; 90%) of prisons for whom information was available indicated that other measures besides searching existed in relation to visitors entering the prison.<sup>37</sup> Seven (10%) prisons indicated that no other security procedures besides searching existed. These prisons tended to be lower security, that is open prisons. Additional security measures identified included metal detectors (N=25; 38%); sniffer/drugs dogs (N=22; 34%); identification systems (such as hand scans, Ultra Violet stamps, palm printing etc.) (N=18; 28%); restrictions on property which can be taken into the visit room (N=16; 25%); X ray machines (N=14; 22%) and CCTV cameras on visitors entering the prison (N=9; 14%). A small percentage (N=8; 12%) of prisons referred to the regulation that visitors must provide ID upon visiting the prison.

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<sup>37</sup> Information was unavailable for seventeen prisons.

Visitors were asked about their experiences with respect to additional security measures encountered prior to the visit. As was the case with searching procedures, interviewees' attitudes to other security measures were largely accepting - *'I don't mind all that . . . it's got to be done, hasn't it?'* (Lisa); *'It's OK. It's prison rules, so I accept'* (Val) *'They have to have them for a reason, don't they?'* (Sam). No interviewees indicated that specific problems had been experienced with the other security measures besides searching encountered upon entry to the prison. One interviewee had not experienced difficulties as such, but did express a certain unhappiness as follows:

*I don't like that barrier that they've just put up outside that gate. It's makes you feel as if you're a herd of cattle going in. They put like a railing just outside the door where you go in, it's like a barrier and it's not been there long and it makes you feel like cattle going into the crusher. It's horrible, I hate it. I got a real thing about it. I don't mind being searched. I don't mind having my ID and that lot, but I hate that barrier for some reason and I have no idea why it is there.*

(Lynn)

Another interviewee commented generally on his experiences in visiting another prison - *'That prison [i.e. prison visited on a previous occasion] is a very, very modern, very high-tech prison and you tend to feel like a no body in the place. It's all video cameras and automatic sliding doors. It's really quite a scary place'* (John). Those interviewees with children were also asked about the children's reaction to the additional security measures. Only two interviewees indicated that their children had experienced difficulties. In both cases, a drugs dog had frightened the children. As one interviewee explained - *'He didn't like the dog . . . it did scare him. I had to put him down and the dog walked round him, so obviously he's going to be scared if the dog is right up to his face and he's wondering why no one's picking him up away from it'* (Jackie).

The above findings reveal the increased emphasis on security that currently surrounds prison visiting. This is exemplified by the increased frequency with which visitors are now subjected to certain searching procedures. The research also drew attention to the visitors' views on security procedures and measures. Examining the most intrusive procedure that visitors encounter prior to the visit, that is searching, revealed that visitors were largely accepting and/or indifferent. Only a minority expressed

dissatisfaction in relation to this particular security measure. This is, perhaps, a credit to the prison officers conducting the searches. Responses to the question concerning prison officers certainly support this possibility. However, the explanation as to why visitors were generally unperturbed by searching procedures or, indeed, those additional security measures encountered could be more complex. Previous literature concerning prisoners' families has pointed out that these individuals, as a group, tend to be rather 'unpoliticised' (Neate, 1990). It is also not entirely unlikely that these families view themselves as somehow deserving due to their association with the prisoner. This could perhaps account for the lack of compulsion amongst visitors to object to the security requirements. The following section moves away from those security procedures that visitors encounter prior to the visit to explore the impact of security on the visit itself.

### ***5.3.3 Security on the Visit***

Those security measures a visitor encounters prior to the visit are not the only measures with which s/he must contend. Measures are also likely to exist in the actual visit room, and visitors encounter these during the visit itself. Previous research has shown how security considerations primarily concerned with preventing drugs being passed over during the visit have come to increasingly dictate the visiting environment (Prison Reform Trust, 1998). Visit rooms are now more likely than not to be furnished or designed so as to restrict contact between prisoners and their visitors and to have Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) surveillance. Prisoners and visitors are also more likely than not to be prevented access to toilet facilities during the visit. It is measures such as these that potentially impact on the quality of contact between a prisoner and his/her family. This research has already touched upon evidence that security considerations are diminishing this quality (see Section 4.2.3.). Prior to examining this in greater depth, those regulations pertaining to security on visits and the relevant findings from the prison visiting survey are outlined.

Standing Order 5 (Communications) indicates that:

. . . all visits be in sight of a prisoner officer and are liable to take place within the hearing of an officer. For the majority of social visits it should be sufficient for officers to be present in the room where visits are taking place, but where necessary it may be stipulated that visits are to be subject

to closer supervision, including being within the direct hearing of an officer.

It further states that an officer supervising visits 'will be responsible for ensuring that no unauthorised article is allowed to pass between a visitor and an inmate'. The prison visiting survey asked respondents to indicate how many prison officers would normally be present in the visit room when visits were taking place. Examining this information in isolation does not reveal much concerning the level of security surrounding visits. The number of prison officers in the visit rooms ranged from less than 2 to more than 10.<sup>38</sup> At over half (N=40; 51%) of prisons for which information was available (N=78) 4 to 5 prison officers were usually present in the visit room during visits. At just over one quarter of (N=22; 28%) prisons there were usually 2 to 3 prison officers in the visit room during visits. These figures were examined in relation to that already known about visit room capacity, that is the number of prisoners that could receive a visit **at any one time**. It was found that there was a statistically significant relationship between the visit room capacity and number of prison officers in the visit room during visits.<sup>39</sup> Those visit rooms with a high capacity had more prison officers in the visit room. This is reassuring in that it implies that visit rooms were supervised in proportion to their size. The prison visiting survey also asked whether or not visits were monitored by CCTV. Just over two-thirds (N=61; 69%) of prisons for which information was available indicated that visits were monitored by CCTV.

These findings serve to indicate the extent to which visits are supervised and monitored, little else. In order to establish the impact security considerations have on contact between prisoners and their visitors one must turn to that information gleaned from interviews with visitors. Visitors were not asked specific questions about those security measures encountered during the visit. Interviewees nevertheless volunteered material relevant to this issue in response to other questions.

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<sup>38</sup> Analysis does not include those prisons with more than one visit room (N=5). In these cases, adequate detail on the numbers of prison officers usually present in the separate visit rooms was not provided. Information regarding the number of prison officers in the visit room during visits was unavailable for a further six prisons.

<sup>39</sup> Significant at < .05; d.f. = 1; value = 6.184 ( $\chi^2$ ); n = 78.



The question concerning conditions in visit rooms yielded comments on the furnishings and how this restricted contact between visitors and the prisoners (see Section 4.2.3). Interviewees described their experiences visiting prisoners in prisons where ‘ . . . seats were bolted to the floor and the tables are bolted to the floor (John); ‘ . . . you’re [i.e. the visitor] not allowed to touch him [i.e. the prisoner] whatever’ (Jaz); ‘ . . . you [i.e. the visitor] can’t even give him a cuddle without getting a bar in your ribs’ (Helen). Another interviewee described how during a visit she was ‘ . . . always conscious of the cameras and the prison officers’ (Paula). Responses to another question also elicited relevant information. Interviewees were asked what for them was the worst aspect of the visit. In response to this question, nearly all interviewees referred to having to leave the prisoner when the visit came to an end. But there were interviewees (N=4) who identified what for them was another unpleasant element to visiting the prison, supervision by prison officers. One interviewee explained – ‘ . . . eyes bear at you when you’re sitting in there . . . we’re very young . . . we like a kiss and a cuddle . . . their [i.e. prison officers] eyes glare at you’ (Mel). Another said:

*They do regular checks on you all the time, you feel like you’re being watched permanently even though you’re doing nothing wrong. I know its part of the prison and everything but sometimes it gets a bit tense, you can’t relax and be how you want to be*

(Ann)

This particular interviewee also referred to CCTV – ‘It’s an invasion, I mean, they’re the convicts, the visitors aren’t, but it feels like we’re being treated the same as they are’. Ann was not the only visitor to express the opinion that prison authorities view visitors as little more than criminals themselves (see above). Returning to the matter at hand, that is the impact security considerations have on that contact a prisoner has with his visitors, questions were also put to interviewees concerning the different ways they kept in touch with the prisoner. Speaking about how she felt about the various forms of contact one interviewee explained that she found it easier to talk to her boyfriend on the telephone because during a visit she was conscious that the prison officers were watching. This particular interviewee also found it difficult to relax during the visit for other reasons:

*There's a lot of drugs things going on and I don't know if you're supposed to lean over, like at first he said to me 'I can't put my hands underneath the table, I've been warned'. He said you've got to watch what you do you know when you put your arms round each other because they [other visitors] keep bringing in drugs and that. I'm a bit better now, but at first I was a bit wary.*

(Helen)

This was not the only instance where an awareness concerning security aimed at preventing drugs entering prison impacted on the visit. Another interviewee explained: *'I try not to go to the toilet when I'm in there . . . but I had to go to the toilet last week . . . and I was worried because I thought they'd take it out on him, you see, I thought they'd search him'* (Sue). Another interviewee related a similar experience:

*. . . last week my boyfriend was dying to go to the toilet after about an hour . . . so he went up to one of the guards and asked to go, and the guard said no because if he went that would be the end of the visit . . . so he had to hang on.*

(Debbie)

The rules and regulations arising from security considerations such as is exemplified in the above case attracted comment from several interviewees. Although not strictly relevant to the issue at hand this particular element to visiting nevertheless deserves further consideration. Findings demonstrate the extent to which visits are dominated with concerns relating to security generally, and drugs in particular.

Two interviewees were unhappy with regard to the rules concerning what can and can not be brought onto the visit. One interviewee describes her experience as follows:

*When the little one was tiny, we came in with a bottle of baby milk and they wouldn't let us take it in on the visit. We had to wait until she started screaming, come out of the visit, go and get it out of the locker and then go back in and warm it up*

(Angie)

Another interviewee was not so bothered with the rules concerning what was, or was not, allowed onto a visit but the fact that these rules varied from one week to the next. She explains:

*Sometimes . . . if I bring this [i.e. fuzzy felt toy] this week they'll just look through it and then let you take it through . . . and then maybe the next week they'll say, no can't let that through. So sometimes you can and sometimes you can't.*

(Lisa)

Lisa went on to suggest that there should be set rules as to what a visitor can and can not bring onto the visit and that these should be consistently adhered to. This being the case would mean that *'everybody [would] know where they stand, so that one week you don't get refused and have to tell a 3 year old, last week you could, but this week you can't'*. Two interviewees had much more serious incidents to relate. Tina described an incident whereby she had been placed on closed visits for trying to pass over a watch to her husband during a visit. Tina was particularly upset about the consequences of this act when she compared her 'punishment' to the 'punishment' meted out to those caught smuggling drugs into prison via the visit. Tina was on closed visits for three months, after which time her visits took place 'right in front of the officers for a further three months.

*. . . and some people get caught with like drugs and God knows what and they get two days closed visits and that is so unfair, honestly. What's more illegal, a watch or drugs? It's only a watch. I've heard from other people that someone got caught with half-an-ounce of cannabis and they get two days closed visits and I get caught with a watch which I wasn't even smuggling in, which I was giving him . . . that's what gets me*

(Tina)

Another interviewee described how she was suspected of attempting to pass drugs to the prisoner and what had happened as a result:

*I had him [i.e. the prisoner] actually dragged off a visit because he was holding my son. Obviously someone got the wrong end of the stick. I mean I'm not going to take drugs into a prison with my son. I don't do that anyway. And he got took off the visit, they didn't get nothing but we had our visit stopped not like they even found anything what they'd thought they'd seen him take off my son. I was disgusted. They just took him off the visit and that was it.*

(Alison)

Alison was actually stripped searched following this incident. Tina and Alison were upset about the particular incidents that had taken place. Both interviewees also felt that their treatment had been unfair.

The above analysis demonstrates that security measures encountered by visitors during the actual visit do, under certain circumstances, disrupt contact between prisoners' and their families. Visitors commented on the restrictions on the physical contact permitted between themselves and the prisoner. Surveillance by prison officers and CCTV cameras also attracted comment. Indeed, there was a perception amongst certain visitors that there existed constant surveillance. In certain cases, awareness in relation to certain security measures translated into anxiety that ultimately prevented visitors relaxing during the visit and enjoying the time spent with the prisoner. Visitors on occasion even altered their behaviour so as not to attract attention to themselves and/or the prisoner. Rules and regulations surrounding visits were also criticised by visitors. Confusion and frustration was expressed in relation to the trivial nature of rules and regulations. Further irritation was caused by the lack of consistency with which certain rules or regulations were applied. These findings further emphasise how important it is that there is clear communication between the prison officers and visitors. Unfortunately, as previous research has shown, communication and explanation with regard to prison rules and regulations does tend to be lacking (McDermott & King, 1992). Interviews with visitors also revealed the potentially serious repercussions for those visitors deemed to be breaking the rules, and the antagonism this leads to between visitors and prison staff.

#### ***5.3.4 A Balancing Act: Security versus Quality***

The above findings demonstrate the extent to which visiting procedure and environment is dominated by security considerations. It was found that visitors tended to endure security measures prior to the visit without little complaint. Reasons for this particular finding were explored. However, those security measures encountered during the visit did cause disruption for certain visitors. One can conclude, therefore, that security considerations are, on occasion, impacting on the quality of contact between prisoners and their families. Another issue raised in the above discussion was the relationship that exists between prison officers and the visitors. That officers occupy a powerful position in relation to visitors makes for a complex relationship. A relationship defined by mutual respect seemed to go a long way towards facilitating a pleasant visiting experience. Unfortunately, there were occasions where the relationship between the prison officers and visitors was less than positive. The

tendency for officers to express inappropriate attitudes and feelings towards the prisoners onto the visitors was a theme in interviewee accounts. Negative encounters in relation to certain rules and regulations also caused contempt between prison officers and visitors. On these occasions adequate communication and clear explanation are important so as to prevent misunderstandings, and avoid confusion and frustration amongst visitors.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

In the introduction to this chapter, it was suggested that prisons have not wilfully neglected their responsibility to assisting prisoners to maintain their family ties but that certain operational requirements have made it difficult for prisons to realize the expressed commitment to family ties. The evidence examined here supports this proposition. Establishments were found to be struggling to meet the demands for visits and this was impacting on prisoners' contact with their visitors. Examining the impact IEP has had on visiting arrangements demonstrated the extent to which prisoners' contact with those on the outside is dominated by this particular policy - a policy that, by its very nature, contradicts a commitment to family ties. The above findings also revealed the extent to which security considerations have come to dominate the visiting environment and impinge on the quality of contact. Having arrived at this conclusion, it is important to emphasise that the issues examined in this chapter are not the only ones that the Prison Service has had to address in recent times. Financial constraints and limited resources must also be acknowledged as contributing to the difficulties that prisons have experienced in committing to family ties. The next chapter examines the commitment to family ties from other quarters - Visitors' Centres and the prisoners' families themselves.

## **6. VISITORS' CENTRES SUPPORTING FAMILIES; FAMILIES SUPPORTING PRISONERS**

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, an argument pursued in previous chapters is re-visited. It has been argued that, despite the Prison Service's expressed commitment to maintaining prisoners' family ties, the needs of families visiting prison continue to be neglected. Earlier discussions focused on the facilities for visitors inside the prison. In this chapter, those facilities normally located outside the prison, referred to as Visitors' Centres, are considered. Visitors' Centres constitute a valuable resource for prison visitors. Their general purposes are to provide visitors with a comfortable environment in which to wait prior to their visit, to provide certain essential facilities, and to provide information and emotional support (HM Prison Service, 1996b). Visitors' Centres have increased in number in recent times (Lloyd, 1992b). Their value as a means to assisting prison visitors has also been officially acknowledged (HM Prison Service, 1994). One could argue that these developments signal a move towards meeting the needs of prisoners' families. This argument is contested in the following analysis. The findings from the present study suggest that needs are not adequately met; that the potential for Visitors' Centres to assist prisoners' families remains largely unrealised. In the second section, the families' commitment to prisoners is explored. This is also an issue that has been touched upon in earlier chapters. It is argued that the extent of commitment from families is such that the Prison Service would find it difficult to function without their assistance. This adds further substance to the argument that the needs of prisoners' families should be recognised.

### **6.1 Supporting Families: The Visitors' Centre**

In this section, the question addressed is to what extent the needs of families visiting prison are met through Visitors' Centres? This is explored on two levels. First, whether Visitors' Centres were available at prisons, and the extent to which Visitors' Centres were providing the necessary facilities, is determined. This analysis draws upon the results from the prison visiting survey. Second, the situation at two prisons at which Visitors' Centres were provided is detailed. In this case, the corresponding analysis draws upon information from observation and interviews with visitors. To

begin, the rationale that originally informed Visitors' Centres and their development in subsequent years is explored.

### ***6.1.1 Why Visitors Centres?***

Visitors' Centres were established initially in response to a concern about the difficulties experienced by visitors upon their arrival at prison. Early research into prisoners' families highlighted this particular issue. For instance, Vercoe (1968) described how 'visitors had to queue outside the prison walls in all weathers, with nowhere to rest, feed or change babies, get something to eat or drink, or for the children to play' (cited in Lloyd, 1992b: 178). Similarly, Matthews (1983: 24) in noting the 'agonising experience' that often constituted the prison visit pointed to the potential for Visitors' Centre to provide a 'supportive and constructive environment' for visitors to prison. The ethos upon which Visitors' Centres were initially established has informed, and continues to inform, how these facilities operate. It is worthwhile, therefore, examining further the principles upon which Visitors' Centres were originally developed.

The first Visitors' Centre was established at Winson Green prison in 1969. It was run by the Probation Service and staffed by volunteers. Monger & Pendleton (1977: 10) outlined the benefits this facility provided to visitors - 'wives and children can come for refreshments and a chat before . . . or after a visit; children can be left with the helpers if it is not desired to take them into the prison'. The importance attached to having the Visitors' Centre outside and separate to the actual prison was emphasised. Monger & Pendleton (1977: 10) explained that this encouraged visitors into the Centre and allowed them to 'feel free to seek help and express themselves in a way which . . . they would not within the prison walls'. Visitors' Centres increased in numbers in subsequent years. Lloyd (1992b) estimates that about twenty were established in the two decades following the inception of the first at Winson Green. Although some were developed through partnerships with prison authorities and the Probation Service, most relied on some form of input from voluntary agencies and organisations. Indeed, the voluntary sector has continued to play an important role in Visitors' Centres. Organisations such as Save the Children and the National Association for the Care and

Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) have been instrumental not only in soliciting support for the provision of Visitors' Centres but also in their management and operation (Lloyd, 1992b; Neate, 1990).

Official recognition for the Visitors' Centre was slow to materialise. In 1989, the Home Office declared that every new or refurbished prison would be provided with a purpose-built Visitors' Centre (Home Office, 1989: para. 7.35). Support for Visitors' Centres then flourished in the early 1990s. Amongst advocates was Lord Justice Woolf. The Woolf Report (1991) recommended that there should be 'satisfactory facilities for visits [at prisons] including an adequate Visitors' Centre' (para. 11.69). In response to the Woolf Report (1991), the Government stated that it would 'consider ways of increasing the provision of Visitors' Centres' (Home Office, 1991a). The then Chief Inspector of Prisons, Judge Tumim, also voiced his support for Visitors' Centres. He pointed to the crucial role that these facilities occupied in the

. . . strengthening of family links [through] not only providing visitors with somewhere comfortable to wait where they can get refreshments but also providing places where families can be helped with problems and information on the prison can be displayed.

(HMCIP, 1994: 34)

The Prison Service formally acknowledged the role of the Visitors' Centre in its Operating Standards document published in 1994. Standard Q14 states:

A suitable equipped visitors' centre should be provided. A statement should be published and displayed in the centre and other prominent areas of the prison open to visitors setting out opening times and facilities available.

(HM Prison Service, 1994: 43)

The Prison Service subsequently reported that during 1993-1994 it had contributed £695,000 to the running costs of 48 Visitors' Centres (HM Prison Service, 1995a: 27). This figure is not so impressive when one considers that the prison estate at this time comprised over 100 different establishments. Furthermore, existing Visitors' Centres were subject to much criticism. In his 1995/6 report, the Chief Inspector of Prisons observed that 'there were too many highly unsatisfactory Visitors' Centres' (HMCIP,



1996: 25). The provision and quality of Visitors' Centres at individual prisons are amongst those issues addressed below.

Prior to turning to the results from this study, it is important to mention one more significant development relevant to the present discussion. In 1996, the Prison Service published its guidelines for good practice for Visitors' Centres (HM Prison Service, 1996b). This document condensed the various functions that Visitors' Centres serve into the following Statement of Purpose:

Visitors' Centres exist to meet the needs of adults and children visiting relatives or friends in prison. They aim to offer a safe, pleasant environment where all visitors are met with dignity and respect, provided with the facilities they need and offered information, support and the opportunity to discuss the difficulties they might face in confidence.

(HM Prison Service, 1996b: 10)

The guidelines were drawn up in consultation with individuals experienced in the management and operation of Visitors' Centres. Although not without its critics (see Lloyd, 1992b), the document provided previously unpublished advice and information on relevant practice and policy issues. The extent to which Visitors' Centres are operating according to good practice guidelines is also an issue that is considered in the following analysis.

### ***6.1.2 Visitors' Centres: Provision***

As outlined above, one of the aims of this chapter is to determine the extent to which visitors' needs are met through Visitors' Centres. The first issue addressed with this aim in mind is provision. Provision is explored on two levels. First, in reference to the Visitors' Centres themselves. Visitors' Centres and their provision at individual prisons are examined. Second, provision is explored in relation to facilities at Visitors' Centres. The extent to which Visitors' Centres were providing the necessary facilities is considered. Together these analyses serve to indicate the extent to which prisons were performing according to Operating Standards.

The prison visiting survey revealed that many prisons do not have a Visitors' Centre. This was the case at just under half (N=39; 44%) of prisons. The majority (N=31;

80%) of these prisons, however, provided a waiting room or area for visitors. The remaining prisons (N=8) had neither a Visitors' Centre, nor a waiting room or area for visitors. The evident lack of provision raises the issue of need. To what extent was there a need for a Visitors' Centre at those prisons where one was not provided?

A question concerning need was included in the prison visiting survey. Respondents for those prisons that were without a Visitors' Centre were asked if they felt there existed a need for a Visitors' Centre at the prison. Over half (N=21; 58%) of respondents considered there to be no such need.<sup>1</sup> An examination of explanations as to why revealed a preoccupation with the practical benefits that these facilities provide to visitors. Respondents indicated that access to the visit room was not a problem. For instance, at one prison, visitors were permitted entry into the visit room 30 minutes prior to visits beginning. At another prison, visitors were '*moved into the visit room without delay*'. These responses suggest a rather limited understanding with regard to the various functions that Visitors' Centres serve. The possibility that visitors to prison perhaps require more than somewhere to shelter from adverse weather conditions seems to have been overlooked. Visitors' Centres act not only as waiting areas but also as a means to providing information, advice and emotional support to visitors (HM Prison Service, 1996b). As Lloyd (1992b: 181) points out, Visitors' Centres 'offer shelter in a metaphorical as well as in a literal sense'. One could argue, therefore, that Visitors' Centres are a necessary requirement at each and every prison. It follows then that visitors' needs are not addressed at those prisons where a Visitors' Centre is not provided.

Respondents identified the need for a Visitors' Centre at fourteen (39%) of those prisons that were without one. At six prisons there were plans to introduce a Visitors' Centre. In most cases, however, these plans were dependent on the availability of funding. This finding supports previous research that has identified limited financial support as a particular problem for Visitors' Centres (Peart & Asquith, 1992; HMCIP, 1994). The Prison Service does provide financial assistance to Visitors' Centres. This fact has been presented as testament to its commitment to family ties (HM Prison Service, 1995a: 27). However, the funding that the Prison Service imparts is not

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<sup>1</sup> Information was unavailable for three prisons.

secured funding.<sup>2</sup> Visitors' Centres must submit funding bids to prison Governors in the same way as prison departments.<sup>3</sup> This means that Government cuts to the prison budget are potentially detrimental to Visitors' Centre provision. Indeed, those cutbacks announced in 1995 elicited particular concern amongst those involved in already under funded Visitors' Centres (FPFSG, 1996). Furthermore, the funding that the Prison Service grants to Visitors' Centres does not suffice to cover all running costs. As the guidelines for Visitors' Centres states 'it is most unlikely that all the necessary funding will be available' (HM Prison Service, 1996b: 13). It recommends that Visitors' Centres obtain charity status and offers advice on how Visitors' Centres may supplement their income through trusts and fundraising initiatives.

Another implication of funding arrangements that is relevant to the present discussion concerns the issue of need. Findings from the present study suggest that prison personnel hold a rather narrow understanding with regard to the various ways in which Visitors' Centres assist visitors. This potentially impacts on provision. Governors at individual prisons may be reluctant to provide financial support where there is perceived to be little or no need for a Visitors' Centre. One way of increasing provision, therefore, may be to raise awareness amongst Governors as to the value of these facilities to visitors.

It has been argued that there exists a need for a Visitors' Centre at every prison. However, this need is undoubtedly more acute at certain prisons, for instance, those situated in isolated locations. Findings from the present study have shown that certain prisons, namely closed and open prisons, tend to be located on remote sites that are distant from centres of population (see Section 4.1.1). However, results revealed that it was at these prisons that Visitors' Centres were most likely to be absent. Just under half (N=22; 46%) of closed prisons and nearly all (nine out of ten) open prisons were without a Visitors' Centre. At the majority (N=19; 76%) of local prisons a Visitors' Centre was provided. Furthermore, all but one of those establishments that were without a Visitors' Centre *or* waiting room/area (N=8) were closed or open prisons.

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<sup>2</sup> In 1994/5 and 1995/6 the maximum financial support per Visitors' Centre as provided by the Prison Service was £15,000 (HM Prison Service, 1996b).

<sup>3</sup> This arrangement followed the devolvement of budgets to individual prison Governors in April 1994. Previously, Prison Service Headquarters administered grants to Visitors' Centres.

So it was most likely that a Visitors' Centre was not provided at those prisons where there quite possibly existed a particular need for one.

At just over half (N=50; 56%) of prisons, a Visitors' Centre was available. One cannot assume, however, that where a Visitors' Centre was provided, visitors' needs were automatically met. The facilities these Visitors' Centres extend to visitors also require consideration. Lloyd (1992b) identified a number of core facilities and services that she felt Visitors' Centres should provide in order to meet the needs of families visiting prison. Another source of information on what Visitors' Centres should provide in terms of facilities is the Prison Service good practice guidelines for Visitors' Centres (HM Prison Service, 1996b). The facilities these publications recommend that Visitors' Centres make available to visitors are outlined below. The extent to these facilities were provided is then considered.

Lloyd (1992b: 180) recommended that Visitors' Centres provide a supervised play area, canteen facilities, a quiet room to allow privacy for visitors wishing to discuss confidential matters, a comfortable waiting area, toilets, baby changing facilities and a public telephone. Lloyd (1992b) also recommended the provision of certain services. These included play matched to the needs of children; childcare advice; inexpensive food and drinks; counselling; advice and information, and a means to linking families to support in their home areas (Lloyd, 1992b: 180-181). According to Prison Service guidelines, Centres should, at the very least, provide a seating area, toilets, a quiet area/office, a refreshment counter, an area for children and a payphone (HM Prison Service, 1996b: 32). The guidelines document additionally emphasises that these elements constitute the minimum that Visitors' Centre should make available to visitors. It states that this 'minimum should not be seen as adequate if more could be offered' (HM Prison Service, 1996b: 32)

The prison visiting survey included a question that required respondents to identify which facilities were provided to visitors via the Visitors' Centre. Responses revealed that Visitors' Centres rarely provided all those facilities considered necessary by Lloyd (1992b). Furthermore, not all Visitors' Centres were operating according to the minimum in terms of facilities as recommended in Prison Service good practice

guidelines (HM Prison Service, 1996b). All Visitors' Centres provided a seating area and toilet facilities. Baby changing facilities were available at nearly all Visitors' Centres (N=44; 90%). Just over three-quarters (N=38; 78%) of Visitors' Centres provided visitors with refreshments. It is important to bear in mind, however, that refreshment facilities could well constitute nothing more than a vending machine. The extent to which Visitors' Centres were equipped with adequate canteen facilities, therefore, remains unclear. Nearly three-quarters (N=35; 71%) of Visitors' Centres provided a public telephone. Whereas most Visitors' Centres provided a play area for children (N=34; 69%), only a small percentage (N=6; 12%) provided a *supervised* play area (or crèche as it was referred to in the questionnaire). At only one-quarter (N=13; 27%) of Visitors' Centres were quiet rooms available.

Respondents were invited to describe those facilities and services provided via Visitors' Centres, other than those already mentioned. Responses revealed that, on occasion, a conscious effort had clearly been made in catering to the needs of visitors. At one Visitors' Centre, visitors were not only provided with all those core facilities as indicated but also childcare necessities, such as baby foods, nappies, pushchairs and highchairs, and a 'drugs hotline'. Another Visitors' Centre provided a counselling service to visitors and second hand clothing. At another Visitors' Centre, a Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) volunteer came to the Centre on a regular basis to offer advice to visitors. It must be acknowledged, however, that these cases were exceptional. At only six (out of fifty) Visitors' Centres were such additional facilities and/or services provided.

The above analysis suggests that, even where Visitors' Centres were provided, the needs of visitors were not always adequately provided for. One must concede, however, that the situation for visitors was much worse at those prisons that were without a Visitors' Centre. As outlined above, eight (9%) prisons were without a Visitors' Centre or waiting room/area. Presumably, there was little in the way of facilities for visitors outside these prisons. Even at those prisons (N=31) where there was a waiting area/room, facilities were lacking. At only six of these prisons, were refreshment facilities available. Facilities for children were practically non-existent - only two prisons provided a play area or crèche. Furthermore, waiting rooms when

available were prone to overcrowding. At six (19%) prisons, waiting rooms were frequently overcrowded. A further eleven (36%) reported that waiting rooms were occasionally overcrowded. At one prison overcrowding in the waiting room was very rarely a problem as the facility was so 'poor' that visitors were reluctant to use it.

Operating Standard 14 states that a 'suitable equipped Visitors' Centre should be provided' (HM Prison Service, 1994: 43). The above findings reveal the extent to which this standard has not been achieved. A Visitors' Centre was not provided at a significant number of prisons. Furthermore, even where one was available, the recommended facilities were not always provided. The evidence presented above provides further support for the argument that the needs of families visiting prisons remain unrecognised. This argument is developed further in the following section. At this point, the discussion moves away from the findings of the prison visiting survey. The situation at two specific prisons, both of which provided a Visitors' Centre, is explored. The analysis draws upon information collected from two sources - observation and interviews with visitors.

### ***6.1.3 Two Visitors' Centres in Practice***

Observational data was collected at the Visitors' Centres provided at the two prisons at which interviews with visitors were conducted - Prison 'A' and Prison 'B'. Findings relating to the two Visitors' Centres are each explored in turn. Information obtained via observation is examined first. A number of issues are considered, such as accessibility; staffing arrangements; premises; the relationship with the prison; provision of information, and provision and quality of facilities. Visitors' views on the particular Visitors' Centres are then explored. Findings from observational study, together with interviewee accounts, serve to indicate the extent to which these particular Visitors' Centres were meeting the needs of adults and children visiting the respective prisons.

If a Visitors' Centre is to respond to visitors' needs, it must be open on days and at times that correspond to when its facilities and services are most likely to be in demand. The extent to which the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A' was operating

accordingly was explored. The Visitors' Centre opened on every day that visiting at the prison took place, 1 hour prior to when visits were due to commence. It remained open throughout visiting time and did not close until 45 minutes after visits at the prison were scheduled to finish. On the face of it, these opening times may seem appropriate. Observation revealed, however, that this was not the case. On any given day, at least eight to ten visitors arrived an hour (on occasion more than an hour) before the Visitors' Centre opened. This was actually 2 hours prior to when visits at the prison actually commenced. The reason as to why visitors felt compelled to arrive at the prison at this time is a separate issue. It is, however, one that is relevant to the present discussion. Upon arrival at the prison visitors were allocated a number that dictated the order in which they were permitted entry into the prison. This arrangement was not so much the problem. The difficulties stemmed from the rather protracted procedures involved in gaining entry to the prison. Due the time taken to process visitors, those who arrived at the prison later than most were more likely to receive less than the maximum visiting time (see Section 3.1.1). Visitors, therefore, tended to arrive at such a time so as to avoid this eventuality. In this case, both the prison and the Visitors' Centre were failing visitors - the prison for the way in which visits were organised and the Visitors' Centre for not opening at an earlier time.

Turning now to staffing arrangements in the Visitors' Centre. Lloyd (1992b) recommends that Visitors' Centres employ 'staff capable of working in a professional, non-judgmental manner' (1992b: 180). On no occasions were the individuals who worked in the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A' seen to conduct themselves in such a way that contradicted this recommendation. Paid civilian staff, volunteers, and prison officers worked together to staff the Visitors' Centre. The prison employed a full time co-ordinator to perform management duties. The only other paid member of staff was the booking clerk. It was her responsibility to take bookings for visits from visitors in person and by telephone. The booking clerk only worked weekdays. At the weekends, uniformed prison personnel were employed to take the bookings for visits. Volunteers were relied upon to perform the day-to-day duties such as opening-up, serving refreshments and checking in visitors. There was usually at least one volunteer in the Visitors' Centre on any given day. It was noted that the contribution from volunteers

was such that the Visitors' Centre would have struggled to function effectively without their assistance.

The Visitors' Centre itself was housed in a building that constituted little more than two adjoined portacabins. Informal interviews with staff revealed that the Visitors' Centre had been located in this building for about six years.<sup>4</sup> The structure was beginning to show its age. It was more than slightly shabby and run down in appearance. To a first time visitor, it was not immediately obvious that this building was actually the Visitors' Centre. Although physically separate from the prison, several factors contrived to give the impression that it was a part of, or at the very least closely associated to, the prison. It was painted a rather drab institutional grey and located only a few metres away from the main prison reception area. It was also noted that a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) camera surveyed its entrance. The Visitors' Centre was also very much involved in the administrative procedures surrounding the prison visit. It was here that visitors booked future visits and 'checked-in' prior to their visit. This latter procedure involved visitors queuing to obtain a number that dictated the order in which visitors would be permitted into the visit room. The Visitors' Centre was also where the property that visitors wished to be passed on to prisoners was processed. This meant that there was at least one prison officer present in the Visitors' Centre prior to every visit. As noted above, uniformed prison personnel also performed the function of booking clerk at the weekends. The presence of prison officers in conjunction with the involvement in visit administration somehow reinforced the initial impression that the Visitors' Centre was closely related to the prison.

Upon entering the Visitors' Centre, one could turn either left or right. To the right, was the main waiting area that could accommodate, at most, about fifteen visitors. Seating was rather formally arranged. Chairs were placed around the outside of the room with a table in the middle. In one corner of the waiting room, there was a display cabinet containing various items that had been made by the prisoners. It was noted that these items were for sale. A sign indicated that any money raised was to be used to purchase Christmas presents for prisoners' children. The co-ordinator's office was

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<sup>4</sup> The co-ordinator also explained that a new Visitors' Centre was soon to be established at the prison. Funding had been secured and planning permission was imminent.



adjacent to the main waiting area. It also served as a quiet room available to visitors wishing to discuss private and confidential matters. A counselling service was provided to visitors on an informal basis only.<sup>5</sup> The toilet facilities were located to the other side of the main waiting area. Information provided to visitors in the main waiting area included - public transport timetables; taxi numbers; a few posters advertising voluntary organisations concerned with supporting prisoners' families and numerous leaflets offering advice on Social Security Benefits. It was noted, however, that the latter, although provided in different languages, were rather dated. It was also observed that there was a general emphasis amongst that information provided on drugs and drug-related issues.<sup>6</sup> HM Prison Service Statement of Purpose was prominently displayed in the main waiting area within the Visitors' Centre. It was additionally noted that application forms for Assisted Prison Visits were not freely available in the Visitors' Centre. Indeed, there was no information at all on assisted visits provided or displayed in this particular Visitors' Centre.

There were two rooms to the left side of the Visitors' Centre. One room constituted what was loosely referred to as the reception area. It was here that visitors queued to check-in prior to their visit, to hand-in property for the prisoner and to purchase certain refreshments, namely tea, coffee or juice. Some information concerning visits was displayed in the reception area. For instance, there was a list outlining what items were permitted to be handed-in for the prisoner and the telephone number for booking visits. A wanted poster and a newspaper clipping about a visitor caught attempting to smuggle drugs into a prison were also displayed, as was HM Prison Service Race Relations Statement. There was also a notice stating that 1347 visitors had been arrested for possession of drugs since April 1997. The other room on this side of the Visitors' Centre was known as the booking office. The booking office served various functions. As the name suggests, it was here that visitors booked future visits with the booking clerk. Property lockers for visitors were provided in the booking office, as were play facilities for children. Provision for children visiting the prison was observed to be rather limited. There was no designated play area. A few toys were provided. It was noted, however, that these tended to be old, broken and more than

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<sup>5</sup> The Co-ordinator was a trained counsellor.

<sup>6</sup> Informal discussions with the Visitors' Centre co-ordinator revealed that she had recently held a drug awareness week for visitors. This could account for the emphasis on the subject.

not, left in their box located in the corner of the room. The booking office also served as an additional waiting area for visitors. Baby changing facilities and disabled toilets were located just outside the entrance to the booking office.

The above account provides some indication as to what the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A' provided for visitors. Turning now to visitors' views. Eight out of the fifteen visitors interviewed at Prison 'A' criticised the Visitors' Centre. One interviewee described the Visitors' Centre as '*rubbish*' (Jackie). Another felt that the Visitors' Centre was '*not very good*' (Jen). Three interviewees were complimentary in certain respects but felt that there was room for improvement. The remaining interviewees were completely satisfied with the Visitors' Centre and indicated that there were no improvements that they would like to see introduced. These particular interviewees differed from the others in one respect - none had young children who accompanied them on visits to the prison.

Interviewees drew attention to three aspects of the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A' with which they were dissatisfied – the facilities for children, the provision of refreshments and access to the Visitors' Centre. Eight interviewees felt that facilities provided for children in the Visitors' Centre were lacking. As one interviewee explained '*there's absolutely nothing for them [i.e. her children] to do*' (Paula). Another interviewee remarked '*really there's nothing for the children*' (Jackie). One interviewee pointed out '*they haven't got enough for them to play with . . . not for the old ones anyway*' (Jen). Inadequate facilities for children created problems for visitors. One interviewee commented '*If you bring the children it's very stressful because there's not a lot for them to do. They get fed-up*' (Cath). Another interviewee outlined the difficulties she experienced in attending to both the needs of her children and those of her imprisoned boyfriend:

*I don't like to get here too early because he [i.e. the child] gets fed up. You don't want to come here early so you leave it until later, but then by the time you get in there you miss half the visit. Either way it's awkward. And then he'll [i.e. the boyfriend] moan because you've not got here early, then if I do get here early he [i.e. the child] gets fed-up.*

(Jackie)

This interviewee is referring to the visiting procedure that compels visitors to arrive at the prison at least an hour prior to when visits are scheduled to commence (see Section 3.1.1).

Four interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction in relation to the refreshment facilities that were provided in the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A'. Interviewees felt that there should be more choice where refreshments were concerned - as one interviewee pointed out '*... if you don't drink tea or coffee then tough*' (Paula). The final criticism angled at the Visitors' Centre concerned access. Two interviewees felt that the Visitors' Centre should open earlier. One interviewee usually arrived at the prison at about 11.00 a.m. The Centre opened at 1.00 pm. She explained:

*In the winter it is a little bit difficult standing outside for an hour, hour-and-a-half. Also, when you are elderly, you need to go to the ladies quite often. I've got kidney problems with diabetics and so on ... there should be a facility where at least that is open before the time.*

(Mary)

Similarly, the other interviewee commented '*... if you happen to be waiting outside for an hour, which we were today, after you've driven for hour-an-a-half, you can be crossing your legs and looking round for a bush*' (Paula).

Data obtained through observation and interviews suggest that, despite the fact that a Visitors' Centre was available at the prison, the needs of visitors were left wanting. This assertion can be defended on three grounds. First, access was not as it should have been. As noted above, the Visitors' Centre did not open at a time that corresponded to when visitors arrived at the prison. Second, it was found that, although the Visitors' Centre was operating according to those minimum requirements as outlined in the good practice guidelines, the quality of certain facilities were lacking. Third, it was noted that, despite its autonomy in management terms, the Visitors' Centre seemed very much under the authority of the prison. This is reflected particularly in the nature of certain material displayed in the Centre. Proximity to the prison and the presence of uniformed staff also gave the impression that the Visitors' Centre was merely an extension of the prison. This situation contradicts previous research that has emphasised that Visitors' Centres remain separate and independent

from the prison (Monger & Pendleton, 1977; Neate, 1990; Lloyd, 1992b). Such a relationship has been identified as essential if Visitors' Centres are to function according to their fundamental purpose, that is 'to meet the needs of adults and children visiting relatives or friends in prison' (HM Prison Service, 1996b: 10). Despite the identified inadequacies, the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A' was benefiting visitors in one important respect that should be acknowledged. It provided visitors with somewhere to congregate prior to visits and this facilitated the formation of informal support networks. Visitors were often observed sharing information, exchanging advice and discussing their problems amongst themselves.<sup>7</sup> As one interviewee pointed out *'There's always someone to talk to in here'* (Lisa).

Turning now to the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'B'. An examination of the extent to which this particular Visitors' Centre was meeting needs revealed a slightly different situation to that as observed at the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A'. As before, findings from the observational fieldwork that was conducted in the Visitors' Centre are considered first. Visitors' views are then explored.

The Visitors' Centre at Prison 'B' was supposed to open on every day that visits at the prison took place. Staffing problems, however, meant it was, on occasion, closed on visiting days.<sup>8</sup> The co-ordinator left his post shortly after fieldwork commenced at this prison. In the absence of a replacement, the responsibility for running the Centre fell to volunteers. It was not that volunteers were unwilling to take on this responsibility. Indeed, if it were not for the dedication of a few, the Centre would not have opened at all. On occasion that the Centre remained closed there was simply no one available to open it. There were no facilities for visitors besides those provided in the Visitors' Centre. When the Visitors' Centre was closed, visitors who travelled to the prison on public transport waited outside the prison, with no shelter or access to basic amenities.

Visitors usually started arriving at the prison about 1 hour to 1½ hours before visits at the prison were actually due to commence. Visiting procedure provided an explanation as to why visitors arrived so early. Exactly the same situation existed at

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<sup>7</sup> This finding most likely explains why visitors to this prison were better informed about Assisted Prison Visits despite the absence of any material on the subject in the Visitors' Centre (see Section 4.1.2).

<sup>8</sup> This occurred on at least three occasions over the four week period during which this Visitors' Centre was observed.

Prison 'B' as was observed at Prison 'A'. Visitors upon their arrival at the prison were allocated a number that dictated the order in which they were permitted entry into the prison. Again, there were delays in processing visitors through to the visit room that resulted in those visitors who arrived at the prison later than most receiving less than the maximum visiting time (see Section 3.1.1). So visitors arrived early so as to ensure a place at the start of the queue and, with this, the maximum amount of time with the prisoner. As one interviewee explained – *'you've got to get here early to get an early tally [i.e. number] otherwise you miss half your visit'*.

Unlike the Visitors Centre at Prison 'A', the Centre at Prison 'B' opened at times that corresponded to the arrival of visitors. Only rarely were visitors observed arriving at the prison before the Visitors' Centre opened. On weekdays, the Visitors' Centre opened 1¼ hours prior to when visits at the prison commenced. At the weekend, the Visitors' Centre opened 1¼ hours before visits at the prison were scheduled to begin. The Visitors' Centre remained open during visits and closed 45 minutes after visits had finished. It was noted, however, that visitors tended to leave the Visitors' Centre and make their way over to the prison at least 30 minutes prior to the time when visits were scheduled to begin. Visitors then waited outside the prison gates, where there was little in the way of shelter, until it was their turn to be let into the visit room.<sup>9</sup> Again, visiting procedure provided an explanation for visitors' actions. Interviews, informal and formal, revealed that visitors were anxious not to miss their designated place in the queue. As one interviewee explained – *'You've got a number, but they [i.e. the prison officers] don't always stick to it . . . if you're not there or if you're standing back and don't hear them shouting, someone else will go through'*.

The Visitors' Centre at Prison 'B', like the one at Prison 'A', was also housed in a portacabin. Unlike the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A', the one at Prison 'B' was very much physically separate from the prison. It was located to one side of the prison car park and was about five minutes walking distance from the actual prison. The Visitors' Centre appeared to be rather new. Indeed, conversations with staff revealed that it had only been open since March 1995.<sup>10</sup> This Visitors' Centre differed from the one at Prison 'A' in another respect – it was not at all involved in visit administration.

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<sup>9</sup> There was a bus shelter on the road just outside the prison gates. Visitors found shelter here when it was raining.

<sup>10</sup> Fieldwork was conducted in 1998.

The co-ordinator also explained that prison officers never came into the Visitors' Centre. Observation supported this claim. There was a sign prominently displayed in the Visitors' Centre that clearly outlined the relationship it had with the prison. It stated that the Visitors' Centre was not part of the prison. It also reassured visitors that any problems raised with staff would be treated with absolute confidence and without prejudice.

Upon entering the Visitors' Centre, one immediately encountered a large notice board. On the side facing the entrance, there was a poster that stated 'Welcome' in several different languages. The purpose of the Visitors' Centre was also clearly outlined. On the other side of the notice board, ample information relevant to prisoners' families was displayed. This included - public transport timetables; literature from various voluntary organisations that provide support for prisoners' families and a poster providing contact details and information on Assisted Prison Visits. It was noted, however, that the relevant forms that visitors require in order to apply for assisted visits were not provided in the Visitors' Centre.<sup>11</sup> Another poster stated - *'Don't run the risk. Bringing drugs into this prison may cost you your freedom'*. Also displayed on the notice board were two notices concerning visits. One informed visitors that there was a possibility that visiting sessions may be cut short due to increased demand for visits under Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP). The other outlined the privileges that prisoners were permitted under IEP at this particular prison. Numerous leaflets on social security benefits were also available. This literature was observed to be relatively recent and published in a variety of different languages. Information on visiting procedure at the particular prison was also clearly displayed in the Visitors' Centre. Turning now to the specific facilities provided in the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'B'.

The entrance to the Visitors' Centre led into what was the main waiting area. Seating for approximately twenty visitors was provided. It was immediately obvious that someone had made a conscious effort to provide a waiting area that was informal, comfortable and inviting. The room itself was brightly decorated. Pictures and children's drawings adorned the walls. Comfortable chairs were arranged around

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<sup>11</sup> Conversations with staff confirmed that this was indeed the case.

small coffee tables upon which various magazines were placed. There were plants on the tables and curtains over the windows. A play area for children occupied one corner of the room. Although this was an unsupervised play area, it was observed to be well equipped. Numerous toys, books and games were provided. Refreshment facilities were also available at this Visitors' Centre. There was a serving counter, with a small kitchen attached, from which visitors were able to purchase a varied range of drinks and snacks. Toilets and baby-changing facilities were provided. The co-ordinator's office served as a quiet room for visitors wishing to discuss private matters. Unlike the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A', there was no counselling service, informal or otherwise, provided at this Visitors' Centre. One final noteworthy characteristic of this Visitors' Centre was that it allowed visitors the opportunity to express their views on the facilities provided. Visitors using the Visitors' Centre were invited to sign a comments book. A perusal of the entries revealed the positive light in which visitors viewed the Visitors' Centre. For example, one visitor had written '*excellent . . . a lifesaver*'.

On the basis of the evidence presented above one could tentatively conclude that the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'B' was fulfilling its defining purpose, that is, to meet the needs of visitors. It offered a pleasant environment in which to wait, it was well equipped and it also provided ample information that was relevant to prisoners' families. The nature of the information provided to visitors was also appropriate in that it focused primarily on welfare issues that may concern prisoners' families. Another respect in which this particular Visitors' Centre addressed needs was manifested in the detachment it had from the actual prison. As has been pointed out, such a relationship is considered crucial if Visitors' Centres are to adequately respond to the needs of their users (Monger & Pendleton, 1977; Neate, 1990; Lloyd, 1992b). Having said this, it was not the case that the needs of visitors to this prison were always adequately provided for. For instance, as noted above, the Visitors' Centre had no co-ordinator. This resulted in restricted access to the Visitors' Centre. Ultimately, prison personnel are to blame for allowing this situation to arise. It was their responsibility to recruit and employ a co-ordinator. Also, as was the case at Prison 'A', it seems that visiting procedures were, to a certain extent, undermining attempts to address visitors' needs. Dialogue between representatives from the Visitors' Centres

and the respective prisons may have helped redress the balance between visitors' needs and organisational imperatives.

Turning now to visitors' views. Interviews conducted with visitors presented further testament to the extent to which this particular Visitors' Centre was meeting needs. Interviewees were generally very positive about the Visitors' Centre. Only four, out of the fifteen visitors interviewed, identified possible improvements. Two of these interviewees felt that the Visitors' Centre should provide sandwiches. The remaining interviewees were unhappy with the opening times at the Visitors' Centre. Both expressed their view that the Visitors' Centre should open earlier. As one interviewee put it - *'I'd like the loo to be open earlier'* (Wendy). These interviewees usually visited on the weekend. As noted above, at these times the Visitors' Centre was open only just over an hour prior to when visits at the prison commenced.

All visitors interviewed at Prison 'B', including those who identified possible improvements, expressed their approval of the Visitors' Centre and the facilities provided therein. Interviewees commented - *'It's very nice'* (Jill); *'Quite good, everything's here if you need it, toilets and canteen'* (Jaz); *'I think it's quite good it gives you somewhere to go and get a hot drink'* (Debbie); *'When it's cold outside it's really nice to come in'* (Pat); *'This [i.e. the Visitors' Centre] is a good idea'* (Nikki). Interviewees were particularly complimentary about the facilities provided for children in the Visitors' Centre. For instance, one interviewee commented *'The children's corner is good'* (Jaz). Another interviewee observed *'I've never seen a kid unhappy in here with what they've got, my children enjoy it, and there's plenty of books for the older ones as well'* (Nikki). She went on to explain that the facilities for children in the Visitors' Centre made visiting much easier. One interviewee, who was only on her second visit to the prison, identified another benefit of the Visitors' Centre:

*Well, it helps me just because it gives you somewhere to stay and everyone's in the same position in here. I know when I came last week, I didn't know what to expect, but I asked somebody and they told me, you can ask the lady who gives you the coffee, and today a woman has done the same, she's asked me . . . but in that way it is quite good. Sometimes you don't want to approach the guards because you always think they look a bit standoff-ish*

(Debbie)



Two other interviewees also remarked on the volunteers who staffed the Visitors' Centre. Eileen explained - *'The people [i.e. the volunteers] who come on are very good'*. Similarly, another interviewee commented that the volunteers were *'ever so friendly'* (Pat). However, Pat went on to explain that at previous prisons she had visited, the volunteers working in Visitors' Centres had not been so friendly - *'some places you go they're [i.e. volunteers] ever so nasty . . . in the way they spoke to you and that'* (Pat).

Interviewees often commented on their experiences of visiting other prisons when asked about the facilities provided in the Visitors' Centres. Indeed, it was quite common for interviewees at Prison 'B' to modify their views on the Visitors' Centre with the addendum *'its better than most places'* or similar. Three interviewees recounted their experiences of visiting prisons that were without a Visitors' Centre. For example, one interviewee described visiting a prison where visitors had to:

*. . . queue outside the prison with no shelter, no nothing. It was terrible, absolutely terrible. And they don't let you in a minute earlier or ten minutes earlier, it could be pouring down with rain and they still won't let you in.*

(Jane)

Two interviewees to Prison 'A' had also encountered similar difficulties at other prisons. John, for instance, described the Visitors' Centre at Prison 'A' as *'excellent'*. However, he went on to say *' . . . when you compare it to a prison like Lincoln, what you do at Lincoln, you stand in a queue in the rain, outside, and that's it. It's hideous'*. Comments such as these underline the extent to which Visitors' Centres represent a valuable resource for visitors.

#### ***6.1.4 Visitors' Centres: Unrealised Potential***

The evidence presented above suggests that the potential for Visitors' Centres to operate as a means to providing support for prisoners' families has yet to be realised. This is perhaps most clearly exemplified in the apparent lack of provision, both in terms of Visitors' Centres themselves and facilities provided within Visitors' Centres. The examination of the situation at two specific prisons raises three issues. One concerns the discrepancy between what visitors require and what Visitors' Centres

actually provide in terms of facilities and services. Clearly, it is not enough to simply provide a Visitors' Centre. Consideration must also be given to the extent to which facilities and services are relevant to the users. The second issue concerns the relationship between Visitors' Centres and prisons. The above findings demonstrate how important it is that constructive links exist between the two. Visitors' Centre must maintain a certain independence from the prison in order to meet the needs of families visiting prison. But at the same time it is also important that Visitors' Centres and prisons work together in partnership with this objective in mind. The final issue concerns the value of Visitors' Centres. Interviews with visitors revealed the role that Visitors' Centres play in making a visit to the prison a much more positive experience. This adds further substance to the argument that their provision is a necessary requirement at every prison.

## **6.2 Supporting Prisoners: The Families' Commitment**

McDermott & King's (1992) interviews with prisoners' families led them to the conclusion that there existed an additional, unwritten and unofficial Prison Rule entitled 'Stand By Your Man'. They commented on the extraordinary tenacity with which prisoners' spouses, partners and mothers adhered to this Prison Rule. The present study has already presented evidence to suggest that this conclusion is well founded. Earlier chapters documented the willingness on behalf of families to undertake difficult, expensive and frequent journeys to prisons in order to visit the prisoner. In this chapter, the commitment that families have to supporting prisoners is explored further. This is measured with reference to the time that individuals have spent, and intend to spend, supporting prisoners. The financial costs of imprisonment to families, other than those incurred through visiting, are also examined.

### ***6.2.1 The Families' Sentence***

Commitment is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the time that individuals have sacrificed, or intend to sacrifice, to visiting that person who is in prison. This is explored below. The reasons as to why families feel compelled to support the prisoner throughout his/her sentence are also considered.

Interviewee accounts revealed that visitors had spent on average 2½ years visiting their respective partners, brothers and sons at over 65 different prisons. Examining averages somewhat disguises individual commitment. Eileen had been visiting her husband in prison for 10 years in total at four different prisons. Sue had been visiting her husband for nearly 6 years at five different prisons, both here and abroad. For four interviewees, this was not the first time their partner or husband had been in prison. Jill had not only visited her husband for the past 14 months. She also visited him for the 12 months he was in prison on a previous occasion. Alison's fiancée had served numerous prison sentences. She had been visiting him for 7 years in total - *'Since I've been with him I've been visiting him in prisons. He's been all over the place, I've toured bloody England with him . . . he's been in and out of Borstals, prisons, Young Offenders since the age of fourteen'*. Similarly, Pat's son had been in prison on eight previous occasions. She had been visiting him for eight years, in total.

All interviewees stated that it was their intention to continue to visit the prisoner for the remainder of that time he would be in prison. This is perhaps not so much a commitment for those visiting a prisoner who is serving a relatively short prison sentence or those who are visiting a prisoner who has only a few months left to serve. For others, the intention to continue to visit means undertaking a long term of prison visiting and all else that comes with supporting a person in prison. For instance, Mel has been visiting her boyfriend for nearly 2½ years. She indicated that she intended continue to visit her boyfriend during the remainder of his sentence. He was sentenced to a 15 year prison term. Mel was not the only interviewee to express the desire to continue visiting a prisoner who was serving a long sentence. That there were visitors amongst those interviewed who were already long term visitors suggests that certain visitors will continue to support the prisoner during his/her time in prison, even if it was over years rather than months.

An examination of the frequency with which interviewees visited provides further testament to the dedication that families have to supporting the prisoner. As outlined earlier, over half (N=15; 57%) of interviewees visited the prisoner once a week or more and just under one third (N=8; 31%) visited twice a month.<sup>12</sup> Two interviewees

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<sup>12</sup> Information unavailable for four interviewees. See Section 3.1.1.

visited once a month and the remaining interviewee three times a month (see Section 3.1.1). An insight into why visitors visited as often as they did was provided when interviewees were asked 'Do you ever visit when you would rather not?' Ten interviewees indicated that, on occasion, they had visited when they would have preferred not to. When asked why, interviewees most often referred to the prisoners' welfare - '*They [i.e. the prisoners] need you*' (Paula); '*They [i.e. the prisoners] look forward to it . . . if they're feeling down, it's not fair to them if you don't come*' (Cath); '*It keeps him going*' (Jen); '*I've got to come for him*' (Jackie); '*He expects me to visit*' (Helen); '*Because he needs it*' (Lynn). What these comments reveal is the priority position that the prisoners' needs occupy in these lives of visitors. Their own needs are neglected in order to ensure the prisoners' happiness. This tendency has been noted elsewhere (see Section 4.1.3). Evidence as to the commitment families have towards supporting prisoners is presented above. The next section continues in a similar vein. The level of commitment is measured this time with reference to the financial costs of imprisonment to visitors.

## 6.2.2 The Financial Cost of Commitment

The present study has already drawn attention to the financial costs that prisoners' families bear in relation to the prison visit (see Section 4.1.2). In this section, those additional costs that usually accompany imprisonment are explored. Previous research has noted that prisoners often put their relatives under pressure to send money in and to buy items for them on the outside (Peart & Asquith, 1992; McDermott & King, 1992). Indeed, a recent study found that partners of prisoners often went without themselves to ensure the prisoner was provided with whatever s/he required. (Codd, 1997). Commentators have often called for an increase in prisoners' wages so as to reduce the demands that prisoners make of their families (Ruxton, 1989; McDermott & King, 1992; NACRO, 1994c).<sup>13</sup> This research looks again at the extent to which families are relied upon to provide financial support for prisoners.

Fourteen out of the thirty visitors interviewed regularly sent in money for the prisoner. The amount of money ranged from £10 to £100 a month. On average, interviewees

<sup>13</sup> Under present arrangements prisoners are paid an average £6 per week (Livingston & Owen, 1999).

were sending prisoners £65 per month. The remaining six interviewees did not send in money. Four of these interviews indicated that other family members sent money to the prisoner. As one interviewee commented – *'His family's good like that, he gets what he needs from his family'* (Mel). All four interviewees were visiting their 'boyfriend' or 'partner' in prison. Another interview, who was also visiting her partner, provided the following explanation as to why she did not send in money - *'I can't afford to give him any money. Basically, the choice is have me visit or nothing . . . the only money I've got is money to come and visit'* (Cath). The remaining interviewee explained that she did not have to send money to her husband because *' . . . fortunately he doesn't smoke, all he ever buys are phone cards and necessities'* (Sue).

All, but one, interviewee had, at some time or another, provided the prisoner with other items, such as clothes, shoes, trainers, tapes, CDs and books.<sup>14</sup> Only six interviewees were able to provide an estimate as to how much they had spent on such items. On average, these interviewees were spending £10 per month. Often the amount of money interviewees spent on such items varied from one month to the next. One interviewee explained - *'Over a month, it could be £50 or it could be £10'* (Val). Similarly, another interviewee commented – *'It does vary . . . in a proper month when he needs clothes, socks and things, about £60'* (Mel). Certain interviews were able to identify the cost of particular items they had recently purchased for the prisoner. One interview had purchased a coat for her boyfriend that cost £100. She explained *'They don't want cheap stuff . . . I wouldn't spend £100 on a coat for myself, but I did for him'* (Jane). Likewise, another interviewee who was unable to estimate exactly how much money she spent on such items, commented – *'He won't have cheap things. He won't wear anything that's cheap'* (Angie). Interviewees were also asked about larger items they may have provided for the prisoner. Nineteen out of the thirty interviewees had, at some point, bought the prisoner other items such as CD players, computers, quilt covers, curtains. An average £376 had been spent on such items per interviewee. Where interviewees had not provided larger items, it was not the case that the prisoner had not asked for such items. Two interviewees indicated that financial constraints meant that they could not provide what the prisoner had asked for. As one interviewee explained *'If I could afford to I would'* (Jackie). In the remaining cases, it was most

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<sup>14</sup> The exception had only been visiting her boyfriend for a short time.

often the case that other family and friends had provided for the prisoner. One interviewee explained that her husband had asked for a radio. His friends had paid for this, as she could not afford to. Similarly, another interviewee commented '*He's got a lot of friends who buy him stuff*' (Tina).

Only eight out of thirty interviewees indicated that they had ever felt under pressure to provide for the prisoner. One interviewee described her situation as follows:

*I don't think he really means to do it, but he tries to make me feel guilty if you can't buy it. I suppose the way he looks at it is all he can have so it's why can't you get it for me, it's all I ask you for and you can't get it, but at the same time I've got my son to look after and myself and bills to keep and my car to run, but sometimes I don't think he understands that because he's not in the same situation as me, he doesn't realise*

(Jackie)

Another interviewee explained '*You know he's [i.e. the prisoner] got to be the priority and sometimes when you've got bills and everything you could do without having to pay for him*' (Jill). That not more interviewees indicated that they had felt under pressure to provide for the prisoner quite possibly reflects the prisoners' relationship with the interviewee and individual circumstances more than anything else. Five of the interviewees who had felt under pressure were visiting their husband or partner. All had children to support. Two interviewees were visiting their son in prison. Both were struggling financially. As one interviewee explained - '*We feel we must give him what he needs if we can get it, but I'm not working. I don't have a lot of money*' (John). The remaining interviewee visited her brother in prison. Both her parents were unemployed. She also had two young children.

The additional expenditure that accompanies the imprisonment of a loved one, as outlined above, may not seem particularly excessive. However, it is important to bear in mind that these costs are in addition to those incurred as a result of maintaining contact with the prisoner. The average cost of travelling to/from the prison to visit was just under £20 per visitor (see Section 4.1.2). As outlined earlier, most interviewees made the journey to the prison at least once a week or more (see Section 6.2.1). It is also important to put these figures in context. As has been noted elsewhere, it is likely that prisoners' families, like prisoners themselves, come from relatively deprived

economic backgrounds (see Section 1.1). That families manage to make the visits and put money aside for prisoners' needs in spite of their financial circumstances demonstrates their level of commitment to supporting prisoners.

### **6.2.3 The Families' Commitment Reviewed**

In the above discussion, further evidence as to the sacrifices that families make for their loved ones or relatives who are in prison is presented. In previous chapters, the willingness on behalf of families to endure long, expensive and frequent journeys to the prison in order to maintain contact with prisoners was explored. In this chapter, the willingness on behalf of families to support prisoners throughout their prison sentence and provide them with money and other items that they may require was examined. The fact that families themselves are likely to be struggling financially further exemplifies the level of their commitment to prisoners. The extent of the commitment from families is such that if they were to withdraw their support, the Prison Service may well find itself facing yet another crisis. The Prison Service depends on this commitment. Yet, as is outlined in this and earlier chapters, there is little that the Prison Service provides for these families in return. Their circumstances are ignored, their needs placed second to other penal considerations and the support they provide to prisoners taken for granted.

## **6.3 Conclusion**

In the introduction to this chapter, it was argued that the potential for Visitors' Centre to function as a means to assisting families has yet to be realised. The evidence examined above indicates the extent to which this is the case. Further support for the argument pursued in earlier chapters was presented – that the Prison Service's expressed commitment to family ties is little more than rhetoric. The families' commitment to supporting the prisoner was also explored in this chapter. Taking the above findings with those presented in previous chapters reveals the true extent to which the prison system relies on these individuals, a prison system that does little for them in return. Clearly, the Prison Service needs to look again at the way in which it treats prisoners' families if it is to claim a true commitment to family ties.

## **7. PRISONERS' FAMILIES: A WAY FORWARD?**

In January 1983, Matthews published the findings from her study on the experiences of prisoners' families. She described prisoners' families as the 'forgotten victims of the penal system'. Several years later, Matthews (1989: 7) looked again at the situation. She argued that prisoners' families could 'still be accurately described as forgotten victims, suffering through no fault of their own from the normal operation of the penal system'. The present study set out to determine the extent to which, a decade later, this description remains applicable to prisoners' families. The findings suggest that prisoners' families continue to be ignored by a prison system that treats them as little more than a resource, removed from penal considerations yet entwined into policy when their assistance is required. In the first section of this chapter, these findings are reviewed. In the second section, recommendations for improving the situation for prisoners' families are considered.

### **7.1 The Present Study**

In this section, the criticisms aimed at previous research in the area of prisoners' families, as identified earlier in this thesis, are reviewed. The way in which the present study has attempted to address these criticisms is considered. The discussion then moves on to explore the theoretical implications of this research and the resulting recommendations. The main findings from the present study are then presented.

#### ***7.1.1 The Position Prior To This Study***

In Chapter 1, four points were raised in relation to previous research on prisoners' families. First, it was noted that prisoners' families as a subject area remains relatively under-researched. Studies that have addressed issues relevant to prisoners' families are few and far between. It was also noted that those studies that have been conducted have tended to focus on the 'typical' prisoners' family, that is, the partners and spouses of male prisoners and their children.

Second, it was found that much of the research was conducted prior to the early 1990s. As outlined in Chapter 1, much has changed within the prison system since this time.



In 1993, the Government renewed its emphasis on law and order policies. This led to an increase in the prison population that, in turn, led to overcrowding in prison. Also, there has been an increased emphasis on security and control in prison following escapes from two high security prisons and the subsequent enquiries (see Woodcock, 1994; Learmont, 1995). As far as prisoners' families are concerned, this development is significant for two reasons. First, it led to the introduction of additional security measures in relation to visits. Second, it ultimately resulted in the implementation of the policy known as Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP). This policy is relevant to prisoners' family ties as one privilege that prisoners may be earn under IEP is extra and improved visits. Another issue that has particularly preoccupied the Prison Service in recent years is drug misuse amongst prisoners. This, again, is significant to prisoners' families, as it has led to the implementation of various measures aimed at stemming the flow of drugs into prison via domestic visits.

Turning now to the third point, it was observed that previous research has tended to be relatively small-scale. In other words, studies were based on rather small samples. For example, Davies (1992) in her study on the financial cost of men's imprisonment to women and children interviewed only eight women who had partners in prison. The final point raised in relation to previous research on prisoners' families was that, with the exception of a few, studies have tended to be largely atheoretical. There are four major approaches that have in the past dominated within criminology - left idealism; administrative criminology; right realism and left realism (see Young, 1994). Much of the research conducted in the area of prisoners' families was not informed by or located within any of these particular theoretical traditions.

The present study attempted to address each of these points. In relation to the first and second points, it adds to and updates current knowledge. For instance, the present study examines the impact of recent developments, as identified above, on prisoners' opportunities to maintain contact with their families through visits. Where the third point is concerned, an explanation as to why previous research has tended to be based on relatively small samples is provided. As outlined in Chapter 2, prisoners' families as a group are not easily accessed. The present study attempted to address this point through adopting a multi-method approach that involved the collation of information from various sources. A self-completion questionnaire was forwarded to all prisons in

England and Wales (133 at the time). This postal survey, referred to throughout this thesis as the prison visiting survey, elicited a response rate of 67%. Second, semi-structured interviews with individuals visiting someone in prison were conducted. Thirty interviews in total were completed at two separate prisons. Third, observational data was also collected at the two prisons at which interviews were conducted.

Turning now to the final point, theoretically, the present study may be located within the feminist tradition in criminology. Recent feminist work emerging from North America has drawn attention to the 'hidden' implications of crime control policies for women *outside* the criminal justice process (see Danner, 1998; Massey et al, 1998). This new approach focuses, amongst other issues, on 'women and children whose lives have been affected by the men they love or indirectly hurt by policies designed to control people other than themselves' (Miller, 1998: xv). As outlined in Chapter 1, prisoners' families constitute one group with whom this new approach is concerned. Feminist work in this area is informed by a desire to change the direction of criminal justice policies through bringing the voices of these women 'closer to the centre of policy-making' (Miller, 1998: xv). This concern also informed the present study which focused specifically on penal policies and practices. The aim was to try to make a difference for those women who more often than not constitute the prisoners' family. To this end, a number of recommendations for changes to penal policies and practices are presented (see Section 7.2).

### ***7.1.2 Considering the Implications***

In this section, the theoretical implications of this research and the resulting recommendations are considered. The implications of the recommendations are considered with reference to the feminist aims upon which the research was based. The discussion then moves on to examine the implications for working with offenders to reduce their offending behaviour.

As outlined above, a feminist perspective formed the theoretical basis for the present study. The concern was to try to improve the lives of those women who more often than not comprise the prisoner's family. In order to achieve this objective, a number of changes to visiting policies and practices are proposed. These changes are designed

to make it easier for families to maintain contact with their loved ones who are in prison. It could be argued, however, that the proposed changes might also serve to increase women's oppression. Facilitating contact may provide men in prison with additional means to exert control over the lives of the women on the outside who visit them. Such an outcome is very much at odds with the feminist endeavour and, indeed, the theoretical position that informed the present study. It is therefore important to clarify exactly how the recommendations as presented will benefit women.

The findings from this research suggest that the way in which the prison system treats the women who more often than not comprise the prisoner's family places certain restrictions on their lives. The recommended changes to visiting policies and practices are intended to remove such restrictions and give these women back some control over their lives. To take one example, the findings from this research revealed that prisons tended to provide one visiting session per day, usually in the afternoon. The corresponding recommendation is that prisons should provide visitors with the option to visit in the morning and evening. Such an arrangement provides the women concerned with more choice as to when to visit. It provides them with more control over their own lives. The proposed changes to visiting policies and practices are therefore concerned with empowering the women who visit someone in prison. The problem remains, however, that the recommendations if implemented may make it easier for men in prison to manipulate the women who visit them. One possible response to this situation is to encourage these women to see the various ways in which prisoners may be using them. Further research to reveal how this may be achieved is clearly required.

The limited response to the needs of families visiting prison, as revealed in the present research, may be explained with reference to the law and order ideology that currently dominates penal policy. As Codd (1998) points out 'within a penal climate dominated by the discourse of law and order, justifications for facilitating the rehabilitation of offenders through assisting families have limited application'. Rehabilitation formed the central aim of the penal system in the 1950s and 1960s. The 'rehabilitative ideal', as it was known, collapsed partly as a result of research which questioned the effectiveness of measures intended to reform offenders (see Lipton et al, 1975; Brody, 1976). The belief that 'nothing works', that 'whatever you do to offenders makes no

difference' was soon widely accepted amongst commentators on and professionals working within the criminal justice system (Cavadino & Dignan, 1992: 36).

The view that 'nothing works' has been challenged in recent times (see Gendreau & Ross, 1987; McGuire, 1995; Underdown, 1995). McGuire (1995) summarised the cumulative findings from meta-analytic and narrative reviews of early research into the effectiveness of interventions designed to reduce re-offending. He identified a number of core principles for effective programmes. One of these principles he referred to as 'community base'. McGuire (1995) found that community-based programmes generally yielded more positive results. The relevance of this finding for the present research is not immediately obvious. However, McGuire (1995) went on to state that 'proximity to individuals' home environments has a greater prospect of facilitating real-life learning'. This is very much pertinent to the present study. It adds further support to the argument for community prisons as envisaged by Woolf (1991). Other research into the effectiveness of rehabilitative programmes has drawn attention to the need to consider social factors in working with offenders to reduce their offending behaviour (see Raynor & Vanstone, 1994; 1996). One such social factor may be offenders' community ties. Research has already shown that prisoners who manage to sustain family relationships during their time in prison are less likely to re-offend upon release (see Holt & Miller, 1972; Ditchfield, 1994). The potential for programmes that include a component aimed at assisting prisoners to maintain their family ties to reduce future offending should be explored.

In the above discussion, two main areas for future research were identified. The first concerned the relationship between men in prison and the women that visit them. The possibility that making it easier for families to maintain contact with prisoners might actually increase women's oppression was acknowledged. Further research exploring ways in which this may be addressed was recommended. The second area for future research was concerned with the wider issue of crime reduction. The scope for attending to prisoners' family ties in designing rehabilitative programmes for offenders in prison was identified. In the next section, the discussion returns to the findings from the present study.

### ***7.1.3 The Main Findings***

Early research into prisoners' families conducted in the late 1980s and early 1990s drew attention to the lack of consideration the Prison Service afforded to families visiting prison. This situation was reflected in the language writers employed in reference to these families. For instance, Matthews (1983) described prisoners' families as the 'forgotten victims of the penal system'. However, following the Woolf Report (1991) and subsequent reforms, commentators were optimistic that, at last, the Prison Service was starting to address the issue of prisoners and their families (see Light, 1993). Prison Service publications from this time would lead one to believe that this was indeed the case. For instance, in its 1993/4 report the Prison Service declared that it recognised the 'importance of helping prisoners to maintain their family ties' (HM Prison Service, 1995a: 27). In this thesis, it has been argued that the expressed commitment to family ties is little more than rhetoric. In reality, the Prison Service has a long way to go if it is to meet its obligations in relation to prisoners' family ties.

Support for this argument was initially found in the discrepancy between policy and what actually occurs in practice. Further evidence to suggest that the Prison Service is less than committed to family ties was found in the extent to which the needs of families visiting prison remain unmet and/or marginalized by other organisational imperatives. For instance, it was found that not all prisoners were provided with the minimum amount of contact with their visitors to which they are entitled; that visiting arrangements and procedures tend to operate according to that which was most convenient for the prison with little consideration for visitors' needs or circumstances; that conditions under which visits take place remain far from ideal; that facilities for visitors, both inside and outside prisons, continue to be inadequate and that opportunities for extended, quality contact for prisoners and their children remain limited. It was also found that visitors continue to endure long, expensive journeys to/from prisons in order to visit and remain inadequately informed with regard to issues that concern them, such as assisted prison visits and visiting arrangements. Findings also revealed the extent to which the prison system depends on the families of prisoners. It was noted that if families were to withdraw their assistance, the prison

system might well find itself facing yet another crisis. Why then has there been so little progress towards meeting the needs of families visiting prison?

It has been argued that prisons have not wilfully neglected their responsibilities in relation to family ties but that factors, such as overcrowding, and the obligation to address other operational concerns have undermined the expressed commitment to family ties. It was found that increased numbers in prison, coupled with the introduction of a system of Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP), has resulted in a demand for visits that individual prisons have struggled to meet. This, in turn, has affected the contact provided through visits to prisoners and their families. IEP was implemented in response to concerns regarding order and control in prison. At a policy level, IEP contradicts the expressed commitment to family ties. In practice, it completely disregards the prisoner's family. The requirement to maintain a certain level of security in prison in conjunction with attempts to reduce drug misuse amongst prisoners have also undermined the ability to respond to obligations where prisoners' family ties are concerned. Findings revealed the extent to which security considerations have come to dominate the visiting environment and impinge on the quality of contact that prisoners have with their families.

## **7.2 Improving the Situation for Prisoners' Families**

In this section, a number of recommendations for changes in policy and practice are presented in order to improve the situation for prisoners' families. These are also listed in Appendix 6. Recommendations have been grouped under eight headings. First, recommendations relating to the regulations that govern how much contact a prisoner is permitted to have with his/her family are presented. Two general recommendations are then considered. The discussion then moves on to consider recommendations relating to specific aspects of the visiting process. Ways in which visiting procedures and arrangements, and the quality of contact provided via visits may be improved, are discussed. Recommendations relating to special visits; for improving the provision of information to visitors; for addressing the difficulties visitors encounter in travelling to/from the prison to visit and reducing the financial demands that prisoners place on their families are then considered. Finally, a number

of recommendations relating to the provision and operation of Visitors' Centres are presented.

### ***7.2.1 Recommendations Relating to Visiting Entitlements***

An examination of the regulations that dictate how much contact a prisoner is permitted to have with his/her family and the extent to which prisons were adhering to these regulations raised three salient points. First, the language used in Standing Orders in relation to minimum visiting entitlements was found to be ambiguous. For instance, it is not immediately obvious exactly how many visits prisoners are entitled to receive over a certain period of time or how long these visits should last. Operating Standards were found to be similarly vague in this respect. **Prisoners' entitlements in terms of visits should be clearly stated in Standing Orders and Operating Standards. These entitlements should be made clear to prisoners.**

The second point again concerns Standing Orders. It was noted that Standing Orders contain much of the detail with regard to how much contact prisoners are permitted to have with their visitors. Yet, as has been pointed out, Standing Orders provide 'no more than non-statutory guidance to those charged with managing the prison system' (Livingston & Owen, 1999: 21). Establishments are, therefore, under no particular obligation to adhere to Standing Orders. It follows that prisons are not required to operate according to minimum visiting entitlements. The findings from this research demonstrate that prisons were, on occasion, providing prisoners with less than the minimum in terms of visiting entitlements. **Minimum visiting entitlements should be re-instated as a Key Performance Indicator for the Prison Service and remain so.**

The third point concerns the clause contained within Standing Orders that allows prisons, under certain circumstances, to operate below minimum visiting entitlements. Relatively speaking, minimum visiting entitlements do not allow prisoners and their families a great deal of contact. Under Standing Orders, convicted prisoners are entitled to at least 1 hour visiting time per month. To reduce this to 30 minutes a month, as is currently permitted, restricts contact to an unnecessary degree. Ideally, the provisions contained within Standing Orders that permit prisons to operate below

minimum visiting entitlements should be removed. However, a recommendation along these lines is somewhat impractical as circumstances are bound to arise that leave prisons with little choice but to operate below the minimum. What is required is some degree of monitoring as the extent to which establishments are operating below minimum visiting entitlements, when this is taking place and under what circumstances. **Information to show how often, when and why prisons are operating below minimum visiting entitlements should be collated annually and disseminated accordingly.**

### ***7.2.2. General Recommendations for Every Prison***

Prior to examining recommendations relating to specific aspects of the visiting process, two general recommendations are presented. These recommendations are considered at this point as they form a prerequisite to certain other recommendations presented in the remainder of this chapter.

The findings from this study drew attention to the extent to which individual prisons continue to neglect the needs of their visitors. For instance, it was found that visiting procedures and arrangements tended to operate with little consideration as to visitors' needs and circumstances. Furthermore, as mentioned above, a similar indifference was found to exist in the provision of facilities for visitors at prisons. The two recommendations presented in this section are concerned with assisting prisons to address this situation. The first step towards meeting visitors' needs is to establish exactly what their needs are and the extent to which these needs have been met. One way to obtain this information is to conduct a needs analysis. It is important that each individual prison conduct its own analysis, as visitors' needs are likely to vary from one prison to the next. It is also important that such an analysis is conducted on more than just the one occasion as the needs of visitors may change over time. For instance, local prisons, in particular, have a high turnover of prisoners, which means the visiting population and, therefore, visitors' needs are likely to change from time to time. All those issues relevant to visitors should be addressed in the needs analysis, from travelling to/from the prison to facilities for visitors at the prison itself. **Every prison should conduct a regular needs analysis in order to assess the services, facilities**



**and support required by visitors. Every aspect of the visiting process should be examined.**

In order to conduct regular needs analyses as recommended and also ensure that the information obtained is met with the appropriate response requires a certain amount of organisation. It follows that someone at the prison needs to be designated this responsibility. In the subsequent discussion, a number of additional duties relating to visits are identified. On this basis, it is argued that what is really required at every prison is an individual whose sole responsibility is to co-ordinate efforts to assist prisoners in maintaining their family ties. This leads to the second recommendation - **A Family Contact Development Officer (FCDO) whose sole responsibility is to oversee and co-ordinate all aspects of family contact should be employed at every prison.**

### ***7.2.3 Recommendations Relating to Visiting Procedures & Arrangements***

A recurring theme to emerge from interviews with visitors was their dissatisfaction in relation to visiting procedures. At both the prisons at which interviews were conducted, visits were scheduled to commence at a particular time. In fact, visits did not begin at the scheduled time for all visitors. Both the respective prisons began allowing visitors into the prison around the time when visits were actually supposed to commence. This arrangement, in conjunction with the length of time required to process visitors into the prison, meant that certain visitors, namely those who arrived later than most, received less than the maximum available visiting time. This situation impacted on visitors in two ways. First, it meant that visitors felt compelled to arrive at the prison for their visit excessively early. Second, the situation led to resentment and frustration amongst visitors. **Prisons should make themselves aware of the difficulties that visitors may be experiencing as a result of visiting procedures and consider arrangements that are more convenient to all concerned. This could be covered in the needs analysis as mentioned above.**

There is one way in which the difficulties that visitors encounter in relation to visiting procedures may be addressed. This is to extend visiting hours and introduce a system whereby visitors make an appointment to visit. Visits could take place, for example,

from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. with visitors allowed to make a booking for a visit anytime between these specified hours. The needs analysis referred to above could be employed to assist prisons in deciding the time period over which visits might take place. Such an appointment-based system would reduce the probability that visitors arrived at the prison at the same time. The benefits for visitors are twofold. Waiting times may be reduced and the likelihood that visiting time is lost due to delays in processing visitors through to the visit room decreased. **Prisons should explore the possibility of introducing more flexible visiting arrangements and extending the time periods over which visits are available.**

There are other advantages to arranging visits in the above way. One is that it would allow visitors the opportunity to visit at times when it is perhaps more convenient for them. Findings from this research highlighted the particular difficulties visitors encountered in relation to the scheduling of visits. For example, it was found that prisons tended to provide one visiting session per day, usually in the afternoon. However, as interviews with visitors revealed, this arrangement creates problems for those with work, children and other commitments. Visits that take place in the afternoon only allow visitors little choice as to when they may visit. **All prisons should provide visitors with the opportunity to visit in the morning and evening.** Introducing a number of morning and evening visiting sessions could improve the situation. But those difficulties encountered in relation to visiting procedures, as considered above, may remain. Extending visiting hours and introducing visits by appointment not only addresses these difficulties but also allows visitors more choice as to when they may visit.

Findings from this study also revealed that increased numbers in prison in conjunction with those arrangements introduced under the policy known as Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) has created a demand for visits that individual establishments are struggling to meet. The demand for visits has meant that prisons have had to implement measures to control the numbers requiring visits. One such measure is the booked visit system. Such a system operates so as to restrict the number of visits that can take place to that which the visit room can accommodate, thus preventing overcrowding in the visit room. Systems tend to differ from prison to prison but the same general principle applies. Visitors must pre-book their visit either by telephone

or in person whilst at the prison. The prison then records the numbers requiring a visit on any particular day and when the visit room capacity is reached no more bookings for visits are taken. The results from this study revealed the extent to which booked visit systems were operating effectively in reducing overcrowding in the visit room. Furthermore, a booked visit system is a necessary requirement if prisons are to arrange visits along those lines as recommended above. **A booked visit system should be adopted in all prison establishments.**

It is not enough, however, to just provide a booked visit system. Consideration needs to be given to the service provided to visitors. Again, this is an issue that may be addressed in the needs analysis referred to above. The present study drew attention to the particular difficulties visitors encountered in relation to booked visits. These fell into three categories - problems stemming from the booking of visits by telephone; confusions concerning the booking itself and difficulties in booking a visit on the preferred day. Three recommendations for improving the situation for visitors are presented.

Interviews highlighted the problems visitors experienced when the only way to book a visit was to telephone the prison. For example, it was reported that telephone lines were frequently engaged and/or calls to the prison often went unanswered. Allowing visitors to book future visits whilst at the prison seemed to alleviate these problems. **A dedicated, staffed phone-line for booking visits should be developed in all prisons together with a facility whereby visitors may book visits in person whilst at the prison.** It is also advised that prisons endeavour to keep telephone booking lines open throughout the day up to at a certain time in the evening. **Visitors should be forwarded written confirmation upon booking a visit.** This should state clearly date and time at which the visit has been booked. The prisoner the visitor wishes to visit should also be named. The prison should retain accurate records with regard to who is visiting whom and when. Such a system may help reduce occasions whereby visitors arrive at the prison only to be turned away due to some confusion around their booked visit. **Travelling costs should be reimbursed where a visitor has made the journey to a prison for a booked visit that ultimately does not take place due to an error on behalf of the prison or any other changes in arrangements.**

The final problem reported by visitors in response to questions concerning booked visits was not being able to book a visit on their preferred day. Responses to the prison visiting survey also drew attention to this situation. These findings demonstrate the extent to which prisons continue to experience difficulties in meeting the demand for visits. As outlined above, booked visits were introduced in response to these difficulties. But what prisons have done here is to avoid addressing the real issue, the demand itself. Prisons need to increase their capacity to meet the demand for visits. An extension in visiting hours is one way in which this may be achieved. This constitutes yet another benefit to re-arranging visits along those lines as recommended above.

At this point, the discussion moves away from the practical side of visiting arrangements and procedures to consider the implications for visitors of the policy known as Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP). Findings from this research demonstrate the extent to which IEP has come to dominate prisoners' contact with those on the outside. The consequences for the family were also documented. It was noted that IEP impacts on the prisoners' family in two respects. On the one hand, it puts additional pressure on the family who are expected to make more frequent visits to the prison. On the other, it punishes the family through removing contact as and when the prisoner is no longer deemed worthy of those extra visits awarded under IEP. **The way in which IEP operates in relation to visits should be reviewed. More specifically prisons should consider providing visitors with a choice as to whether they would prefer longer or more frequent visits under IEP.**

The final recommendation presented in this section concerns the prison staff that visitors encounter in negotiating visiting procedures. Previous research has drawn attention to the tendency amongst prison officers to treat visitors in an unhelpful and less than courteous manner (Neate, 1990; Howard League, 1993; McDermott & King, 1992; Prison Reform Trust, 1997). The present study revealed similar findings. The tendency for officers to impress their attitudes and feelings towards prisoners onto their visitors was also occasionally reported. As one interviewee in this study explained - '*... they [i.e. prison officers] treat you like a criminal*'. Clearly, this is an issue that individual establishments need to address. **Practice guidelines and standards to which prison officers are expected to adhere in their contacts with**

**visitors should be developed. Officers' performance in this respect should be evaluated and monitored. Training should be provided wherever necessary.** The Family Contact Development Officer (FCDO), referred to above, should take on the various responsibilities associated with evaluation and monitoring. S/he should also regularly assess the training needs of individual officers.

#### ***7.2.4 Improving the Quality of Contact***

The quality of contact is determined by two factors - the conditions under which visits take place and the facilities provided for visitors in the visit room. Where the first factor is concerned, the present study found that overcrowding in visit rooms is impacting on the quality of contact provided to prisoners and their visitors. **Visits should not take place in overcrowded conditions. This should be monitored.** The booked visits system should be used as a means to monitoring visitor numbers. As outlined above, individual prisons need to address the source of the problem and that is the demand for visits. Recommendations in this respect have already been proposed (see Section 7.2.3).

Findings from the present study also noted the extent to which security measures in visit rooms are adversely affecting the quality of contact provided to prisoners and their visitors. For example, visitors commented on the restrictions on physical contact permitted between themselves and the prisoner and the close supervision of visits by prison officers in the visit room. As has been outlined, awareness of the security measures in the visit room translated into anxiety that ultimately prevented visitors relaxing on their visit. Certain visitors even altered their behaviour so as not to draw attention to themselves and/or the prisoner. The recommendation here is not that security measures in visit rooms, or indeed those encountered upon entry to the prison, are removed. As has been pointed out, their existence may well serve to reduce the pressure on visitors from prisoners to bring illicit items into the prison via visits. However, the impact that security measures have on the quality of visits is an issue that should be addressed. One way in which the balance between security requirements and quality of contact may be restored is to implement security measures that allow for the monitoring of visits in a more remote and, therefore, less intrusive

manner. **Prisons should consider the introduction of less intrusive security measures, such as Closed Circuit Television (CCTV), in visit rooms.**

Turning now to the second factor, facilities provided for visitors in the visit room. Findings from this study indicate that, in terms of provision, the situation seems to have improved since early research was conducted in this area (Clarke et al 1992; McDermott & King, 1992; NACRO, 1994c). Findings also suggest, however, that in providing facilities little thought has been afforded to the needs of visitors. For example, at one prison at which interviews were conducted the refreshments provided in the visit room were found to be overly expensive and canteen facilities generally inadequate. Interviews with visitors also revealed the extent to which play facilities were provided with little consideration as to the various needs of children. Facilities for older children visiting a parent in prison were found to be particularly lacking.

The present study revealed one initiative that may assist prisons in providing for children visiting prisons. At one prison, information on the ages of children visiting on any particular day was collected via the booked visit system. This allowed the prison in question to pre-plan child-care arrangements. As has been pointed out, such an initiative is one that other prisons could benefit from incorporating into visiting procedure. Another good idea, this time suggested by one of the visitors interviewed as part of this research, was that facilities should be provided that allow prisoners and their children to play together during visits. Such an arrangement may not only relieve boredom for children visiting the prison but also encourage interaction between children and their imprisoned parents. The provision of games in which all members of the family may participate is one very simple way in which such interaction may be facilitated. Again, the provision of facilities in the visit room is another issue that should be addressed in the needs analysis referred to earlier in the discussion. **Special attention should be paid to facilities in visit rooms and the extent to which the facilities provided meet the needs of families visiting the prison. Facilities for children should cater for all age groups. Possibilities for facilitating interaction between imprisoned parents and their children should be explored.**

### ***7.2.5 Recommendations Relating to Special Visits***

The provision of special visits that allow extended and improved contact between children and their imprisoned parents is yet another area where there is definitely scope for improvement. The findings from this research highlighted the relative lack of provision where these visits are concerned. **Special visits for prisoners and their children should be provided at all prisons. Prisons should be placed under an official obligation to provide special visits.**

Findings from the present study also drew attention to the tendency to provide special visits with little consideration as to the various needs that different visitors may have. For example, at one prison those visitors with younger children found the special visits that were provided to be beneficial whereas those visitors with older children did not. It was also found that the structure and format of special visits varied widely from one prison to the next. The potential for special visits to assist children in coping with the imprisonment of a parent should be explored further. Throughout a prisoners' sentence there are various issues relating to children that may arise. Special visits provide an appropriate setting in which to address these issues. For instance, in the latter stages of a prison sentence, special visits could focus on preparing the children for the release of their imprisoned mother or father. **Good practice guidelines for special visits should be produced. The possibilities of using these visits more constructively throughout the prisoners' sentence should be explored. The provision of special visits is another area that could be examined in the needs analysis.**

The final recommendation presented in this section concerns the way in which Incentives and Earned Privileges (IEP) operates in relation to special visits. Findings from this study revealed that nearly all those prisons at which special visits were available they were considered a privilege that could be withdrawn and were, consequently, not provided to all prisoners. For the most part, prisoners' regime under IEP dictated provision where these visits were concerned. Those prisoners on the lowest regime, known as basic, were not provided with special visits at any of the relevant prisons. Children have a right to maintain a meaningful relationship with their imprisoned parents (Shaw, 1987; 1989). Children should not be denied this right,

even if their mother or father fails to ‘maintain acceptable standards’ in relation to their behaviour and performance (HM Prison Service, 1996a). **Special visits that allow extended contact between imprisoned parents and their children should be removed as a privilege to be earned. There should be a minimum number of special visits to which every prisoner is entitled.**

#### ***7.2.6 Keeping Families Informed***

Previous research has often drawn attention to the distinct lack of information provided to prisoners’ families at prisons (Matthews, 1983; Smith, 1989; Peart & Asquith, 1992; McDermott & King, 1992; NACRO, 1994a; Codd, 1998). Findings from the present study suggest that the situation has not improved. Three issues require consideration. First, whose responsibility is it to keep visitors informed? Second, what information should be provided to visitors? Third, how should this information be disseminated?

Where the first issue is concerned, **individual prisons should take responsibility for providing visitors with the relevant information.** The reason for this is that local circumstances vary from one prison to the next. Individual prisons are, therefore, best placed to provide the appropriate information for visitors. This leads into the second issue, what information should be provided to visitors? Visitors need to be adequately informed as regards every aspect of the visiting process. **Each individual prison should compile its own information pack for visitors. This should cover every aspect of the visiting process including material on travelling to/from the prison, visiting arrangements and procedures, and guidance on visiting regulations.** Findings from this research drew attention to the extent to which visitors were ill informed about the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme (APVS). It is particularly important, therefore, that an application form for, and literature on, assisted prison visits is included amongst that information provided to visitors. It is also important that the relevant public transport timetables are included, especially if visits by appointment are introduced as recommended above. Visitors may then book a visit for a time that corresponds to their estimated arrival at the prison. There are also certain criteria that should be adhered to where information for visitors is concerned. For instance, it must be accurate, relevant, up-to-date and specific to the prison in



question. It should also be provided in languages other than English. Turning now to the third issue, how should information be disseminated? Findings from this study indicate that even where prisons had compiled information it was not always effectively disseminated to visitors. **The address details of a prisoner's prospective visitors should be obtained as part of his/her reception into a prison. Information should then be sent out immediately to arrive at its destination preferably before visitors make their first visit to the prison.**

It is important to acknowledge that, for certain visitors, information provided in a purely written form may be unsuitable. Furthermore, visitors may also require additional information and/or assistance. **Prisons should establish a dedicated Visitors' Help-Line.** The Visitors' Help-Line should be separate from the telephone line for booking visits. The booking number could be used, however, and callers who need assistance put through to the help-line. Of course, staffing is very important if such a service is to work effectively. Operators should be trained and able to provide information, advice and emotional support to callers when and if required.

#### ***7.2.7 Making it Easier for Families to Visit & Reducing Financial Demands***

Previous research has often drawn attention to the long and expensive journeys prisoners' families endure in order to visit (Matthews, 1983; 1989; McDermott & King, 1992; Peart & Asquith, 1992). Indeed, commentators have in the past called for a restructuring of the prison estate so as to facilitate allocation of prisoners close to their homes which, in turn, would alleviate the difficulties families encounter in travelling to/from the prison to visit (Morris, 1965; King & Morgan, 1980). Similarly, Lord Justice Woolf (1991: para. 11.49) recommended that prisoners should be located in prisons 'sited within reasonable proximity' to the community with which 'they have their closest links'. In order to achieve this objective, Woolf (1991) proposed the development of community prisons. As has been pointed out, the Prison Service did, in principle, accept Woolf's recommendation (HM Prison Service, 1995b). In practice, however, Woolf's (1991) concept of community prisons has not been realised. Recent research has shown that many prisoners continue to serve their sentences in prisons that are not within reasonable proximity to their home areas (Prison Reform Trust, 1998). It

follows that many families of prisoners continue to endure long, expensive journeys to/from prisons in order to visit.

The findings from the present study suggest that there has been limited progress towards addressing the difficulties that families experience in travelling to/from prisons to visit. As McDermott & King (1992: 59) point out, there is 'much that [can] be done to make the final stages of the journey more convenient and less expensive'. One way in which individual prisons may assist in this respect is to provide visitors with special transport. Such transport removes the reliance on taxis thereby drastically reducing the expense associated with making the visit to a prison. The present study revealed that such transport is rarely provided. This is another issue that individual prisons need to address. There are other ways in which the difficulties visitors encounter in travelling to/from the prison may be alleviated. For instance, local taxi firms could be negotiated with in order to secure a better service for visitors. A reduced rate for visitors could be agreed or it could be requested that visitors are transported to the prison in groups rather than individually. The Family Contact Development Officer (FCDO) referred to above could be involved in such negotiations. **The difficulties that visitors experience in travelling to/from prisons to visit should be addressed at a local level. Provision of special transport based on a needs analysis should be considered.**

The recommendations presented above, if implemented, should reduce the costs associated with visiting the prisoner and, hence, the financial pressure on prisoners' families. However, as has been outlined, the expense that comes with visiting is not the only financial cost that families have to contend with when one of them is imprisoned. As previous research has shown, families often find themselves under pressure to send money in and to buy items for their relatives who are in prison (Peart & Asquith, 1992; McDermott & King, 1992; NACRO, 1994c; Codd, 1997). The present study also detailed the financial support that families provide to prisoners.

One way to alleviate the financial pressure prisoners place on their families is to increase prisoners' pay. The last time prisoners' pay levels were increased was following the Woolf Report (1991). Prisoners are now paid on average £6 per week (Livingston & Owen, 1999). Further increases in prisoners' wages should assist in

reducing the demands on families to provide financially for the prisoner. However, the present study recommends a much more straightforward approach to the problem. This is to place some sort of limit on the value of items that prisoners are permitted to have sent into the prison. As one interviewee in this study commented - *'They don't want cheap stuff'*. One may ask why this is the case. A possible explanation concerns the fact that personal possessions represent a valuable commodity in prison (Wilkinson et al, 1995). Prisoners request more expensive items as they wish to exchange them for other items, such as drugs. Where this occurs, the family is indirectly and perhaps unknowingly subsidizing a prisoner's drug habit. Placing a limit on the value of items entering prison may avoid such a situation. **Prisons should re-consider the value of items that prisoners are permitted to have in their possession.**

#### ***7.2.8 Recommendations for Visitors' Centres***

Findings from this study revealed the extent to which the potential for Visitors' Centres to operate as a means to providing support for visitors has yet to be realised. For example, it was found that a significant number of prisons did not have a Visitors' Centre. **A Visitors' Centre should operate at every prison.** The findings also indicated that even where there was a Visitors' Centre, provision and quality of facilities was lacking. **In providing a Visitors' Centre, consideration should be given to the needs of visitors and the extent to which Centres are meeting these needs.**

The findings also suggest that Visitors' Centres tend to function as little more than glorified waiting areas. Yet, Visitors' Centres are well placed to alleviate many of the difficulties families encounter when one of them is imprisoned. At the very least, Visitors' Centres should be providing relevant information, support and facilities to families visiting prison. Visitors' Centres may also function as a means to linking visitors with organisations in their own community that provide assistance to prisoners' families. **Visitors' Centre should occupy a much more central role in the provision of services for visitors at the prison.** A necessary requirement in achieving this objective is that every visitor passes through the Centre. Involving the Visitors' Centre in the administration of visiting is one way to ensure that this takes

place. The booking of visits could take place in the Visitors' Centres. Another possibility is to locate the lockers for visitors within the Visitors' Centre.

The final recommendation presented in this section concerns the relationship between Visitors' Centres and prisons. Findings from this study highlighted occasions whereby there was clearly little consultation between Visitors' Centres and prison staff. **Visitors' Centre staff and prison personnel should endeavour to work in partnership together with a view to meeting the needs of visitors.** Again, the Family Contact Development Officer referred to above should assist in co-ordinating the partnership between the prison and its Visitors' Centre.

### 7.3 Conclusion

In this thesis it has been argued that the Prison Service's expressed commitment to family ties is little more than rhetoric. In reality, the Prison Service is far from committed to assisting prisoners in maintaining their relationships with those on the outside. So what can be done to close the apparent gap between the rhetoric and reality? The first step is to collate information. Individual establishments need to know what visitors' needs are and to what extent these needs have been met. Only then are establishments in a position to make the necessary improvements. The second step is to monitor the situation. Facilities and services should be regularly reviewed in order to ensure that the needs of the individuals concerned continue to be met. This is important as the needs of those visiting the prison may change over time. Facilities and services need to be altered accordingly. If these steps were to be taken then the Prison Service may be able to more accurately claim that it has recognised and met its obligations where prisoners' family ties are concerned.

## A Survey of Prison Visiting \*

This survey forms part of a research project which examines the impact of imprisonment on the families of prisoners. The aim of the questionnaire is to gather information on visiting arrangements and facilities at prisons in England and Wales.

- The questionnaire should take about 30 minutes to complete.
- Please answer by ticking the appropriate box or where relevant writing your answer in the space provided.
- Answer all questions unless otherwise stated.
- On completion return the questionnaire in the S.A.E provided.

NAME OF PRISON: .....

TYPE/CATEGORY OF PRISON:

MALE - Local	<input type="checkbox"/>
Remand Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dispersal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Category B Training	<input type="checkbox"/>
Category C Training	<input type="checkbox"/>
Adult Open	<input type="checkbox"/>
YOI (Open)	<input type="checkbox"/>
YOI (Closed)	<input type="checkbox"/>

FEMALE - Local	<input type="checkbox"/>
Remand Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>
Closed	<input type="checkbox"/>
Open	<input type="checkbox"/>
Category A	<input type="checkbox"/>

\* Any reference in this questionnaire to 'visiting' or 'visits' should be interpreted as relating to domestic visits only i.e. visits to prisoners by family and friends.

Ref No . . . . .

**IF ESTABLISHMENT DOES NOT HOLD CONVICTED OFFENDERS - GO TO ORANGE SECTION, QUESTION 4**

**Section 1a: Length and Frequency of Visits (Convicted Offenders Only)**

- 1) Please indicate visiting times for **convicted** prisoners only and the appropriate day.

	Visiting Times	
	am	pm
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

- 2) How often are **convicted** prisoners granted a visit?

	Basic	Standard	Enhanced
Once every 4 weeks			
Once every 3 weeks			
Once every 2 weeks			
Once a week			
More than once a week (please specify)			
Daily			
Other (please specify)			

- 3) How long are visits to **convicted** prisoners?

	Basic	Standard	Enhanced
Less than 15 mins			
15 mins or more but less than 1/2 hr			
1/2 hr or more but less than 1 hr			
1 hr or more but less than 1 1/2 hr			
1 1/2 hrs or more but less than 2 hrs			
2 hrs or more but less than 2 1/2 hr			
2 1/2 hrs or more but less than 3 hrs			
3 hrs or more			

**IF ESTABLISHMENT DOES NOT HOLD UNCONVICTED OFFENDERS - GO TO BLUE SECTION, QUESTION 7**

**Section 1b: Length and Frequency of Visits (Unconvicted Offenders Only)**

- 4) Please indicate visiting times for **unconvicted** prisoners only and the appropriate day.

	Visiting Times	
	am	pm
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

- 5) How often are **unconvicted** prisoners granted a visit?

	Basic	Standard	Enhanced
Once every 4 weeks			
Once every 3 weeks			
Once every 2 weeks			
Once a week			
More than once a week (please specify)			
Daily			
Other (please specify)			

- 6) How long are visits to **unconvicted** prisoners?

	Basic	Standard	Enhanced
Less than 15 mins			
15 mins or more but less than 1/2 hr			
1/2 hr or more but less than 1 hr			
1 hr or more but less than 1 1/2 hr			
1 1/2 hrs or more but less than 2 hrs			
2 hrs or more but less than 2 1/2 hrs			
2 1/2 hrs or more but less than 3 hrs			
3 hrs or more			

## **Section 2: Transport to and from Prison**

- 7) Does the location of this prison present problems for visitors who do not have their own transport?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If No - Go to Question 8*

*If Yes - Answer Questions i & ii below*

- i) Why is this the case?

- ii) What are the main difficulties experienced by such visitors?

- 8) Is there any special transport provided for prison visitors?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If No - Go to Question 9*

*If Yes - Answer Questions i - iv below*

- i) Please describe.

- ii) Who provides this transport?



iii) When is this transport available for use by prison visitors?

iv) How much does it cost visitors to use this transport?

9) Does the prison provide visitors with information about travelling to and from the prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If No -* Why not?

*If Yes -* How is this information made available to visitors?

By telephone

☐

On request only in leaflet form

☐

Leaflets available in prison waiting room

☐

Leaflets available in Visitors' Centre

☐

Provided via prisoner

☐

In poster form

☐

Other (please specify) .....

.....

.....

.....

### **Section 3: The Visit Room**

- 10) What is the approximate capacity of the visit room in terms of how many prisoners can receive a visit **at any one time**?

**No. of prisoners** .....

- 11) What is the maximum number of adults and children allowed to visit a prisoner **at any one time**?

**No. of adult visitors** .....

**No. of children** .....

- 12) How would you describe conditions in the visit room?

- 13) Are prisoners and their families confined to the visit room for the duration of the visit?

**Yes**

☐

**No**

☐

***If No -***

**Please explain.**

14) Is the visit room used for other purposes when visiting is not taking place?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If No - Go to Question 15*

*If Yes - Answer Questions i - ii below*

i) Please give details.

ii) Does the use of the visit room for other purposes disrupt prison visiting?

All the time

☐

Frequently

☐

Occasionally

☐

Very rarely

☐

Never

☐

15) Are visits ever cut short?

All the time

☐

Frequently

☐

Occasionally

☐

Very rarely

☐

Never

☐

*If Never - Go to Question 16*

*If All the time, Frequently, Occasionally, or Very Rarely - Answer Questions i - iii below*

i) Why are visits cut short?

ii) On what days is this most likely to occur?  
(please tick all that apply)

Mon ☐ Tues ☐ Wed ☐ Thur ☐ Fri ☐ Sat ☐ Sun ☐

iii) On average, how much visiting time is lost when visits are cut short?

. . . . . minutes

16) Does the visit room ever become overcrowded?

Yes ☐ No ☐

17) Does this prison split visits?

All the time ☐  
Frequently ☐  
Occasionally ☐  
Very rarely ☐  
Never ☐

*If Never - Please go to Question 18*

*If All the time, Frequently, Occasionally, or Very Rarely - Answer Questions i - ii below*

i) On what days is this most likely to happen?  
(please tick all that apply)

Mon ☐ Tues ☐ Wed ☐ Thur ☐ Fri ☐ Sat ☐ Sun ☐

ii) What problems, if any, are encountered when visits are split?

18) Have visits ever taken place in another part of the prison due to lack of space in the visits room?

All the time ☐  
Frequently ☐  
Occasionally ☐  
Very rarely ☐  
Never ☐

*If Never - Please go to Question 19*

*If All the time, Frequently, Occasionally, or Very Rarely - Answer Questions i & ii below*

- i) On what days is this most likely to happen?  
(please tick all that apply)

Mon ☐ Tues ☐ Wed ☐ Thur ☐ Fri ☐ Sat ☐ Sun ☐

- ii) What problems, if any, are encountered when visits take place in another part of the prison?

- 19) Are there other ways of preventing overcrowding in the visits room in operation at this prison?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If No - Go to Green Section, Question 20*

*If Yes - Answer Question i & ii below*

- i) Please describe.

- ii) What problems, if any, does this cause?

#### **Section 4: Facilities in the Visits Room**

20) Would you describe the visits room at this prison as 'family friendly'?

**Yes**

☐

**No**

☐

*If No -*

Why not?

*If Yes -*

In what ways is the visits room 'family friendly'?

21) Is there a canteen in the visiting room?

**Yes**

☐

**No**

☐

*If No -*

Why is there no canteen in the visits room?  
(please tick all that apply)

**Lack of Space**

☐

**Security Reasons**

☐

**Staffing Problems**

☐

**Lack of Funds**

☐

**No demand**

☐

**Other (please specify)** .....

.....

.....

***Go to Qu. 22***

*If Yes -*

i) Who runs the canteen?

ii) Is the canteen open during all visiting hours?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If Yes - Go to Question 22*

*If No - Answer Questions iii - v below*

iii) Please indicate when the canteen is open.

	Opening Times	
	am	pm
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

iv) Why is there only limited access to the canteen?

v) What alternative arrangements for refreshments exist when the canteen is not open?

22) Are there machines in the visits room which provide refreshments?

Yes ☐ No ☐

23) Is there a play area for children in the visits room?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If No -*

Why is there no play area in the visits room?  
(please tick all that apply)

Lack of Space

☐

Security Reasons

☐

Staffing Problems

☐

Lack of Funds

☐

No demand

☐

Other (please specify) .....

.....

.....

*Go to Qu. 24*

*If Yes -*

i) Is this a **supervised** play area?

Yes

☐

No

☐

ii) Is the play area always available for use during visiting times?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If Yes - Go to Question 24*

*If No - Please answer Questions iii - v below*

iii) When is the play area available for use?

	Opening Times	
	am	pm
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		



iv) Why is there only limited access to the play area?

v) What alternative arrangements for children exist when the play area is not available for use?

24) Do visitors have access to baby-changing facilities during visits?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If Yes -* Where is this facility?

25) Are there any plans to improve child care and play facilities at this prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If Yes -* Please describe any planned improvements.

26) Have any facilities for visitors been withdrawn recently?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If No - Go to Question 27*

*If Yes - Answer Questions i & ii below*

i) Which facilities?

- ii) Why have these facilities been withdrawn?  
(please tick all that apply)

Security Reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staffing Problems	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of Funding	<input type="checkbox"/>
No demand	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify) .....

.....

.....

- 27) Are visiting facilities and arrangements monitored in any way?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If Yes -* Whose responsibility is it to monitor visiting facilities and arrangements?

- 28) Is there any formal consultation between a representative from the prison and visitors as regards visiting arrangements and facilities?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If No - Go to Purple Section, Question 29*

*If Yes - Answer Questions i & ii below*

- i) Please describe.

- ii) What are visitors' views regarding visiting arrangements and facilities at this prison?

## **Section 5: Supervision of Visits**

- 29) How many prison officers are usually present in the visit room while visits are taking place?

One	<input type="checkbox"/>	Four	<input type="checkbox"/>
Two	<input type="checkbox"/>	Five	<input type="checkbox"/>
Three	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)	.....

- 30) Are prison officers provided with any training as regards their contact with prisoners' families?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If Yes -* What does this training involve?

- 31) Is there a specific member of staff who is in charge of visiting at this particular prison such as a Dedicated Visits Officer or Family Contact Development Officer?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If No - Go to Question 32*

*If Yes - Please answer Questions i - iv*

i) What is his/her official title?

ii) What are his/her main responsibilities?

iii) What grade of officer?

iv) Did he/she receive any special training for the post?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If Yes -* Please describe what this training involved.

32) Please indicate the type and frequency of searches which **adults** are required to undergo before a visit?

	Belongings Searched	Clothing Searched	Strip Search
Every time			
Usually			
Occasionally			
Rarely			
Never			

33) Please indicate the type and frequency of searches which **children** are required to undergo before a visit?

	Belongings Searched	Clothing Searched	Strip Search
Every time			
Usually			
Occasionally			
Rarely			
Never			

34) What security precautions besides searching exist as regards visitors entering the prison?

35) Are visits monitored by closed-circuit TV?

Yes

☐

No

☐

36) Does the layout of the visiting room allow for close, limited or no contact between prisoners and their **adult visitors**?

Close Contact

☐

Limited Contact

☐

No contact

☐

Other (please explain) .....

.....

.....

37) Does the layout of the visiting room allow for close, limited or no contact between prisoners and their **children**?

Close Contact

☐

Limited Contact

☐

No contact

☐

Other (please explain) .....

.....

.....

38) Are there any further security measures or initiatives which have been introduced recently that concern prison visitors?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If Yes -* Please describe.

## **Section 6: Special Visiting Arrangements**

- 39) Does this prison offer any special visiting arrangements?  
(e.g. family day visits, child centred visits, extended/all day visits)

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If No (special visiting arrangements) -*

- i) Are there any plans to introduce any such special visiting arrangements?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If Yes -*

Please describe.

*Go to Qu. 40*

*If Yes (special visiting arrangements) -*

- i) Please describe.

- ii) How often can a prisoner have such a visit?

	Basic	Standard	Enhanced
Once a year			
Once every 6 months			
Once every 3 months			
Once a month			
Once every two weeks			
Once a week			
Other (please specify)			

iii) Are such visits a privilege which can be withdrawn by the prison?

Yes ☐ No ☐

iv) Are such visits open to all prisoners?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If No -* Which prisoners are given the opportunity to take part in such visits?

40) Do prisoners have the opportunity to go on 'town visits'?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If No - Go to Red Section, Question 41*

*If Yes - Please answer Questions i - iv*

i) How often can a prisoner go on a 'town visit'?

	Basic	Standard	Enhanced
Once a year			
Once every 6 months			
Once every 3 months			
Once a month			
Once every two weeks			
Once a week			
Other (please specify)			

ii) Are such visits a privilege which can be withdrawn by the prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

iii) Does anyone accompany those prisoners who go on 'town visits'?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If Yes -* Who accompanies prisoners?

iv) Are 'town visits' open to all prisoners?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If No -* Which prisoners are given the opportunity to take part in such visits?



## **Section 7: Waiting for Visits**

41) Does this prison have a Visitors' Centre?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If No (Visitors' Centre) -*

i) Do you feel there is a need for a Visitors' Centre?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If No -* Why not?

ii) Are there plans to introduce such a facility?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*Go to Qu. 42*

*If Yes (Visitors' Centre) -*

i) Who staffs the Visitors' Centre?

ii) Which of the following facilities does the Visitors' Centre provide to prison visitors?  
(please tick all that apply)

Seating area	<input type="checkbox"/>	Visiting Information	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refreshments	<input type="checkbox"/>	Property Lockers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's play area	<input type="checkbox"/>	Crèche	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baby changing facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disabled Toilets	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toilets	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disabled Access	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>	Quiet Rooms	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify) .....

.....

.....

iii) What are the opening times of the Visitors' Centre?

	Opening Times	
	am	pm
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

iv) Is the Visitors' Centre involved with the processing of Visiting Orders?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*If Yes -*

What problems, if any, does this cause?

***Go to Qu. 43***

42) Is there a visitors' waiting room at this prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

***If No - Go to Question 43***

***If Yes - Answer Questions i & ii below***

- i) Which of the following facilities exist in the waiting room?  
(please tick all that apply)

Seating area	<input type="checkbox"/>	Visiting Information	<input type="checkbox"/>
Refreshments	<input type="checkbox"/>	Property Lockers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Children's play area	<input type="checkbox"/>	Crèche	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baby changing facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disabled Toilets	<input type="checkbox"/>
Toilets	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disabled Access	<input type="checkbox"/>
Telephone	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Other (please specify) .....

.....

.....

- ii) Does the waiting room ever become overcrowded?

All the time	<input type="checkbox"/>
Frequently	<input type="checkbox"/>
Occasionally	<input type="checkbox"/>
Very rarely	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 43) Does this prison provide any other facilities or services for prison visitors which have not yet been mentioned?

Yes ☐ No ☐

*If Yes -* Please describe.

..... PLEASE TURN TO NEXT PAGE .....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you have any queries concerning the questionnaire, please contact Christine Magill on 0116 2525779.

Finally, in case I need to clarify any of the above information please provide the following:

Name: .....

Employed as:

<b>Governor</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Grade</b> .....
<b>Assistant Governor</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Chief Officer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Grade</b> .....
<b>Principle Officer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Senior Officer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>Prison Officer</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

If you would like to add further comment on the issue of prisoners and the maintenance of family ties, please do so in the space below.

# Interview Schedule : Prison Visitors

I am a student from the University of Leicester conducting some research into the experiences of those who visit someone in prison. As part of this research I am interviewing people who visit this and other prisons in the area. Interviews are completely confidential and anonymous. The information you provide will not be disclosed to the prison or the person you are visiting. The interview should take about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. You do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. The questions will cover a wide range of issues concerning prison visits. To begin, I would like to ask you some questions about yourself and the person you are visiting.

General Information

(Tick appropriate box)

Male ☐ Female ☐

Age 16-20 yr. ☐ 31-40 yr. ☐ 51-60 yr. ☐  
21-30 yr. ☐ 41-50 yr. ☐ Over 60 yr. ☐

Ethnicity White ☐ Black/African-Caribbean ☐ Asian ☐  
(i.e. Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi)

Other (please specify)

Subject No. . . . .

Prison . . . . .

Visiting History

1) Who do you visit in prison?

Spouse/partner

Ex-spouse/Ex-partner

Boyfriend/girlfriend (i.e. do not live with partner)

Child/stepchild

Brother/sister

Parent/stepparent

Friend

Other (please specify)

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

☐

2) Is he/she

On remand

Sentenced

☐

☐

On remand - Go to Question 3  
Sentenced - Go to Question 6

3) How long has your partner/child etc. been on remand at this prison?

. . . . .

Months

4) Have you been visiting your partner/child etc. during all this time?

Yes

No

☐

☐

YES - go to Question 5  
NO - answer Question i below

i) How much of his/her time on remand have you been visiting?

5) How long has your partner/child etc. got left to serve on remand?

. . . . .

Months

GO TO Question 10

\_\_

6) How long has your partner/child etc. been serving his/her sentence at this particular prison?

. . . . .

Months

7) Has your partner/child etc. been at any other prisons during this sentence?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Question 8*

*YES - answer Questions i & ii below*

i) How many other prisons has your partner/child etc been to during this sentence?

One

☐

Two

☐

Three

☐

More than three (please specify)

ii) How long was your partner/child etc. at this/these other prisons?

. . . . . Months

. . . . . Months

. . . . . Months

➔ 8) Have you been visiting your partner/child etc. during all his/her time in prison serving this sentence?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*YES - go to Question 9*

*NO - answer Question i below*

i) How much of his/her time in prison serving this sentence have you been visiting?

9) How much of this sentence has your partner/child etc. got left to serve?

. . . . . Months

➔ 10) Do you intend to continue to visit your partner/child etc. during the remainder of his/her time in prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*YES - go to Next Section*

*NO - answer Question i below*

i) Why not?

---

## Visiting History (Previous Sentences)

---

11) Is this the first time your partner/child etc. has been in prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*YES - go to Question 12*

*NO - go to Question i below*

i) How many other times has he/she been in prison (excluding the present sentence)?

Once

☐

Twice

☐

Three times

☐

More than three (please specify)

ii) How long was your partner/child etc. in prison on this/these previous occasions?

. . . . . Months

. . . . . Months

. . . . . Months

iii) Did you visit your partner/child etc. during all his/her time at this/these other prisons?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*YES - go to Question 12*

*NO - answer Question iv below*

iv) How much of his/her time at this/these other prisons did you visit?

→ 12) Have you ever visited anybody else in this or any other prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Next Section*

*YES - answer Question i below*

i) What was your relationship to this/these other person(s)?



---

**Travelling to/from Prison**

---

13) Do you experience any difficulties getting to this prison?                      Yes    ☐  
   No    ☐

*NO - answer Question i below*  
*YES - answer Question ii below*

i) Why is this the case?

**GO TO Question 14 —**

ii) What difficulties do you experience?

---

➔ 14) How far do you have to travel in order to get to the prison?                      1-10 miles                      ☐  
   11-20 miles                      ☐  
   21-40 miles                      ☐  
   41-60 miles                      ☐  
   61-80 miles                      ☐  
   81-100 miles                      ☐  
  
   More than 100 (please estimate)  
  
   Don't Know                      ☐

15) How long does it usually take you to reach the prison upon leaving your home?

Less than 1/2 hr	<input type="checkbox"/>
1/2 hr or more but less than 1 1/2 hrs	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 1/2 hrs or more but less than 2 1/2 hrs	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 1/2 hrs or more but less than 3 1/2 hrs	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 1/2 hrs or more but less than 4 1/2 hrs	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 1/2 hrs or more (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

16) What forms of transport do you use in getting to the prison?

Car/Van	<input type="checkbox"/>
Public Bus	<input type="checkbox"/>
Train	<input type="checkbox"/>
Boat	<input type="checkbox"/>
Taxi	<input type="checkbox"/>
Walk	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prison/Probation bus	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	

17) Approximately how much does it cost you in travelling expenses every time you visit the prison (not including other expenses such as money spent on refreshments etc.)?

£ .

18) Approximately how much do you spend on refreshments etc. every time you visit the prison?

£ .

19) Have you ever claimed back your expenses from the Assisted Prison Visits Unit since your partner/child etc. has been in this prison?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

NO - answer Question i below  
YES - go to Question ii below

i) Why is this the case?

Not eligible for Assisted Prison Visits	<input type="checkbox"/>
Didn't know such assistance was available	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please explain)	

GO TO Question 20 —

➔ ii) How much of your expenses did you get back?

iii) Have you claimed or will you put in a claim for the cost of this visit?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*YES - go to Question v below*

*NO - answer Question iv below*

iv) Why is this the case?

v) Have you experienced any problems with the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Question 20*

*YES - answer Question vi below*

vi) What problems have you experienced?

---

➔ 20) Have you ever travelled to this prison to visit your partner/child etc. and the visit not taken place?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Question 21*

*YES - answer Questions i, ii, iii & iv below*

i) How did this make you feel?

ii) Why did the visit not take place?

iii) How often has this happened whilst you have been visiting this prison?

Once

☐

Twice

☐

Three times

☐

More than three (please specify)

iv) Did you get back any the cost of travelling to the prison on this occasion?

Yes

☐

No

☐

➔ 21) Is this the closest prison to your home?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Don't Know

☐

**YES or DK - go to Next Section**

**NO - answer Question i below**

i) How would you feel about having your partner/child etc. located in a prison closer to your home?

---

## Visiting Arrangements

---

22) How often do you visit your partner/child etc.?

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| Once every 4 weeks                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Once every 3 weeks                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Once every 2 weeks                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 times a month                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Once a week                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| More than once a week (please specify) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Daily                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify)                 |                          |

23) How long do these visits normally last?

- |                                       |                          |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Less than 15 mins                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15 mins or more but less than 1/2 hr  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1/2 hr or more but less than 1 hr     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1 hr or more but less than 1 1/2 hrs  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 1 1/2 hrs or more but less than 2 hrs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 hrs or more but less than 2 1/2 hrs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 1/2 hrs or more but less than 3 hrs | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 hrs or more                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other (please specify)                |                          |

24) Do you visit your partner/child etc. on every possible occasion i.e. every visit?

- |     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*YES - answer Question i below*

*NO - answer Questions ii & iii below*

i) What problems, if any, does this cause?

**Go to Question 25**

➔ **ii) Why do you not visit on every possible occasion?**

**iii) Can you tell me how often is the prisoner allowed a visit?**

- Once every 4 weeks
- Once every 3 weeks
- Once every 2 weeks
- 3 times a month
- Once a week
- More than once a week (please specify)
  
- Daily
- Don't Know
  
- Other (please specify)

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➔ **25) Do you think that visits at this prison should be**

- Longer in length
- Shorter in length
- Take place more often
- Take place less often
- Remain as they are
- No opinion

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**26) Are you aware of the regime system that is in operation at most prisons whereby a prisoner is allowed certain privileges if he/she is well behaved?**

Yes  
No

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☐

*NO - go to Question 27*  
*YES - go to Question i below*

**i) Which level of regime is your partner/child etc. on at present?**

- Basic
- Standard
- Enhanced
- Don't Know

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Other (please specify)

ii) What does being on this regime allow him/her in terms of visits?

iii) Has your partner/child etc. ever lost his/her privilege visits during his/her time at this prison?

Yes  
No

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☐

*NO - go to Question 27*

*YES - answer Question iv below*

iv) How did this make you feel?

→ 27) Have you ever had a visit at this prison disrupted in any way (e.g. cut short, delayed start)?

Yes  
No

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☐

- *NO - go to Question 28*

*YES - answer Questions i & ii below*

i) Why did this occur?

ii) How did you feel when your visit was disrupted in this way?

→ 28) Do visiting times at this prison allow you to visit whenever it suits you best?

Yes  
No

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☐

29) What changes to the visiting times would you like to see introduced so that visiting was easier?

30) Do you 'book in' to visit at this prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Question 31*

*YES - go to Question i below*

i) How do you go about booking a visit?

ii) Have you ever experienced any problems when booking a visit?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Question 31*

*YES - answer Question iii below*

iii) What problems have you experienced?

→ 31) When your partner/child etc. first came to this prison were you provided with any information about prison visiting (i.e. how to get to the prison, visiting arrangements; regulations regarding visits etc.)?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Next Section*

*YES - answer Question i below*

i) Who provided you with this information?



Quality of Visits

32) How long do you usually wait outside the visits room before the visit begins? . . . . . Minutes

33) How would you describe the waiting facilities for visitors at this prison?

34) How does waiting before a visit in such circumstances affect your visit?

35) Would you like to see any improvements to waiting facilities at this prison?

Yes ☐

No ☐

*NO - go to Question 36*  
*YES - answer Question i below*

i) What improvements would you like to see?

► 36) How would you describe conditions/facilities in the actual visits room at this prison?

37) How do conditions/facilities in the visits room affect your visit?

38) Would you like to see any improvements to the conditions/facilities in the visits room?

Yes

No

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*NO - go to Next Section*  
*YES - answer Question i below*

i) What improvements would you like to see?

The Importance of Keeping in Touch

39) How did you feel the first time you visited a prison?

40) How do you usually feel before a visit at this prison?

41) How do you usually feel after a visit at this prison?

42) How important to you is being able to see your partner/child etc.?

43) Do you think the prison visit is helpful or beneficial to you and your partner/child etc.?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - answer Question i below*  
*YES - answer Question ii below*

i) Please explain.

**GO TO Question 44** —

➔ ii) In what way is the prison visit helpful or beneficial to you and your partner/child etc.?

➔ 44) What for you are the worst aspects of the prison visit?

45) Do you ever visit when you would rather not?      Yes ☐  
No ☐

*NO - go to Question 46*  
*YES - answer Question i below*

i) Why do you visit on those occasions when you would rather not?

46) Has your partner/child etc. ever had a community or town visit whilst he/she has been at this prison?      Yes ☐  
No ☐

*NO - go to Question 47*  
*YES - go to Question i below*

i) How many such visits has your partner/child etc. had since he/she has been at this prison?

One ☐  
Two ☐  
Three ☐

More than three (please specify)

ii) Do you think such visits are helpful or beneficial to you and your partner/child etc.?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

**NO - go to Question iii**

**YES - answer Question iv below**

iii) Please explain.

**GO TO Question 47** —

iv) In what way are such visits helpful or beneficial to you and your partner/child etc.?

---

► 47) Do you and your partner/child etc. keep in touch with by telephone?

Yes ☐  
No ☐

**NO - answer Question i below**

**- YES - go to Question ii below**

i) Why are you and your partner/child etc. not in touch by telephone?

**GO TO Question 48** }

➤ **ii) How often does he/she ring?**

**iii) Do you find it easier to talk to him/her on the telephone as compared to on a visit?**

Yes ☐  
No ☐

*YES - answer Question iv below*

*NO - answer Question v below*

**iv) Why is it easier to talk to him/her by telephone?**

**GO TO Question 48**

➤ **v) Why is this the case?**

➤ **48) Do you and your partner/child etc. keep in touch by letter?**

Yes ☐  
No ☐

*NO - answer Question i below*

*YES - go to Question ii below*

**i) Why do you and your partner/child etc. not keep in touch by letter?**

**GO TO Next Section**

➔ ii) How often do you write to him/her?

iii) Do you find writing to him/her is helpful or beneficial to you?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - answer Question iv below*

*YES - answer Question v below*

iv) Please explain.

***GO TO Next Section***

➔ v) In what way do you find writing to him/her helpful or beneficial to you?

## The Cost of Keeping in Touch

49) Do you send in money for your partner/child etc.?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO – go to Question 50*

*YES – answer Question i below*

i) How much money do you usually send each month?

£

.

50) Do you usually hand-in anything for your partner/child etc. when you visit?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO – go to Question 51*

*YES – answer Question i & ii below*

i) What sort of things do you usually bring for him/her?

ii) How much do you usually spend on such items each month?      £      .

51) Has your partner/child etc. ever asked you to provide him/her with larger items (e.g. things for his/her cell)?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Question 52*

*YES - go to Question i below*

i) What sort of things has he/she asked for?

ii) Did you provide him/her with these items?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO – go to Question 52*

*YES – answer Question iii & iv below*

iii) How did you feel about providing him/her with these items?

iv) How much did these items cost you?      £      .



➔52) Do you ever feel under any pressure to provide him/her with money etc. ?

Yes  
No

☐  
☐

*NO – go to Next Section*  
*YES – answer Question i below*

i) Why do you feel this way?

**Security Issues**

53) Have you ever been searched before a visit at this prison?

Yes  
No

☐  
☐

*NO - go to Question 54*  
*YES - go to Question i below*

i) Please indicate the type and frequency of searches you have undergone whilst visiting this prison.

	Belongings searched	Clothing searched i.e. rub down	Strip search
Every time			
Usually			
Occasionally			
Rarely			
Never			

ii) How do you feel about being searched?

iii) Has anything ever been confiscated as a result of a search?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Question 54*

*YES - go to Question iv below*

iv) Would you like to explain what happened?

► 54) Have you ever had a closed or non-contact visit at this prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Question 55*

*YES - answer Questions i & ii below*

i) Why did you have such a visit?

ii) How did you feel about having such a visit?

► 55) How do the prison officers you come into contact with at this prison treat you (i.e. prison officers in the VC, prison officers on the gate and prison officers in the visits room)?

58) How do you feel about drugs in prison?

➔ ii) How many children do you have/care for?

iii) What are their ages?

61) How often do the children visit?

Once every 4 weeks

Once every 3 weeks

Once every 2 weeks

3 times a month

Once a week

More than once a week (please specify)

Daily

Other (please specify)

☐  
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62) Do you bring the children with you every time you visit?

Yes

No

☐  
☐

*NO - answer Question i below*

*YES - answer Question ii below*

i) Why do you not bring the children along every time you visit?

➔ ii) What problems, if any, does this cause?

63) Would you like to see any improvements to the facilities provided for children visiting the prison  
(i.e. facilities inside and outside the prison)?

Yes  
No

☐  
☐

*NO - go to Question 64*

*YES - answer Question i below*

i) What improvements would you like to see?

➔ 64) Do you think the prison visit is helpful or beneficial to the children and their father/stepfather etc.?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*YES - answer Question i below*

*NO - go to Question ii below*

i) In what way is the prison visit helpful or beneficial to the children and their father/stepfather etc.?

➔ ii) Please explain.

**GO TO Question 65**

➔ 65) Have you ever had a special visit such as a 'family day' visit at this prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Question 66*

*YES - go to Question i below*

i) Please describe this special visit?

ii) Do you think this visit was beneficial or helpful to you, your partner/child etc. and the children?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - answer Question iii below*

*YES - answer Question iv below*

iii) Please explain.

iv) In what way?

**GO TO Question 66**

▶ 66) Have the children ever been searched before a visit at this prison?

Yes

☐

No

☐

*NO - go to Question 67*

*YES - go to Question i below*

i) Please indicate the type and frequency of searches the children have undergone whilst visiting this prison.

	Belongings searched	Clothing searched i.e. rub down	Strip search
Every time			
Usually			
Occasionally			
Rarely			
Never			

ii) How do the children react to being searched?

iii) Has anything ever been confiscated as a result of a search?

Yes

☐

No

☐

***NO - go to Question 67***

***YES - answer Question iv below***

iv) Would you like to explain what happened?

► 67) How do the children react to other security measures they come into contact with at this prison?

**Any Further Comment?**

Are there any specific difficulties that you have experienced whilst visiting this prison which have not yet been mentioned?  
Would you like to add anything to what you have already said about visiting this prison?

Thank-you for your time

## **APPENDIX 3 – Covering Letter**

### **A Survey of Prison Visiting**

I am a researcher conducting a three year study into the impact of imprisonment on the families of prisoners. An analysis of prison visiting is crucial to this study as the visit constitutes the primary mechanism through which prisoners and their families keep in touch. The 'Survey of Prison Visiting' allows for such an analysis. The aim of the survey is:

- to examine visiting arrangements and the facilities at prisons.

The Prison Service is committed to helping prisoners prepare for their return to the community through the maintenance of family ties. This survey provides the Prison Service with the opportunity to express its opinions about policy, practice and associated problems in this area of work.

The enclosed questionnaire has been sent to every prison in England and Wales. The areas covered include:

- length and frequency of visits
- transport to and from prison
- facilities and services provided for visitors at prisons
- supervision of visits
- special visiting arrangements

The questionnaire should take about 30 minutes to complete. It requires you to simply tick a series of boxes and add, at the most, a few short descriptive sentences.

This survey has been sent to you as the Governor of the prison. However, if you think that there is someone more suited to its completion then please pass it on to the appropriate person. It would be extremely helpful if you could return the attached acknowledgement slip indicating who will be completing the survey. A small S.A.E. has been provided.

Thank you for your help. If you require any further information my contact number is 0116 2525779.

Yours Sincerely,

Christine Magill  
(Research Assistant)



#### **APPENDIX 4 – Follow-up Letter**

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing as regards the ‘Survey of Prison Visiting’ that was sent to you as the Governor of this prison a few weeks ago. The response to the survey has been excellent, with the majority of questionnaires having been returned.

I am now in the process of contacting those prisons which have yet to return a questionnaire. According to my records, I have not received a questionnaire from your prison. Hence, this letter to ask you if it would be possible for it to be returned over the next week. If the questionnaire has already been posted back, please disregard this letter.

If there are any problems, my contact number is 0116 2525779. Thank you again for your help, it is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Christine Magill  
(Research Assistant)

## **Notice to Visitors:**

Over the next couple of weeks a student from Leicester University will be carrying out some research at the Visitors' Centre. The aim of this research is to examine the experiences of those who visit someone in prison.

You may be approached and asked if you would be willing to participate in this research. You are under no obligation to agree. If you do agree you can be assured that your replies will remain anonymous and confidential. The information you provide will under no circumstances be disclosed to the prison or the person you are visiting.

If you are interested in taking part in this research, or require further information, contact Visitors' Centre co-ordinator.

## **APPENDIX 6 - Recommendations**

### ***Recommendations Relating to Visiting Entitlements***

- Prisoners' entitlements in terms of visits should be clearly stated in Standing Orders and Operating Standards. These entitlements should be made clear to prisoners.
- Minimum visiting entitlements should be re-instated as a Key Performance Indicator for the Prison Service and remain so.
- Information to show how often, when and why prisons are operating below minimum visiting entitlements should be collated annually and disseminated accordingly.

### ***General Recommendations for Every Prison***

- Every prison should conduct a regular needs analysis in order to assess the services, facilities and support required by visitors. Every aspect of the visiting process should be examined.
- A Family Contact Development Officer (FCDO) whose sole responsibility is to oversee and co-ordinate all aspects of family contact should be employed at every prison.

### ***Recommendations Relating to Visiting Procedures & Arrangements***

- Prisons should make themselves aware of the difficulties that visitors may be experiencing as a result of visiting procedures and consider arrangements that are more convenient to all concerned. This could be covered in the needs analysis as mentioned above.
- All prisons should explore the possibility of introducing more flexible visiting arrangements and extending the time periods over which visits are available.
- All prisons should provide visitors with the opportunity to visit in the morning and evening.
- A booked visit system should be adopted in all establishments.
- A dedicated, staffed phone-line for booking visits should be developed in all prisons together with a facility whereby visitors may book their visits in person whilst at the prison.
- Visitors should be forwarded written confirmation upon booking a visit.

- Travelling costs should be reimbursed where a visitor has made the journey to a prison for a booked visit that ultimately does not take place due to an error on behalf of the prison or any other changes in arrangements.
- The way in which IEP operates in relation to visits should be reviewed. More specifically prisons should consider providing visitors with a choice as to whether they would prefer longer or more frequent visits under IEP.
- Practice guidelines and standards to which prison officers are expected to adhere in their contacts with visitors should be developed. Officers' performance in this respect should be evaluated and monitored. Training should be provided wherever necessary.

### ***Improving the Quality of Contact***

- Visits should not take place in overcrowded conditions. This should be monitored.
- Prisons should consider the introduction of less intrusive security measures, such as Close Circuit Television (CCTV), in the visit room.
- Special attention should be paid to facilities in visit rooms and the extent to which the facilities provided meet the needs of families visiting the prison. Facilities for children should cater for all age groups. Possibilities for facilitating interaction between imprisoned parents and their children should be explored.

### ***Recommendations Relating to Special Visits***

- Special visits for prisoners and their children should be provided at all prisons. Prisons should be placed under an official obligation to provide special visits.
- Good practice guidelines for special visits should be produced. The possibilities of using these visits more constructively throughout the prisoners' sentence should be explored. The provision of special visits is another area that could be examined in the needs analysis.
- Special visits that allow extended contact between imprisoned parents and their children should be removed as a privilege to be earned. There should be a minimum number of special visits to which every prisoner is entitled.

### ***Keeping Families Informed***

- Individual prisons should take responsibility for providing visitors with the relevant information

- Each individual prison should compile its own information pack for visitors. This should cover every aspect of the visiting process including material on travelling to/from the prison, visiting arrangements and procedures, and guidance on visiting regulations should.
- The address details of a prisoner's prospective visitors should be obtained as part of his/her reception into a prison. Information should then be sent out immediately to arrive at its destination preferably before visitors make their first visit to the prison.
- Prisons should establish a dedicated Visitors' Help-Line.

### ***Making it Easier for Families to Visit & Reducing Financial Demands***

- The difficulties that visitors experience in travelling to/from prisons to visit should be addressed at a local level. Provision of special transport based on a needs analysis should be considered.
- Prisons should re-consider the value of items that prisoners are permitted to have in their possession.

### ***Recommendations for Visitors' Centres***

- A Visitors' Centre should operate at every prison.
- In providing a Visitors' Centre, consideration should be given to the needs of visitors and the extent to which Centres are meeting needs.
- Visitors' Centre should occupy a much more central role in the provision of services for visitors at the prison.
- Visitors' Centre staff and FCDO should endeavour to work in partnership together with a view to meeting the needs of visitors.

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