

Depicting a web of narratives



Malta – a Mediterranean island of shifting realities



This is us...





Established formally in 2011

- ▶ An independent run training institute offering courses accredited at a European level.
- ▶ Currently running our 8th cohort for the Postgraduate Diploma in Systemic Psychotherapy
- ▶ And our 3rd cohort for the Masters in Systemic Psychotherapy course
- ▶ As well as many other projects... Rarely we get some funding for research

Locked Out: Families of the Incarcerated (2017)

- ▶ Research project in collaboration with a local NGO working with prisoners and their families, financed by the Office of the President of Malta
- ▶ Aiming at bringing forth the realities experienced by the families of the incarcerated to influence policy and practice.
- ▶ This study considers multiple perspectives including those of families but also the inmates themselves, prison wardens, and a group of volunteers directly involved with prisoners and their families.
- ▶ Adopted a systemic position and tried to consider the relational phenomenology between children, families, incarcerated men and women, prison staff, and voluntary services embedded within the current social context.

Tools and processes

- ▶ After consideration we decided that semi-structured interviews and focus groups would be most loyal to our research curiosity.
- ▶ Conducted 21 interviews with families who accepted to take part in the research as well as a focus group each with male and female prison inmates, prison wardens and a group of volunteers.
- ▶ Our research team was headed by Dr Charlie Azzopardi and included a team of four of our Masters students partnered with individuals from the group of volunteers to assist with interviews.

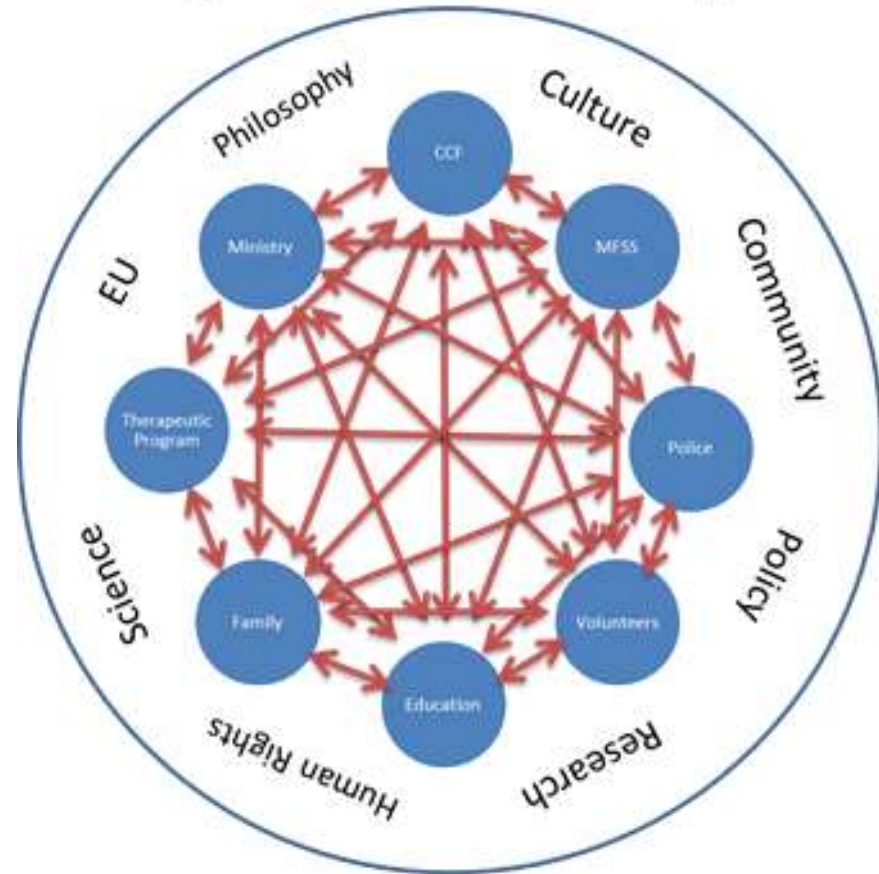
Interviews and Interviewers

- ▶ Interviews were carried out at the families homes on their request, although IFT premises were also an option. Interviews were carried out by a trainee partnered with a volunteer who the family might know already, for familiarity but also for safety. Other interviews needed to be held necessarily within the prison with the permission of the Prison Director.
- ▶ We provided initial training around interviewing skills as well as organized regular meetings along the course of the interviews to support interviewers.
- ▶ Listening to the powerful and poignant stories of some of the families interviewed called for processing as interviewers needed to unpack the complexity of emotions stirred within them.

Research Methodology

- ▶ We identified Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the analysis method to try to explore as best as we could participants' experiences and meanings attributed.
- ▶ QDA Miner software for qualitative data was used to code data. Emerging codings were connected with other codings from other participants until exhaustion. Multiple codes were clustered in groups of themes and themes grouped in supra-themes.
- ▶ What emerged was a beautiful, rich and intricate web of data we found extremely hard to represent in its complexity.

Ecological Correctional System



Multiple Dilemmas...

- ▶ Should we have gone with a different research methodology to better do justice to the richness of data our participants provided?
- ▶ How do we best account for the different sets of participants and their voices? ...families, partners, siblings, children, inmates, prison wardens, volunteers...
- ▶ How do we best elicit the relationship between them and the information they provided?

Voices and voicelessness

- ▶ How do we best represent the lack of words?
- ▶ Some participants lacked verbal eloquence. In many instances we saw this as having to do with difficulty in verbalizing the experience with outsiders very often for the first time. In some cases it seemed to be linked with shame and trauma as some participants spoke in very disjointed and ambiguous ways. It could have been linked to low verbal ability, How would we know?
- ▶ What were the implications of enrolling trainees as research interviewers?
- ▶ How did that impinge on the data collected and the direction conversations took?

Working towards publication

- ▶ The amount of data generated is incredible!
- ▶ How do we decide what to leave out when writing up the research paper and simultaneously do justice to the vulnerable groups we are trying to represent, maybe from our position of privilege?
- ▶ How do we represent the different voices of the different categories of participants justly?

What we did was

- ▶ Attempt a systemic understanding of the data by connecting all the themes together in a systemic rationale which includes the expressed experience of those categories interviewed.

Thank you

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. These shapes are primarily located on the right side of the frame, creating a modern, layered effect against the white background.