

Mark Halsey and Melissa de Vel-Palumbo, *Generations through Prison: Experiences of Intergenerational Incarceration*, Routledge: Abingdon and New York, 2020; 168pp.: 978-0-8153-7516-6, £ 120.00 (hbk), 978-1-351-24057-4, £ 36.99(ebk)

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In criminology, parents' criminal history has often been identified as a strong predictor of youth delinquency alongside family breakdown and poor parenting (e.g. Farrington 2003). However, the precise ways in which parental offending and imprisonment interplay with genetic and environmental risk factors to result in the transmission of behaviour, including crime, across generations remain poorly understood. In addition, why some families experience intergenerational incarceration while others with similar characteristics do not – as well as with what consequences – is still empirically underresearched.

Generations through Prison is an important book that addresses these insufficiencies and challenges common-sense understandings of the relationship between crime, imprisonment and the family. Drawing on prison survey data and the narratives of second- and third- (and sometimes fourth- and fifth-) generation prisoners in South Australia, the book sets out an ambitious goal of understanding the complexity of mechanisms that affect the formation and continuation of familial trauma, crime and incarceration. In addition, it aims to disentangle how imprisonment shapes particular families' experiences of the criminal justice system to suggest viable changes in how prison *is done* in the 21st century.

The first chapter ('Intergenerational Incarceration in Context') establishes intergenerational incarceration as a significant social concern across jurisdictions and distinguishes it from intergenerational offending. Chapter 2 ('Getting and Analysing the Data') presents how the authors gathered and analysed the surveys and interview

transcripts on which the book is based. Moreover, the chapter demonstrates and comments on the research participants' demographic data. By doing so, it does not only affirm deprived and poorly educated men, often of Indigenous background, as the 'usual suspects' of the Australian criminal justice system, but also emphasises the personal weight of familial incarceration that they carry.

The book's main empirical contribution is presented in the next two chapters. Chapter 3 ('The Ubiquity of Trauma and Loss') uses the density of research participants' accounts to present the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, loss and abuse in some families. The chapter exposes prisons – along with care homes, juvenile institutions, social services and the police – as aggravating the 'cascading effects of (...) instability' (p. 33) within particular families and thereby contributing to the cycle of incarceration instead of preventing it. Importantly, the chapter also critically addresses the prevalence of trauma in the lives of Aboriginal prisoners.

Chapter 4 ('Three Generations through Prison') reveals the adverse lived experiences of intergenerational incarceration by presenting together the narratives of three generations of prisoners. Building on the findings in Chapter 3, the chapter argues that incarceration nowadays still encourages values and behaviours that are corrosive to the capacity of prisoners to adapt to life (post release). In prisoners from families with histories of institutionalisation, this triggers what Shadd Maruna has called condemnation scripts. As prisoners and their family members feel they are 'doomed to deviance' (Maruna 2001: 74), prison weaves through their lives naturally across generations.

Chapter 5 ('Prison as Homecoming') further explores how prison has been normalised in many poor White and Aboriginal families, serving as a rite of passage,

a locus of family reunions and a homecoming space. However, the chapter presents this finding along with the unfavourable effects that intergenerational imprisonment has on families' wellbeing. It concludes by conceptualising co-prisoners as possible substitute family members and as potentially encouraging each other in desistance processes both while serving their sentences and after they have been released.

In Chapter 6 ('Prison as Criminogenic Event'), the authors challenge the perception of the prison as a 'reinventive institution' (Crewe and Ievins 2019). They argue that for most inmates the prison operates as a criminogenic setting that contributes – combined with prior familial experiences – to the development of criminal behaviour and incarceration. The authors also depict the mechanisms, through which incarceration could be triggering the imprisonment of subsequent generations: 1.) The lack of focus on rehabilitation; 2.) Reconnecting criminal peers and reinforcing the criminal code; 3.) Problematic transitions of prisoners into the community; 4.) Vicarious pains of imprisonment for family members.

The final chapter ('The Fortunate Few: Evading Intergenerational Incarceration') examines the effects of imprisonment within the same family, deciphering why some family members are subject to intergenerational incarceration while others avoid it. It considers factors such as expected gendered norms of behaviour, the availability of family members as capable guardians, and individual agency. Chapter 7 also touches upon the ways in which incarcerated relatives try to protect – albeit often unsuccessfully – their kin from offending behaviour, institutional involvement and imprisonment. In the 'Concluding Remarks' the authors present the policy implications of their research, suggesting data collection on intergenerational trauma and incarceration in prisons; challenging gender norms in

schools; early intervention within some families; making reintegration the central role of prison; and helping reduce the strains of non-incarcerated family members.

Overall, the book is empirically rich and written accessibly enough for both academics and professionals. Criminologists working in the fields of prisons and crime and the family will find in *Generations through Prison* a much needed complex interpretation of intergenerational incarceration beyond the view that criminality and imprisonment are passed down from one generation to the next. The book will also be of interest to practitioners working within criminal justice, corrections and probation, the police, social care and early intervention, possibly helping them put incarceration in a broader familial and structural context to seek appropriate support for prisoners' families. This book will undoubtedly inspire further study and hopefully encourage future scholars to gather dense empirical data and use it for both a rigorous theoretical examination of the deleterious effects of imprisonment, as well as a rethink about the justifiability of prison itself.

References:

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