

## Life of children in prison: The Innocent victims of mothers' imprisonment

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### Abstract:

**Background:** Prison is not the space where children should live. A jail can never provide a family environment which every child very much deserves. Stimulating and emotionally supportive care is associated with positive developmental outcomes for children but, in the absence of a family structure, the concept of a home is almost absent in prison. The present study identifies the prison facilities and life of children inside the prison.

**Study design and method:** The field survey is conducted in Dasna prison, Ghaziabad. Data was collected via self reporting method using structured interview checklist.

**Results:** The children residing in prison (the innocent victims of mother's imprisonment) were primarily deprived of love, care and affection of father and other family members; secondly, there was lack of recreational facilities; thirdly, children were exposed to criminogenic influences (abusive language, frequent fights) of other prison inmates round the clock.

**Conclusion:** The innocent children are living under the vulnerable circumstances of prison that might lead to future development of low self esteem and problem behavior. In addition to this, imprisoned mothers expressed the concern related to child future in terms of behavior, education and social life.

**Key Words:** imprisoned mother, Children residing in prison, Children of incarcerated women, children in jail

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### I. Introduction

Children of imprisoned parent are often considered as forgotten children and ignored victims of justice.<sup>1</sup> What happen to a child's life when he/she has to live with imprisoned mother in a jail? Children younger than 6 years are often brought to remain with mother inside the prison custody.<sup>2</sup> Crime is a social fact, functionally in-avoidable and essential for social change. According to the Crime in India Report,<sup>3</sup> the female percentage for arrested persons at all India level was at 4.7 and there has been upward trend in female criminality over the period of 1990-2000.

According to Greenfield and Snell,<sup>4</sup> approximately 7 in 10 women under correctional sanction have a child who is under the age of 18. When a woman is imprisoned, in the absence of better solutions for the care of their children, women prefer that they remain with them in custody.<sup>5</sup> Research has suggested that having young (pre-school-aged) children in prison with mothers can enhance bonding and avoid some of the negative impacts of separation for both mothers and children.<sup>6</sup> However, the children will have to live in the same conditions as their imprisoned parents, which are often unsuitable. Children on prolonged exposure to negative social factors can have serious consequences for their health & well-being. Because children experience rapid developmental changes, unfavorable social conditions can lead to a host of poor behavioral & emotional outcomes.<sup>7</sup> The daily routine in prison is also directed by strict discipline and fixed timings decided by the prison rules. An Indian study reported that the children in the prison suffered from diverse deprivations relating to food, healthcare, accommodation, education and recreation and documented the deprived conditions for a child in prison.<sup>8</sup> Clearly the conditions in prison and what alternative care arrangements were available are the significant considerations to ensure healthy lifestyle of children in the prison. The present study aimed at evaluating the existing prison conditions for care and development of young children residing in prisons with their mothers.

### II. Objectives

1. Assess the adequacy of prison condition for the child health and development.
2. Assess whether prison is safe for children against hazards and accidents.

### III. Methodology

**Setting:** Women cell of “Dasna prison”, Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. Dasna prison is the second largest Jail in North India and is one of many ISO certified prisons.

**Study design:** Field survey

#### Study participants

1. Imprisoned mothers (Mother inmates) who were willing to participate in the study
2. Imprisoned mothers (Mother inmates) who could understand Hindi or English

**Sample size:** 22 imprisoned women

#### Methods of data collection

1. Structured Interview Checklist

#### Tools for data collection

1. Structured Interview Checklist to assess prison environment for child health and development was comprised of 11 chief domains (41 sub-items in total) like physical facility (10), Health & Hygiene (4), Nutritional (6), Medical (3), Recreational (6), Educational (2), trained child carer (1), bonding with father and other relatives (3) Un-intentional injuries and accidents (2), and Criminogenic influences (4) etc.

#### Data collection

1. Permission for the study was obtained from the prison authority
2. Informed consent was obtained from the prison staff members imprisoned women for their participation in the study.
3. An assessment of the prison environment was done using structured observational checklist.
4. Mother prisoners were interviewed in a group of 5-6 each session of 20-25 minutes.
5. Confidentiality of participants ensured through unique code to each participant.
6. Data generated through direct interview were compiled and analyzed.

### IV. Result

Study data was generated in the month of January 2014. Structured interview schedule containing information from women prisoners, and prison staffs were processed manually for drawing out inferences and conclusions. Table I summarizes the adequacy of prison environment for child development.

**Table I Extent of Adequacy of Prison Environment for Child Development**

Physical aspect of prison life	Adequate/ Inadequate		Remarks
Physical facilities	Adequate		Lack of child friendly atmosphere, Lack of privacy
Health and Hygiene	Adequate		
Nutritional services	Adequate		
Medical services	Adequate		
Recreational facilities		Inadequate	Inadequate number of toys. No provision for any recreational or educational visits.
Educational facilities	Adequate for children age 3 years and above	Inadequate for children below 3 years	Neither creche nor separate trained staff to look after the children inside prison.
Bonding with father and other family members		Limited frequency and time duration	Half an hour visit of father/relatives weekly or fortnightly
Prevention of Un-intentional injuries and accidents	Adequate		
Protection from criminogenic influences		Inadequate	Use of abusive language and violent, aggressive behavior of prison inmates.

## **V. Discussion**

Present study is empirical in nature and based primarily on primary data collected from the field survey. Visits to different areas of women cell of prison provided the opportunity to interact with the women prisoners and children. A total of 44 children of age group (06 months to 7 years) were found to be residing with their mothers within the prison. This is in contrast to the previous reported data in 2004, when only 7 children were found to be living with mother in Ghaziabad jail.

### **Physical facilities**

In the present study there was no separate mother child unit in the prison. Children were living in common barracks including all female prisoners (married/unmarried/with/without children). Each woman prisoner is provided with the living space of a single mattress within the room. The individual child also gets the space of one additional single mattress.

Positive aspects: Rooms were well ventilated and lighted. Round the clock electricity was present. Toilets and bathrooms were found to be clean. Fans were in good working condition. The television was the mode of entertainment within the common living room. Women prisoners were responsible for the daily cleaning of the living room, children playground, toilet and bathrooms. There was a routine checks by the prison authority staff to ensure the compliance to cleanliness.

Negative aspects: There was not even a single picture or wall decoration appealing to the child. No age appropriate toys were present for children to play. The privacy for the nursing and lactating mothers of infants was inadequate.

### **Health and Hygiene**

Children had maintained satisfactory level of hygiene and were found to be dressed in age appropriate clothing. No child was sick at the time of data collection.

### **Nutritional services**

Food grains and fresh vegetables were brought and cooked on a daily basis. Women prisoners (5-6 in number) in rotation prepare the meals for themselves and for their children. Safe and adequate drinking water was available. Children got 2 meals and 2 snacks daily including milk (1/2 litre) and one egg every day. Lactating women and pregnant woman were provided with 1/2 litre of milk and an egg in the daily diet. In the previous literature<sup>8</sup> by B.N. Chattoraj, in most of the prisons, women prisoners with children were not being provided with extra meals for their babies, they generally had to share their meals with their children. But, in a few prisons, separate food used to be provided to growing up children, over the age of five. But the quality of food used to be same as supplied to adult prisoners. In another literature,<sup>9</sup> it was revealed that supplementary nutrition (1/2 liter milk per day) was being received by mothers to feed their children. However, they had to share their own food with their children.

### **Medical services**

The prison had adequate facility for child immunization against major diseases, growth monitoring, health checkups and OPD services. Essential medications were also provided as and when needed. For the treatment of emergency and major illnesses, children usually brought in the outside hospitals. Pregnant woman at the time of child birth, go to the hospital outside the prison accompanied by prison staff. In previous literature, no separate medical facilities for the children existed in Indian jails. Children had to share the same medical facility as was available to the adult prisoners. However, services of medical checkups for pregnant women were present.<sup>8</sup>

### **Recreational and Educational Facilities**

Children, in the present study had play ground near to their living barracks. Cleanliness of playground was maintained on a daily routine basis by the women inmates. Although playground was equipped with the adequate play equipments but there were no provision of stimulating toys for children to meet their recreational needs. Children only get the opportunity to participate occasionally in cultural programs (Independence Day & Republic Day) organized thrice or quarterly by the prison authority. However, children were deprived of outer world.

Children of age 3-6 years enjoyed the informal preschool-education by a professional teacher in all working days but crèche was found to be non- functional to cater the educational and recreational needs of young children below 3 years and there were no prison staff specially trained to look after children in jails.

In previous literature also, some kind of general education was reported to be provided to the grown up children of women inmates, but for younger children no arrangements were found except in few selected jails which had crèche to take care of children during day time.<sup>8</sup>

### **Bonding with father and other family members**

In the present study, prison policies allowed for 02 visits (maximum half an hour) of father or other family members in a month and 01 visit a week if father is also imprisoned in the same prison. The previous study in India,<sup>9</sup> also found that the children within prison were deprived of affection by father and other members of the family.

### **Un-intentional injuries and accidents**

According to the women prisoner and prison staff members, none of the child was reported to be the victim of specific common un-intentional accidents/ injuries in previous one year; viz., burns, falls, electric shock, poisoning, drowning, accidental hemorrhage or other serious injury or accidents.

### **Criminogenic influences**

There were strict rules against the use of abusive language by prison inmates or by prison staffs. But at night use of abusive language and fights were common among the mother inmates inside the barrack. The women in jails were violent and used abusive language. This might adversely affect the psychological development of young children. Mother inmates have verbalized the feeling that their stay in jail would have a negative impact on child behavior, education and social life after their release from the prison. In the previous study,<sup>9</sup> also the children grow up in an environment where they see inmates fighting, abusing and constantly struggling for their survival and space. Also, women inmates felt that the stay in jail would have a negative impact on the future physical and mental development of their children.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Inside the prison, child's basic physiological and safety needs were fulfilled to a certain extent (physical facilities, nutrition, medical or educational facilities) to promote normal physical growth and to prevent un-intentional injuries and accidents among children.

Children were not only deprived of recreational facilities, and affection of father/ family members but exposed to criminogenic influences of other prison inmates (as reflected in their abusive language and frequent fights) making them vulnerable to future development of problem behavior. In addition to this, imprisoned mothers expressed the concern related to child future in terms of behavior, education and social life.

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