



Who Pays the Price of Incarceration? A Narrative Story of a Prisoner's Wife

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Abstract

This paper summarizes the lived experiences of an incarcerated father's family, otherwise known as the shadows of prison. This study used the qualitative approach through a narrative inquiry employing in-depth interviews as the primary data gathering tool. It was revealed in the study that paternal incarceration greatly disturbs family relations. Its impact includes the following: a) having a marital strain; b) distress on the part of the wife who is concerned about the safety of her incarcerated husband; c) absence of a father figure in the family resulting in children's neglect; d) financial burden; e) social stigma, and f) emotional tensions. The shadows of prison face intense and multifaceted risk factors to their emotional, physical, and financial well-being. The findings of the study will serve as a guide for the establishment of peer-support groups and resources for the families in each municipality or city that will help the families in their coping stage.

Keywords: paternal incarceration; shadows of prison; impact of incarceration; problems of separation

1. Introduction

The growth of crime made imprisonment justifiable. The basis of imprisonment lies with the principle of incapacitation, which focuses on the elimination of individuals' opportunity for crime and deviance. However, the impact of incarceration is not limited to those serving time behind bars. While inmates experience the direct

effects of confinement, their families live their lives in what Codd (2008) describes as the shadow of the prison.

Research studies find that incarceration creates challenges and difficulties for the family members of inmates (Arditti, 2003, 2005; Braman, 2004) and that these family members face a number of harmful outcomes (Geller, Garfinkel, & Western, 2011; Wildeman, Schnittker, & Turney, 2012). Prisoners' family members face multiple, often competing, demands, and obligations during the incarceration period (Braman, 2004; Comfort, 2008; & Fishman, 1990). When a parent is sent to prison, many dimensions of family functioning undergo significant changes. The family structure, financial relationships, income levels, emotional support systems, and living arrangements may be affected (Travis, McBride, & Solomon, 2003).

In a similar manner, studies show that there is a strong association that exists between imprisonment, divorce and separation (Huebner, 2005; Western, Lopoo, and McLanahan, 2004; Lopoo and Western, 2005). This is supported by Salmon (2007) in which he suggested that 45% of inmates lose contact with their families during their incarceration and 22% of married inmates divorce or separate. One possible explanation is that correctional facilities are often geographically isolated making travel to and from the facility challenging (Delgado, 2011).

Parental incarceration has been said to negatively affect emotional, social, physical, behavioral, psychological and cognitive development (Bloom, 1993; Johnson & Waldfogel, 2001; Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2003; Porterfield et al., 2000). According to Murray and Farrington (2008), parental incarceration is a risk factor for a wide range of adverse issues during childhood, from externalizing behaviors such as aggression, violence, and crime, to internalizing outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems.

Several studies have illustrated that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to engage in crime, in both the short term and the long term (Huebner and Gustafson, 2007; Murray and Farrington, 2005; Roettger and Swisher, 2011). Also, such children are more likely to experience mental health difficulties, aggression, troubles in school, and substance abuse problems (Aaron and Dallaire, 2010; Rodriguez, Smith, and Zatz, 2009; but see Murray, Farrington, and Sekol, 2012). Moreover, parental incarceration may be an especially confusing form of separation for children, as it often is unexpected and rarely explained to them in a way that they can fully understand (Eddy and Poehlmann, 2010; Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Murray and Farrington, 2008).

Further, parental incarceration can affect many aspects of a child's life, including emotional and behavioral well-being, family stability, and financial circumstances. There is a consensus that these children are exposed to many risk factors and that the effects of parental incarceration on them are subject to a host of variables, including pre-incarceration living arrangements; the quality of the parent-child relationship; the degree to which inmate parents participated in daily care and financial support of their children prior to confinement; children's current living arrangements; the amount of contact children have with their incarcerated parents; and children's age, temperament, gender and coping skills, among other factors (Christian, 2009).

Paternal incarceration has consistently been associated with higher levels of aggressive, delinquent, or antisocial behavior across a range of rigorous examinations. A father's recent incarceration is associated with higher levels of aggression in preschoolers (Geller et al., 2012; Wildeman, 2010) and externalizing and delinquent behavior in both school-age children (Geller, 2010; Haskins, 2015) and young adults (Murray et al., 2012; Murray & Farrington, 2005; Porter & King, 2015; Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Wakefield & Wildeman, 2011). This association is consistently stronger for sons, with daughters only showing smaller or statistically non-significant behavior changes (Geller et al., 2012; Haskins, 2015; Wildeman, 2009, 2010). The theory of same-sex role models suggests that sons may be more sensitive to the influence of their fathers and thereby more affected by paternal incarceration (Foster & Hagan, 2013), and that acting-out behavior among sons may be particularly consequential for intergenerational criminal justice involvement (Roettger & Swisher, 2011).

2. Objectives

This study was conducted due to the growing problem of incarceration that significantly impacts family relations. Therefore, the main aim of this research was to determine the impact of paternal incarceration on the lives of the wife and children. It will specifically uncover the lived experiences of the family members of the incarcerated father. Through this study that it will raise awareness on the needs of the shadows of prisons and assist them in coping with the long-term effects of incarceration.

3. Materials and Methods

This research utilized the qualitative approach to research. It is a type of approach that focuses on "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to

their experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Further, a narrative inquiry was applied, which is a way of understanding and inquiring into the experience through a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They noted that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. In other words, people’s lives consist of stories.

To arrive with the data, an interview guide was used and a recording device was established. Rapport was developed, and informed consent was obtained, including permission to record conversations. The participant was guaranteed of the confidentiality of their answers and the anonymity of their identities.

The verbal data were transliterated into written form then initial codes were created. Codes identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst. It refers to the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998).

Thematic organization or Synchronic organization was employed in the treatment of data. This method was considered useful for understanding the significant events in the narrative and the effect of those events on the individual constructing the narrative (Labov, 1972).

4. Results and Discussions

The following themes illustrates the conditions of Chloe’s family while her husband is incarcerated.

Marital Strain

The study revealed that during the first month of staying inside the jail, the incarcerated husband becomes jealous and too suspicious, which causes fights every jail visitation. She said, there are times that he is sending messages saying that I am doing bad things outside like looking for another man. Also, the husband became demanding that he wants her wife to visit him every day-offs that she had. But, it was not that easy as she shared, sometimes, when I can’t visit him because I need to work, he feels terrible about it. Her statement is congruent with the study of Braman (2004) in which he mentioned that incarceration might weaken the trust between partners and increase the perception that individuals need to look out for themselves first, that others are selfish, and that relationships are exploitive.

Incarceration places marital relationships under significant stress. Sometimes, the burden is a consequence of the criminal behavior itself, while at other times, it is a consequence of separation or from other difficulties faced during the sentence (Codd, 2008). Father engagement is also tied to the quality and form of the father's relationship with his wife. Parents who sustain a romantic relationship through the period of incarceration report lower quality relationships (Turney, 2015), and declines in father involvement may be particularly acute for these couples (Turney & Wildeman, 2013). Romantic relationships with incarcerated men are particularly prone to dissolution (Edin, 2000; Western et al., 2004), in part due to the physical separation incarceration imposes on families (Massoglia et al., 2011) The disengagement of the father can be particularly acute if the mother has a new romantic partner (Nurse, 2002).

Wife's Distress about Her Husband's Condition

From the accounts of the wife, it can be inferred that she still cares about her husband. It causes distress in thinking about the possibilities of her husband being harmed inside. She described it as, I always think of his condition inside, especially when he was in Benguet Provincial Jail because there was a problem involving him and his co-inmates. Also, he has asthma and kidney disease.

When her husband was moved to Muntinlupa (National Bilibid Prison), she became very much worried. Though they have contacted a relative to look over him, still the anxiety persisted, particularly when the husband did not send them messages for a few months. She narrated, I was waiting for his messages from the time he was moved to Muntinlupa (New Bilibid Prison) in December. This finding can also be reflected in the studies of Ferraro et al. (1983), showing that women may undergo emotional strain from not knowing what their partner is experiencing while incarcerated. In relation with this, Hannem (2015) disclosed in his study that more than half of the survey respondents worry a lot to the safety of their family member while incarcerated.

Children are Longing for a Father Figure

Since the children are close to their father, they kept on looking for him. As she described it, it was an unusual setting. They have been looking for their father. At present, they get used to it already because sometimes, their father is making phone calls with them). Initially, the mother did not tell them what their father is doing in Muntinlupa, and she manipulates stories to cover the real reason. She said, as time goes by, the children came to know that their father was in prison. However, they do not see the reason why he's there. I invent stories so that they won't be hurt). She may have lied, but it was for the children's sake – not to get hurt too much. This scenario is

similar with another study suggesting that the stigma of having an incarcerated member can be so strong that families may not disclose that one of their members is incarcerated, make attempts to hide the incarceration, or avoid relations with others all together (Arditti, Lambert-Shute, & Joest, 2003; Hairston, 2003).

Initially, the mother doesn't have any intention to bring her children in prison to visit him. However, the father insisted. When they visited her husband, it was very emotional. They were crying, especially the youngest. She narrated, our youngest child was crying. He asked his father, "Papa, when will you go home?" Then his father would answer, "I'll be going home after I'll finish my work here").

On the other hand, the mother observed that their children became jealous of other kids being fetched in school by their father. As expressed by the mother, she feels guilty that her relatives are the ones taking care of their children because of her hectic schedule at work. The protection, care, and nurturance of prisoners' children is a primary concern of prisoners and their families. When parents go to prison, most children go or continue, to live with relatives (Bloom and Steinhart, 1993; Mumola, 2000). Children's care arrangements provide love, connections to kin, and a sense of belonging, but they are not ideal. There is a marked physical absence of men and father figures in the daily lives of prisoners' children as women carry the primary, and often sole responsibility for caregiving for the children (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Hairston, 1991, 1995; & Mumola, 2000).

Financial Burden

Indeed, there is a financial loss that happened after the incarceration of the father. Before the husband's imprisonment, both of them are working to provide for the needs of the family. But then, due to her husband's imprisonment, the wife became the sole provider for the family. Regardless of what happened, she remained positive saying, we were financially burdened, but still, I am doing my best to provide the needs of our family even if are in debt. We can't buy our wants, but again, we receive blessings). It is true that for some families, the incarceration of a family member may mean the loss of the family's primary source of income (Codd, 2008). Most families also experience financial losses because of incarceration. There are the costs of maintaining the family, the loss of income of the imprisoned parent who was contributing to the household, legal fees associated with criminal defense and appeals, the costs associated with maintaining contact during imprisonment and the costs of maintaining the prisoner while he is in prison (Hairston, 2001).

The wife confessed that since she has to work double-time, she has neglected her children at times. Thus, their school performance was slightly affected, for no one will watch over them. To support this, family members who have to assume child-rearing responsibilities face numerous new challenges trying to divide their time and resources between caring for the children and providing support for the imprisoned relative (Travis et al., 2003).

Further, the financial impact of incarceration is not limited to immediate family members. Grandparents who care for their grandchildren during a parent's incarceration have identified financial problems as one of their primary sources of the difficulty. In situations in which grandparents' care for the children of inmates, especially for children of imprisoned women, they will almost certainly experience financial hardship (Codd, 2008).

Social Stigma towards the Children

The behavior of the incarcerated father extends to his family in the form of stigmatization. Children frequently go out of their houses to play with other kids because they are being teased. They are ashamed of disclosing to the other kids about the incarceration of their father. She narrated, they are afraid to play with our neighbors because they are being tagged as "children of a criminal."

Parke & Clarke-Stewart (2003) have said that children go through getting teased and ostracized by peers at school because of their parents' incarceration. According to Hernandez (2006), children of incarcerated parents start losing friends and also they are being teased. Also, in her study, teachers did nothing to conceal the fact that a student had an incarcerated mother and would, in some instances, speak openly about it with the student inside the occupied classroom.

The social stigma of incarceration may prompt adult family members to avoid complicated or difficult discussions with children to explain the absence of an incarcerated family member. Being kept in the dark about a family member's incarceration can influence the child emotionally and psychologically, and this, in turn, impacts the restoration of parent-child relationships (Travis et al., 2003).

In another view, Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) interviewed 34 children who, at the time of the study, had a parent incarcerated. The children established an acute awareness of the negative assumptions that may be made about them because they had a parent in prison. Several of the children described their struggles with deciding to disclose their parent's incarceration to others or to keep it private. The researchers found

that nearly all the children expressed a desire to reveal their situation to others, while simultaneously acknowledging the risks associated with doing so.

Therefore, prisoners' children and families must also deal with feelings of shame and social stigma. Imprisonment is not a reason for celebration nor a right to be proud. It is not the goal one seeks for oneself or one's children. Many family members do not tell even their closest friends about a relative's incarceration and go to great lengths to protect the prisoner's children from the consequences of revealing the family secret (Schneller, 1976).

Emotional Issues

The mother confessed that there are times when their children opt to stay inside their rooms and don't want to speak to anyone. They became aloof and emotional once they ask about their father. Both the inmate and his family experiences loneliness due to separation. Prisoners and their families experience a tremendous sense of loss when incarceration occurs, and that loss is very disturbing when children are involved. Couples are usually denied sexual intimacy and are unable to engage in the day to day interactions, experiences, and sharing, which sustain marital and other intimate, adult relationships. Loneliness and missing each other and a host of different feelings about the separation, justice system, criminal activity, and each partner's honesty and faithfulness are common. Guilt and a sense of relief that a troublesome relative has finally been sent away are also among the emotions experienced by a prisoner's kin. Difficulties in adjusting to separation and loss have led to depression and other mental health problems among prisoners and their families (Daniel and Barrett, 1981; King 1993; Lanier, 1993).

Besides, when the husband was still with them, they had a limited quality time together like strolling and eating outside. Even if they had fights and problems, they still managed to have time together, especially when the father was at home. As mentioned by the mother, he gave them the attention they needed, especially to their children. The attachment between her husband and their children made it very hard for her to explain the family's situation. Now that he is not around, the children are longing for his presence. It changed their behavior from being happy to lonely. This finding is supported by Schaffer and Emerson (1964), who further studied the development of the Attachment Theory by Bowlby (1969). One of the changes recorded when a child is separated from their parent is the Separation Anxiety. This is the distress level when separated from a parent, the degree of comfort needed on return. Thus, when a parent is incarcerated, it undergoes this stage. In fact, according to one estimate (Baunach, 1985),

70% of young children with incarcerated mothers had emotional or psychological problems. Children exhibit internalizing problems, such as anxiety, withdrawal, hypervigilance, depression, shame, and guilt (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993; Dressler et al., 1992).

5. Conclusion

The shadows of prison face intense and multifaceted risk factors to their emotional, physical, and financial well-being. The wife of an incarcerated husband encounters challenges being the sole provider and protector of their children. Aside from the wife, the children are the most affected mainly if there lies a bond before the incarceration. They are indeed the hidden victims of incarceration suffering from financial, emotional, and anxiety effects. It has undeniably created disequilibrium in the family process.

Families of offenders should be regarded as key partners in the correctional journey – their presence and support are vital to the successful release and reintegration of their loved ones. Everyone will benefit when family relationships are strong. These people have not been convicted of a crime, and do not deserve to be punished. By engaging them as partners, providing information, respecting their needs, and ensuring access to adequate support services, it will help to ensure better outcomes for families affected by crime and incarceration, better outcomes for offenders, and an increase in public safety.

The ability to keep trying under the most difficult of circumstances that inmates' families display and the sense of obligation that they have for a member who has been publicly sanctioned are substantial strengths. These actions, provide sound reasons to promote strategies that will help prisoners maintain family ties and help families carry out their family obligations and responsibilities for their children.

6. References

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