



ARC East of England Understanding the impact of the enforced separation of incarcerated mothers and newborn babies

Improving the experiences of women in prison and their babies

In the UK, incarcerated women give birth to an estimated 100 babies each year. There is no exact data on the number of newborn babies removed from their mothers at or soon after birth. Separation of mothers in prison and their newborns poses significant emotional, psychological, and social challenges for both the mothers and their infants. The need to understand

the experiences of health and social care professionals, as well as prison officers who care for these women, is paramount in informing future policy and supporting initiatives.

What is the aim of the project?

The Lost Mothers Project aims to investigate the impact of separating

incarcerated women and their newborns on health and social care professionals and prison officers who care for these women. By understanding its impact, we want to drive policy changes to better support these women and their children. The study is the first project to link the professions of social work, Health Visiting, midwifery, and criminal justice staff with the experiences of women who have been in prison.

What are we doing?

The project team has visited four prisons and conducted around 50 interviews with women with Criminal Justice System involvement, social workers, midwives, health visitors, and prison officers. We have also observed mother-and-baby decision-making boards.

How are we involving people?

The project involves collaborative teamwork in partnership with the charity Birth Companions and members of their lived experience team. This project has been shaped by a lived-experience team consisting of mothers with direct experience of the criminal justice system.

What is NIHR ARC East of England?

The National Institute for Health and Care Research Applied Research Collaboration (NIHR ARC) East of England is one of the 15 NIHR ARCs. We collaborate with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust and the Universities of Cambridge, East Anglia, Hertfordshire and Essex, along with other NHS Trusts, Local Authorities, Integrated Care Systems, patient-led organisations, charities, and industry partners.

What is the impact so far?

The project has provided firsthand insights into the emotional and psychological impacts of enforced separations on both mothers and their newborns. We anticipate that the findings will drive policy changes that better support incarcerated mothers and their newborns, improve the support systems within prisons, and foster a more compassionate and equitable approach to care to reduce the negative impacts of enforced separation.

What next?

We will be holding a stakeholder event to share the findings and we will develop a play to share people's experiences.

For more information about this project

Scan the QR code or contact the Principal investigator, Dr Laura Abbott (l.abbott@herts.ac.uk).



Get in contact with NIHR ARC East of England

 arc-oe.nihr.ac.uk

 ARCOffice@cpft.nhs.uk

 [@ARC_EoE](https://twitter.com/ARC_EoE)

 [nihrclahrceoe](https://www.linkedin.com/company/nihrclahrceoe)

 arc-oe.nihr.ac.uk/newsletter

