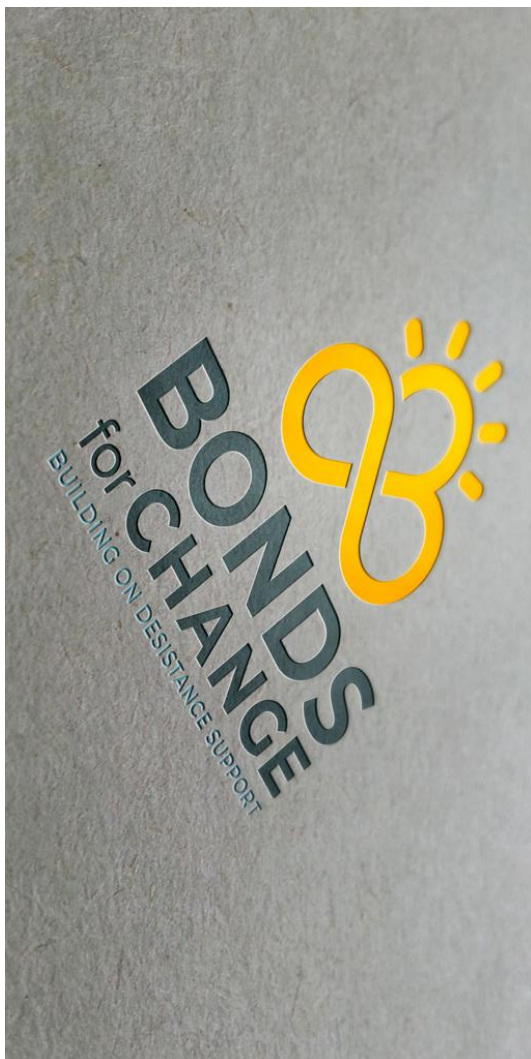


# The burden of desistance policy

Understanding how to ease the burden of desistance (stopping offending) policy on informal relations and women.

## University of Lincoln research has:

- ➔ Identified desistance policy oversight and suggested next steps to minimise negative impact
- ➔ Established the concept of Desistance Emotional Work (DEW) as a conceptual framework to understand the resources women invest into criminal justice-affected relationships
- ➔ Helped inform how to support women ease their DEW in practice through data sharing at the Lincolnshire Women and Girls' Event (February 2022)



When a person who has engaged in a number of illegal activities begins to live a law-abiding life, this is increasingly understood to constitute the 'desistance' process, and it refers to the development of a crime-free life characterised by well-being, good relationships and a positive sense of self.

Desistance policy does not acknowledge how the expectation of support frequently falls to informal relations to provide the capital required to embark upon and maintain the desistance process. Research conducted by Dr Lauren Hall and Dr Lyndsey Harris involved the completion of 6 online interviews with women whose partners were desisters. The results showed the gendered impact of supporting a desisting partner. The barriers associated with prison visits, including the financial implications of maintaining contact, were also emphasised. We have therefore conceptualised the support provision by partners of desisters as a form of Desistance Emotional Work (DEW) which is uniquely shaped and experienced in line with the desistance process.

## Criminal Justice Barriers

The women detailed the stigma and difficulties of visits, and of having to support partners to attend appointments post-release.

The repercussions of challenges faced particularly concerning maintaining a relationship during periods of incarceration extended to impact the women's lives in a range of ways. As Rochelle explains:

"For me, because he wasn't just down the road in prison, there is one literally four miles away which he went to on remand and then went – it just made life so much harder. It took me two and a half hours to get there. I'd then have to wait there for two hours before the visit just to get a good spot.

Have the visit and then a two-and-a-half-hour drive back. So, it was the whole day. So, it was a day that I wouldn't be able to see any counselling clients. That was taken off completely. So, a day I couldn't make money basically." Rochelle, P.20

'Nearly half of women prisoners (48%) report having committed offences to support someone else's drug use, compared to 22% of male prisoners' (Prison Reform Trust, 2017): relationships can therefore increase women's proximity to the criminal justice system.

## Desistance Emotional Work

Challenges faced supporting a loved one to desist do not end when the partner is released from prison, or their criminal justice contact ends. We have therefore conceptualised support provision by women who are partners of desisters as a form of Desistance Emotional Work (DEW) which is uniquely shaped and experienced in line with the desistance process. The investment of DEW, when shared between partners and when desistance was maintained, returned the joy of shared relational strengths, but could damage or deplete the women's resources when desistance lapsed or ended entirely. Even when relationships were positive, the investment of DEW by women could still cause strain on emotional and financial resources because of criminal justice contact. Understanding how to ease the burden of DEW for women will help to ensure that desistance policy and practice is reciprocally beneficial relationally and could also help to prevent criminal justice system contact for women in this position.

## IMPACT ON POLICY

- The concept of DEW is being further examined to better understand ways in which desistance policies can acknowledge and uplift the informal support provided by women whose partners are affected by the criminal justice system
- Desistance policy remains insufficiently aware of the onus placed on women and informal relations of Desisters and beginning this work represents the start of a process of partner awareness to policy
- The recent launch of the Lincolnshire Women and Girls Research Network will help to support further understanding of the model of DEW as a mechanism of crime-prevention for women

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