

FAMILIES AFFECTED BY IMPRISONMENT

A policy impact and engagement guide for researchers



ABOUT THE PROJECT

This guide is produced as part of a British Academy Rising Star Engagement Award, awarded to Anna Kotova, to hold two symposiums for Early-Career Researchers working on projects involving families affected by imprisonment in the UK. It draws on the discussions that took place at these symposiums.

The first symposium was held at Birmingham University, and involved ten Early-Career Researchers (ECR) working on projects to do with families affected by imprisonment. A number of stakeholder organisations, including New Leaf, Himaya Haven, Children Heard and Seen and POPS were also represented.

The second symposium took place in London, and was aimed at bringing together ECRs with senior policymakers. Present were Lord Farmer, Baroness Helena Kennedy, The Scottish Children's Commissioner, an MP who sits on the Justice Committee and representatives from the Howard League for Penal Reform and Prison Reform Trust.

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WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Charities, community groups, campaign groups

Work with stakeholder organisations, and avoid assuming what kind of research or outputs will be useful to them. Discuss outputs with these organisations in order to ascertain what is needed, and when. Involve stakeholders from early on in the research process (e.g. from the design stage), do not just bring them in for dissemination. Moreover, consider disseminating early outputs promptly, as organisations often cannot wait months/years until academic research has been formally written up as an article.

Build positive, collaborative relationships with stakeholders in the same way you would with participants. This leads to more fruitful collaboration and may result in more 'impactful' dissemination. Maintain these relationships with your stakeholder organisations after the research project has been concluded. They may be able to help you with your next project, for example, and/or offer access to data or research participants. You can do so by attending their AGMs, inviting representatives to do short guest lectures to your students, and so on.

Remember that people who work for these organisations often have limited time and resources. Think about how best to communicate with them efficiently and effectively, and they will be more likely to want to engage with you.

Stakeholders can also be gatekeepers, so time, energy and resources need to be dedicated to establishing a working relationship with them. These organisations are often rightly concerned about their service users, and often have serious ethical considerations to bear in mind. It is important to be cognizant of this.

Consider promoting your stakeholders' work as appropriate. For example, you might consider writing a blog entry or a report for them. You could also promote their work on social media (e.g. Twitter), and help with fundraising. This will not only allow you to sustain an ongoing relationship with your stakeholders, but also provide an opportunity to give back to them in return for their help/collaboration.



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WORKING WITH POLICYMAKERS

Parliamentary Committees, MPs, Ministers, House of Lords

Do not be hesitant to contact MPs/Ministers regarding your research, especially if they are already interested in your cause. Having someone within Parliament to champion the cause is always beneficial; they in fact might find your work useful during debates or PM Questions. You might want to attend your local MP's surgery and discuss whether they might be able to raise a question in Parliament, for example - especially if the issue is of particular concern to the constituency.

Be flexible: policymakers have numerous commitments and are time-poor. Make your points clearly and succinctly, arrange meetings near their locations, and work around their existing commitments. At the same time, be appropriately persistent - follow up emails, make phone calls, and politely request for updates.

Think of original ways in which to engage. Dr Shona Minson produced short films on the issue of maternal imprisonment and children's rights (see Key Resources) which have captured the attention of the legal profession, charities and policymakers. This was because the films were accessible, concise and professionally produced.

Be aware of funding pots that are available for engagement and impact activities. The British Academy Rising Star Engagement Award which was used to fund this project is one, but there are also others, such as the ESRC Impact Acceleration Accounts (speak to your university's funding team).

Be aware of Committees (Select and Public Bill) taking place, and step forward to give specialist advice when they request it. They only accept evidence in specific formats - written or oral - so please be aware of these formats so as to ensure your evidence is considered. See Key Resources for guidance. Be aware Parliament runs training for researchers seeking to learn about policy impact (see Key Resources).

Do not hesitate to directly state the implications of your research to policymakers, and to make clear recommendations for policy change. It is best to make these recommendations and implications clear rather than expect policymakers to make those links themselves.



BE FLEXIBLE; MAKE YOUR POINTS CLEARLY AND SUCCINCTLY...WORK AROUND POLICYMAKERS' EXISTING COMMITMENTS



KEY RESOURCES

Research Impact at the UK Parliament -
<https://www.parliament.uk/research-impact>

Justice Committee (UK Parliament) -
<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/justice-committee/>

Parliament Guide to Giving Evidence to s Select Committee of the House of Commons - <https://www.parliament.uk/get-involved/committees/how-do-i-submit-evidence/commons-witness-guide/>

ESRC Guide to Influencing Policy - <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/influencing-policymakers/>

Prisoners' Families Research Group - https://twitter.com/Prisoner_Family

British Academy Rising Star Engagement Award -
<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/british-academy-rising-star-engagement-awards>

Scottish Government Cross-Party Group for Families Affected by Imprisonment - <https://www.parliament.scot/msps/families-affected-by-imprisonment.aspx>

Scottish Parliament Justice Committee -
<https://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/justice-committee.aspx>

Shona Minson - 'Safeguarding Children When Sentencing Mothers' -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L18nFBXzHII&t=6s>

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