

# To study the impact of parental imprisonment on the children

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## Abstract

Parental imprisonment results in problems for the family, which is left behind, including difficulty in childcare, affects the family income, difficulty in continuing contact with the imprisoned parent, humiliation, at home, school, and society. Children and parents are troubled by the separation and respond by acting out or becoming introvert, nervous or disheartened. The main objective of the paper is to examine the attitude impact of imprisonment of parents on their children. In the research author examine upto what the children feel stigmatized depends on the nature of the crime committed by the parent, the attitude of the society towards that particular crime and individual character of child.

## Introduction

Parental imprisonment disturbs millions, perhaps tens of millions, of children across the globe, who often belong to the underprivileged and helpless sections of society. Exact data on the intensity of the issue are inaccessible as authorities rarely record the details about the children of prisoners; however, numerous studies have quantified the extent of problem in certain countries. In Australia, almost 5% of children have had a parent imprisoned. Similarly, in the year 1999, around 1,498,800 children in America had a parent in prison (Mumola, 2000). However, research submits that compared to the general population, these children are likely to come from families witnessing unemployment, multiple mental health problems, marital problems, exploitation, disregard and the complications linked with lower social strata (Murray, 2005). Incidents of cruelty or psychological problems within the family are predominantly observed among the children with imprisoned mothers (Taylor, 2004). Experience of such an environment increases the possibility that children are prone to selfish or immoral inclinations in later life.

The incarceration or even the arrest of a parent generally aggravates resilient response among children. These responses may include grief, annoyance, anxiety and a sense of loss. Even within a family, the reaction is not uniform and varies according to previous interactions, type of crime, social support systems and other socio-cultural factors. The impact of parental imprisonment on children can be deep and lifelong. Children of prisoners are often differentiated and defamed because of parental imprisonment and suffer from pain, anxiety, embarrassment, guiltiness, and low self-respect (Simmons, 2000)

Their relationship with other family members also suffers. Some children become introvert, show poor academic performance, exhibit increased hostility, become unkind and develop criminal tendencies. The implications of parental imprisonment is so severe that the children at times harms their physical and mental health. Studies have revealed that the children often shows changes in the sleeping and dietary patterns, besides increased consumption of drugs, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Crawford, 2003). Since the

level of understanding varies among children, they often recognize parental imprisonment in a different manner. This again depends on the incorrect reasons, explained to the children, regarding the absence of parent during the imprisonment. Sometimes, they are explained that their parent is in hospital or has gone far for earning money to fulfill their needs. However, when they came to know about the reality, they behave in an unusual manner. Sometimes the elder child knows about the factual position, but under the direction of elder caregiver, keeps the secret to himself. There is no accepted consensus on whether and when the children should be revealed about parental imprisonment. Keeping the incarceration secret may avert certain problems and possibly decreases the shock of parting; though, “doubt and lack of facts weakens children's ability to cope [and] ... children who are unaware about their parent’s imprisonment are more restless and fearful” (Parke, and Clarke-Stewart, 2001). Realizing that they have been misinformed, the children becomes suspicious and loses confidence in those who are around them.

### **Review of Literature**

Substantial economic and smaller ethnographic literature (Fagan and Richard, 1999) shows that imprisonment decreases ex-offenders’ later incomes and job prospects. Literature reveals that various laws negate ex-offenders the privilege to vote or hold office, the chance to engage in certain jobs in some places, and the right to receive various communal remunerations (Fellner and Mauer, 1998). Literature has also shown that incarceration often leads to the fragmentation of families and social associations and to less parental participation with their children (Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999).

### **Implications of imprisonment on offenders’ Children**

On this subject, the literature is particularly thin and scattered, as Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) show, and the most demanding job is to assimilate the prevailing knowledge in order to frame conceivable suppositions and evolve methodical research plan. Assumptions would apparently address the consequences of incarceration on the socio-economic permanency of convict’s families while they were in prison and subsequently, on the maintenance of prisoner’s associations with families, and on the short and long-term welfare and social working of prisoner’s children. Researchers upheld that the outcome of imprisonment on the wives and children of convicts are probably adverse.

### **Research Methodology**

The samples for the present study were selected from the prisons of Shimla and surrounding areas. The imprisoned parents whose children were under eighteen years of age were selected for the study.

## Objective

To examine the attitude impact of imprisonment of parents on their children.

## Research Method

Morgan and Smircich (1980) claim that the actual suitability of a research method stems from the essence of the social phenomenon to be studied. Brink (1999) points out that the research questions, the aim, and the objectives of the study should influence the selection of the research design. In the present study non-probability sampling technique was used. In this study we used descriptive research design to explore the impact of parental imprisonment on children. The samples for the present study were selected from the prisons of Shimla and surrounding areas. The imprisoned parents whose children were under eighteen years of age were selected for the study. Interview schedules were prepared according to the objectives of the study. Information was gathered by administering pre-designed schedules on the targeted respondents. For data collection the researcher visited the prisons and spent time discussing with imprisoned parents, observing their lifestyle, and their views regarding the judicial system and the problems, which their families face when they were imprisoned. At the same time, the children and their caregivers were also conversed.

## Data Analysis

To assess the impact of imprisonment on children, the imprisoned parents were interviewed to know, what they think and how they perceive imprisonment and its impacts on their family. In all, there were 46 male and two female prisoners. As far as the age-wise distribution is concerned, maximum (50 percent) accused parents were between 31-40 years of age, followed by 33.3 percent in the age group 41-50. The family structure of accused parents was evaluated and it was found that 52.02 percent of the respondents had family consisting of 5-7 family members followed by 27.08 percent families having 3-4 family members. The educational qualifications of accused fathers was noted down during the survey and it was found that maximum (36.96 percent) were matriculate, followed by 17.40 percent educated up to +2 and 15.22 percent illiterates. Information regarding the occupation of accused (in case of fathers), was gathered and it was found that 41.67 percent were involved in agriculture, followed by 35.42 percent involved in private jobs.

The study took into account the parents whose children were under 18 years of age. The accused parents were interrogated to know, the number of children, they had. Most of the parents (33.34 percent) had two children, followed by 29.17 percent having one child, 20.83 percent having three children. Only 6.25 percent had five or more than five children. With the increase in the number of children in each family, the responsibility of the parent to fulfill the financial and emotional needs increases. The more children a family has, the more is the financial burden and this is again linked with the economic condition of the family. The duration of imprisonment also governs the impact of the same on the children, family, and spouse. The longer is the duration, the more is the impact, because if the parent stays away for longer time, he/ she will not be able to cater the psychosocial needs of the children. During the study, an effort was made to know the duration for which the parents were imprisoned. Maximum parents' (41.67 percent) were imprisoned for more than ten years, followed by 33.3 percent, who were captivated for 5-10 years. 22.9 percent were

imprisoned for 2-5 years and only one parent was caged for a year. The longer imprisonment keeps the children away from their parents for lengthier time, thereby not only snatching away their infancy, but by hampering their growth and development.

### Conclusion

The wellbeing of a child must be the main contemplation on actions that may have impact on the children of incarcerated parents. Efforts must be to form and execute laws/policies to ensure the process occurs in a way that it has no impact on the children of imprisoned parents. Every child is an individual and has specific needs. A child's needs are governed by their personal circumstances, including their age or stage of growth, and any infirmities or special needs they have. Whether imprisoned with or detached from parents, children of caged parents are vulnerable and are entitled to particular care and protection. Family members very often undertake informal care. Sometimes, informal caregivers may feel indebted to care for the children even if they lack sufficient resources.

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