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# Experiences of Relationships for Ex-prisoners with Intellectual Disability



## Relationships and Crime

*Crime is not first an offence against society, much less against the state. Crime is first an offence against people, and it is here that we should start.*

Zehr (1990, pp 181-182)



# Background to the Research

## Key Research Question

How do people labelled as having an intellectual disability interpret their life experiences before prison, during prison and when they re-enter the community?

# Research Methodology and Method

## PhD Study: Life Stories of Ex-Prisoners with Intellectual Disability in Queensland

Life story interviews of 7 male and 3 female participants

Supplemented by interviews with 6 practitioners

Constructionist and interpretive with a moral imperative

Looking at before, during and after prison

Thematic and narrative analysis

# Relationship Needs

- Need to belong and feel safe; for love, nurturing and family; need for respect

## Group One (6)

- Enter prison with high relationship needs
- Traumatized by prison experience
- Exit prison with even greater needs

## Group Two (4)

- Enter prison with high relationship needs
- May be traumatized by prison experience, but also perceive some needs being met
- Exit prison with even greater needs

# Beds as Bus Stations

	Foster Care	Children's Homes	Juvenile Detention	Hostels/ Boarding Houses	Psychiatric Hospitals	Homeless	Secure Settings PWD	Public Housing
Anakin	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Light	Light	Dark
Angela	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Light
Damon	Dark	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark	Light	Light
Kylie	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark
Leanne	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark	Light
Mario	Light	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Light	Light	Light
Matthew	Light	Dark	Dark	Dark	Light	Dark	Light	Light
Michael	Light	Light	Light	Dark	Dark	Light	Light	Light
Peter	Light	Light	Light	Dark	Dark	Light	Light	Light
Wayne	Light	Light	Light	Light	Dark	Dark	Light	Light

# Prior to Imprisonment

- A need to belong and feel safe
  - In school
  - In living environment
  - In the community
- A need for love, nurturing and family
  - Family disruption and conflict
  - Grief and loss
  - Violence
  - Difficulty relating
- A need for respect
  - As a man or woman
  - As someone with power



*Anakin: I hear all these stories... I don't know if there's another father Mum married... at the time or...*

*Worker: He was just really angry because the one thing that was most important in his life was gone... He had no knowledge of whether he was coming back... At that time Mario wasn't allowed to see him.*

*Peter: Like I said, I always admired the guy because he didn't hurt me - what he used to do, he just used to masturbate me. That's it. That's the bottom line. That's all he did. So that doesn't hurt.*



# During Imprisonment

- Belonging and safety:
  - A constant background noise of violence, assault and psychological bullying
  - Increased security and isolation for prisoners with ID
- Connections to loved ones:
  - Difficulties in parenting
  - Shame brought on family
- Respect:
  - Dependent on knowledge of prison code of behaviour
  - Loss of autonomy

*Damon: If you said something you get bashed*

*Mario: People grab you - you look over your shoulder all the time*

*Kylie: In in in Women's and Boggo Road they they they always give me a good birthday when I am in there.*

*Kylie: You're allowed to get cans of coke and that. But I had to be watched... They had to pour it into my cup and then I have to give the can back... Cause some girls are suicidal.*



# Post Release

- Belonging and safety:
  - Artificial relationships
  - Violent relationships
- Connection to loved ones:
  - Little contact with biological family
  - Re-institutionalised in mental health facilities
- Respect:
  - Redefining self



*Angela: Mum and Dad disowned me, didn't want to know me, so I couldn't go back to them. And so I had to stay with my baby's father, Russell. And that was emotional abuse. And everywhere I went to ask for help they were either um no vacancies, or you need referral, or you need to um be on the waiting list. And I tried everywhere for accommodation. Caravan park, motel anywhere and nothing so I had to stay with my baby's father. And the only place where I felt safe and get the coping and be able to cope and that was commit a crime and go back to to prison.*

*Wayne: R\* didn't want me to hang around young children. "I don't want you to hang around young children. You might reoffend. You might do this, you might do that" [Wayne mimics in a nagging voice] He brought this all up in front of me. Like my relative's kids I can't talk to them even... So who the hell does he think he is?*



# Appropriate Responses

- Developing competencies of communities to provide humane responses (Sullivan and Tift 2006)
- Interventions that result in a valued social status
- Shift away from purely custodial interventions to more therapeutic, human-centred responses
- Safety and security through a developmental ethic of care (Wwolff and Shi 2009)
- Sustainable approach to cross-agency collaboration
- Setting clear expectations and pro-social modelling (Trotter 2006)