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Children on the Outside of the Fence

A Qualitative Study on Organizational Support and the Invisible Group of Children with Incarcerated Parents in Sweden

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Author: Alice Svalin

Supervisor: Linnéa Österman

Abstract

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Author: Alice Svalin

Key words: Support, Parental Incarceration, Children, Civil Society Organizations.

Background: Following an increase in repressive approaches to criminal justice policy as well as upcoming sentencing reforms in Sweden, the amount of children who have an incarcerated parent is growing. Known as an adverse childhood experience, parental incarceration is associated with a large variety of negative consequences for children experiencing it. To mitigate these consequences, civil society organizations in Sweden are accordingly providing these children with support.

Purpose: The aim of this study was to explore the role of Swedish civil society organizations in meeting the psychosocial support needs of children with an incarcerated parent, as well as to explore the challenges and opportunities connected to this work. Corresponding with the research aim, the study addressed three research questions: How do Swedish civil society organizations understand and address the support needs of children with an incarcerated parent? What organizational, structural, and social barriers do Swedish civil society organizations encounter when providing support for children with an incarcerated parent? How do Swedish civil society organizations perceive opportunities for overcoming barriers and strengthening support for children with an incarcerated parent?

Method: Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine members of staff working at five different geographical locations within three civil society organizations who provide targeted support to children with an incarcerated parent in Sweden. The empirical material was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings: The findings revealed that civil society organizations understand children's support needs as both individual and holistic and organize their support accordingly, targeting multiple levels of children's ecological systems. Similarly, organizations encounter barriers on multiple levels, the most evident one being financial constraints related to their own ecology. Furthermore, barriers to providing support were found to derive from social stigma, political discourse, institutional structures, and the invisibility of the issue itself. Correspondingly, findings revealed that to overcome barriers and strengthen support for children experiencing parental incarceration, there is a need to direct attention to a macrolevel of society. Findings suggest a necessity for reduced stigma, enhanced children's rights and perspectives, and increased attention to and knowledge about the topic of parental incarceration.

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1. Introduction

Forgotten victims, orphans of justice, and unseen victims of the prison boom. These are all names that have previously been used to describe children of incarcerated parents, displaying how they have often gone unnoticed or been excluded from discourse within society (Murray et al. 2012). Commonly, the main focus within debates about incarceration is on its role in reducing crime rates, meanwhile the adverse effects that incarceration has on children and families is often ignored (Saunders 2018).

It is important that children with an incarcerated parent are not forgotten but are rather given attention since research has revealed them to be a vulnerable group that face many difficulties throughout their lives (Turney 2018). When a parent has custodial responsibility and is present, one of the most apparent consequences of parental incarceration for children is the physical loss of a family member. This leads to uncertainty, confusion, and a broken secure attachment to the incarcerated parent (Berman et al. 2013). Additionally, children who have an incarcerated parent are reported to be three times more likely to suffer from "mental health problems, anti-social delinquent behaviour and other adverse outcomes", compared to those who do not experience parental incarceration (Jones et al. 2013, p. 133). Due to all of the harms that affect children when a parent is incarcerated, parental incarceration is commonly described as an adverse childhood experience (Rhodes et al. 2023; Turney 2018). It is therefore observed that these children are in need of support interventions to help deal with their circumstances and strengthen resilience (Berman et al. 2013). As Condry & Minson (2021, p. 544) describe it, children with an incarcerated parent experience negative effects as unintended outcomes of imprisonment, and these harms "breach the rights of citizens who are innocent of wrong-doing". To promote and fulfill children's rights then, states could be considered to have residual obligations to reduce the harms experienced by these children (Condry & Minson 2021).

1.1 Problem Area

In Sweden, there is no way of knowing exactly how many children are affected by parental incarceration today due to a lack of updated and reliable statistics (Borén et al. 2018). A number however estimates that 30 000 children in Sweden have an incarcerated parent today, if clients of the probation offices are included, although this number is an underestimation and believed to be much larger (Cortes 2025; Borén et al. 2018). An urgency in discussing

and researching parental incarceration within the Swedish context stems from the increasingly hardening climate within Swedish criminal policy today. During the Swedish elections in 2022, law and order became, after a period of increasing focus on crime and justice, one of the most central electoral issues and it remains that way as of today (Andersson & Nilsson 2025). During this time, criminal justice policy has shifted from more rehabilitative approaches to repressive ones (ibid.). In other words, Swedish criminal justice policy is currently engaged in "the moral condemnation of the criminal", characterized by increased penalties and harsher treatment of criminals as opposed to rehabilitation, and commonly known as 'tough on crime' (ibid., p. 313). As a result, the number of detainees within Swedish prisons is expected to increase from around 8 000 to up to roughly 35 000 within the next 10 years if all planned sentencing reforms are implemented (ibid.; Kriminalvården 2024a). Inevitably then, the number of children with an incarcerated parent will grow concurrently, and it is presumed that in 10 years, around 100 000 children in Sweden risk having a parent who is incarcerated (Cortes 2025).

While the amount of children affected by parental incarceration is and will continue to increase, empirical evidence shows that support provided for these children in Sweden today is dispersed and does not wholly meet the support needs these children have (Borén et al. 2018). Additionally, there currently exists no national strategy for supporting these children (Cortes 2025). In this way, support for children with an incarcerated parent can be seen as an underdeveloped practice in social work. Considering the expected increase in children affected as well as the previously mentioned harmful impacts of parental incarceration where human rights are breached (see Condry & Minson 2021), the lack of attention to these children is alarming. The way Cortes (2025) puts it, "as criminal policy hardens, children's rights must be strengthened, otherwise we risk letting a generation grow up to bear the consequences of adults' decisions without having done anything wrong" (my translation). The lack of adequate support itself moreover breaches children's rights, since states have a responsibility to ensure children are cared for and do not have the rights set forth in the Convention on the Rights of the Child violated (United Nations 1989).

Aside from the Swedish state having a duty to promote human rights, the profession of social work is likewise responsible for this (IFSW, no date; Androff 2016). Although there exists no national strategy for support, a few civil society organizations (CSOs) in the field of social work in Sweden are currently providing a vast majority of target specific support to children with an incarcerated parent (Borén et al. 2018). Through this support provision, these CSOs

promote welfare and well-being, and complement the social work provided by the public sector (see Herz 2016; see Lundberg 2020) (for further details, see section 2.2). Being the only actors who work closely with children of incarcerated persons, these organizations possess valuable knowledge and thus play an important role in highlighting circumstances affecting the experiences of these children as well as their support needs. This is especially valuable considering how the topic is under-researched in the context of Sweden. As the group of children in need of support rises, it is valuable to understand these organizations' perceptions of support needs and the workings of interventions, and in what ways support provided through social work can be enhanced to promote human rights and better outcomes for these children.

1.2 Study Aim

The aim of this study is to explore the role of Swedish civil society organizations in meeting the psychosocial support needs of children with an incarcerated parent, as well as to explore the challenges and opportunities connected to this work.

1.3 Research Questions

The study will address three research questions:

- How do Swedish civil society organizations understand and address the support needs of children with an incarcerated parent?
- What organizational, structural, and social barriers do Swedish civil society organizations encounter when providing support for children with an incarcerated parent?
- How do Swedish civil society organizations perceive opportunities for overcoming barriers and strengthening support for children with an incarcerated parent?

1.4 Scope and Delimitations

This study applies a focus on CSOs and is therefore limited to not include other forms of organizations such as the public sector. This delimitation stems from the fact that CSOs are currently the largest providers of target-specific support to children with an incarcerated parent, while the public sector offers notably minimal support (Borén et al. 2018). It is therefore unlikely that a delimitation that does not include the public sector overlooks significant details on this topic.

Although studies have shown that there are possible gender differences that affect the impacts of parental incarceration (see Kruttschnitt 2010; see Dallaire 2007), this study will not employ a focus on gender. The organizations that constitute the focus of this study provide support to children of both incarcerated mothers and fathers, and do not differentiate between the two in any distinct way. For this reason, gender differences are not of relevance for the aim of this study, although research on parental incarceration in general could benefit from more studies employing this focus (Gadian et al. 2025).

As this study pays great attention to children, a clarification of age may be needed. Proceeding from this study's focus on CSOs, this study's definition of children aligns with the CSOs definitions. Simply put, when referring to children in this study, it implies that they are of the age that they can access support from these organizations. This delimitation additionally entails that adults who experienced parental incarceration as children will not be addressed, since the aim of the study is to examine support at the present time.

Furthermore, this study will not argue for whether or not maintaining a relationship with an incarcerated parent is in the "best interest of the child" in specific cases. However, this does not necessarily mean that all children who are involved with the studied organizations currently are or wish to be in contact with their incarcerated parent. The convention on the rights of the child (United Nations 1989) protects children's right to have their views expressed and heard, meaning that children should have a say in whether they want to maintain a relationship with their parent or not, provided that it is still within the best interest of the child. It is essential to bear in mind that parental incarceration can, for some children, "bring relief to a chaotic home situation" and not necessarily cause suffering in the same way it will others (Nylander et al. 2018, p. 35). CSOs provide support for all children no matter if they are in contact with their parent or not, although the support may differ depending on this situation.

2. Background

This chapter aims to provide the reader with information helpful for understanding children with incarcerated parents' opportunities for relationship maintenance and support offered in Sweden today. First, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service will be discussed. Background information about the Prison and Probation Service is useful for the reader as the circumstances of incarceration are central to understanding the situation for families affected by it and thus the context that organizational support work is located within. Thereafter follows a discussion on civil society as welfare providers to give the reader context concerning the important role of CSOs. Finally, this chapter discusses social work as well as its responsibility to facilitate human rights that children of incarcerated parents can claim.

2.1 The Swedish Prison and Probation Service (Kriminalvården)

As of 2024, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service (SPPS) consisted of 33 probation offices, 42 jails, 6 women's prisons, and 40 men's prisons (Kriminalvården 2024b). The same year, Swedish jails and prisons contained around 11 000 detainees, though this number is continuously rising and within the upcoming 10 years, SPPS is planning to triple the number of places offered (ibid.). SPPS has a crucial role for ensuring incarcerated parents and their children can stay in contact and maintain a relationship throughout the time of incarceration, something that is emphasized from a children's rights perspective also by the government (Prop. 2009/10:135). However, staff have expressed a lack of clear instructions for how to implement a child's perspective into their work, resulting in discrepancies between prison locations (Kriminalvården 2024c).

To facilitate parent–child relationship maintenance, SPPS offers possibilities for having phone calls, video calls, letter correspondence, and visits in a specific child-friendly visitation room (Kriminalvården, no date, a; Kriminalvården, no date, b). For those prisoners permitted to have day releases, they can do this with a purpose to visit family (Kriminalvården, no date, c). Another opportunity designed for maintaining parent–child relationships that is offered to parents in prison is to record a compact disc where they read their children bedtime stories (Kriminalvården, no date, b). Some prisons in Sweden furthermore offer so-called "parent groups" that incarcerated parents can join to get support in their role as a parent (ibid.; Kriminalvården, no date, d). To ensure that SPPS assumes a child-friendly position, all prisons, jails, and probation offices have "child representatives" (barnombud). The role of

these representatives is to be responsible for the authorities' part in supporting incarcerated parents and their children (Kriminalvården, no date, b).

Chapter two § 5 of the Swedish act of imprisonment *Fängelselag* (SFS 2010:610) states that infants are allowed to stay with a parent in prison, if it is considered to be in the best interest of the child. Around 10 children every year have been allowed to live with their incarcerated parent in prison (Borén et al. 2018), and although the law makes no distinction between mothers and fathers, no fathers have yet brought their infants with them (Björkhagen Turesson & Staaf 2023). SPPS and their operations are directed by a gender-neutral legislation meaning that circumstances should ideally be the same for children no matter if their incarcerated parent is residing in a women's or a men's prison (ibid.).

2.2 Civil Society and Welfare Production

CSOs provide social services and advocate for vulnerable groups toward common goals and are separate from the state, yet they constitute an essential part of democracies (Prop. 2009/10:55). CSOs' right to exist and operate are protected within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948) as well as within the Swedish constitution *Kungörelse om beslutad ny regeringsform* (SFS 1974:152), through the freedom of speech and the freedom of association and assembly. The central part that CSOs play for democracy in Sweden is emphasized within a government bill where the Swedish government proposes a strategy to strengthen and improve civil society's capabilities for promoting welfare (Prop. 2009/10:55). This is similar to a common trend seen within many welfare states today where CSOs are becoming increasingly responsible for welfare production, shifting the responsibilities and role of civil society to play a more crucial part for a society's well-being (Lundberg 2020; Herz 2016). In Sweden, the welfare system has undergone significant change within the last three decades where the role of the public sector has decreased, creating a form of "institutional deficit" (Herz 2016, p. 365). This has generally led to discussions regarding the ways in which CSOs can complement the welfare state and serve as an alternative to social work provided by the public sector, something that they are currently greatly expected to do (ibid.; Lundberg 2020).

Part of the responsibility for welfare production in Sweden is thereby transferred from the state to civil society and its organizations. As an example related to parental incarceration, SPPS frequently refer family members of incarcerated individuals in need of support to local CSOs (see Kriminalvården no date, a; see Kriminalvården, no date, e; see Kriminalvården, no

date, f). They collaborate with and provide these organizations financial support as they believe they "complement and contribute" (my translation) to their own operations (Kriminalvården, no date, g). The collaboration between SPPS and CSOs is a great example of how these organizations can help fill the gap between the public sector and welfare.

One additional way that the Swedish state works to promote welfare by means of CSOs is through civil society-public partnerships, in Sweden known as IOP (Idéburet Offentligt Partnerskap) (Borén et al. 2018). IOP is a partnership between idea-driven and public actors, facilitating collaborations between them through mutual agreements (SOU 2019:56). A shared trait for IOPs is that all actors within the partnership share a mutual, beneficial, societal goal and that they contribute with resources to reach these, including money, facilities, voluntary work, and knowledge (ibid.). Civil society-public partnerships are based on the idea that some complex, societal issues require united action to be solved, meaning that a cooperation is beneficial (ibid.). IOP furthermore promotes more prolonged and stable operations towards the common goals actors pursue as it ensures organizations have predictable finances, something that is of great importance for CSOs to be able to work long-term (Borén et al. 2018).

Nevertheless, the role that CSOs play for Swedish welfare can not merely be categorized as complementary to the public sector. Rather, Herz (2016, p. 377) claims that they can more accurately be described as "a short-term solution aimed at the members of society that are not being reached by the welfare state" due to the aforementioned institutional deficit. CSOs are in this way actors who fill the gaps of welfare provision that are left when the state withdraws its institutions, reaching those who are otherwise forgotten (ibid.). In relation to parental incarceration, it becomes obvious how CSOs constitute a vital part of welfare provision for children affected, as social services in most Swedish municipalities do not offer any target-specific support to the group (see Borén et al. 2018). Moreover, the public tends to place more trust in CSOs, further contributing to these more often being able to reach vulnerable groups that are reluctant to trust the public sector (SOU 2019:56).

2.3 Social Work and Human Rights

The work that CSOs carry out can be defined as social work. On a macro and political level, social work can target communities and society as a whole through advocacy and policy formulation, while it can also operate on a more micro and personal level when working with counseling families, small groups, and individual persons (IFSW, no date). In the case of

parental incarceration, research calls for multi-level interventions (see Arditti & Johnson 2022; see Rhodes et al. 2023; see Davis & Shlafer 2017). Social workers therefore have both the potential and responsibility to ensure that children of incarcerated parents get the support they need, and those working within support-providing CSOs are currently doing most of the heavy lifting (see Borén et al. 2018).

In accordance with the global definition of social work, social workers have a mandate to promote and respect human rights (IFSW, no date; Androff 2016). Human rights are accordingly something that is commonly principal to the work of CSOs (Androff 2016). Particularly central to the issue of parental incarceration is the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989) and in Sweden, the convention was incorporated into Swedish law through *Lag om Förenta nationernas konvention om barnets rättigheter* (SFS 2018:1197) on January 1st, 2020. Thereby the state of Sweden, along with social workers and CSOs, has an obligation to ensure that the rights stated in the convention are fulfilled. Furthermore, building on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 2010 the Swedish government accepted a government bill (Prop. 2009/10:232) for a strategy to strengthen children's rights (Borén et al. 2018). Thereupon, not only is Sweden obligated to abide by the convention, but all legislation relating to children must coincide with it (ibid.). The government bill furthermore emphasizes that parents should be provided with support in parenthood and that knowledge about children's situations and rights should constitute all decisions and operations affecting them (ibid.; Prop. 2009/10:232). Human rights are in this way crucial for those working closely with children, and the Swedish state is obligated to in every way facilitate the fulfillment of these rights and thus also support the CSOs who work to promote them. Articles within the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989) that are specifically relevant for children with an incarcerated parent are:

> In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. (Art. 3 § 1)

> The child shall [...] have [...] as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents. (Art. 7 § 1)

States Parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interests. (Art. 9 § 3)

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (Art. 12 § 1)

States Parties shall use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child [...]. (Art. 18 § 1)

For the purpose of guaranteeing and promoting the rights set forth in the present Convention, States Parties shall render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children. (Art. 18 § 2)

(United Nations 1989)

These human rights protected within the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989) show the importance of considering children's best interests, autonomy, relationship with parents, and emphasizes state parties' responsibility to promote these. However, conflicts may occur when rights are pitted against each other. A child's expressed wish (Art. 12 § 1) to be in contact with and see their incarcerated parent may for example contradict perceptions of the best interest of the child, while articles 7 § 1, 9 § 3, and 18 § 1 may similarly contradict with a child's wish. Nonetheless, the best interest of the child seems to be most prevalent within the convention and tends to be deemed as the primary consideration for all matters involving children (see United Nations 1989). Likewise relevant is chapter 6 § 2a of Sweden's children and parents code *Föräldrabalk* (SFS 1949:381) where it is stated that "the best interests of the child should be paramount in all matters of custody, residence and association" (my translation).

3. Literature Review

This chapter presents a selective account of the existing research and knowledge concerning children with an incarcerated parent and what is known about their support needs and how these can be addressed, thus being anchored in the study's research questions. This chapter aims to place the present study in an academic literary context, enhance credibility, and provide a background that describes possible needs for further research (see Denscombe 2017). The chapter will review literature and studies conducted in both international and Swedish contexts. While this chapter does not claim to provide an exhaustive account of all research and knowledge on the topic, it nevertheless aims to offer readers an overview of the core themes in the literature that deals with children of incarcerated parents. These themes are specifically related to the impact of parental incarceration for children, support measures, and policy and practice.

Literature discussed in this chapter was found through advanced searches using the databases ProQuest, Scopus, Google Scholar, and Supersearch (provided by the library at the University of Gothenburg), and additionally through exploring reference lists of found articles. To take full advantage of the literature searches, key words were used in different combinations while considering synonyms (see Denscombe 2017). Key words used included: child* OR youth AND "parental incarceration" OR "incarcerated parent" OR "familial incarceration" OR "family incarceration" OR "parents in prison" OR "parents in jail" AND support* OR help*. When searching for literature on the Swedish context, the key word "Sweden" was added, or the previously mentioned key words were translated into Swedish.

3.1 Framing the Literature

When examining the previous literature and academic research through search statistics, one can see that the topic is most dominantly researched within the subject area of social sciences, followed by psychology and medicine (Scopus 2025a). These studies have largely focused on the effects that parental incarceration has on children. As these studies have shown, there are a lot of risks and challenges associated with parental incarceration, inducing a need for research that alternatively focuses on identifying ways to support these children and promote resilience, described as the "capacity of children and youth to sustain well-being in the context of adversity" (Corcoran et al. 2025; Arditti & Johnson 2022, p. 57). Arditti & Johnson (2022, p. 57) call this shift in focus from problems to solutions a "critical turning point" for the field. However, studies adopting this new focus are sparse and there are more

research gaps to fill, notably when it comes to protective factors for children as research primarily has focused on singular contexts of the individual and families (Corcoran et al. 2025).

Most research on the topic of parental incarceration as a whole is dominated by Anglophone settings while other contexts are left considerably unobserved (Scopus 2025b). Although a lot of the impacts of parental incarceration can be applicable within diverse contexts, the situation and experiences of this group of children can look different in various countries due to differences within the criminal justice and support systems, and in norms (see Jones et al. 2013). There therefore exists a knowledge gap concerning country-specific experiences for children of incarcerated parents outside of the Anglophone context. Consequently, the situation for children of incarcerated parents in Sweden is largely under-researched within academic literature. Existing knowledge about the Swedish context mainly stems from practitioner perspectives, more specifically CSOs and SPPS.

3.2 Well-being and Parent–Child Closeness

One commonly recurring concept within this research area is that of well-being. Although a broadly defined term, well-being can be understood to refer to "the state of feeling healthy and happy" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Naturally, when a parent is incarcerated, it entails a direct separation between parents and children and changes family structures, and studies have shown that the maintenance of a close relationship with the parent throughout the time of incarceration is related to children's well-being (Turney 2023). Among other things, a parent's incarceration can be described as an ambiguous loss for children, affecting their ability to cope with the situation and grieve "the loss of a parent who is alive, yet emotionally and physically absent" (Miller 2006, p. 478). Experiences of loss due to separation from a parent has been shown to hinder children's development and lead to anxiety, depression, and stress (ibid; Turney & Goodsell 2018). Aside from feelings of loss affecting well-being, a study by Condry & Minson (2021) considers previous literature demonstrating the negative effects of imprisonment on entire families, including children, and conceptualizes these effects as 'symbiotic harms'. Symbiotic harms, they argue, entail the multitude of harmful consequences of imprisonment experienced by family members. In addition to disrupted attachments due to separation, harms are related to mental health, marginalization, abuse, and include "negative interactions with criminal justice agencies" (Condry & Minson 2021, p.

543). These harms are not intended outcomes yet they are common nonetheless, and are described to be a breach of human rights (ibid.).

Similar to Condry & Minson (2021) mentioning disrupted attachments as a harmful effect of incarceration, within a study conducted by Turney (2023) findings show that parent–youth relationships are acutely weakened by parental incarceration. Younger children are found to be especially vulnerable to this. Furthermore, it is concluded that the closeness of children's relationship to the incarcerated parent is predicated by the relationship between both parents due to "the interconnected nature of dyadic familial relationships", as incarceration fractures parental relationships too (ibid., p. 1105). A common barrier related to maintaining a close relationship with an incarcerated parent is related to communication and visitation, particularly for young children who are more dependent on their caregivers to facilitate these (ibid.). Clopton & East (2008) raise a debate concerning prison visitation and note that distances to travel for visiting a parent in prison may be long and costly. Caregivers may also be unwilling to accompany or facilitate children's visits (ibid.), sometimes due to fractured romantic relationships between the parents, as understood through the family systems perspective highlighted by Turney (2023). Regardless, failure to recognize children's need for maintaining close contact with their incarcerated parent, especially if that is their own wish, has shown to have negative consequences for well-being, development, and mental health (Turney & Goodsell 2018).

3.3 Stigma

Previous studies have examined how children of incarcerated parents are affected by the stigma that exists around the topic of incarceration (see Saunders 2018; Phillips & Gates 2011). Although as Saunders (2018) notes, older studies have argued that experiences of stigma do not significantly affect children of prisoners negatively, more recent results in studies by both Saunders (2018) and Phillips & Gates (2011) demonstrate opposing conclusions. Findings by Saunders (2018) show that children of incarcerated parents report experiences of both external and internal stigma. Fear of judgement, fear of becoming like their parent, and feeling different from others are the internal experiences of stigma found in the study (Saunders 2018). Moreover, external experiences of stigma include bullying, discrimination, and exclusion (ibid.). Phillips & Gates (2011) reported similar findings and additionally mentioned that the fear of stigma may affect children and families of the incarcerated more negatively than actual encounters. Both studies point out how children at

times tend to conceal the truth about their parent's absence by virtue of this fear of stigma and that this also can be an impediment to seeking help, posing a challenge for professionals to access the group to provide support (Saunders 2018; Phillips & Gates 2011). However, strategies to identify children within this group in order to provide them with appropriate support can be stigmatizing in itself since it risks reinforcing ideas of these children being different from others thus strengthening "ideas of 'us' versus 'them'" (Phillips & Gates 2011, p. 291).

3.4 Children's Right to Know

Many children are not told the full truth about their parents absence (Muentner & Eddy 2023; Phillips & Gates 2011). This is in multiple studies described as potentially destructive for children since not knowing, in combination with ambiguous loss, can lead to children thinking their parent intentionally abandoned them, assuming it is their fault (ibid.). Additionally, upon later learning the truth, it can lead to distrust towards their caregivers, weakening the relationship (ibid.). On this topic, Muentner & Eddy (2023) conducted a study where they investigated well-being in relation to children's knowledge about their parent's situation. Results in this study indicate that children who are given "more complete information" about their parent's incarceration often have fewer behavior problems and depressive symptoms (Muentner & Eddy 2023, p. 7). However this was only the case amongst younger boys while older boys in contrast show greater behavior problems when given more information, indicating a context-dependency for consequences and support (ibid.). Nonetheless, their results show that providing children with accurate and age appropriate information about a parent's incarceration can have positive effects (Muentner & Eddy 2023). Similarly, Nesmith & Ruhland (2008) and Jones et al. (2024) stress a need for families to have access to guides and information concerning how to support and talk to their children about incarceration.

In a report based on an interview study lifting children's own voices concerning parental incarceration in Sweden, it was found that 9 out of 10 children believe they have a right to know if their parent is incarcerated (Storm Mukwana & Franzén 2021). The other children (1 out of 10) are unsure of whether *all* children should know as they emphasize the importance of age-tailored information and context-specificity. Children in the study furthermore expressed that they should not have to wonder or worry about what happened to their parent, and that it is better to know than to imagine (ibid.). The authors furthermore accentuate the

fact that denying children information about their parents whereabouts can prevent children's possibilities for support, hinder their processing of emotions, and weaken abilities to cope (ibid.).

3.5 Mental Health

The aspect of mental health is a recurring theme within previous research. In 2017, Davis & Shlafer conducted a study where they examined mental health in relation to parent–child relationships as a protective factor using data from a survey in the US state of Minnesota. Findings of their study demonstrate a strong association between mental health problems and parental incarceration (Davis & Shlafer 2017). Furthermore, results show that a strong relationship between parents and children can have a buffering effect against the mental health problems children face (ibid.). On the other hand, a meta-analysis conducted by Murray et al. (2012, p. 190) "found no association between parental incarceration and poor mental health". Although studies generally have shown mixed results in this concern, other research has contradicted Murray et al.'s findings (see Davis & Shlafer 2017). Newer studies have moreover been conducted with a focus on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), defined as "potentially stressful or traumatic events" (Turney 2018, p. 218). Studies by both Turney (2018) and Rhodes et al. (2023) have found that experiences of ACEs are more common amongst children of incarcerated parents whilst Arditti & Savla (2015) found parental incarceration to be a possible predictor of trauma for children. Conclusions of these studies show that children of incarcerated parents are a vulnerable group and more research is needed to identify possible resilience factors (Turney 2018; Rhodes et al. 2023).

Nylander et al.'s article "After a childhood with a parent in prison – relationships and well-being as a child and young adult" (2018) is an example of research on the topic of mental health where the Swedish case specifically was studied. The authors conducted a study where they compared the experiences of young adults in Sweden who had a parent in prison while growing up with those who did not, focusing on investigating "parental support, school well-being and functioning, and socioemotional and/or behavioral problems" (Nylander et al. 2018, p. 34). In the case of parental support, results of the study indicate that those with experiences of parental incarceration, in comparison to others, report having poorer relationships and less regular contact with both parents while also having felt less loved as a child (ibid.). In school, children with a parent in prison were found to be disadvantaged and in need of support (ibid.). Results suggest these children have negative

experiences of well-being in school and are less likely to continue to upper-secondary school, something that is uncommon in Sweden (ibid.). In regards to the last issue, children with an incarcerated parent have a "higher risk of hospitalization for mental health issues", and have a tendency to plan or attempt suicide and self-harm (ibid., p. 42). Important to mention though, is that Nylander et al. (2018) clarify the risk of over-simplifying results, stressing a need for multidimensionality. A parent's imprisonment, they note, is not "the sole causal factor" for results indicating a disadvantage for the children (Nylander et al. 2018, p. 43). Factors such as age, prior health, details of the parents' imprisonment, and circumstances before incarceration may for example also affect the studied aspects of children's lives (ibid.). Nevertheless, the authors highlight that these children are a vulnerable group who face many difficulties and are in need of special attention for support by services in Sweden. However, the authors further note that currently, support interventions in Sweden are few and considerably under-studied within academic research (ibid.).

3.6 Long-Term Effects

The impacts that parental incarceration has on children do not necessarily disappear upon a parent's re-entry into society or as children grow up to be adults, though studies focusing on life courses have been few (Shaw 2022). Shaw (2022) conducted a study on potential long-term effects of parental incarceration through interviewing adults who experienced parental incarceration as children. His results conclude that residential instability, emotional and financial strain, and transference of stigma all negatively affect the life course and social mobility of those who have had an incarcerated parent (ibid.). Another possible long-term effect of parental incarceration that has been frequently debated within research is that of anti-social behavior (Miller 2006). Previous studies have found an association between parental incarceration and an increased risk of anti-social, criminal behavior, suggesting an intergenerational transmission of crime (see Murray et al. 2012; see Besemer et al. 2017). However as Miller (2006) explains, other experts have previously disagreed with and questioned similar results. In line with critique presented towards the argued association, Besemer et al. (2017) highlight that there is a knowledge gap relating to whether or not the association found between anti-social behavior and parental incarceration is causal. This is similarly the case for several of the impacts of parental incarceration. It is difficult to isolate one variable and there are most probably multiple circumstances other than incarceration that contribute to the well-being and behaviors of children with incarcerated parents (Turney & Goodsell 2018). Nevertheless, findings on the topic of parental incarceration overall indicate

that these children are exposed to numerous challenges in their lifetimes and are in need of support regardless of causality.

3.7 Contextual Differences

As an illustration of possible differences across various countries as mentioned in section 3.1, Jones et al. (2013) compares the case of Sweden with those of Germany, Romania, and the United Kingdom in a EU-funded report written for the COPING (Children of Prisoners, Interventions & Mitigations to Strengthen Mental Health) project. In their comparison, children in Sweden were most likely to have experienced parental incarceration on multiple occasions, more likely to have long journeys for visiting a parent in prison, and more in need of help with their feelings (Jones et al. 2013). Simultaneously, Swedish children were least likely to report instances of bullying and they experienced less stigma linked to services providing support to them and their families in comparison to children within the other studied countries (ibid.). This comparison is a great example of how experiences may vary in different contexts, and why academic studies focusing on the case of Sweden are important.

Another contextual difference that previous literature has acknowledged is related to gender and whether a child has an incarcerated father or mother. Researchers have often considered the possibility that consequences of parental incarceration may differ depending on the parent's gender, although studies employing this focus are few (Gadian et al. 2025). Statistics show that mothers more often than fathers are more likely to have been the primary caregiver of their child prior to incarceration (ibid.). As a consequence of this, children of incarcerated mothers are more often required to move into the care of a relative or placed in statutory care, uprooting them from their schools and communities (ibid.: Turney & Goodsell 2018). By contrast, when a father is incarcerated, children most commonly "remain in the family home with their mother" (Gadain et al. 2025, p. 3), indicating that maternal incarceration could potentially be more consequential for children than paternal (Turney & Goodsell 2018). Furthermore, prolonged separation from one's mother is known to be damaging for children's social–emotional development (Gómez et al. 2024). Results from studies applying this focus show that children experiencing maternal incarceration are more likely to suffer negative impacts than those experiencing paternal incarceration (Kruttschnitt 2010; see Dallaire 2007). However, other studies have indicated that paternal incarceration is more associated with behavioral problems for children, and that issues related to maternal incarceration are more commonly not directly associated with the incarceration but rather preceding disadvantages

(see Wildeman & Turney 2014; Turney & Goodsell 2018). A limitation in many studies on the topic of parental incarceration has been the inability to differentiate between paternal and maternal incarceration, making it even more difficult to draw general conclusions about discrepancies between the two (Beresford 2018). Nevertheless, overall disadvantages experienced by children of incarcerated parents affect those with both mothers and fathers in prison, although a research gap concerning differences prevails (Gadian et al. 2025).

3.8 Protective Factors, Support Measures, Policy and Practice

As can be understood from previous studies focusing on the possible negative impacts of parental incarceration, the quality of the relationship between an incarcerated parent and their child has consequences for children's well-being (Turney 2023). On this theme, Corcoran et al. (2025) conducted a study with a focus on youth's relationships and the association between closeness and mental health to discover potential protective factors. Through a latent profile analysis, the authors identified six profiles amongst youth: "Very High Closeness Across Contexts", "High Average Closeness Across Contexts", "Average Closeness to Family and Friends, Very Low Closeness Beyond", "Average Closeness to Family and Friends, Low Closeness Beyond", "Close to Teachers and School Adults, Low Closeness Beyond", and "Low Closeness Across Context" (Corcoran et al. 2025, p. 2727). These profiles all display different levels of closeness to people across different contexts (ibid.). Overall, data within the profiles indicate an association between mental health and different relationship's level of closeness while findings moreover show the importance of acknowledging relationships across various contexts (ibid.). Specifically, findings reveal that mental health symptoms were significantly less prevalent amongst youth who had strong and close relationships to people across multiple contexts. Moreover, results demonstrate that family relationships in particular play an important role for protecting the mental health of youths with an incarcerated parent (ibid.). Findings are similar to the previously mentioned study by Davis & Shlafer (2017) where strong parent–child relationships were found to have a buffering effect for mental health problems (see section 3.5). Evidence of these associations call for policy and practice which support family relationships and help maintain a strong parent–child relationship when they are separated by incarceration (Corcoran et al. 2025). Alongside a focus on family systems, children and youth should be provided with opportunities to build relationships within other contexts. For this, Corcoran et al. (2025, p. 2734) suggest "extracurricular activities, mentoring programs, and youth-led advocacy programs". Interventions that emphasize the importance of different relationships and

consider resilience as multisystemic will accordingly strive to promote lasting well-being (ibid.).

Correspondingly, Arditti & Johnson (2022) applied a perspective of family resilience onto the case of parental incarceration in order to provide recommendations for future practice. Similar to the findings of Corcoran et al. (2025), interactions between children and their incarcerated parents are emphasized to be positive for families (Arditti & Jonson 2022). It is however debated within research whether or not in-person visits are beneficial or harmful to children visiting a parent in prison (Arditti & Johnson 2022; Clopton & East 2008). While visits can provide children with reassurance, ease adjustment, and strengthen bonds, they can likewise stir up difficult feelings of frustration, fright, and emotional pain (ibid.). Therefore, Arditti & Johnson (2022) recommend prisons should ensure that search procedures and visiting rooms are more welcoming and more family and child friendly, whilst supporting families in all stages of this process. Other recommendations for promoting family resilience include making an effort to reduce mass incarceration (ibid.), a more controversial take considering the increasingly rough climate of criminal policy globally and in Sweden specifically (Newburn 2017; Andersson & Nilsson 2025). However, in the cases where incarceration is necessary, Arditti & Johnson (2022) say policies should facilitate positive parent–child relationships and aim to achieve social justice through alleviating disadvantages. Meanwhile, the authors moreover note that different families and children will be in need of different support measures and interventions and at different times. Separate considerations are needed for each case in order to fully benefit all (ibid.).

Arditti & Johnson (2022) furthermore argue for the importance of multilevel interventions to address the challenges that children face, something that other authors concur with (Davis & Shlafer 2017; Rhodes et al. 2023). Children of incarcerated parents have many different risk factors that may negatively affect their well-being throughout their life course, implying that protective factors would likewise be diverse (Davis & Shlafer 2017). Studies therefore highlight how interventions are predicted to be more effective when they are focused on multiple contexts of children's lives including schools, neighborhoods, communities, and relationships (Arditti & Johnson 2022; Rhodes et al. 2023; Davis & Shlafer 2017). Validating this is an interview-study by Jones et al. (2024) who endorse family-centered and community-based support interventions. In their interviews, families articulated a need for support and resources from the community as well as initiatives to reduce stigma. Specifically, families wished for more organizations within the community to offer

target-specific programs, support groups, and counseling for both children and caregivers (Jones et al. 2024). The study underlines the value of the community when it comes to supporting families affected by incarceration and one main conclusion is that “understanding from teachers, doctors, community members, and their organizations” is crucial for children's feelings of support (ibid., pp. 35-36).

Similar to these studies that have advocated for multilevel interventions, Nesmith & Ruhland (2008) emphasize how children's needs should simultaneously be targeted on a higher level through community action and policy changes. One form of community action the authors recommend is raising public awareness about the situation for children with an incarcerated parent, in hope that it will reduce stigma and bring attention to the children's needs for resources (Nesmith & Ruhland 2008). Community action can furthermore include collaboration between community services and agencies. Policy reforms for criminal justice systems that place children’s needs at the center are moreover recommended (ibid.).

Overall, studies that focus on support and resilience show that children of incarcerated parents would benefit from interventions, support measures, and policy changes that facilitate relationship maintenance, promote social justice, involve both family and community, and target needs on different levels.

3.9 Targeted Support to Children of Incarcerated Parents in Sweden

In 2018 the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare published a report with the aim to map and analyse the services that are currently provided for children of incarcerated parents and if they adequately meet children's needs (Borén et al. 2018). The report was conducted with an extensive scope and the methods collected data from a large variety of actors including non-profit organizations, social services, SPPS, and other authorities working with children’s rights (ibid.). In the report, Borén et al. (2018) conclude that a significant amount of the support offered to children with an incarcerated parent in Sweden today is provided by non-profit organizations meanwhile a majority of Swedish municipalities do not offer specific support to the target group. The conclusion of the report discloses that services available in Sweden do not adequately meet the needs that children have today (ibid.). Specifically, the authors conclude there is a need to enhance “children’s right to information about the support”, “the availability of support for all children in Sweden”, “social services support to the target group”, and “children’s right to have contact with the incarcerated parent” (my translation) (ibid., p. 8). Additionally, there is a need for improved practices regarding prison

visitations, enhanced knowledge about the children, and increased collaboration between different actors working with them (ibid.). The report confirms previous findings claiming that support in Sweden is limited and in need of advancement and further research (see Nylander et al. 2018).

To give a voice to children's own perspectives and stories, Swedish children's rights organizations Solrosen, Erikshjälpen, and Bufff compiled a report having interviewed over 50 children and youths (Storm Mukwana & Franzén 2021). Three out of four children in their study expressed a wish to have more contact with an incarcerated family member and expressed a level of dissatisfaction with options offered today. Similar to conclusions made by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (see Borén et al. 2018), Storm Mukwana & Franzén (2021) highlight how a lack of target-specific services in Swedish municipalities leads to children falling through the cracks and being deprived of their rights. Children in the study perceive this as unfair and express a wish for all children to get the same opportunities for support and help, as expressed by one child in the study: “if you want help it must exist” (my translation) (ibid., p. 11). 93% of those who have received targeted support from organizations believe this has helped them. That said, children also express that support sometimes has been delayed and that additional and more distinct support is desired (Storm Mukwana & Franzén 2021). Similar to findings of previous studies (see Jones et al. 2024; see Corcoran et al. 2025), the interviewed children emphasize the importance of supportive and respectful treatment from actors within schools, expressing a wish for this to be acknowledged (Storm Mukwana & Franzén 2021). Findings in the report overall show that while organizational support provided in Sweden today is greatly appreciated and helpful, support needs to be more geographically dispersed and should be extended to collaboration with other actors. To improve circumstances for these children, “it takes active action, expanded resources and increased knowledge within society” (my translation) (ibid., p. 18).

4. Methodology

This methodology chapter will define and defend the methodological choices made for this study. Striving for transparency and trustworthiness, the chapter aims to provide the reader with a thorough account of the research process and the choices therein. First, the research approach will be discussed, including epistemological and ontological considerations, the choice of a qualitative research strategy, and the relationship between theory and research. Second, the data collection process will be detailed. Thereafter follows a description concerning the method of analysis, followed by an account of how the study has attempted to fulfill criteria of quality. Lastly, ethical issues that have been considered and addressed when carrying out the research will be discussed.

4.1 Research Approach

All social research and its methodological choices can be regarded as underpinned by various philosophical approaches to the nature of reality and knowledge (Barbour 2014). Fundamental to the philosophical perspectives that guide social research are the concepts of ontology and epistemology. Questions of ontology concern the nature of reality and whether or not social entities are believed to be independent from social actors while epistemological questions center around how knowledge is produced and regarded (Bryman 2016). A researcher's ontological and epistemological ideas are significant for the way social research is produced given that these affect how someone believes the social world can be studied and what someone considers to be evidence (Barbour 2014).

The ontological nature that underpins this study is constructivist. This approach essentially means that social entities are regarded as social constructions which therefore are subject to change (Bryman 2016). The constructivist approach suggests that CSOs, which constitute this study's research focus, should not be regarded as operating in a pre-given reality. Rather, they should be assumed to be context-dependent and constructed through for example cultural norms, policies, social structures, and social actors (see Barron 2006). Moreover, the study is underpinned by an interpretivist epistemology, an approach that sees knowledge as contingent and not objective (Barbour 2014). An interpretivist epistemology pairs well with a constructivist ontology because of how they both reject the conflicting idea of reality and knowledge being fixed. By virtue of this understanding of a subjective truth, the interpretivist approach to epistemology furthermore emphasizes understanding as opposed to positivist explanations, meaning that attention is given to hermeneutics where human action is

interpreted rather than merely observed (Bryman 2016). Both of these philosophical approaches have guided decisions made for this study, which is reflected within how the methodology and research questions accentuate contextual understandings and organizations' perceptions of reality.

In line with these approaches, one of the first methodological decisions made for this study was choosing a qualitative research strategy. A qualitative research strategy, in contrast to the quantitative strategies' focus on numbers, "uses words or visual images as the unit of analysis" (Denscombe 2017, p. 6). The relevance of a qualitative approach for the study emanates from the way in which context is considered as important, as opposed to larger generalizations (see Robson & McCartan 2016; see Bryman 2016). Considering how the research aim and questions are focused around acquiring an in-depth understanding of organizational contexts, a qualitative approach was deemed relevant. The contextual focus of a qualitative strategy also aligns well with the application of a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology as discussed above, demonstrating how these considerations have guided methodological choices for this study. Furthermore, qualitative research has the advantage of flexibility due to its unstructured nature (Bryman 2016). For the current study, it is valuable to have flexibility and be adaptable for changing directions, as pre-existing ideas of how the study will be conducted may change when entering the field and meeting organizations.

An additional approach that is important to consider when conducting research is the role of theory and how different approaches to this affect the relationship between theory and research (Robson & McCartan 2016). A common distinction is made between "theory verification" (deduction), "theory generation" (induction), and "comparative theory evaluation" (abduction) (ibid., p. 67). This study employs an inductive approach, meaning that theory emerges from the data (see Robson & McCartan 2016). This inductive relationship to theory has affected the way the analysis was carried out as theory was generated from the familiarization and analysis of the data (for further details, see section 4.3).

4.2 Interviews

Data collection for this study was done through conducting qualitative, semi-structured interviews with staff working at CSOs that support children with an incarcerated parent. The method of interviewing entails collecting self-reports as a source of data (Denscombe 2017). For this study, interviewing was deemed an appropriate and advantageous method by virtue of how the study aim and research questions concern understandings of a complex issue (see Denscombe 2017). Staff working within CSOs are assumed to hold privileged information about the organizational operations which constitutes the focus of the study. Using interviews as a method thus offers a valuable opportunity for gaining a deeper understanding of the investigated issue because of the insights and experiences these key players have (see Denscombe 2017; see Goodman 2011). Furthermore, questions asked within interviews can facilitate finding out what staff within the organization *do* and what they *think* (see Robson & McCartan 2016), thereby producing data that can answer the research questions of this study in terms of how supportive work is performed and perceived by organizations.

Semi-structured interviews entails that the researcher has prepared an interview guide containing topics or questions, meanwhile it still offers plenty of flexibility when it comes to the outline of the interview (Bryman 2016; Denscombe 2017). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews carries with it a potential for new and interesting directions that emerge within the interview to be followed up and elaborated on, and allows for interviews to evolve throughout the process (ibid.). The semi-structured method was chosen for this study given that it does not significantly restrict what information will emerge in the interview meeting, while still ensuring that data without difficulty can be compared and verified across various interviews.

One disadvantage of using interviews for answering the first research question concerning what people *do* is related to the fact that what people say they do may not accurately represent reality, posing a question of the validity of data (Denscombe 2017). A common method for observing behaviour and what people *do* is ethnography or participant observation (Bryman 2016). Although such methods could have complemented interviews to validate data and further understand organizational activities for this study (see Neyland 2008), they are also highly time-consuming options. Only conducting interviews instead offer a possibility to explore more organizations and other local branches of them, as interviews can be conducted digitally (see Bryman 2016). Choosing interviews as a method thus enlarges the

scope of the study, allowing the findings to reflect more organizational operations in Sweden. Furthermore, the second and third research questions related to CSOs barriers and opportunities can not as easily be observed but rather require a method where people are asked questions (see ibid.).

4.2.1 Sample and Participants

Interviews were conducted with nine individuals working at CSOs that constitute the focus of this study. Contacted organizations were chosen through purposive sampling, meaning that they were chosen due to their relevance for the research questions (Bryman 2016). Specifically, the sampling of organizations was made through a criterion sampling (see Bryman 2016) where all organizations that work with the specific target group were contacted. Each organization was initially contacted through the local manager, a so-called 'gatekeeper', after considering who the most appropriate point of contact would be (see Neyland 2008). These gatekeepers were contacted via email, which were found on the organizational websites. In the initial contact, gatekeepers were provided with information about the study and asked whether they would like to contribute to it. Participants for the interviews were thereafter identified through self-selection. The gatekeepers forwarded information about the study to colleagues and those interested could choose to participate and get in touch with the researcher to decide a time and date for the interviews. Two of the contacted gatekeepers also chose to participate themselves.

Interviews were conducted with nine people working at three different organizations in five different geographical locations. Due to ethical considerations regarding anonymization and confidentiality, no detailed information is provided about the participants or the organizations for which they work. This aspect will be elaborated upon further within the section of ethical considerations (see section 4.5).

4.2.2 Structure and Execution of Interviews

As previously stated, the semi-structured interview utilizes an interview guide for organizing the interview meetings. The interview guide created for this study included 13 questions with 8 follow-up questions. While the follow-up questions for promoting elaboration and detailed descriptions were included within the interview guide, they were most often formulated spontaneously within the interviews (see Kvale 1996). Both an English and a Swedish version of the interview guide can be found in Appendix 5 and 6.

When designing the interview guide and formulating its questions, Kvale's suggestions and advice from 'InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing' (1996) were considered. Questions were hence developed following Kvale's (1996) nine types of questions which are introducing, follow-up, probing, specifying, direct, indirect, structuring, silence, and interpreting questions. Also in accordance with what Kvale (1996) states, questions were evaluated both thematically and dynamically, meaning that the guide contains questions of relevance for the research theme while they simultaneously do not interrupt the flow of conversation but rather promote positive interactions (Kvale 1996). Careful considerations were furthermore made to ensure questions were clear, open-ended, and non-leading to facilitate rich descriptions, enhance credibility, and obtain objectivity (see Bryman 2016). Following the semi-structured design and to follow the turns that the conversation took during the interviews, questions were often asked in a different order than what was outlined in the interview guide. In some cases, interviewees answered questions without having been asked them while sometimes, the questions already answered were instead used as probing questions. During the interviews, silences and pauses were used to give interviewees time for reflection to facilitate further information being provided (see Kvale 1996). After a few interviews had been conducted, the interview guide was reevaluated and some changes were made to make further developments and facilitate valuable responses.

Interviews ranged from 30 to 50 minutes. Three of the interviews were conducted in person while the other six were held digitally, through the software Zoom. This was due to geographical distances. Conducting interviews digitally offered an opportunity to have a more geographically dispersed sample while saving time and cost of travel (Bryman 2016; Denscombe 2017). It can be questioned whether interviews conducted digitally are equivalent to in-person interviews yet they are commonly considered to share similar benefits and drawbacks when the digital interview uses a webcam, which these interviews did (see Denscombe 2017). As the researcher and interviewee can see each other and interact more naturally, both in-person and digital interviews facilitate the establishment of rapport, which is important for building trust and fostering authentic data (Bryman 2016; Robson & McCartan 2016). However, digital interviews can encounter technological problems and disturbances in the quality of the connection, interrupting the interview's flow as well as affecting the quality of the transcription (Bryman 2016). This was something that did occur within the digital interviews. Although there were no major issues that affected transcribing, disturbances came to interrupt the flow of interviews. It is difficult to know exactly how this

came to impact interviews yet it is possible that it resulted in the loss of rapport and disrupted trains of thoughts.

All interviews conducted in person were held at the locations of the organizations. Because of this, the researcher did not have the opportunity to in advance plan the interview setting. This was instead up to the participants. All interviews were nevertheless conducted in private and quiet places meaning that the difficulties often related to on-site interviews, such as disturbances and lack of privacy, were not experienced (see Denscombe 2017). All in-person and digital interviews were audio-recorded, not video-recorded, and transcribed to produce an accurate record of what was said and to reduce bias and error (see ibid.).

4.2.3 Transcription

When transcribing the interviews, a denaturalized transcription style was used due to an analytical interest in meaning rather than dialogue patterns (see Oliver et al. 2005). Therefore, idiosyncratic elements of speech were removed and transcripts did not include stutters, repeated words, or involuntary vocalizations (ibid.). To reduce inaccuracy within the transcription, words that could not be discerned were written as "[inaudible]" instead of presuming or guessing at what was said. Segments of the transcripts were subsequently translated from Swedish to English as they were chosen to exemplify the results within the analysis (see chapter 6). The quotes were translated with conceptual equivalence, meaning that sentences are not translated word for word but rather translated as a whole to capture the meaning of the content to reduce misunderstanding. Additionally, when incorporating these quotes into the analysis, some changes were made in the form of changing or adding words. This was done to either protect participants from being identified or to provide readers with more context that enables the understanding of these quotes. Changes are however made to not alter the meaning of quotes and are marked within brackets []. Also marked as "[...]" is when one or a few words have been removed from a direct quote, in order to enhance reading flow.

4.3 Method of Analysis

Data from the interviews were analysed through thematic analysis. A thematic analysis is a process where themes are constructed from data material and although a vaguely defined term, themes can be, and were within the analysis of this study, interpreted as patterns (Fugard & Potts 2019). A thematic analysis was chosen due to the advantages of flexibility as it can be used for interview data, as well as to its utility for outlining central features within

large volumes of data, and its accessibility where it is “a relatively easy and quick method to learn, and use”, even for fairly inexperienced researchers (Robson & McCartan 2016, p. 470).

This study utilized the qualitative data analysis software NVivo, a useful tool for managing, accessing, and analyzing data while maintaining the important closeness to it (Bazeley & Richards 2000). The analysis process, however, started before the transcripts were uploaded to the software NVivo. Specifically, shortly after the interviews were conducted, preliminary ideas of codes and themes were written down as field notes. Further notetaking was also done while transcribing the interviews. The first step of the analysis was thus familiarization of the data through transcribing and reading through transcriptions (see Robson & McCartan 2016).

After becoming familiar with the data, the next step is to generate initial codes; a process that is central to qualitative analysis generally and to thematic analysis in particular (Robson & McCartan 2016). Before all interviews were conducted for this study, the transcript of the first interview was uploaded to the software to get the researcher familiarized with the program of NVivo, and to start the coding process. More transcripts were progressively uploaded and coded. As coding was done subsequently, codes used in previous transcripts could be used when coding the other ones, meanwhile new codes still emerged. Coding was an iterative process and to ensure that nothing was missed as new codes emerged, all transcripts were read and coded multiple times until personal, reasonable satisfaction was reached (see ibid.). The coding of the transcripts involved organizing data into groups known as codes which were meant to specify what the data is about (see ibid.). The generation of initial codes within NVivo was done manually, meaning that text was highlighted and assigned to codes one by one without the use of automated tools. In line with the inductive relationship between theory and research that underlie this study, coding was ‘data-driven’ (see ibid.). This means that the emergence of codes was based on data interaction with transcripts and field notes without the imposition of pre-existing theory (see Gibbs 2021), although still with the research aim and questions in mind. Even though all transcripts are written in Swedish, coding was done using English to ease the upcoming steps of the process.

While coding in NVivo, notes were simultaneously written down of initial ideas of how codes could be grouped into themes. After the coding was completed for all transcripts, codes were sorted into potential themes. This process was initially done through a visualizing mind-map of connections between codes and themes. Codes that did not appear to fit into any of the themes were grouped together in a ‘miscellaneous’ theme before being reviewed again (see

Robson & McCartan 2016). Themes were identified with an aim to comprehensively capture the data (see ibid.), and were recognized through looking for patterns and similarities between codes that could be addressed together.

Themes were revised, changed, and renamed multiple times throughout the process. Initially, eight themes were identified, though these turned out to significantly overlap with each other and were alternatively grouped together to create new, larger themes. Settling on the final themes, it was considered how widespread they were across the data set and how well these spoke to the study's aim and research questions, and themes thereby portray organizational support. Ultimately, three themes were settled on within the thematic analysis. These were given the names 'Individual and Holistic Support in Times of Family Crisis', 'Organizational Structure: Resources and Constraints', and 'Harmful Discourse and Framework Impacting Support Needs'. The figure below shows the finalized themes and the codes and initial themes that were grouped together to compose them.

Figure 1. Mindmap made in Canva.

4.4 Criteria of Quality

Measuring the quality of data within research is important for demonstrating credibility for findings and establishing the research within its field. Quantitative researchers are known to assess the quality of their research through the concepts of validity and reliability (Denscombe 2017; Bryman 2016). Researchers have however noted difficulties for verifying qualitative research through the same criteria (ibid.). The differences between verifying qualitative and quantitative data derives from the fact that social settings explored within qualitative research can typically not be replicated, and qualitative researchers are inevitably involved in the process of data collection and analysis, rendering validity and reliability fairly useless criteria (Denscombe 2017). Furthermore, philosophical approaches often adopted by qualitative researchers contribute to the inapplicability of validity and reliability, given that the quantitative criteria typically assume an absolute truth (Bryman 2016). For qualitative research then, Lincoln and Guba (1985 as referenced in Bryman 2016) established four new criteria constituting trustworthiness. These four criteria, credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, will be reflected upon and discussed in relation to the current study in the sections below.

4.4.1 Credibility

The criterion credibility is equivalent to validity within quantitative research and is concerned with whether data is "accurate and appropriate" (Denscombe 2017, p. 326). Seeing that this is difficult to verify within qualitative research, the focus instead lies in the reasonable likeliness of these matters having been achieved (ibid.). To strive for credibility, findings in this study are based on multiple interviews. Themes developed within the thematic analysis can be found across several interviews, enhancing credibility as findings do not rely on sole sources and their individual accuracy (see Denscombe 2017). The interview guide (see Appendix 5 & 6) containing clear, open-ended, and neutral questions furthermore strives to enhance credibility through reducing distortion and human error by avoiding predetermined responses (see Goodman 2011). Additionally, the sampling method (see section 4.2.1) where participants are selected by reason of their expertise and experience suggest that participants' testimonies are highly credible by default as they "would be in a position to comment authoritatively on the topic" (Denscombe 2017, p. 220).

4.4.2 Dependability

Dependability is comparable with reliability. In contrast to how the quantitative criterion poses a question of whether a different researcher would produce the same results using the same research instrument, the qualitative criterion of dependability asks if a different researcher would arrive at the same conclusions and get the same results (Denscombe 2017). To achieve dependability, this study provides a carefully developed methodology chapter including a precise account of the decision-making process, analysis, and methods (see Denscombe 2017). The methodology chapter serves as an audit trail, and provides readers with the opportunity to consider if the research portrays "reputable procedures and reasonable decisions" and provided that it does, establishes trustworthiness (Denscombe 2017, p. 327).

4.4.3 Transferability

Transferability is the qualitative equivalence to generalizability within quantitative research. Rather than determining the probability of findings existing in other instances, transferability is concerned with the extent in which findings can be transferred to them (Denscombe 2017). To facilitate the imaginatory process of transferability for readers, studies often provide relevant and rich information about their participants and social contexts. With the details provided, readers will be able to base a comparison and make their own considerations for the findings' transferability to similar participants within similar contexts (see Denscombe 2017). Due to ethical considerations related to confidentiality (see section 4.5.1), this study is not able to provide much information concerning participants and the organizational contexts which could limit the transferability of this study, although as much information as is ethically possible is provided. Nevertheless, results are still meaningful as they reflect these specific organizations' experiences with children of incarcerated parents, and provide depth and meaning to this specific context.

4.4.4 Confirmability

The inevitable involvement of a qualitative researcher within the collection and analysis of data and the process of interpretation poses questions of a researcher's objectivity (Denscombe 2017). Interpretation of data may be influenced by a researcher's background, beliefs, identity, and values, since meaning is a product of those who attach it (ibid.). The criterion of confirmability addresses this as well as the issue of objectivity. As Denscombe (2017, p. 329) describes it, the question of confirmability calls for reflections concerning "the researcher's 'self'" and "keeping an open mind".

Reflections on the researcher's self is commonly known as reflexivity, the purpose of which is to provide readers with "valuable information on which to base a judgement about how reasonable the writer's claims are with regard to the detachment or involvement of self-identity, values and beliefs" (Denscombe 2017, p. 330). The reflexivity section of this study can be found within the ethical considerations (see section 4.5.4). Through this section, it is attempted to show that social backgrounds and personal experiences have been reflected upon by the researcher while having acted in good faith (see Bryman 2016).

Keeping an open mind refers to the approach a researcher has towards the analytical process (Denscombe 2017). To keep an open mind and enhance this study's confirmability, data was analysed inductively and without pre-determined ideas, meaning that the influence of preceding assumptions is minimized. Additionally, data has predominantly been equivalently considered, meaning that contradicting or deviant cases within themes are not neglected but rather considered important to explore (ibid.). However in some cases, data has not been explored further within the analysis due to ethical considerations when these cases have posed risks to damaging confidentiality (for further details, see section 4.5.1). In these instances, the ethical principle of non-maleficence has been given higher value than the criterion of confirmability.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

For this study, since interviews were carried out, ethical considerations have largely been based on four principles that are commonly used as a framework for ethics in research involving human participants in Sweden. These principles are "To do good (beneficence), To do no harm (non-maleficence), To respect autonomy, To uphold justice" (Swedish Research Council 2024, p. 59). The principles collectively uphold the morals of a good research practice and are consistent with the Swedish ethical review act *Lag om etikprövning av forskning som avser människor* (SFS 2003:460) (ibid.). Furthermore, the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (The ALLEA Code) provides guidelines for research and emphasizes the priority of "the protection interest", something that is described as superordinate to other interests when conducting research (Swedish Research Council 2024, p. 13). The aforementioned four principles are closely related to the ALLEA Code and therefore, approaching questions of ethical issues with a priority of abiding by these principles safeguards that this study is morally defensible and follows Swedish and international standards of research practice (ibid.).

Also related to the ALLEA Code's principles is the European Commission's (2026) guideline for responsible use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in research (Swedish Research Council 2024). One recommendation within these guidelines is that researchers should be transparent about their use of generative AI (European Commission 2026). For this study, generative AI has not been used to write text. Nevertheless, non-generative AI tools such as Power Thesaurus, DeepL, and spell check have been utilized.

A more elaborate account on how the study has attempted to respect the four principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, respecting autonomy, and upholding justice follows within the next three sections. Thereafter follows a reflexive account of the researchers 'self', as rationalized in section 4.4.4.

4.5.1 Beneficence and Non-Maleficence

The principles of beneficence and non-maleficence are based on the notion that research should be beneficial and not bring harm to participants, something that is closely associated with the protection interest (Swedish Research Council 2024). Beneficence relates to the research interest which states valuable knowledge should derive from the research conducted (ibid.). This study aims to produce valuable knowledge and help address the existing research gap concerning parental incarceration in Sweden. Nevertheless, the Swedish Research Council (2024, p. 59) establishes that the benefits of research should outweigh the risks and when it comes to the interests, "the protection interest shall always be given priority when it conflicts with the research interest". The focus of this section will therefore be the principle of non-maleficence and how this is ensured.

This study safeguards against harm to participants and protects them through striving for utmost confidentiality and safe data processing. Confidentiality is a vital requirement for social research and is central to ensuring participants do not suffer any personal harm emanating from the disclosure of personal information (Denscombe 2017). Abiding by the confidentiality requirement and thereby also the principle to do no harm, the identities of participants in this study are anonymized (see Denscombe 2017). Accordingly, participants are numbered within the analysis, referred to as *participants* and by using gender-neutral, they/them pronouns to protect their identities since only one participant is a man. The organizations that the participants work for are furthermore referred to as *organizations,* while simultaneously these are not linked to specific participants. These approaches to confidentiality aim to ensure that multiple statements can not be traced back to a single

organization, minimizing the risk of participants being identified. This is especially important considering the small number of organizations working with the target group, and how staff working within their facilities are often not many.

However, complete anonymity for participants is difficult to guarantee, especially due to the sampling method. Multiple participants are colleagues and have been referred to the study by their manager. That being said, participants are aware of the circumstances surrounding sampling and have agreed to participate through informed consent (see section 4.5.2). In addition to this, circumstances surrounding sampling and anonymity have led to these ethical considerations being given much weight. Careful considerations have thus been made when writing the analysis to make certain that clearly identifiable details are not presented (see Bryman 2016). Thereby, the analysis chapter has focused more on consensus across the data while data that stands out but may identify organizations or participants are, for these ethical reasons, not given the same weight and purpose as they otherwise might have.

Confidentiality moreover entails that data should not be accessible to unauthorized persons, demanding that data must be handled, processed, and stored with this in mind (Swedish Research Council 2024). Data processed for this study does not involve sensitive data although it does include personal data in the form of participants name and contact information, as well as their answers to the interview questions. Taking confidentiality into consideration, data processed in this study aligns with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (2016/679) (GDPR). Therefore, “no more data shall be processed than required for the purpose”, data is “stored no longer than required for the purpose”, and is “protected using suitable security measures, such as pseudonymisation” (Swedish Research Council 2024, p. 68). As the GDPR was developed with the intention to protect persons (2016/679) and strengthen privacy (University of Gothenburg, no date, a), following these regulations safeguards from maleficence.

All but one interview were audio-recorded via a dictaphone (Olympus Digital Voice Recorder VN-541PC) and then transferred to a computer via a USB-chord. Using a dictaphone means that personal data in the form of audio recordings are stored and processed safely due to how the dictaphone stores data locally and does not need external tools to transfer it to a computer. For one interview, the dictaphone was out of battery and could not be used. In this case, the interview was instead audio-recorded on an iPhone through the voice memo app. Before recording, it was ensured that the recording app was not synchronized with any cloud storage

services, and the phone was put in flight mode. The recording was later transferred to a computer via a USB-chord before it was permanently deleted on the phone. All audio-recordings and transcriptions were stored only on the desktop of the computer and not in a cloud. Furthermore, the computer itself is protected through a secure password and all contact with participants, including email and Zoom-meetings, was done through a student account for digital tools provided by the university (see University of Gothenburg, no date, a; see University of Gothenburg, no date, b). All of these choices were made with an aim to ensure safe data processing and that data is only accessible to those who have a right to process it (see ibid.), enhancing confidentiality and thereby non-maleficence.

4.5.2 Respecting Autonomy

Participants being allowed and able to make an informed decision about participation is fundamental for respecting autonomy and upholding research ethics (Swedish Research Council 2024). The concept of informed consent, where participants make a self-determined, voluntary decision to participate after having been given information about what participation entails and how data will be processed, is central to this principle (ibid.). Participants in this study were accordingly initially provided with an information letter that presented important information about the study which enabled them to make an informed decision (see Appendix 1 & 2). In this letter, information was provided about the purpose of the study, what participation entails, and how the study aims to follow principles central to research ethics. It was made clear in this initial information letter that consent can be withdrawn, something that is essential for ethical consent (Swedish Research Council 2024), although this opportunity is restricted to when the study has been examined and published.

Participants signed a consent form before the interviews were conducted, to ensure that consent is documented (see Swedish Research Council 2024). Nevertheless, the documented consent is not binding and consent could still be withdrawn even after this form was signed. In addition to the documented consent, participants were once more asked for their consent to participate as well as their consent for audio recording before the start of each interview. The possibility to withdraw consent was likewise repeated in the introduction of the interviews. In connection to participants being provided with the consent form, they were informed about the processing of personal data, their rights in relation to this, and that the processing is done in accordance with GDPR. As emphasized within the ALLEA Code, informing participants about this is essential for researchers to uphold a good research practice (Swedish Research

Council 2024). Providing participants with this information is moreover fundamental for respecting their autonomy, as this enhances their capability to make an informed decision about participation.

The information letter, consent form, and introductory steps within the interviews jointly fulfill the criteria that consent is informed, voluntary, specific, explicit and unambiguous, possible to withdraw, and documented (see Swedish Research Council 2024). Respecting participants' autonomy through these practices respects human dignity and self-determination.

4.5.3 Upholding Justice

Justice is central to the fourth and last principle of research ethics and can be understood as "fair, equitable, and appropriate treatment in light of what is due or owed to affected individuals and groups" (Beauchamp & Childress 2019, p. 196). Upholding justice within research ethics accordingly demands that benefits of research should reach those exposed to the risks, and that these are fairly distributed (Swedish Research Council 2024). To uphold justice, interview participants for this research will be sent the finished study along with it being publicly available for all through the university archive. The aspiration is that the organizations studied will benefit from the knowledge produced and that the study itself will bring awareness to the meaningful work that they carry out. Ideally, justice could be promoted to children of incarcerated parents indirectly through the organizations' benefits or through the knowledge gap being reduced.

4.5.4 Reflexivity

A reflexive account of a researcher's self is, as previously discussed, an important element of confirmability for research (see Denscombe 2017). For research ethics, reflexivity is related to the fundamental principle of honesty, where it is stated that research should be developed in an unbiased way (Swedish Research Council 2024). As the production and analysis of qualitative data can not be completely free from influence of the researcher's self, this should not be ignored. For this study, it is likely that as a researcher, my personal experiences and beliefs have influenced the end-product.

I have previous work experience within SPPS, where I have had frequent contact with incarcerated parents and discussions of family matters. This experience positions me as a *partial* insider, as I am familiar with the criminal justice system and its terminology.

Simultaneously, I remain an outsider of the topic, without personal experience of parental incarceration or of working with the CSOs. Furthermore, choosing to write this study about parental incarceration naturally stems from a personal belief that the topic is of great importance worthy of attention. I was introduced to this context through my work experience within SPPS, where I was introduced to the existence of these CSOs. This demonstrates that my work experience has made an impact on the study. It can also be seen to have affected the pre-understandings of the research object. Although I was introduced to the concept of providing support to children with incarcerated parents through SPPS, this introduction was made through posters on the walls and not through interactions with colleagues or with CSO staff – who I never saw visiting the prison where I worked. My pre-understandings of the research object were thereby few as I did not know much about the issue, although one pre-understanding consequently was that I observed the issue to be very invisible.

Even though my lack of work experience within the CSO field could affect the power dynamics between myself as a researcher and the interviewees through being perceived with less authority, my position as a researcher brings power in itself. For interviewees, it could feel like their organizations and work are being evaluated, even though this is not the case. It may be possible that their perceptions of me as a researcher and the presumed power imbalance affected the interview answers they gave. Participants may not want to paint themselves or influential actors within their ecology in a bad light, knowing that I as the researcher have the power to interpret interview answers and draw conclusions. To minimize this power imbalance then, the research aim, ethical considerations related to participation, data-storage, and anonymization were transparently communicated, and participants were given autonomy for participation. Furthermore, building rapport was prioritized and participants were considered to be the experts, meanwhile I positioned myself as a learner.

The possible influences that these circumstances overall may have brought about have been reflected upon throughout the research process. Literature arguing for conflicting standpoints have not been discarded, data has been examined with an open mind to minimize confirmation bias, and second parties in the form of a supervisor and peers have been present throughout.

5. Theoretical Framework

When working inductively with the empirical data collected for this study, issues concerning the adversity that children of incarcerated parents experience as a consequence of incarceration, and a necessity for multidimensional support became particularly evident – themes that are likewise commonly discussed within previous literature. Theories and concepts that could shed a light on how supportive practices by CSOs to children of incarcerated parents are shaped will be used as theoretical perspectives for this study. The empirical data will accordingly be analysed through the ecological systems theory, which describes a multilevel ecological system affecting children's development. Resilience, a concept that captures how adversity can be overcome, will likewise be included as a theoretical perspective in this study. Lastly, resource dependence theory will be used to capture a broader, organizational perspective. All three of these theoretical tools chosen for this study are connected to the aim and research questions, but they are also derived from the empirical data collected. This means that they were specifically chosen due to their usefulness for explaining and interpreting the results of the thematic analysis. Furthermore, these perspectives all emphasize the importance of environment and context, and align well with ontological and epistemological perspectives of the study. This chapter will describe these three theoretical perspectives.

5.1 The Ecological Systems Theory

The American psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner developed and introduced ecological systems theory in the 1970s (Bronfenbrenner 1994). Founded on the work of other theorists before him, the theory concerns child development and growth and is based on a belief that "human development is a product of interaction between the growing human organism and its environment" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 32). Within his definition, Bronfenbrenner asserts that both the developing person and the environment are dynamic and that the relationship between them is reciprocal, meaning that there is mutual influence (ibid.). Bronfenbrenner established the idea that environmental influences stemming from outside of the immediate setting of a person are equally important to consider when exploring human development (ibid.). Through introducing the ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner contributed to broadening the perception of the environment within developmental psychology, which had previously been more narrow (ibid.). Specifically, the theory addresses the environment through describing an ecological system consisting of five different structures, these are

microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner 1994) (see Figure 2).

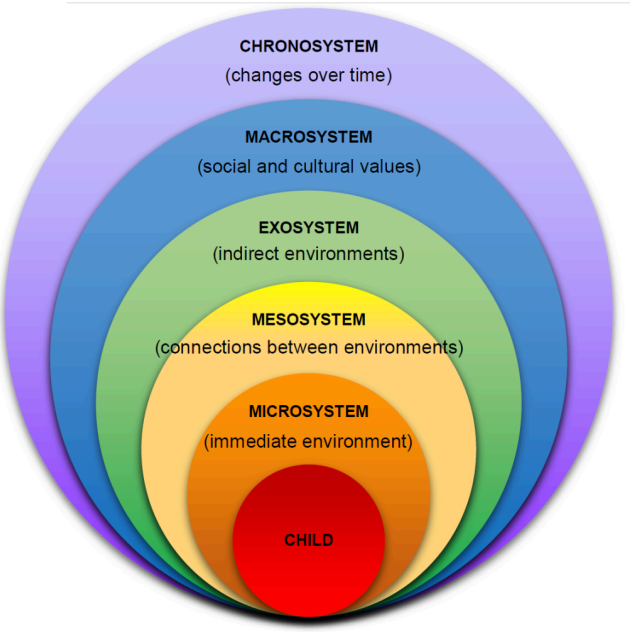

Figure 2. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Budzyna, no date).
ROTEL. Licensed under a CC BY-SA license.

The figure above visualises how the different subsystems surround the developing child within Bronfenbrenner's theory. The microsystem which is closest to the child represents the immediate environment. This entails a direct setting and for instance includes family, school, and peer groups (Bronfenbrenner 1994). The second circle seen in the figure, the mesosystem, represents interrelations between microsystems in which the person participates and moves between (Bronfenbrenner 1979). The way these different microsystems interact creates a mesosystem (Crawford 2020). The next system, the exosystem, is likewise made up of multiple microsystems only in this case, the developing person is not a part of at least one of the settings (ibid.). Nevertheless, these settings indirectly influence the immediate setting of the developing person, which for a child could for instance be a parent's workplace (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Bronfenbrenner 1994). Next, the macrosystem includes values, lifestyles, and belief systems and can be referred to as a "societal blueprint" for different cultures and subcultures (Bronfenbrenner 1994, p. 40). Lastly, the chronosystem refers to the passage of time, and the changes or consistencies that follow (ibid.). Altogether, these ecological systems influence each other and the developing person, as the relationship is, as

previously mentioned, reciprocal. To understand a person's development and what affects it then, one needs to consider all of these ecological systems surrounding the person.

Through the ecology of human development, Bronfenbrenner highlighted the importance of acknowledging these multiple systems within social science (Crawford 2020). His theory contributed to altering the way human development was perceived within research, as he argued the importance of examining multiperson systems of interaction, multiple settings, and distant aspects of the environment (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems are now commonly used concepts within social work practice (Crawford 2020). Within social work, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is useful for designing interventions on multiple levels through acknowledging the different systems that surround children. Furthermore, concepts of chaos and adaptation found within the theory constitute valuable knowledge for social workers as they meet clients experiencing changing or chaotic environments (ibid.), such as those experienced during parental incarceration. The theory is considered a suitable analytical tool for this study as it is useful for understanding the multifaceted, psychosocial support needs that children have and how these can be addressed through organizational support on different levels to fully address issues related to parental incarceration.

5.2 Resilience

Resilience is a common concept used within multiple different disciplines of research (Van Breda 2018). The concept originates from an interest in investigating adversity and its impact. Observing that negative outcomes differ between people facing similar adversities, theorists in the 1980s began to question why some appeared to be invulnerable to poorer outcomes experienced by others (ibid.; Werner 2013). Across social and psychological research, the definition of resilience is however conflicted and there has been a general divide between theorists who view resilience as an outcome, and those who view it as a process (Van Breda 2018; Fletcher & Sarkar 2013). A definition of resilience as an outcome centers on the "state of being resilient" and does not account for variation (Van Breda 2018, p. 3). Alternatively, a definition of resilience as a process asks the important question of *why* outcomes differ, recognizing that there must be mediating processes that affect different outcomes (ibid.). Viewing resilience as a process, the mediating processes which affect outcomes define resilience and in turn lead to resilience as an outcome (ibid.). Moreover, Van Breda (2018) discusses resilience research as required to consider three components,

adversity, mediating factors, and outcomes, while maintaining a focus on the mediating process (resilience), as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

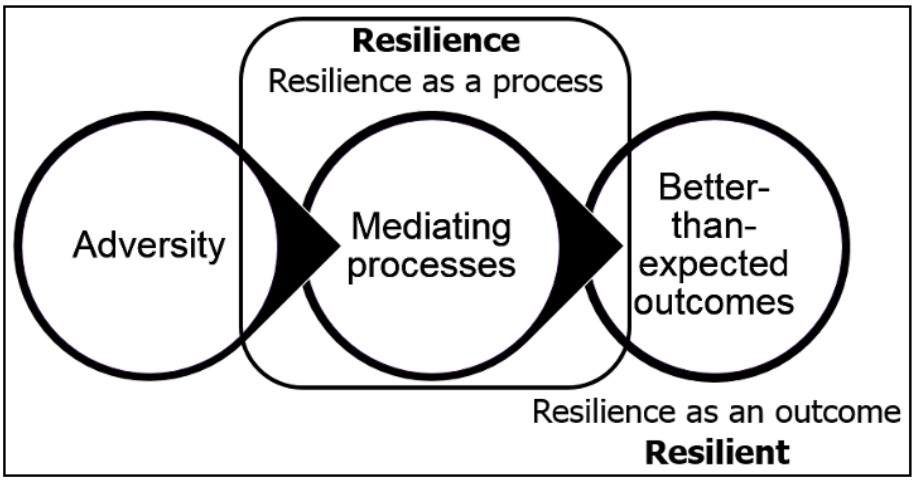

Figure 3. Resilience as process and outcome. (Van Breda 2018).

The definition of resilience applied in this study follows Van Breda's (2018) definition of resilience as a process, defined as "the multilevel processes that systems engage in to obtain better-than-expected outcomes in the face or wake of adversity" (Van Breda 2018, p. 4). Within her definition, Van Breda (2018) recognizes that there are multiple levels of social ecology and that the process of resilience can take place within a variety of these. Additionally, the definition does not limit resilience to concern single individuals, but includes communities, organizations, and families (Van Breda 2018). Ungar (2012) similarly applies a social ecological perspective on resilience and claims that individual traits do not account for all differences within a population, therefore contextual traits of a more extensive physical and social ecology must be considered. This perspective furthermore shifts the responsibility of enabling resilience from an individual level towards a broader, social and collective responsibility (Bottrell 2009).

Examining resilience through this lens is useful for designing social work interventions, especially for those working to support children suffering adverse childhood experiences such as parental incarceration. Through applying the components of adversity, mediating processes, and outcomes, social workers can conceptualize problems, develop and design intervention on different levels, and assess outcomes (Fraser et al. 1999). The concept of resilience is relevant for the aim of this study since organizational support provided for children with an incarcerated parent has the intent to mitigate adversity through mediating processes.

5.3 Resource Dependence Theory

Within their book *The external control of organizations: a resource dependence perspective*, Pfeffer & Salancik (1978) developed resource dependence theory. At the time of its publication, the book and the ideas within it represented a shift for the field of organizational studies, and resource dependency theory is commonly applied and cited in studies today (Pfeffer & Salancik 2003). The resource dependence theory incorporates three central beliefs that signify this shift; that social context is important for understanding organizations, that the concept of power is important for understanding organizations, and that there is "dynamic interaction and evolution of organizations, environments, and interorganizational relations over time" (ibid., p. xii).

Emphasizing the social context of organizations within the theory means that to understand organizations, one has to focus on the external pressures and constraints that exist within their social context, in other words, the organization's ecology (Pfeffer & Salancik 2003). This theme relates to how organizations are seen to be *resource dependent* on external sources and thereby constrained and shaped by their environments (ibid.). This is especially relevant for organizations in the third sector who are not-for-profit. Discussing Parsons' (1956) idea of legitimacy, Pfeffer & Salancik (2003) clarify that legitimacy is an essential component of an organization's survival, as in order to access resources, they are "continually being assessed on the appropriateness of their activities and the usefulness of their output" (Pfeffer & Salancik 2003, p. 24). Organizations thus have to prove their legitimacy to those who hold the resources needed, and demonstrate why a coalition is justified and advantageous for the other party, in order to be able to continue their activities.

The concept of power is valuable for understanding this dependent relationship since power is explained to emerge as a consequence of dependence and the control that some actors have over resources (Pfeffer & Salancik 2003). Pfeffer & Salancik (2003) states that if there exists asymmetry in the exchange relationship between two organizations, one will have a power advantage over the other (ibid.). This definition of power is useful for understanding why various decisions and policies can be forced onto some organizations but not others, considering that "power may be employed in attempting to influence or constrain the behavior of the other more dependent organization" (ibid., p. 53).

The last central belief to the resource dependence theory relates to opportunities for organizations to overcome constraints and manage dependencies to in turn secure more

power, abilities, and autonomy (Pfeffer & Salancik 2003). This implies that organizations are not passive actors within their environments and that there are means for responding to constraints. Pfeffer & Salancik (2003) claim that to manage dependence, organizations can either "adapt and change to fit environmental requirements, or the organization can attempt to alter the environment so that it fits the organization's capabilities" (ibid., p. 106). This claim responds to one of their main points, that an organization's ecology is important. Methods for managing dependence are furthermore related to interorganizational power and approaches to this are mostly focused on the reduction of said power (ibid.).

The perspective that resource dependence theory provides is valuable for gaining insights into organizational activities as well as organizational constraints, corresponding with this study's research objective of exploring CSOs challenges and relating to why it was chosen as an analytical tool.

6. Analysis

This chapter presents the results from the analysis of the interview data conducted for this study. The results will be interpreted and analyzed with the application of theoretical perspectives throughout the chapter, and discussed in relation to existing research in the field. The theoretical perspectives of ecological systems theory, resilience, and resource dependence theory, as described in chapter 5, will be applied. The chapter is thematically organized, meaning that each section describes and analyzes one theme identified through the thematic analysis. Set against the backdrop of the study's aim – to explore the role of CSOs in Sweden in supporting children of incarcerated parents and the challenges and opportunities connected to this – the empirical themes 'Individual and Holistic Support in Times of Family Crisis', 'Organizational Structure: Resources and Constraints', and finally 'Harmful Discourses and Frameworks Impacting Support Needs' will be presented.

6.1 Individual and Holistic Support in Times of Family Crisis

A parent's incarceration represents a time of much change in families' and children's lives. It is made evident within the interviews that the organizations offer a large variety of support services for those experiencing parental incarceration and the hardships that follow. Although interventions differ between organizations and their geographical locations, common for all is that individual support to children, parents, and families is provided, a meeting place is offered where families can meet each other and participate in activities, and child-centered dialogues and parental support is provided for the incarcerated parent. Some also offer group-support to children of different ages and organize larger, joint activities for families. This section will initially describe the individual support needs and interventions provided for children experiencing parental incarceration. Thereafter, discussions will move on to address organizations' holistic and family-centered approaches to support. Lastly, this section will discuss organizational support from a community perspective.

It becomes evident when examining results that participants regard children as requiring different kinds and amounts of support throughout different stages of a parent's incarceration. A majority of the participants highlight the initial stage of a parent's arrest and incarceration as one of the most critical times where children may be in greater need of individual support, as illustrated by Participant 6:

> Then that part becomes really shocking and like of course that [a parent's incarceration] comes out of nowhere. Overall, I'd say [children are in need of more support during] the time of custody after all, since everything is so uncertain. Contact [with the incarcerated parent] is very, very limited. Sometimes it can take a long time before you get any information about what [the charges are] even about.

This quote highlights the fact that before someone receives their sentence, information about what is currently happening and what the future holds is very restricted. During this time, children have no way of knowing how long their parent will be absent. Similarly, participant 1 describes the children as "living in a sort of limbo all the time" due to much uncertainty and unanswered questions. Participants from all organizations state that the lack of information to children about the circumstances of incarceration, as highlighted in the above quote, is something that they work with substantially. Participant 6 details that there are a lot of difficult words and concepts in relation to incarceration that children may not have previous knowledge of. It is thus described that they work informatively towards the children, providing them with age-appropriate, comprehensible information about legal proceedings and prisons so children can better understand their own situation. Participants describe that they have predeveloped themes that they go over in supportive conversations with the children. Simultaneously they work to provide a safe space where children can openly ask any questions they have.

Applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory onto this result presents an apparent association to the chronosystem representing the influence of time. A parent's incarceration is an immense life change which directly impacts children emotionally and developmentally while simultaneously reshaping and influencing the systems within a child's ecology. It can understandably be very difficult for children to successfully adapt to these sudden changes within their environment when they are presented with little to no information about their new circumstances. Participants demonstrate an organizational awareness of how the chronosystem affects children and their well-being, and focus their attention on interventions such as information provision which mitigate some burdens that follow sudden environmental changes. Organizations' informative work towards children can additionally be perceived as a mediating process promoting resilience as an outcome (see Van Breda 2018), since it is used to reduce uncertainties and questionmarks. These represent some of the many impacts that children encounter in the face of adversity and through focusing interventions on reducing these, organizations foster resilience.

Another critical aspect of children's limited information that was raised by a majority of the participants is children's right to know their parent's whereabouts, because according to participants' own experience, it is common that parents make up lies to explain a parent's absence. Participant 4 highlights the importance of telling children the truth and that within the organization, they regularly hear stories from children who "wish that they had been told the truth". Children's knowledge about a parent's incarceration is something that all organizations work to promote through encouraging both parents on the outside and on the inside to, as soon as possible, tell their children the truth, and through educating them about appropriate ways to do this. Participant 5 describes this part of their work:

> We work [...] towards there not being any secrets about [incarceration]. Then, [children] don't need to know everything, because it's not about that, but [they] should know where the parent is and [they] should be able to ask questions about [the situation].

The quote accentuates that the knowledge of a parent's whereabouts enables children to ask questions. Children's knowledge is thus connected to the previous discussion concerning the importance of children being able to have their questions and uncertainties answered. Another reason for why organizations attribute value to children's knowledge is described as a way to minimize the risk of children putting blame on themselves. Participant 4 depicts that children can feel "unloved and unwanted" when they do not know the full truth. Parents may lie about the reason for their absence and claim they are working abroad. A couple of participants exemplify that when faced with such a lie, children place the blame on themselves for their incarcerated parent's lack of contact considering that they do not know incarceration restricts them from reaching out. Telling children the truth thus ensures that they know it is not their parent's choice not to call, enabling them to understand the situation and cope with their emotions.

Similar to organizations' informative work as previously discussed, their work to promote children's right to know can be understood as a mediating process when applying a perspective of resilience (Van Breda 2018). Applying an individual perspective of resilience, children may struggle to engage in mediating processes themselves if they are not aware of the adversity they are facing nor the reason for this. Likewise revisiting the ecological systems theory, it is understood how the circumstances of incarceration in some ways forces one parent into the exosystem, as they can not physically be in a child's immediate

environment in the same manner as before. When a parent is incarcerated, children may then struggle to adapt to changes within their microsystem unless they understand why these changes happen, namely why their parent is no longer around. Organizations encouraging parents to tell their children the truth thus ensures children will have a better ability to adapt. Confirming results in the study by Storm Mukwana & Franzén (2021), this knowledge and the findings discussed shows that knowing the truth will strengthen children's ability to cope.

Aside from the time of arrest where children are faced with a lot of emotions, uncertainties, and questions about the situation, multiple participants express that children might need further support during times of change in general and additionally emphasize support needs during the time of family reunification. Participant 1 accentuates the importance in acknowledging this:

> But then you can't forget that perhaps before the first furlough or before release, it also stirs up a lot of emotions. So I'd say that any change is probably the biggest thing [where children need more support].

It is emphasized that change in the form of reunification also provokes many emotions for these children. Participant 9 likewise describes how during times of reunification, children may grapple with emotions of both excitement and worry as well as questions about how things will work. When it comes to reunification, organizations are thus described as working to prepare both parents and the children for the change that is about to come. Participant 2 states that they talk with all parts of the family about their expectations and prepares them for the fact that things will most likely not be the same as they were before incarceration, since much time may have passed. Once more this presents an opening for interpretation through the chronosystem (see Bronfenbrenner 1979). In the best of circumstances, children will have been able to adapt to and cope with having an incarcerated parent meanwhile new changes, such as a parent's release from prison, once again reshape children's lives and emotions. These changes then introduce new questions and challenges for children to deal with, something that organizations help them with through acknowledging the importance of support within these significant changes.

In contrast to times of arrest and reunification – although families have the possibility to receive support from organizations throughout the entirety of an individual's incarceration – participants state that families may not be in as much need of support in between the time of arrest and reunification. As illustrated by Participant 5, with the passing of time things can be

“pretty calm and you find a rhythm in life with a parent or sibling in prison”. According to the participant, the time after sentencing can be more stable since children know more about what the future will look like, and that it is possible to “have a more regular form of contact” between children and parents. This period where families mainly have adapted to new circumstances is generally described to contain less change for children and their families and thus less difficult emotionally to cope with. All participants draw attention to the countless feelings and emotions these children have to process. Overall, participants detail that organizations encounter children who carry large burdens of worry, loneliness, blame, shame, sadness, anger, fear, and longing as a consequence of parental incarceration. Talking about and dealing with these emotions is something that organizations are described to prioritize in their individual support for children. Participant 5 explains this as a central component of their organization, saying that they “really believe in having the courage to talk and share stories, to be able to express one's feelings and understand oneself. That it is a good path to take”. Participants’ experiences of this time of ‘in-between’ as less critical for children’s support indicates a somewhat successful adaptation and resilience process for the children. It can be interpreted that organizational support that is provided for children within times of change, discussed earlier within this section, is successful. As time passes and children gain access to information and knowledge as well as learn to cope with their emotions, they adapt to their new environment.

Turning the attention to themes with a more specific focus on holistic support, participants describe how their organizations work to provide support for children’s parents, both on the inside and outside of incarceration, to assist them in their parenting. For the incarcerated parent, organizations provide support through child-centered dialogues, explained by Participant 1:

> No, but [supporting the incarcerated] is roughly what we do half the time. That the support we give to the children becomes indirect support based on the fact that we support the person who is incarcerated in how they can help their children in turn.

This quote accentuates an idea that children are indirectly supported through organizational interventions that focus on a parent. Through working with the incarcerated parent, organizations thus intend to generate positive outcomes for the children, displaying how they work to tackle issues holistically. Furthermore, Participant 8 describes that this support to incarcerated parents is likewise a way for their organization to indirectly help the children

they are not able to reach; to support those who do not have knowledge about the organization's existence, those who may not want help, or those who live outside of the organization's geographical area but whose parents organizations meet in their outreach work at jails and prisons. Other participants explain how this work within the prisons is also a way for them to reach children in general, as they hope that incarcerated parents will forward information about the organizations back home to their families. This is described as a crucial element of organizations being able to access those in need of their support since organizations can not seek out and contact families, but families have to find their way to the organizations themselves. This makes organizations dependent on the incarcerated parent to forward the information necessary.

As previously stated, incarceration physically removes a parent from a child's immediate environment, reshaping their microsystem. The incarcerated parent is however still a family member of the child and thus remains a part of the microsystem. In alignment with the ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979), the work that organizations carry out with the incarcerated parent therefore signifies microlevel interventions which would in turn lead to positive outcomes for children. Although parents are represented within a child's microsystem, the prison environment in which they reside constitutes a child's exosystem. As organizations make visits to SPPS and utilize this as an opening to gain access to and indirectly support children, they likewise target children's exosystem. A barrier to support was however identified as organizations will not be able to reach all children in need of their support due to organizations' dependency on the incarcerated parent to forward information and geographical constraints. Barriers and constraints will be elaborated upon within the next section of this chapter (see section 6.2). Nevertheless, as organizations are aware of their difficulties in reaching all, their indirect support to these children through supporting the incarcerated parent can be interpreted as a way that organizations adapt to constraints within their environment. It is exhibited that circumstances are hindering organizations from directly supporting children, leading them to engage in children's micro and exosystems to promote better-than-expected outcomes through holistic, multilevel perspectives in accordance with Van Breda's (2018) and Ungar's (2012) definition of resilience.

For the families that do reach out to the organizations, individual support is likewise provided for the non-incarcerated parent. This is rationalized by some participants through the fact that parents on the outside face a lot of hardships of their own in the face of the other parent's incarceration. These may, though, look different depending on what circumstances existed

prior to incarceration. It is emphasized by several participants that some parents on the outside become single parents overnight and that they often struggle to adapt to their new circumstances. A couple of participants accentuate how families may experience economic consequences from losing an income, leading to families having to move and children changing schools. Additionally, Participant 2 remarks on how difficult the life puzzle can be for newly single parents on the outside and how they are oftentimes just as forgotten as their children. The participant notes that these parents must find the time for meeting with different actors such as lawyers, social workers, and probation officers, all while being responsible for children's activities and regular house duties that may have previously been split between two. Participant 2 explains that this often leaves little to no time for contacting and visiting supporting organizations:

> When this time is spent on what needs to be done, who ends up suffering? It's the children. And then getting in touch with [the organization] sometimes takes a little time because there are so many basic issues you have to resolve before you can focus on everyday life. So in that sense I think there's a [...] gap in the system.

This participant voices a wish for this perspective to be more recognized by state actors. They stress the fact that these parents are in need of more organized support provided by other actors, since the time that they themselves can focus on helping these parents, as a child's rights organization, is limited. Although it can be difficult for families to find time to partake in organization's activities, participants stress the value that it could have for those struggling with getting their daily routine together. As an illustration of this, Participant 4 notes that for the single parents participating in the organization's activities, it can be "a very big relief" that they for one night do not have to cook or clean up but can relax and let their children play. Participant 1 mentions that these family activities that organizations offer additionally give families "an opportunity to create new, positive memories together", something that they further describe as "very beneficial to manage stress, manage anxiety, and manage the chaos that arises in the family when someone is incarcerated".

In light of the information detailed above, it is clear that the non-incarcerated parent is perceived as both a barrier and gateway to supporting children. Organizations being able to relieve parents of some of the burdens and responsibilities is partly a tool for removing barriers and ensuring children have the possibility to get direct support from the organizations. At the same time, providing support to these parents is, akin to support for the

incarcerated parent, a method to indirectly support the children through their microsystem. Thereby, through working to support those who make up a child's microsystem, organizations can facilitate that children are also both directly and indirectly supported, which would under the most favorable circumstances facilitate resilience for all parts of the family. When applying the theoretical perspective of resilience (see Van Breda 2018), the description of the positive outcomes deriving from "new, positive memories" mentioned by the participant are likewise similar to this concept and the possibility to achieve better-than-expected outcomes when faced with adversity. This is a great example of how resilience can take place within someone's social ecology (see Ungar 2012), yet it also exemplifies how families can become resilient together.

Through working with both parents on the inside and outside, organizations clearly adopt family-centered perspectives through recognizing children as part of a family unit. Accordingly, organizations work holistically while maintaining a focus on supporting the children. The importance of holistic interventions is emphasized by Participant 7:

> But the thing is this is often new to everyone, you know. So both the person on the inside and the parent on the outside and the children need—you have to work with everyone. You can't just single out one person.

This quote displays an awareness of how incarceration entails difficult changes for parents as well as children. Returning to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979), changes within the chronosystem in this way not only impacts the child directly, but also disrupts the stable environment of those within the family unit who make up a child's microsystem. Life changes as a consequence of incarceration occur within the chronosystem of all members of the family and affects them too, meanwhile the influence that this has on them individually subsequently reshapes and impacts the microsystem of the child. Organizations then divide their support to include individual support as well as targeting the micro- and exosystems. This once again demonstrates an organizational awareness of how ecological systems influence children and how these can be valuable for providing children with the best opportunities for progress and support.

These results confirm the ideas of Arditti & Johnson (2022), Davis & Shlafer (2017), and Rhodes et al. (2023) who all emphasize the importance of multilevel perspectives for developing successful interventions. The relevance of resilience as a concept moreover becomes apparent here. Organization's holistic, multilevel support for families corresponds

with Van Breda's (2018) and Ungar's (2012) definition of resilience as multilevel and therefore, support provided for parents can be interpreted as mediating processes that may be crucial for generating positive outcomes for their children. Van Breda's (2018) definition of resilience could in this case additionally be applicable to families as a whole, meaning that focusing on family-perspectives mediates resilience for the entire family unit which, once again, represents a child's microsystem.

Aside from all organizations providing individual children, parents, and families with support, one of their main operations include organizing activities and gatherings where families of the organizations get to meet and socialize with each other. This opportunity for families is portrayed by Participant 7 as a valuable and appreciative element of these organizations:

> I think that's what makes us different compared to if you have a support contact. You can seek counseling via a health center or via social services or whoever you've turned to, but then you don't have that community because they can't- this to meet someone else in the same situation. And sometimes it's a huge help. Those who take that step to do it often appreciate it very much.

Within this quote, the families of the organizations are described to create a sort of community together. The community of families and the sense of belonging that this gives them is a theme that was observed within a majority of the interviews. Participants highlight how this community serves an important role for families navigating through change as children and parents can support and assist each other in different matters, exchanging stories and knowledge. Participant 4 expresses that their gatherings are especially valuable for parents, who they notice share both practical advice and emotional support. Similarly, participant 1 articulates how families are at different stages and that parents who have been in the situation for a few years are able to answer questions from those who are within the initial, more uncertain stages. This perspective is additionally emphasized by Participant 5 who expresses that families who have been coming to the organization for a long time "become role models for others".

As parents exchange knowledge and experiences with each other, their capacity to in turn support and promote well-being for their own children is strengthened. Applying ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979), this once more displays how providing support to family members within a child's microsystem ultimately benefits the child. Parents engaging

in supporting and assisting each other furthermore exhibits a process of resilience (see Van Breda 2018). As these activities and processes are things that multiple families engage in together, resilience can in this context be applied to all families and their joint community as a whole. This displays how families help each other resiliate when faced with similar adversities and that they become resilient together. The fact that parents and their children are experiencing similar adversities indicates an inevitable understanding between them. The value of understanding from these families' newfound community becomes evident in light of previous research, specifically the study by Jones et al. (2024) which concluded understanding as essential to children's feelings of support. As participants perceive the community created as helpful and appreciative for families, the findings confirm these results.

Discussing the community in specific regard to children, most of the participants note the importance of the community as a way for children to see that they are not alone in this situation and that there are others like them. This aspect is illustrated by Participant 4:

> And what we see as being very helpful for the children [of the organization] is getting to meet other children who are in a similar situation, and especially not having to struggle with the thought that 'I'm the only one in the world who feels this way'. Because I think, no matter what our parents do when we're young, we find them embarrassing, and we feel ashamed about this and that. And just carrying around a burden like having a parent in prison can feel really lonely, and you don't really know who you can tell of your friends, or how they'll react. Then, when you come here and see that there are other kids, you eliminate that thought of 'I'm the only one in the world who's going through this'.

The quote portrays parental incarceration as a situation characterized by children feeling lonely and shameful. The importance of having a community devoid of judgement becomes especially discernible with this perspective in mind since children, as described in the quote, may fear negative reactions from their peers. A couple of other participants describe how the societal stigma around criminality can lead to others discouraging association with those experiencing parental incarceration and telling other children not to play with these children anymore. This is something that would most likely amplify the mentioned feelings of loneliness and shame. In contrast to this immediate environment which incorporates plenty of stigma, Participant 1 claims that within the organizational community, children can find new friends and talk about their situations "in a different way than they might do with their

classmates, teammates, or other children". Participant 5 likewise stresses that the organization becomes a safe space where families are not met with meanness, also mentioned by Participant 1 who states that it is a place free of judgement. The importance of the organizational community thus stems from the fear of telling others about what has happened and the presence of stigma around the topic of incarceration.

In light of what is discussed above, an application of the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979) clarifies that when children and their parents lose connections to people within their existing community and immediate environment due to stigmatization and exclusion, their microsystem changes and becomes unstable. The loss of a stable, immediate environment can naturally have a negative effect on those already enduring adverse circumstances. Organizations' joint activities for families then presents a safe place where families and children can find a new, supportive community which will ideally promote positive development and adaptation for them. The implementation of resilience additionally demonstrates how a safe, new community where parents and children can talk openly about their situation without fear of judgement can be interpreted as involving mediating processes promoting better-than expected outcomes through destigmatization and showing children that they are not alone (see Van Breda 2018). Revisiting the study by Corcoran et al. (2025) which demonstrated an importance for children to have strong relationships across multiple contexts presents further connections to the findings described. As some relationships within certain contexts may alter or disappear as a consequence of stigmatization, children would benefit from organizational activities that facilitate forming relationships with other peers within a new context. The findings within this study accordingly confirms the results of Corcoran et al.'s study (2025), as participants acknowledge how families value this new community.

In addition to the organizational community that families create together, most participants frame children's schools as an important component of community for these children. It is emphasized that entrusted teachers and school counselors can be additional safe adults that children can talk to about difficulties at home. Multiple participants describe schools as an important entry to reaching children and ensuring they get access to the support measures available to them. Participants talk about how they work informatively towards schools to raise awareness about their organization, but also to provide information and support to professionals about how to attend to these children within their proximity. This is emphasized by Participant 4:

> Then there's also the fact that we're out giving lectures at everything from community college to student health teams to being more present in schools and to provide information. Then it could be that a school counselor gets in touch and asks us for some advice and support about how they can support children who have parents who are incarcerated.

In accordance with the quote, organizations not only provide schools and their staff with lectures on parental incarceration, they also provide individual support to professionals who want to learn more about ways to support these children. However, Participant 2 describes how stigma and a lack of knowledge can be a barrier for schools to allow organizations to hold their lectures and promote themselves in the first place, presenting a paradox. Nevertheless, the participant continues by stating that they work hard to contact the schools within their surrounding area to try and get the word out.

Organizations engaging with and trying to enhance knowledge about parental incarceration within schools can, through the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979), be interpreted as a way for them to indirectly support children through their microsystem. The work that organizations carry out within schools is in this way an attempt to reshape one aspect of children's immediate environment for the better, which demonstrates an awareness of the effect that the microsystem has on a child. Moreover, as participants describe how organizations provide schools and their staff with knowledge and information about parental incarceration, one can interpret this as an attempt to enhance the probability of mediating processes of resilience (Van Breda 2018) taking place within a school environment – an environment the organizations otherwise have no direct impact on. Through awareness-raising, organizations could potentially ensure that school professionals such as teachers and counselors have the right knowledge to promote mediating processes for these children themselves, thereby recognizing resilience as also taking place within children's microsystem in accordance with Van Breda's (2018) definition. These interventions could promote meaningful and beneficial relationships for children within a context of schools and in accordance with the study by Corcoran et al. (2025), this would likely be a protective factor that would buffer mental health issues. Awareness-raising within schools further promotes understanding from teachers, something that is emphasized as important by Jones et al. (2024) for children to feel supported.

Summarizing this section and theme as a whole, participants describe organizations as encountering family members who struggle with managing changing circumstances and feelings tied to parental incarceration. It is portrayed that these organizations all work with individual and holistic interventions to target families and especially children's needs and promote resilience within multiple ecological systems, namely the microsystem, exosystem and chronosystem. Reviewing the concept of resilience (Van Breda 2018) more closely and taking into account how organizational support described in this section is provided with an aim to aid children in the face of adversity, it is possible to reflect upon the difference that organizations make for children's outcomes. Facing an adverse childhood experience such as parental incarceration, children being provided with the opportunity to be supported by an organization determined to promote multilevel resilience can make the crucial difference between better-than-expected outcomes and poorer outcomes (see Van Breda 2018).

6.2 Organizational Structure: Resources and Constraints

As concluded within the previous section and first analytical theme (see section 6.1), organizations make great efforts in supporting children of incarcerated parents on multiple levels. Although doing the very utmost with the resources they have, organizations describe being faced with various constraints when providing support, partly due to their organizational structure as CSOs. This section will primarily cover findings related to challenges and barriers perceived by the CSOs, but also include benefits relating to the organizations' structures. The first topic addressed within this section is related to financial aspects such as funding, although this theme is present throughout the entirety of this section. This is followed by a discussion on geographical distances as a barrier in the provision of support, in turn followed by the matter of a lack of other resources such as time and staff. Thereafter this section will cover issues concerning the invisibility and unawareness of the organizations themselves as well as their target group and the effect of this. Lastly, the section will highlight the advantages of CSOs as providers of support.

Financial constraints and the difficulties of finding funding for organizations' work is one of the most common challenges that was raised within interviews. Among other things, participants point out that applying for funding is a demanding process that takes up a lot of time, which in periods constitutes half of some participants' working time. Furthermore, they observe that there are a lot of valuable but different organizations in Sweden who all have to apply and "fight for" the same money, leading to funders having to evaluate the importance

of each organization and their target group. This is something that Participant 2 describes as very problematic and voices a perceived asymmetry regarding funding for the different local branches of their organization. The participant describes that the amount of money you get can be dependent on the personal opinion of what benefactors believe is important: “So that doesn’t really work, it ends up being handled on an individual basis in a way”. Despite struggling with finding stable funding, common for all three organizations is that they currently receive funding from SPPS, although it only covers one part of their work, as described by participant 7:

> Because the irony of the situation is that we currently have funding for the part we do within the Prison and Probation Service. That is, the support we provide to those who have committed crimes. We have funding for that, but not for the children. It’s completely backwards, but that’s the way it is.

This statement highlights a dilemma for these organizations considering that they are child rights organizations yet are struggling to find stable funding that entirely covers the direct support provided to the children themselves. Multiple participants express a wish and need for larger funding that covers children’s support and is more long-term and stable, as well as less dependent on public funds.

The fact that these organizations are portrayed to be constrained by their demand for funding presents a clear relevance for applying Pfeffer & Salancik’s (2003) resource dependence theory. It is evident from the findings that organizations are dependent on external resources and the actors who supply these in order to maintain and extend their operations. Larger potential funders who possess the resources necessary for organizations survival have, in accordance with the theory, power over those in need of these resources. Funders accordingly have control over funding criteria and the timelines for these, which can be observed in how organizations at times must adjust their activities to make funding deadlines. These criteria can lead to large administrative burdens that affect the amount of time that organizations can spend on their main operations. The difficulties for these organizations to obtain adequate and stable funding thus shape organization’s activities. Furthermore, the asymmetry regarding funding observed by Participant 2 can be explained with the theory’s idea of the importance of social context. Keeping the perspective of social context in mind, similar organizations working for the same cause will have different experiences when it comes to securing funding depending on the actors who control the resources within their specific ecology.

Asymmetry can likewise be interpreted through the concept of legitimacy, as some organizations may be considered more valuable for coalition by their potential funders, while others may struggle to prove their legitimacy to those within their own context. The asymmetry for funding can potentially lead to an increase in the already existing unjust provision of support that exists due to geographical dispersion and the lack of targeted support which will be further discussed below.

Aside from financial constraints, another barrier that exists for these organizations that became evident is related to geographical distances. Participants describe CSOs as practically alone when it comes to providing this target-specific support to children with an incarcerated parent, and they stress that the support that does exist is uneven and very much dependent on where you live. As a result of support being largely dispersed across the country, sole organizations are responsible for covering large geographical areas. This can bring about difficulties for support provision since organizations are most commonly based in one city, though simultaneously wanting to reach those surrounding it, as illustrated by Participant 3:

> But then there are all the surrounding municipalities and we can't reach them, so in that case, I suppose we'd need more time to travel outside [our city]. Because we do have families coming from the surrounding municipalities [...] but they're harder to reach because it feels like it's a bit further away. Even if it's not that far, it's still a few miles, even though we have families who actually come from these surrounding municipalities. So some have managed to find us anyway. That, well, I think we need to focus more on reaching out, but maybe there isn't really enough time for that.

This participant perceives those within surrounding municipalities as more difficult to reach yet they emphasize that the time for doing this is insufficient. Participant 1 similarly says that due to their organization being "based in one part of the region, it might be harder for families from other parts of the region to get to [them]". The situation where organizations carry large burdens of support provision for large geographical areas and their inhabitants can be interpreted as problematic as support becomes unjust and dependent on where families live. Participants' experiences of this confirm the results of studies by Borén et al. (2018) and Storm Mukwana & Franzén (2021) and thus further illustrate the necessity of more widespread support in Sweden. Considering the concept of resilience and the importance of mediating processes for preventing poor outcomes (Van Breda 2018), unjust support provision also results in unjust resilience.

The perspective where distances are framed as an issue is especially evident in interviews with participants who work within some of Sweden's more rural areas. These organizations are described to cover areas that include multiple municipalities and even multiple provinces, meanwhile the more urban organizations commonly do not extend their operations further than to surrounding municipalities. Participant 2 raises this issue and expresses it as the second biggest challenge for their organization, after finding funding for their operations:

> And then number two for me is the distances. But at least that can be addressed digitally, so we can put out a few fires. But I'd like to have more staff. I'd like to have an employee in [one part of the region] who can cover that area, so that I wouldn't have to travel [long distances] to meet with a family. But there's no money for that, so then it's difficult.

The quote clearly accentuates the difficulties for organizations who cover large geographical areas and stresses expanded resources as fundamental for addressing this issue. In accordance with this, a lack of resources such as time and employees are brought up as organizational constraints by a majority of the participants. Participants exemplify how a shortage of time and staff limits their abilities to offer additional activities as well as more often, increase their visibility, travel, reach more families, participate in collaboration forums, and advocate for the children. A lot of these resource-related constraints are however dependent on the amount of funding organizations receive, leading back to the portrayed biggest barrier as discussed earlier. As Participant 4 explains, if organizations have the right economic conditions, they will be able to bring in additional staff which would bring about a possibility to dedicate more time to what they – due to current constraints – can not prioritize.

Once again the findings demonstrate how resource constraints shape organization activities. Although wanting to bring in more staff and free up more time for expanding their operations and support more people, their ecology both directly and indirectly limits this. Financial and resource constraints consequently also impedes families' wishes for increased support groups, counselling, and target-specific programs, as was expressed in the studies by Jones et al. (2024) and Storm Mukwana & Franzén (2021). The participants accordingly frame increased and lasting resources as a way for organizations to in turn increase their capabilities to support those experiencing parental incarceration. Similarly, Storm Mukwana & Franzen (2021) claim that in order to improve circumstances for these children in Sweden, expanded resources for supporting them are necessary. In this way, financial aspects also influence

resilience for clients; increased resources for organizations would generate more mediating processes available for more people, resulting in enhanced resilience.

Connected to resource constraints, some participants note how there is no current statistical data on the amount of children affected by parental incarceration in Sweden. Participant 4 points out that because of this, "some collaborations are declined" due to organizations not being able to statistically argue for and demonstrate the relevance and need for support within a specific municipality or region. The participant mentions statistics as a possibility for being able to establish more collaborations but also to subsequently develop a national strategy for support, a matter that is likewise mentioned by Participant 7. The lack of a national strategy for supporting children with an incarcerated parent collocates with the fact that no one has official responsibility for the target group. This is mentioned by Participant 8 in relation to the group's absence within Sweden's Health and Medical Services Act:

> I think of this fact that no one really has the responsibility for this target group to provide targeted support. I think in the Health and Medical Services Act, for example, there is a legal requirement that children as relatives, when someone has died or you have a parent or sibling with mental illness, for example, then the region has a responsibility to offer these children support. And that is not the case for children of the incarcerated, there you have no responsibility to offer them support. So [...] a child can go to school for several years without any teacher or counselor perhaps knowing that your parent or sibling is incarcerated. So I think that is a big problem. That there is no authority or anyone who has the responsibility to ensure that they receive support.

This quote clearly emphasizes the importance of this group and their needs being recognized by authorities and law makers. Participant 9 likewise raises this issue and expresses how an inclusion of this group as relatives within the Health and Medical Services Act may positively affect possibilities for funding their organization and specifically for entering an IOP with public actors. Although currently not recognized within law as relatives in need of support, multiple participants refer to this perspective of children as relatives as important. Participant 3 describes the group as "a small group among many other larger groups" and states that although those with a relative living with an addiction or mental illness may be more visible and talked about, they wish "that this group, although small, should have an obvious place too. That we don't forget that this group, they are also relatives and need support".

In view of the expressed lack of targeted support and the absence of children with an incarcerated parent within law and statistics, responsibility for support can be interpreted as fragmented. This is most likely further contributing to the lack of resources, as no funder is in charge of the issue and feels a responsibility to contribute to organizations focusing on this. Similar to what Participant 9 said, a change in this – such as including this group within the Health and Medical Services Act – could potentially produce more funding possibilities, since it would emphasize responsibility. Thereby, organizations would be given more ways to argue for their legitimacy (see Pfeffer & Salancik's 2003). In a similar manner, statistical data would positively contribute to the legitimacy of these organizations. Additionally, theorized through the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979), this illustrates the interconnectedness of different ecological systems; the macrosystem in the form of law and norms influence the organizations' capabilities, in turn influencing the individual children in need of support.

Another immense challenge that organizations are portrayed to face is that although participants are very proud of and speak highly of the support they, despite financial constraints, are able to provide, they express that it is not enough in the sense that they are not able to reach and help all those in need of their support. The organizations are described to constantly work on increasing their visibility to ensure that those who experience parental incarceration – and professionals who meet them – have knowledge about the possibilities for support. However, Participant 1 describes their organization as "rather invisible", which could lead back to the invisibility of the group they seek to support. Due to the invisibility of this group and how targeted support is limited throughout the country, Participant 9 communicates a worry over what happens to the children who never find their way to the organizations: "Where do these children end up if they don't come to us? Or do they fall through the cracks, or what?". Participant 9 continues to illustrate the challenge:

> The absolute main challenge is to reach the children who are in this situation. It is a constant challenge that we have that I think you hear from others who work with this target group, that they also have the same challenge more or less. So that is the biggest challenge that you can feel like 'Yes, but these children exist. Where do we find them? How do we reach them?'.

The participant raises the fact that they know that there are many more children affected by parental incarceration than they come into contact with, yet finding and reaching them is not easy. Revisiting organizational constraints with this in mind, multiple participants name the

lack of time and staff as part of the reason for the organizations' invisibility. Participant 3 states that with more staff available, they would be able to reach "many, many more".

Reaching those in need of support and doing this at an early stage is something that the participants frame as important. Likewise highlighting the value of this, Borén et al. (2018) concluded that children's right to information about the support available must be enhanced. This jointly coincides with both perspectives of resilience (Van Breda 2018) and ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner 1979) as early interventions amidst new, changing environments could promote resilience and help children adapt. Reaching out is consequently crucial for organizations to meet their goals. However, applying resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik's 2003), an environmental context where multiple organizations require the same resources for their respective survival will limit this and result in a fight for legitimacy. For these organizations who direct their attention to a small, hidden, and stigmatized group within society, the invisibility of the issues they address can pose barriers for legitimacy making it more difficult to find stable funding, as there exists less societal pressure to address these issues. Simultaneously, working to increase their visibility and prove legitimacy requires resources which presents a paradox. To fully tackle financial constraints and issues of visibility, organizations may need to direct their attention to a broader level of their ecology, to the society that omits these children. This will be discussed further in the next section (see section 6.3).

Although organizations' structure as CSOs evidently leads to financial constraints affecting the resources available to them, participants express that there are also advantages of being civil society based. One aspect of this is illustrated by Participant 3:

> But I think it's easier to build a relationship when you're not an authority with the power to make decisions on various matters. So we become more, I can't quite find the words. But yes, maybe we can listen more and be there for whatever they need rather than making decisions about things. Because oftentimes, it's about having someone to hold their hand through the process, that's the hard part.

The quote draws attention to how CSOs are non-decision-making powers, something that the participant perceives as generating more trust from families who view CSOs as less biased and less critical which facilitates relationship-building between practitioners and clients. Additionally, Participant 5 highlights how their structure as an idea-driven organization enables them to more often than not be able to provide support to those who take the step to

seek help. They point out that when turning to their organization, in contrast to numerous public sectors, families are not met with refusal or long waiting times but get to "feel that they have a right to support". Participant 6 likewise compares their organization to the structure of support that can be provided via health care, and states that in comparison, their organization does not have a limit to the support they provide, meaning that there is no time pressure. Rather, support may "take as long as it takes" and families and children are allowed to choose to leave themselves when they feel they no longer have a need for support.

In light of the above details, these organizations and their possibilities for providing support are strengthened by their structure as CSOs. At the same time, this section has displayed how financial constraints due to dependencies lead to a lack of resources in the form of money, staff, and time, in turn creating barriers for organizational support. On another level, barriers for securing larger and more stable funds materialize from the competitive ecology surrounding organizations and the invisibility of the target group they seek to support. Accordingly, increased visibility and recognition of these children as well as expanded funding options for organizations would enhance organizations' capabilities for reaching and supporting children, strengthening resilience.

6.3 Harmful Discourse and Framework Impacting Support Needs

The themes addressed within the previous section (see section 6.2) encompasses multiple challenges organizations face in relation to practically providing support for children with an incarcerated parent. Lifting the analytical gaze further, this section will encompass themes related to how macro-level issues influence the experiences of these children, in turn affecting their support needs and organizational interventions. Initially, this section will discuss social stigma and prejudice, followed by an exploration of predominant political discourses of 'tough on crime' that emerged as relevant in the results. Thereafter, it will be explored how consequences of criminal policy that materialize within the SPPS affect children and organizational support. Following this is a discussion on SPPS as a rigid system lacking the prioritization of children's perspectives. Lastly, this section will cover topics related to advocacy and the possibilities for changing harmful discourses and frameworks.

A prevalent aspect that was brought up by a majority of the participants is the stigma that surrounds the topics of incarceration and criminality. Building onto what has been discussed within the first analytical theme where children were portrayed as feeling lonely and blaming themselves (see section 6.1), stigma is illustrated to play a major role in this. Families are

described to feel very alone in their situation due to how having an incarcerated family member is taboo and how this issue is not talked about much within society. Simultaneously, participants express a view that societal stigma places blame on and punishes entire families when a family member commits a crime, something that affects family members emotionally and increases support needs. However, stigma is concurrently portrayed to be a barrier for families to seek help and support. Participant 3 describes stigma as challenging for their organization since it can make it difficult for families to take the crucial first step to visit an organization and dare to talk about their situation when it is a very taboo subject. Stigmatization as well as prejudice towards families with an incarcerated family member are things that multiple participants mention as something they would like to change within today's society. Participant 2 expresses this wish:

> That we would rather take these [affected families] in and take care of them instead of being afraid and pushing them away. Because we hear that super often. And I don't just mean parents, I mean professionals, principals, teachers, who don't want to touch the subject. That they are, I don't know, afraid maybe.

This quote accentuates how stigmatization and prejudice can be identified not only amongst family members' peers, but also among professionals who are meant to be understanding and supportive in their role. Traces of these ideas are thus evident within multiple groups surrounding these families and affects how they are met – with care and understanding or with rejection. Participant 2 proceeds to state that the topic of criminality is something that interests people, meanwhile they do not want to fully address the issue.

Interpreting this through the application of ecological systems theory (see Bronfenbrenner 1979), stigma and prejudice are both elements of values and beliefs as evident within Sweden's societal blueprint within the macrosystem. The macrosystem shapes what is considered 'normal', in this case labelling having a parent in prison as deviant. These ideas then in turn influence and dictate other systems, including the microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem. With this theoretical perspective in mind and returning to the findings presented, stigma and prejudice are negatively impacting children of incarcerated parents through all of these systems, inducing destructive emotions and thought patterns of being different and alone while hindering the pursuit for support. Building onto this through adding a perspective of resilience (Van Breda 2018), stigma and prejudice serves as a barrier to mediating processes for children in the face of adversity, obstructing better-than-expected outcomes.

These results confirm the studies of Saunders (2018) and Phillips & Gates (2011), verifying how stigma and harmful perceptions of this group of children negatively affects them in various ways. Furthermore, just like participants express a wish for parental incarceration to be destigmatized within society, both studies similarly emphasize the importance of this for reducing marginalization (see Saunders 2018; see Phillips & Gates 2011).

As described by participants, these processes of stigmatization and prejudice where incarcerated individuals are regarded with hostility are also clearly evident within criminal policy and political discourse in Sweden today. Ideas of 'tough on crime' are dominant therein and all of the participants who discuss this discourse do so in a negative light. Participant 5 reflects on stigma as amplified by these discourses within criminal policy:

> And then, this policy of painting criminals as monsters doesn't really help. But if we were to focus more on the fact that these are people who have ended up in trouble – and who need to take responsibility for their actions – but who are not hopeless cases as we often get the picture of, I think that would make it easier to say 'my father or mother is in prison'. To broaden the picture of who ends up in prison. That would hopefully reduce the stigma.

The participant considers how prejudice and harmful discourse around criminality increases stigma for those with an incarcerated family member. In this respect, political discourses induce stigma and affect families' potential for getting support within a safe, non-judgmental space. Multiple participants therefore express a wish for crime to be discussed in a more nuanced, humane way. Adding this information onto the previous analytical discussion, this further reveals the interconnectedness throughout the ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Bearing in mind that ecological systems are described as dynamic, parts of the macrosystem can influence other parts of the same system. The presented data exhibits a useful example of this as policy changes are seen to alter cultural values, promoting the stigmatization of offenders and their families. Equal to the earlier discussion, the macrosystem then reshapes the other systems and affects the experiences of children. In the same way, a shift in the political climate where discourses around criminality are more nuanced and humane – as desired by the participants – would alternatively influence society to be more understanding and supportive towards these children, thus safeguarding against some of the negative impacts they face.

In addition to the 'tough on crime' discourse impacting stigma, participants illustrate other experienced consequences of the discourse in regard to their support provision. One of the consequences brought up by multiple participants relates to how current changes in the law as a result of 'tough on crime' will lead to more children being affected by parental incarceration, as more people are sentenced to prison and with longer sentences. Participant 4 addresses this topic:

> But if you take the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the perspective of children's rights as your starting point, it would be sick if you heard a politician say that 'today we have a hundred thousand children affected by parental incarceration but our ambition is to have two hundred thousand children within four years'. But that is what is happening right now.

This statement highlights the problem with excluding children's perspectives within the discourse, especially considering the current increase of prisoners and thus children affected. The participant claims that when placing children's rights in the center, the current discourse sounds "sick", implying that the discourse is omitting these important perspectives. Participant 4 continues by stating that there is a need for considering the best interest of the child as well as preventative approaches within the discourse, especially since these children are at greater risk of experiencing social exclusion, mental health issues, and becoming involved in crime themselves. This perspective is supported by other participants who emphasize the acknowledgement of these children and their own organizations as an approach to crime prevention, something that is often overlooked in discussions of 'tough on crime'.

In light of what has been discussed within the previous section concerning the organizations' struggle to obtain funding (see section 6.2), they may struggle to convince other actors of their legitimacy (see Pfeffer & Salancik's 2003). Integrating this information with the findings presented above, politicians within organizations ecology prioritizing the 'tough on crime' perspective while omitting children from the discussion of incarceration likely influences organizations' claim for legitimacy. The results jointly indicate that if politicians in contrast framed incarceration as affecting children too, and acknowledged what Participant 4 stated in the above quote, the call for support within society may look very different and organizations would more easily legitimize their work. Similarly, these organizations view themselves as preventative meanwhile their surrounding ecology is dominated by discourses

that contradict preventative measures. This may further contribute to restricting legitimacy, in turn affecting funding opportunities.

One additional consequence of the present 'tough on crime' discourse as brought up by multiple participants relates to how the shift in criminal policy has led to a lot of changes for SPPS. Participants remark on how overcrowded prisons have led to worsening opportunities for prisoner's children to stay in contact with their parent, in turn affecting how well children cope with the situation. It is exemplified by a majority of the participants that one of the larger consequences for children regarding SPPS's expansion is associated with the loss of the principle of proximity. The principle of proximity suggests that incarcerated individuals should, as far as possible, be placed in close proximity to their domicile and thus their families. Due to current overcrowdedness however, participants describe how it has become increasingly difficult for SPPS to fulfill this principle which consequently affects families' abilities to easily visit an incarcerated parent. A couple participants further note that children's opportunities for visiting an incarcerated parent have lessened as a result of the closing of special visiting apartments that have been dismantled to be reconstructed into children's units to accommodate for the government's decision to be able to place 13-year-olds in prison (see Prop. 2025/26:132). In these ways, consequences of politics affect the children organizations meet and influences the way organizations provide support, as illustrated by Participant 1:

> It is clear that what is happening in society or the fact that sentences are getting longer or that the prisons are getting fuller and fuller, it means that access to visiting rooms is decreasing, access to phone time is decreasing and that affects the children's opportunities to have contact with their family member. So we have to deal with that all the time. Many conversations are about how to handle the fact that contact opportunities are decreasing based on the prisons becoming more full with double occupancy and longer sentences and things like that. So yes, to summarize it in some way, all the changes in society in various legislative changes and policies that affect our target group, it also affects what issues we encounter, which emotions we have to help the children deal with.

The quote distinctly demonstrates an interconnectedness between society as a whole, children, and the organizations. It displays how organizations have to adapt support interventions in accordance with support needs and societal shifts. In view of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979), this is not surprising. The political system as part of

the macrosystem shapes SPPS through new reforms and laws, thereby impacting children's exosystem, yet also their microsystem. Factors that influence the development and resilience of a child with an incarcerated parent are in this way greatly interconnected over different ecological systems and organizations need to acknowledge this when developing intervention strategies. These findings are similar to claims of Nesmith & Ruhland (2008) who emphasize the importance of targeting support needs on higher, more macro levels through policy change and community action. Additionally, the fact that participants frame changes within SPPS as a problem for children due to lessened child–parent contact opportunities validates previous studies of Turney (2023) and Corcoran et al. (2025). Findings together demonstrate how parental incarceration weakens child–parent relationships and establishes the importance of parental closeness as a protective factor contributing to children's resilience and well-being.

Relating to how children are affected by overcrowded prisons through lessened contact opportunities, participants note that children oftentimes suffer the consequences of incarceration and are in that way indirectly punished for their parent's crime. Participants tell stories of families who have travelled long distances to visit a parent in prison, but who have been declined entrance upon arriving due to having been late as a result of matters out of their control. Stories furthermore portray how children have experienced monitored video calls being cancelled without neither notice nor apology, due to unknown circumstances within the prison. Participants accordingly portray SPPS as a rigid, square system that does not have any space for individualization, resulting in children suffering from this. Participant 4 depicts an example of how they hear children talk about this:

> We recently heard from a boy that 'All you adults tell me it's not my fault, but in the end I'm the one who has to suffer the consequences'.

The quote accentuates how children's experiences of the mentioned consequences, where they feel as if their parent's punishment is somewhat transferred onto themselves, counteracts with the support that organizations provide. As Participant 7 describes it, children feel powerless and as if "the focus is not on their needs, but rather on the adult world's". When organizations work to provide support to children, teaching them to not put blame on themselves, children's realities look different and contradict this segment of support. Organizations thus have to work not only on an individual level, but also consider the system that indirectly places blame and consequences on children, hindering them from resilience as

it obstructs mediating processes (see Van Breda 2018). Returning to the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979) while keeping Van Breda's (2018) multilevel definition of resilience in mind, it can be interpreted that the exosystem in the form of the criminal justice system has a great influence on children and that mediating processes on an individual level is not as productive without simultaneously targeting this aspect. This finding affirms previous literature arguing for multidimensional interventions for successfully supporting children with an incarcerated parent (see Arditti & Johnson 2022; see Davis & Shlafer 2017; see Rhodes et al. 2023). Results further exemplify Condry & Minson's (2021) concept of 'symbiotic harms'. Findings demonstrating children's negative interactions with SPPS show how incarceration unintentionally affects children and brings them harm.

In terms of children suffering the consequences of incarceration, multiple participants view these consequences as amplified by jails and prisons not prioritizing children's perspectives, and state that this negatively affects children's support needs and the possibilities for organizations to support them. Participant 6, as an example, claims that children are not "taken into account when making decisions in prisons". It is furthermore portrayed by multiple participants that there exists a lot of irregularities and discrepancies between different jails and prisons regarding decisions as well as their prioritization of children's perspectives. This means that children can have largely different experiences depending on where their parent is placed, and that these as well as decisions can change when a parent is moved around. Participant 5 refers to children's perspectives within SPPS in general to be "a footnote" within their work and that it might be easier "to run over children and their perspectives". This participant also accentuates the fact that child–parent contact "is about the child's right to parents and not the other way around". As an example of this, participant 7 states that:

> The visits or the contact via phone or video call, they are supposed to be for the child and they should actually be based on the fact that they should happen when it suits the child. But that's not the case. Instead you get an appointment on a Sunday at 3 o'clock and then the child has to adjust to when mom or dad can call. So it's kind of backwards. We say one thing but we do another. We talk about the Convention on the Rights of the Child in nice words, but in reality The Remand Prisons Act and the Prisons Act and all sorts of other things that are assessed take precedence, so to speak. That's unfortunately the case.

The quote emphasizes how children must adapt to the rigid system of SPPS if they want to have contact with their incarcerated parent, and that this does not seem to align with children's perspectives. Nevertheless, although participants experience children's perspectives as absent, as represented within the above quote, they also recognize that the current situation for SPPS as a result of policy changes and restructuring makes this difficult. It is noted that some staff within SPPS seem to want to work more with children's issues, but that the time for this does not exist as other issues are prioritized. However, this does not account for the differences in experiences between different facilities.

Results displaying the lack of children's perspectives within SPPS validates the implication of Nesmith & Ruhland's (2008) recommendation to place children's needs at the center of criminal justice systems. Additionally, corresponding to contact opportunities seldom being perceived as made for the children, Borén et al. (2018) advocate for enhancing children's right to have contact with their incarcerated parent and for the need to improve practices regarding prison visitations. Similar to the most recent theoretical application, these results and examples once again indicate the importance of acknowledging and targeting the exosystem (see Bronfenbrenner 1979) as it influences children and induces symbiotic harms. Additionally applying resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik 2003), it can be understood that the demand on SPPS is increasing as they are given more clients to work with, yet they do not have the resources to keep up with structural changes and simultaneously prioritize children's perspectives. Just like the organizations are constrained by their own environment, SPPS is dependent on policymakers to provide them with enough resources and discretion to give precedence to their clients' children meaning the macrosystem affects the exosystem in this way too (see Bronfenbrenner 1979). Taking into consideration this perspective in addition to the previous discussions within this section, it is apparent that the macrosystem in many different ways influences and shapes other ecological systems within Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model. The macrosystem is thereby exceptionally influential for the experiences, development, and resilience for children with an incarcerated parent and must consequently be addressed in organizational interventions. This will be further discussed at the very end of this section.

In view of the above discussions, it is apparent that SPPS's structure affects children with an incarcerated parent. Through the application of theoretical perspectives, it moreover becomes evident that organizations need to adapt their support interventions in accordance with this. One way that the organizations can do this is through awareness-raising and advocacy. To try

and raise awareness about children with incarcerated parents and facilitate change to minimize negative consequences, organizations thus work to raise issues and share stories as brought up by the families they meet to SPPS. As mentioned by Participant 7 though, this aspiration is somewhat obstructed by the power imbalance that exists between the organizations and SPPS:

> It's difficult, it's a balance to come with just the right amount of criticism when you're also dependent on being allowed to come [to the jails and prisons] and meet [clients]. That's how it is. You're kind of sitting in their lap and I can't say whatever. Yes, so it's a power imbalance, you could say.

This statement draws attention to another paradox; organizations are dependent on SPPS to fund and facilitate support provision to families, yet bringing awareness to problems and criticizing them is a fundamental part of supporting children and minimizing the hardship they face. This paradox presents a natural opening for applying resource dependence theory, as it exemplifies Pfeffer & Salancik's (2003) idea of asymmetry in an exchange relationship, resulting in a power imbalance. Accordingly, one way to reduce this power imbalance to reveal more opportunities for criticism and overcome barriers is to lessen organizations' dependency on SPPS. To achieve this, organizations then must secure stable funding from other actors, which in view of conclusions within the previous section is easier said than done (see section 6.2). Simultaneously, a dependency would still exist as a result of organizations being dependent on SPPS to be able to reach a large percentage of the families they seek to help. However, if the knowledge of these organizations' presence was more widespread and common, this dependency would inevitably be reduced as more families would be able to find their way to the organizations themselves.

Returning to earlier discussions concerning stigma and criminal policy, in addition to advocating for these children to SPPS, organizations likewise carry out advocacy on a higher, more political and societal level. It is exemplified that the organizations engage in political meetings and projects, talk to the Ombudsman for children, and write reports and debate articles. When working with this to spread awareness and knowledge about the issues of parental incarceration, organizations prioritize emphasizing child rights perspectives, framing these children as relatives and right bearers with a right to support to meet the many needs they have. Participant 2 describes how they act as representatives for the children they meet in their work:

> It's about highlighting the need, because I don't think people understand what that need is or just how much emotion is involved. So when we give lectures, we bring along quotes from the kids. We show statistics on how many we've met over the year. We share these stories, and people are absolutely shocked. And I think there's so much missing when it comes to this.

The quote highlights the importance of bringing the stories of these children to light, especially since it is a perspective that is rarely raised. Doing this through presenting quotes gives children a platform to have their voices heard. The quote furthermore shows the value of awareness-raising considering that multiple participants similarly report that they, within their advocacy work, encounter lots of people who have never previously heard of or considered the difficult realities of these children. Keeping this in mind, it is undoubtedly implausible that people who do not acknowledge a problem exists can contribute to the solution. In this way, results amplify similar findings from previous studies where it is accentuated that increased knowledge within Swedish society is crucial for improving circumstances for children with an incarcerated parent (see Borén et al. 2018; see Storm Mukwana & Franzén 2021).

Returning to the ecological systems theory, organizations carry out advocacy work within multiple systems of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model. Most central to this theme though is the influence of this within the macro system. Organizations targeting a political level within the macrosystem entails possibilities for reshaping political discourse. Through telling children's stories related to the consequences of 'tough on crime' policies, organizations seek to reshape the way politicians view the issue of incarceration, bringing attention to children's perspectives. If organizations were to successfully reshape political discourse to be less harmful for these children, it may subsequently be accompanied by other positive changes within other systems due to the interconnectedness of these, something that has been apparent within the discussions of this section. In the best of cases, a shift in political discourse and greater awareness of parental incarceration amongst law makers may make them consider these children's perspectives and rights when making decisions. In turn, this could lead to SPPS giving children better possibilities for staying in close contact with their parent and ensuring they don't suffer symbiotic harms as much as they currently are. Moreover, it could lead to a decrease in societal stigma. It is accordingly evident that advocacy within the macrosystem entails much potential for alleviating the impacts of parental incarceration.

Summarizing this section, within children's macrosystems there are multiple factors that influence their circumstances and how well they adapt to adversity. The results show that stigma, prejudice, and political discourses affect a multitude of children's experiences. In turn, these macrosystems are described to influence and shape children's microsystems, mesosystems, and exosystems. Specifically addressed is the weight of the influence the macrosystem has on SPPS, leading to symbiotic harms for children. The interconnectedness of these systems leads to an alteration of children's support needs. It becomes evident within discussions that in order to successfully mitigate adversity within all levels of a child's ecology, organizations need to focus their attention to the macrosystem to advocate for these children's rights and raise awareness about their situation.

7. Concluding Discussion

The aim of this study has been to "explore the role of Swedish civil society organizations in meeting the psychosocial support needs of children with an incarcerated parent, as well as the challenges and opportunities connected to this work". This chapter summarizes the key findings from the analysis and its theoretical application, and links these with the study's research objectives. Subsequently, possible implications and limitations of the study are considered, including suggestions for social work practice, policy makers, and further research.

7.1 Key Findings

The findings of this study revealed that CSOs work very broadly to meet the support needs of children with an incarcerated parent. Practices include individual support to children through providing information, promoting knowledge, and encouraging emotional processing with a focus on changing circumstances. With a particular focus on holistic support that targets children's ecological systems, organizations provide individual support to both the incarcerated parent and the parent on the outside, to indirectly support their children. It is furthermore disclosed that CSOs form a valuable community for families experiencing parental incarceration and that they try to influence children's existing community through their contact with schools. As an additional way to indirectly promote resilience and adaptation for children with an incarcerated parent, the organizations carry out advocacy on a higher level to raise children's stories and promote children's rights. Altogether, the findings display that CSOs work with multilevel interventions and target children's psychosocial support needs throughout multiple ecological systems.

Secondly, results indicated that CSOs encounter a variety of barriers for providing support. One major finding is that a central barrier to support provision is reaching the target group. Families may not have the knowledge about the organizations or the possibility for support that exists, they may not have the time to pursue the organizations, or they may not live within close proximity to the organizations. Other barriers revealed within the findings relate to a lack of time and staff to be able to provide support equivalent to their wishes. A lot of the barriers that exist for these organizations are displayed to derive from financial constraints. Findings show how organizations struggle with resource dependency and that limited resources shape a lot of these barriers. Furthermore, it is revealed that children's support needs are increasing as a consequence of symbiotic harms as well as harmful discourse and

frameworks. These findings further shape organizational barriers, as the lack of children's perspectives within society as a whole and more specifically within criminal policy and SPPS hinders children's resilience and feelings of support. This makes organizational goals all the more difficult to reach. Also central to organizational barriers is that parental incarceration is a hidden issue lacking attention and responsibility.

Finally, the study found that CSOs perceive reduced stigma, enhanced children's rights, stable funding, and an awareness of and emphasis on these children's situations as opportunities for overcoming organizational barriers to strengthen support. More specifically, it is depicted that stable funding would ensure organizations have the time and resources needed to provide support on more levels and for more families. Furthermore, findings reveal that placing these children, their experiences, and their rights in the center of discussions around incarceration could possibly reduce stigma, promote awareness and knowledge, and increase funding opportunities for the organizations. Ultimately, results show that a lot of the opportunities for overcoming challenges seem to trace back to a macrolevel of society and to politics specifically. It will inevitably be difficult to fully support and promote better-than-expected outcomes for a group of children who are continuously being forgotten. One significant finding is therefore that to effectively support children with an incarcerated parent, it is of utmost importance that parental incarceration becomes a topic of interest and that we bring these children out of the shadows they have thus far grown up in.

7.2 Study Limitations and Implications

While previous research predominantly has focused on the impacts of parental incarceration, support needs, and protective factors, this study employs a focus on existing support provision, what it entails, what barriers exist, and possible improvements. The findings of this study contributes to a deeper understanding of support in practice and how this can be developed to effectively foster positive development and resilience for children experiencing parental incarceration in Sweden. Findings support previous knowledge arguing for multilevel, holistic interventions (see Arditti & Johnson 2022; see Davis & Shlafer 2017; see Rhodes et al. 2023). The implication of this suggests a collective responsibility for ensuring these children have the right circumstances to become resilient. Society as a whole needs to illuminate these children and their situations, work to reduce stigma, and promote the operations of the CSOs who support them. This study serves as part of the solution; it raises

awareness and highlights the issue of parental incarceration in Sweden and displays this as an important group that deserves more attention and better opportunities for resilience.

One limitation of this study is its transferability. Since the sample of this study is not representative, findings may not necessarily portray the complete picture. Support measures, challenges, and perceptions of solutions may therefore be missed. Results however portray these aspects relevant for the organizations who are represented within the sample. Considering the geographical spread of the existing sample, findings and its implications are thus still relevant. Further research may however be needed to reveal more ways of ensuring children with an incarcerated parent in Sweden have the best possible preconditions for acquiring better-than-expected-outcomes in the face of adversity.

While this study has focused on CSOs working to support children with an incarcerated parent, the participating organizations likewise provide support for those with an incarcerated sibling. As this study has not focused on the aspect of siblings, there is thus another limit to what extent findings encompass these organization's support provision and challenges as a whole. Worth mentioning however is that this topic was raised within multiple interviews and coded as a miscellaneous theme. Considering how criminal policy is hardening and law makers are proposing the possibility to sentence children as young as 13 to prison (Prop. 2025/26:132), the target group of those with an incarcerated sibling will grow substantially in the event that this bill is passed. This indicates an urgency in further research addressing this target group, focusing on impacts and support needs as well as the challenges and respective solutions connected to support. Results discussed detailing suggestions for overcoming organizational challenges and improving policy and practice in Sweden also apply to alleviating circumstances for children with an incarcerated sibling. However, these children are in need of their own spotlight.

The findings of this study have revealed how children with an incarcerated parent in Sweden today have a large variety of support needs that CSOs aim to meet. One significant finding relates to children's experiences of symbiotic harms. The application of theoretical perspectives in combination with the analytical findings demonstrated how a prioritization of children's perspectives within both criminal policy and SPPS could potentially alleviate some of these harms. Since symbiotic harms as a consequence of incarceration are unintentional yet unavoidable within a society that uses imprisonment as a punishment, further research should center on possible approaches to mediate symbiotic harms. The implications of these findings

moreover suggests a necessity for policy and practice to give more priority to children's rights as these are breached as a consequence of the symbiotic harms. Social work practice and policy makers should take this into consideration when an individual is incarcerated, meaning that they have to be aware of these issues and have knowledge of possible mediating processes connected to this. Specifically for the social work field, the results contribute by emphasizing the social work responsibility of protecting, caring for, and supporting children of incarcerated parents. The results highlight the need for social work to develop their practices to acknowledge these children. The application of ecological systems theory and the concept of resilience displays the importance of this, and shows the significance that a consideration of these theoretical perspectives can have for social workers providing support to the target group.

In light of findings of the study revealing the lack of responsibility for targeted support as a barrier for providing support and obtaining funding for this, it suggests that there is a need for developing a national strategy for supporting children with an incarcerated parent in Sweden. This need was likewise expressed by participants. The development of a national strategy would illuminate the support needs these children have and strategize a plan to ensure all in need have access to adequate support. Furthermore, developing a national strategy for supporting the target group may be an appropriate approach for the state to fully comply with human rights. In accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989), state parties have the responsibility to "render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children" (Art. 18 § 2). Developing a national strategy for support would thus promote the fulfillment of children's rights and ensure that these children are cared for. Further research should therefore investigate what a possible national strategy could look like.

Finally, this study revealed significant findings in regards to macro perspectives. It is found that multiple symbiotic harms experienced by children of incarcerated parents can be alleviated on a macro level of society. Considering power imbalances due to dependencies, the Swedish Government has the power to influence SPPS. They could put pressure on SPPS to prioritize children's rights while also providing them with adequate resources and opportunities to do so. A change where SPPS are able to consider more of children's perspectives could lessen symbiotic harms and promote resilience and adaptation, fostering better-than-expected outcomes for children experiencing parental incarceration.

Bringing public attention to the topic of parental incarceration could moreover possibly increase organizations legitimacy and put pressure on potential funders to provide funds to CSOs working with these children. In turn, this could alleviate organizational challenges and strengthen support provision. Furthermore, changing discourses and raising awareness about parental incarceration on a macro, wider societal level is a destigmatizing process that contributes to minimizing stigma and prejudice against those who experience it, easing circumstances that are adverse. Additionally, implications of the findings show that if parental incarceration becomes a topic that is more acknowledged and more widely discussed within Swedish society and political discourse, it brings public attention to the support needs of these children. This would put pressure on society to take on a collective responsibility to meet children's support needs and enable resilience. In this way, a key to addressing the support needs of children with an incarcerated parent is to bring them to light and not let them remain forgotten victims.

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Appendix 1 – Information Letter, English

INFORMATION LETTER

My name is Alice Svalin and I am studying the master's programme in social work and human rights at the University of Gothenburg. I am currently in my final semester and am writing my master's thesis and am therefore looking for participants for my thesis, which is an interview study.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to examine how civil society organizations in Sweden support children of incarcerated parents, as well as to understand the challenges these organizations face in their daily work and how these challenges can be addressed at various levels.

Participation

As a participant in the study, you will take part in an interview that will last approximately 45 minutes. The interview will be conducted online or in person and with your consent, the audio will be recorded and then transcribed into text. However, if you are not comfortable with the audio being recorded, you have the right to object, in which case the interview will be noted down instead. You also have the right to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the process.

Research ethics principles

The study follows the research ethics principles established for research. The information provided through this information letter is intended to help potential participants make an informed decision regarding consent. Consent is then given through a consent form that is signed (either digitally or by printing and scanning), where important information regarding data management is also presented in more depth. Personal data collected for the study will be deleted after the thesis has been approved, will not be shared with others and will only be used for the current study. Furthermore, all participants will be anonymized in the study and details that can be traced back to an individual will be omitted. Through these measures, I ensure that the requirement of information, the requirement of consent, the requirement of confidentiality, and the requirement of usage are met. Other ethical considerations are made with caution.

If you have any further questions about the study, please contact me or my supervisor using the contact information below.

Thank you in advance!

Kind regards,
Alice Svalin
xxxxxx

Supervisor:
Linnéa Österman
xxxxxx

Appendix 2 – Information Letter, Swedish

INFORMATIONSBREV

Mitt namn är Alice Svalin och jag studerar masterprogrammet i socialt arbete och mänskliga rättigheter vid Göteborgs universitet. Just nu läser jag sista terminen och skriver därmed min masteruppsats och letar därför efter deltagare till min uppsats i form av en intervjustudie.

Syftet med studien

Syftet med studien är att undersöka hur icke-statliga organisationer i Sverige stöttar barn till frihetsberövade föräldrar, samt att förstå vilka utmaningar dessa organisationer står inför i sitt dagliga arbete och hur de kan hanteras på olika nivåer.

Deltagande

Som deltagare i studien ställer du upp på en intervju som kommer att vara i cirka 45 minuter. Intervjun kommer att hållas digitalt eller personligen och ljudet kommer, med ditt samtycke, att spelas in för att sedan transkriberas till text. Är du däremot inte bekväm med att ljudet spelas in har du rätt att invända och då kommer intervjun istället att antecknas. Du har även rätt att närhelst under processen avbryta din medverkan och dra tillbaka ditt samtycke.

Forskningsetiska principer

Studien följer de forskningsetiska principer som finns etablerade för forskning. Den information som ges genom detta informationsbrev är tänkt att hjälpa potentiella deltagare att ta ett informerat beslut gällande samtycke. Samtycke ges sedan genom ett samtyckesformulär som signeras (antingen digitalt eller genom utskrift och skanning), där även viktig information gällande datahantering presenteras mer djupgående. Personlig data som samlas in för studien kommer att raderas efter det att uppsatsen godkänts, inte delas med andra samt endast användas för den aktuella studien. Vidare kommer alla deltagare att anonymiseras i studien och detaljer som kan härleda tillbaka till en person kommer att utelämnas. Genom dessa åtgärder säkerställer jag att informationskravet, samtyckeskravet, konfidentialitetskravet och nyttjandekravet uppnås. Andra etiska överväganden görs med försiktighet.

Vid ytterligare frågor gällande studien, kontakta gärna mig eller min handledare via kontaktinformationen nedan.

Tack på förhand!

Med vänliga hälsningar,
Alice Svalin
xxxxxx

Handledare:
Linnéa Österman
xxxxxx

Appendix 3 – Consent Form, English

Information about the processing of personal data for educational purposes at the University of Gothenburg and consent to participate in the work

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requires that you are informed about how your personal data is processed. This document describes how the processing is carried out and what rights you have as a data subject. The last page of this document also contains a consent form for participation in the work described below.

Who is responsible for the processing of your personal data?

The University of Gothenburg is the data controller for the processing carried out by students in the context of their studies.

If you have questions about the processing, you can contact the student who carries out the processing.

Course code	SW2579
Title of the student's project	Children on the Outside of the Fence: A Qualitative Study on Organizational Support and the Invisible Group of Children with Incarcerated Parents in Sweden.
Name of the student	Alice Svalin
Email address of the student	xxxxx

Legal basis and purpose of the processing

According to chapter 1 §2 of the Higher Education Act (1992:1434), the university has a mission to organize education. This means that the university has the right to process personal data on the legal basis of public interest when it is necessary to fulfil its educational mission according to article 6.1 e GDPR.

This also means that individual students process personal data for educational purposes. Students process personal data in their education, e.g. when carrying out individual projects, essays or field studies. In these cases, the student must formulate an explicit and limited purpose for the project. The student has filled in the purpose of the project below.

Purpose for the student

The purpose of this study is to examine how civil society organizations in Sweden support children of incarcerated parents, as well as to understand the challenges these organizations face in their daily work and how these challenges can be addressed at various levels. To achieve the study's purpose, interviews will be conducted with staff members at these organizations. During the interviews, data is collected in the form of participants' responses to interview questions via audio recordings or notes. This data, as well as names and contact information, will be processed for the study.

The student will process the following data about you

Below, the student has ticked the data the student will process about you:

☒ name, contact information and/or address information

☒ only indirect personal data such as answers to survey questions, etc.

☐ ethnic origin

☐ political views

☐ religious or philosophical beliefs

☐ membership of a trade union

☐ health

☐ information about sexual life or sexual orientation

☐ genetic data

☐ biometric data used to uniquely identify a person

☐ data on offences against the law

☐ other types of personal data, please specify in free text:

Method of collection

Below, the student has ticked the method(s) that will be used for data collection in the project.

☐ Image or video recording

☒ Sound recording

☐ Survey

☒ Interview

☐ Observation

☐ Other method, describe it here:

Who will be able to access the personal data?

Only the persons involved in the project that the student is conducting for educational purposes at the University of Gothenburg will be able to access your personal data. This means, for example, that the student and a possible supervisor of the student will have access to your personal data.

Data can be requested under the principle of public access to official records

Your personal data or documents containing your personal data may, if submitted to the university by the student, be subject to a request in accordance with the principle of public access to official records. This means that individuals can request access to official documents and thus gain access to information in which your personal data appears, if these are not covered by confidentiality. These requests are handled in accordance with the principles of the Freedom of the Press Act (1949:105) and the Public Information and Privacy Act (2009:400).

Students are encouraged not to submit information about you that can identify you directly (name, contact details, etcetera) when submitting their finalised work. This way, it will in most cases only be possible to request indirect personal data about you from the university.

For how long will the personal data be processed?

Your personal data will only be processed for the duration of the student's work for educational purposes. After the project has been completed, the student will delete the personal data. However, this does not apply to data that has been submitted to the university and which thus becomes a official document (see above).

Will your personal data be processed outside the EU/EEA?

As the result of the university's activities, the university may transfer personal data to third countries; i.e. to countries outside the EU/EEA. In such circumstances, special legislation applies. In these cases, the university will take all reasonable legal, organizational and technical measures required to achieve an appropriate level of protection for the personal data. A transfer to the US may occur when the student is using the text editing and file storage tools provided by the university. The university uses Microsoft for these services.

Your rights according to GDPR

GDPR states that individuals have a number of rights. The most relevant rights are listed below. If you want to read a more detailed description of your rights according to GDPR, please visit https://www.gu.se/en/about-the-website/processing-personal-data.

Right of access (register extract)

As an individual, you have the right to once a year, free of charge, request information about what personal data the university processes about you. Contact us via dataskydd@gu.se to request an extract of your personal data from us.

The right to be forgotten

As an individual, you have the right to have your personal data erased in cases where the personal data is no longer needed to fulfil the purpose for which it was collected (the right to be forgotten).

There may be other legislation stating that personal data cannot be erased, in which case this legislation applies and the data cannot be erased.

In cases where there are legal obstacles to the deletion of personal data, the university will limit the processing of these personal data to only include processing to the extent that there is a legal basis for.

The right to object to processing

As an individual, you have in certain cases the right to object to the university processing your personal data. If there are no compelling reasons for the university to continue processing the personal data, such as to fulfil legal requirements, the university will cease processing.

Contact details for the Data Protection Officer

If you have questions about the specific processing, you can contact the student who collected the data. The student has filled in his/her/their name and contact details under the heading "Who is responsible for the processing of your personal data?" in this document.

If you have questions about the processing or have complaints, you can also contact the university's Data Protection Officer, by email dataskyddsombud@gu.se.

If you want to read more about how the University of Gothenburg processes personal data in general and a detailed description of your rights according to GDPR, please visit https://www.gu.se/en/about-the-website/processing-personal-data.

You have the right to complain to the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection (IMY)

If you believe that the university processes your personal data in violation of GDPR, you have the right to file a complaint with the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection, IMY. Further information on how to make a complaint can be found on the website of IMY, www.imy.se/en.

Consent to participating

Your participation in the student's work is voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any time until the work has been submitted. Please read the information above before agreeing to participate. If you have any questions about the above information or the student's work, please contact the student. The student's contact details can be found on the first page of the information and below.

Course code	SW2579
Title of the student's project	Children on the Outside of the Fence: A Qualitative Study on Organizational Support and the Invisible Group of Children with Incarcerated Parents in Sweden
Name of the student	Alice Svalin
Email address of the student	xxxxxx

Consent

I consent to participation in the project carried out by the student as described above.

I consent to the processing of my personal data in the project mentioned above.

I have read the information presented together with this consent form.

_____	_____
Signature	Date
_____	_____
Name clarification	Contact information (Email and/or phone number)

Appendix 4 – Consent Form, Swedish

Information om behandling av personuppgifter i utbildningssyfte vid Göteborgs universitet och samtycke till deltagande i arbetet

Dataskyddsförordningen (GDPR) ställer krav på att du ska få information om hur dina personuppgifter behandlas. I detta dokument beskrivs hur behandlingen går till och vilka rättigheter du har som registrerad. På sista sidan i detta dokument finns även en samtyckesblankett rörande deltagande i nedan beskrivna arbete.

Vem är ansvarig för behandlingen av dina personuppgifter?

Göteborgs universitet är personuppgiftsansvarig för den behandling studenter utför inom ramen för sina studier.

Om du har frågor om behandlingen kan du vända dig till studenten som utför behandlingen.

Kurskod	SW2579
Titel/benämning på studentens arbete	Children on the Outside of the Fence: A Qualitative Study on Organizational Support and the Invisible Group of Children with Incarcerated Parents in Sweden.
Studentens namn	Alice Svalin
Studentens e-post	xxxxx

Rättslig grund och ändamål med behandlingen

Universitetet har enligt 1 kap. 2 § högskolelag (1992:1434) i uppdrag att anordna utbildning. Detta innebär att universitetet har rätt att behandla personuppgifter enligt den rättsliga grunden allmänt intresse när det är nödvändigt för att utföra sitt utbildningsuppdrag, enligt artikel 6.1 e GDPR.

Detta innebär även att enskilda studenter behandlar personuppgifter i utbildningssyfte. Studenter behandlar personuppgifter i sin utbildning, t.ex. vid genomförande av självständiga

arbeten (examensarbeten), uppsatser eller fältstudier. Studenten ska då formulera ett tydligt och avgränsat syfte med arbetet. Studenten har nedan fyllt i syftet med arbetet.

Studentens syfte

Syftet med studien är att undersöka hur icke-statliga organisationer i Sverige stöttar barn till frihetsberövade föräldrar, samt att förstå vilka utmaningar dessa organisationer står inför i sitt dagliga arbete och hur de kan hanteras på olika nivåer. För att uppnå studiens syfte genomförs intervjuer med personal vid dessa organisationer. Vid intervjuerna samlas data in i form av deltagares svar på intervjufrågor via ljudupptagning eller anteckningar. Denna data, samt namn och kontaktuppgifter kommer att behandlas för studien.

Studenten kommer behandla följande uppgifter om dig

Studenten har kryssat i de uppgifter som studenten kommer att behandla om dig:

- ☒ namn, kontaktuppgifter och/eller adressinformation
- ☒ enbart indirekta personuppgifter såsom exempelvis svar på enkätfrågor m.m.
- ☐ etniskt ursprung
- ☐ politiska åsikter
- ☐ religiös eller filosofisk övertygelse
- ☐ medlemskap i en fackförening
- ☐ hälsa
- ☐ uppgifter om sexualliv eller sexuell läggning
- ☐ genetiska uppgifter
- ☐ biometriska uppgifter som används för att entydigt identifiera en person
- ☐ uppgifter om lagöverträdelser
- ☐ andra typer av personuppgifter, ange i fritext:

Metod för insamling

Nedan har studenten kryssat i vilken eller vilka metoder som kommer att användas för insamlingen i studentens arbete.

- ☐ Bild- eller videoupptagning

☒ Ljudupptagning

☐ Enkät

☒ Intervju

☐ Observation

☐ Annan, ange i fritext:

Vem kommer att kunna ta del av personuppgifterna?

Enbart de personer som är involverade i det arbete som studenten utför i utbildningssyfte vid Göteborgs universitet ska kunna ta del av dina personuppgifter. Det innebär exempelvis att studenten själv och eventuell handledare till studenten kommer att ta del av dina personuppgifter.

Uppgifter kan begäras ut med stöd av offentlighetsprincipen

Dina personuppgifter eller handlingar som dina personuppgifter förekommer i kan, om de lämnas in till universitet av studenten, komma att bli föremål för en begäran om allmän handling i enlighet med offentlighetsprincipen. Det innebär att enskilda kan ta del av allmänna handlingar och därmed få tillgång till uppgifter där dina personuppgifter förekommer, om dessa inte omfattas av sekretess. Sådana utlämnanden hanteras därför i enlighet med bestämmelserna i tryckfrihetsförordning (1949:105) och offentlighets- och sekretesslag (2009:400).

Studenter uppmanas att inte lämna in direkt identifierande uppgifter (namn, kontaktuppgifter m.m.) om dig när studenten lämnar in sitt färdigställda arbete. På så vis kommer det i det flesta fall enbart vara möjligt att begära ut indirekta personuppgifter om dig från universitetet.

Hur länge kommer personuppgifterna att behandlas?

Dina personuppgifter kommer enbart att behandlas under den tid som studentens arbete i utbildningssyfte pågår. Efter att arbetet har avslutats kommer studenten att radera personuppgifterna. Detta gäller dock inte sådana uppgifter som har lämnats in till universitetet och som därmed blir en allmän handling (se ovan).

Kommer dina personuppgifter behandlas utanför EU/EES?

Universitet kan i verksamheten komma att föra över personuppgifter till tredje land, det vill säga till länder utanför EU/EES. Under sådana förhållanden gäller särskild lagstiftning. Universitet kommer under sådana förhållanden att vidta alla rimliga juridiska, organisatoriska och tekniska åtgärder som krävs för att uppnå en lämplig skyddsnivå för dessa personuppgifter. En överföring till USA kan komma att ske vid behandling i universitets verktyg för textredigering och fillagring som studenten använder. Universitetet använder Microsofts tjänster för detta.

Dina rättigheter enligt GDPR

Dataskyddsförordningen anger att den enskilde har ett antal rättigheter. Nedan anges de mest relevanta rättigheterna. Om du vill läsa en mer utvecklad beskrivning av dina rättigheter enligt GDPR kan du gå in på www.gu.se/om-webbplatsen/behandling-av-personuppgifter.

Rätten till tillgång (registerutdrag)

Som enskild har du rätt att kostnadsfritt en gång per år begära information om vilka personuppgifter som universitetet behandlar om dig. Kontakta oss via dataskydd@gu.se för att begära ett utdrag av dina personuppgifter hos oss.

Rätten till radering

Som enskild har du rätt att få dina personuppgifter raderade i de fall som personuppgifterna inte längre behövs för att uppfylla det ändamål som de samlades in för (rätten att bli bortglömd).

Det kan finnas bestämmelser som anger att personuppgifterna inte får raderas, vilket gör att det då är dessa bestämmelser som gäller och att uppgifterna därför inte kan raderas.

I de fall det finns rättsliga hinder mot radering av personuppgifterna kommer universitetet att begränsa behandlingen av dessa personuppgifter till att endast omfatta behandling i den utsträckning som det finns rättsligt stöd för.

Rätten att invända mot behandling

Som enskild har du i vissa fall rätt att invända mot att universitet behandlar dina personuppgifter. Om det inte finns tvingande skäl för universitetet att fortsätta behandla personuppgifterna, som till exempel för att uppfylla rättsliga krav, kommer universitet att upphöra med behandlingen.

Kontaktuppgifter till dataskyddsombudet

Har du frågor om den specifika behandlingen kan du vända dig till studenten som har samlat in uppgifterna. Studenten har fyllt i sitt namn och kontaktuppgifter under rubriken ”Vem är ansvarig för behandlingen av dina personuppgifter?” i detta dokument.

Om du har frågor om behandlingen eller har klagomål kan du även vända dig till universitets dataskyddsombud på e-post dataskyddsombud@gu.se.

Om du vill läsa mer om hur Göteborgs universitet behandlar personuppgifter generellt och en utvecklad beskrivning av dina rättigheter enligt GDPR kan du gå in på www.gu.se/om-webbplatsen/behandling-av-personuppgifter.

Du har rätt att klaga till Integritetsskyddsmyndigheten (IMY)

Om du anser att universitetet behandlar dina personuppgifter i strid med dataskyddsförordningen har du rätt att lämna in ett klagomål till Integritetsskyddsmyndigheten. Närmare information om hur du går till väga för att lämna ett klagomål finns på Integritetsskyddsmyndigheten webbplats, www.imy.se.

Samtycke till deltagande

Det är frivilligt för dig delta i studentens arbete och du kan närsomhelst återkalla ditt samtycke fram till dess att arbetet har lämnats in. Vänligen läs igenom informationen ovan innan du samtycker till deltagande. Om du har frågor om informationen ovan eller studentens arbete kan du kontakta studenten. Studentens kontaktuppgifter finns på första sidan i informationen samt nedan.

Kurskod	SW2579
Titel/benämning på studentens arbete	Children on the Outside of the Fence: A Qualitative Study on Organizational Support and the Invisible Group of Children with Incarcerated Parents in Sweden.
Studentens namn	Alice Svalin
Studentens e-post	xxxxx

Samtycke

Jag samtycker till deltagande i ovanstående arbete som utförs av studenten.
Jag samtycker till att de personuppgifter som nämns ovan behandlas om mig i arbetet.
Jag har tagit del av informationen som presenterades tillsammans med denna samtyckesblankett.

_____ _____

Underskrift Datum

_____ _____

Namnförtydligande Kontaktuppgifter (E-post och/eller telefonnummer)

Appendix 5 – Interview Guide, English

Interview Guide

Introduction

Repeat who I am and what I am studying, as well as the purpose of the study:

The purpose of the study is to investigate how civil society organizations in Sweden support children of incarcerated parents, and to understand the challenges these organizations face in their daily work and how these can be addressed at different levels.

Inform about research ethics principles:

You have the right to discontinue your participation and withdraw your consent at any time during the interview.

Ask about consent to audio recording.

Do you have any questions before we start the interview?

Introducing questions

1. Could you start by telling me about your experiences at [the organization] and how you came to work there?
    - How long have you been working there?
2. Can you describe your role within the organization?

The daily work

1. How do you work to reach the target group of children with incarcerated parents, who are in need of your support?
    - What is the most common way that children come into contact with [the organization]?
    - What challenges do you encounter in this phase of reaching children in need of support? What do you think is the underlying cause of this?
    - In your opinion, what might make it easier for you to reach your target group?
2. What kind of support does [the organization] offer to the target group?
    - How often/for how long are these offered?

3. At what stages of a parent's incarceration do you feel children need the most support? Why?
    - How do you work to support children during these specific stages?
4. How is the support tailored to each child's specific, personal circumstances?
5. How do you collaborate with other actors on the issue of children with incarcerated parents?
    - What challenges are there when it comes to this collaboration? Potential solutions?
6. How do you work to raise awareness of your target group's rights and needs at a higher, more national level?
7. How do you feel that national and local policies, guidelines, and laws affect the organization's work?
    - How are the ongoing changes in criminal policy affecting the organization's work? Have you noticed any difference over time?

Challenges, Strategies, and Development

1. In your opinion, what are the main challenges [the organization] faces in its work with children who have an incarcerated parent?
2. How are you currently working to address the challenges you have described?
3. Overall, what potential changes (at both the local and national levels) would strengthen your ability to support children with incarcerated parents?

Concluding Reflections

1. Is there anything I haven't asked about that you think is important to bring up?

Conclusion

Thank them for participating.

Let them know what the next steps are.

Do they have any questions for me?

Appendix 6 – Interview Guide, Swedish

Intervjuguide

Inledning

Upprepa vem jag är och vad jag studerar, samt syftet med studien:

Syftet med studien är att undersöka hur civilsamhällesorganisationer i Sverige stöttar barn till frihetsberövade föräldrar, samt att förstå vilka utmaningar dessa organisationer står inför i sitt dagliga arbete och hur de kan hanteras på olika nivåer.

Informera om forskningsetiska principer:

Du har rätt att närhelst under intervjun avbryta din medverkan och återkalla ditt samtycke.

Fråga om samtycke till inspelning av ljud.

Har du några frågor innan vi börjar med intervjun?

Inledande frågor

3. Kan du börja med att berätta om dina erfarenheter inom [organisationen] och hur det kommer sig att du började jobba där?
    - Hur länge har du arbetat där?
4. Kan du beskriva din roll inom [organisationen]?

Det dagliga arbetet

8. Hur arbetar ni för att komma i kontakt med målgruppen barn med frihetsberövade föräldrar, som är i behov av ert stöd?
    - Vilket är det vanligaste sättet som barn kommer i kontakt med [organisationen]?
    - Vilka utmaningar upplever du förekomma i denna fas med att nå barn som är i behov av stöd? Vad tror du ligger till grund för detta?
    - Vad skulle möjligtvis kunna underlätta för er att nå ut till målgruppen, enligt dig?
9. Vilken form av stöd erbjuder [organisationen] till målgruppen?
    - Hur ofta/länge erbjuds dessa?

10. Vid vilka stadier av en förälders frihetsberövning upplever du att barn behöver mest stöd? Varför?
    - På vilket sätt arbetar ni för att stötta barnen i just dessa stadier?
11. På vilket sätt anpassas det stödjande arbetet efter barns specifika, personliga omständigheter?
12. Hur samarbetar ni med andra aktörer i frågan om barn med frihetsberövade föräldrar?
    - Vilka utmaningar finns när det kommer till detta samarbete? Potentiella lösningar?
13. Hur arbetar ni för att lyfta målgruppens rättigheter och behov på en högre, mer nationell nivå?
14. Hur upplever du att nationella och lokala policys/riktlinjer/lagar påverkar organisationens arbete?
    - Hur påverkar de pågående skiften i kriminalpolitiken [organisationens] arbete? Har du märkt någon skillnad över tid?

Utmaningar, strategier och utveckling

4. Enligt dig, vilka är de främsta utmaningarna [organisationen] möter i ert arbete med barn som har frihetsberövade föräldrar?
5. Hur arbetar ni för närvarande för att hantera de utmaningar du har beskrivit?
6. Överlag, vilka potentiella förändringar (på både lokal och nationell nivå) skulle stärka er förmåga att stödja barn med frihetsberövade föräldrar?

Avslutande reflektioner

2. Finns det något jag inte har frågat om som du tycker är viktigt att lyfta?

Avslutning

Tacka för deltagandet.

Informera om nästa steg.

Har hen några frågor till mig?