Parents in prison in Albania

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Abstract

This article aims to contribute in increased interest and consideration for the effects of parental imprisonment on children by addressing new issues for social work practice with this social group. The purpose of the research was to address the lack of information that exists about the parents in prison in Albania and to provide an initial profile of their needs. The article presents a study that the author has conducted with 10 parents in prison, 5 men and 5 women parents in the Institution of the Execution of Criminal Decisions 325 in Tirana, Albania. The method has been that of qualitative research, based on semi-structured interviews. The article has reached in some findings and conclusions. The responses of participants indicate that having children may impact on the ways that many prisoners view their sentence. Many of the participants expressed concern about the effect that being in prison had on their relationship with their children. The lack of child-friendly visiting facilities in the men's prison was repeatedly highlighted as an obstacle to maintaining contact with children. Other concerns included the changes that had taken place in children's behaviour since the start of the sentence. These issues suggests positive sentence management programmes for parents in prison that aims to focus on issues relating to their children

Keywords: parents in prison, children, children with parents in prison, social work, social policy

Abstrakt

Ky artikull synon të kontribuojë në rritjen e interesit dhe të konsideratës për efektet e dënimit të prindit/ërve tek fëmijët duke adresuar çështje të reja të praktikës së punës sociale dhe me këtë grup shoqëror. Qëllimi i këtij artikulli është të adresojë mungesën e informacionit që ekziston rreth prindërve në burgje në Shqipëri dhe të mundësojë një profil të nevojave të tyre. Në artikull do të paraqitet një studim që kërkuesja ka realizuar me 10 prindër të dënuar, 5 burra dhe 5 gra në Institucionin e ekzekutimeve të vendimeve penale 325 në Tiranë. Metoda kërkimore ka qenë ajo cilësore, e bazuar në intervistat e thelluara gjysmë të strukturuar. Ky artikull ka arritur dhe në disa gjetje dhe konkluzione. Përgjigjet e pjesëmarrësve tregojnë se të pasurit fëmijë ndikon në mënyrën se si shumë të burgosur e perceptojnë dënimin e tyre. Shumë nga pjesëmarrësit shprehën shqetësimin e tyre rreth efekteve që burgimi sjell në marrëdhënien me fëmijët e tyre. Mungesa e lehtësirave të vizitave të bazuara në mjediset miqësore të fëmijëve në burgjet e burrave u parashtrua si një vështirësi që ndikon në mbajtjen e kontakteve me fëmijët. Një tjetër shqetësim përfshinte ndryshimet që vireshin re tek sjelljet e fëmijëve që me fillimin e vuajtjes së dënimit. Këto çështje sugjerojnë programe pozitive të menaxhimit të dënimit për prindërit në burgje me qëllim fokusimin në marrëdhëniet me fëmijët e tyre.

Fjalet kyçe: prindër në burgje, fëmijë, fëmijë me prindër në burgje, punë sociale, politika sociale

Апстракт

Оваа статија има за цел да придонесе во зголемување на интересот и грижата за ефектите од издржувањето на затворска казна на родителите врз нивните деца со решавање на проблемите со оваа социјална група. Целта на истражувањето е да го истражи недостатокот на информации што постои за родителите во затвор во Албанија и да обезбеди профил на нивните потреби. Статијата претставува студија која авторот ја реализирал со 10 родители во затвор, 5 мажи и 5 жени родители во оваа институција на извршување на кривичната одлука 325 во Тирана, Албанија. Методот е квалитативно истражување, врз основа на полу-структурирани интервјуа. Статијата обезбеди некои наоди и заклучоци. Одговорите на учесниците укажуваат на тоа дека децата можат да влијаат на начините на кои многу затвореници ја

согледуваат нивната казна. Многу од учесниците изразија загриженост за ефектот што затворот го има врз нивниот однос со децата. Недостатокот на капацитети за посета на децата во затворите беше постојано потенциран како пречка за одржување на контакт со децата. Други проблеми кои произлегуваат се промените кои се случуваат во однесувањето на децата уште од почетокот на издржувањето на затворската казна. Овие проблеми укажуваат на потреба за подготвување позитивни програми за управување со родителите кои ги издржуваат казните во затвор со цел да се фокусираат на прашањата кои се однесуваат на нивните деца.

Клучни зборови: родители во затвор, деца, деца со родители во затвор, социјална работа, социјална политика

I. INTRODUCTION

The rising incarceration rates of women and men means there is an increasing group of young children who are vulnerable and at risk (Reed and Reed, 1997). Imprisonment has a more immediate and wide reaching impact on affected families. Hagan (2000) states that the incarceration of parents can seriously diminish the economic and social capital on which families and communities depend to successfully raise children. The disintegration of the family that often results from imprisonment means that children can experience prolonged and intensified periods of instability and uncertainty. He suggests that parental imprisonment may have the following negative effects: the strains of economic deprivation; the loss of parental socialization through role modelling, support and supervision; and the stigma and shame of being labelled by society.

Children of parents who are in prison, or have been imprisoned, are a uniquely vulnerable group of children, yet little is known about what happens to these children while their parent is in prison, where they live and how they are cared for. In many studies refers to the children of prisoners as “the forgotten victims of crime”, who are not afforded the priority their situation warrants in terms of public policy and health and welfare resource allocation. The lack of information gathered by the prison system about the parental status of prisoners and the fate of their dependent children is confirmed by several studies. Children of incarcerated parents are among the most vulnerable populations of children, at high risk for neglect, abuse, behavioural health problems, delinquency and substance abuse. The problems of children, whose parents are incarcerated, if unattended, can produce

intergenerational patterns of crime and violence. Historic changes in family structure, substance abuse rates, criminal sentencing policies and related increases in the number of incarcerated parents have exerted a profound negative impact on the well being of children of incarcerated parents.

Children can be affected in different ways, depending on the role that was played by the parent who is imprisoned. One significant issue that arises is the provision of alternative care in cases where women who were the primary caregivers are incarcerated. Women are more likely than men to be primary caregivers prior to incarceration, which means that the children of female inmates are likely to experience greater disruption to care-giving arrangements (Healy et. al, 2000). Extended family networks often become involved, with grandparents, aunts and uncles taking over the role of carer. If such support is not available, foster care becomes an option (Howard, 2000). On the other hand, the imprisonment of fathers can sometimes remove the main earner from the family structure, which increases the likelihood of financial hardship. Remaining single parents may therefore have less money and less time for their children, which can affect their overall development.

Both mothers and fathers play very important roles in their children's development of a sense of identity, security, and belonging which will affect them throughout their lives. The major concerns for most parents who are incarcerated are:

- 1) Dealing with the emotions of being separated from their children,
- 2) Making decisions regarding the placement and care of their children,
- 3) Maintaining contact with their children during their incarceration, and
- 4) Reuniting with their children once they are released from prison.

Children with parents in prison have multiple and immediate needs. They need a safe place to live and people to care for them in the absence of their parent/s, as well as for everything else that a parent should provide for his/her children: affection, food, clothing, medical care, etc.. Studies have shown that this category of children experience a range of feelings such as fear, anger, guilt, experience anxiety, feel abandoned and alone (Block & Potthast, 1998). Some children exhibit problematic and aggressive behaviour in school, home and community, while others were closed in it-self and were fall in depression (Hunter, 1980). Previous researches (not in Albania) show that many of these young people are more at risk

to continue the cycle of incarceration ranging from their fathers (Mumola, 2000). Their needs are undoubtedly numerous.

The number of children in Albania who have a parent in prison is unknown. The number of parents in prison also is unknown. This study the first one in Albania brings to the attention of researchers, the perception of parents in prison about their relationships with their children. This aims is to open a new field of study that requires the attention of social work professionals, and not only.

The purpose of the research was to address the lack of information that exists about the parents in prison in Albania and to provide an initial profile of their needs.

- The research questions of this study were:
- What are the needs of parents in prison?
- What can be said about the relationships with their children?
- How can social worker help?

I.1 Methodology

This study has used the qualitative research method. Results of this study cannot be generalized to a wider population, but the purpose of this study is to understand in detail, how parents in prison perceive their relationships with children.

a) Development of research

In this study, is used as tool the semi-structured interview. This method permits to collect the necessary information in limited time and in depth way. The interviews were tape recorded and fully transcribed. The format of interview was reviewed by a group of researchers from Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Tirana. Following these consultations, several small revisions were made before the final version was completed.

a) Data collection

The interviews with parents were organised through the staff of the Institution of the Execution of Criminal Decisions (IECD) 325 in Tirana, Albania. The nature and objectives of the study were explained to potential respondents. Five women and five men agreed to participate in the study. All respondents gave their consent to having the interviews recorded. Interviews with parents in prison (n=10) took place on March 28th, 29th and 30th.

b) Ethical and procedural issues

This study has pay significant attention to these ethical principles:

- Informed consent according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) and Strydom (2002) is the process of seeking explicit permission subject to being participants in the study, based on his understanding of the full interview procedures and its purpose. For example, all participants in this study have been made known the purpose of the interview and the fact of recording the interview. They are allowed to read the notes at any time of the interview.
- Confidentiality involves an agreement by the applicant to protect the anonymity of study participants (Stydom, 2002). Very few people would like to share with others details of their private life, s opinions and emotions. For this reason confidentiality is an essential requirement for reliable research (Oka and Shaw, 2000).
- Reporting of results: Results of the study will be published showing much care about the rights of participants. At no point the information should be misunderstand (Stydom, 2002). In this study, the results rely entirely on data obtained from participants.

II. Results and discussion

a) Background

The sample of parents interviewed for the study was not representative of the general prison population in terms of numbers. As a result of the fact that no statistical records are kept about the parental status of prisoners, no sampling frame

was available. The respondents included five women (8.6% of the total number of women prisoners in Albania). On the day that the interviews took place; there were 86 women in the IECD323, Tirana. Five parents from the men's prison (0.125% of the total number of men prisoners in Albania) also agreed to participate. The total number of prisoners in the men's prisons on the days on which the interviews took place ranged between 3678 and 4000.

Table 3.1: Age group of parents in prison

Age	Frequency	Percent
18 – 24	1	10
25 – 34	3	30
35 – 44	5	50
45 +	1	10
Total	10	100

Most of the respondents (70%) were aged less than 44 years, with the majority aged between 35 and 44 years. Three respondents were aged between 25 and 34, only one was aged 18 and 24, and only one was aged over 45.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN:

The majority of parents (90%) had between one and three children. None of the respondents had more than four children.

Table 3.2: Age group of prisoners' children

Age	Frequency
0 – 3	4
4 – 6	1
7 – 9	1
10 – 12	2
13+	9
Total	17

The 10 respondents had a total of 17 children between them. Of these children, 6 were aged less than 9 years. Two of children were aged between 10 and 12 years, while the remaining nine were aged over 13 years.

MARITAL STATUS:

When asked about their marital status, 1 respondent (10%) stated that he was cohabiting with his partner prior to his admission into prison. Eight (80%) were married, and one (10%) was separated.

LENGTH OF SENTENCE:

Eight of the respondents (80 %) were serving sentences of between one and three years, while two (20%) were serving sentences of three years or more. None of the prisoners were on remand. The respondents were not asked why they were in prison, as it was felt that such a question would have a negative effect on the recruitment of respondents for the study.

PREVIOUS SENTENCES:

Only one of the respondents (10%) stated that he had served other sentences in the past, while the remaining 9 (90%) were serving their first sentences.

b) Contact with children

Eight of the respondents stated that they lived with their children prior to their admission into prison. Two respondents (one woman and one man) had lived with at least one child. The reason given by the respondents as to why they did not live with their children prior to incarceration was divorce. After their divorce the children lived in one case with the other parent (mother) and in the other case the children lived with the parents of the mother. The parents who had not lived with their children prior to their imprisonment had had some type of contact with them

on a regular basis. The man respondents had met their children on a daily or almost daily basis; the woman respondent had had contact at least once a month.

ALTERNATIVE CARE ARRANGEMENTS:

The respondents were asked if they had been given time to organize alternative care arrangements for their children after they were sentenced. The question was not applicable to the two parents who did not live with their children prior to the start of the sentence. Of the remainder, one stated that they had had time to make arrangements for their children's care. In most of these cases, however, the children had been living with both parents prior to the sentence and the other parent had become the sole caregiver. One mother stated that she did not get a chance to make alternate arrangement for her child and that her mother was forced to take over her role, to prevent the child from going into foster care. One father said that his mother had initially looked after his child, but that he became sick and his mother had to take over the role of caregiver.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AFTER THE SENTENCE:

Of the total 17 children whose parents took part in the interviews, 9 were living with their other parent since the start of the sentence. A further 6 were living with one or both of their grandparents and two were in foster care.

The responses indicate that the gender of the parent who is imprisoned can have a great effect on whose care they enter into post-sentence. None of the children of the five mothers who participated in the study were living in the full-time care of their fathers since the start of the sentence. Two of the mothers said that one or all of their children were in foster care; one stated that her child was in the care of both the father and another relative; and the remaining two stated that their children were being looked after by their grandparents. The situation was quite different for the children of male prisoners, the majority of whom were now being looked after by their mothers.

The findings concur with previous studies (Healy et. al, 2000), which indicate that the imprisonment of a mother tends to place a greater strain on extended family networks, with grandparents and siblings taking over the role of caregiver. In addition to causing greater upheaval and change in children's lives, the

imprisonment of a parent may force a grandparent back into the role of primary caregiver, which she or he may find difficult to resume.

Contact with children

All the respondents stated that they have phone contact with their children on a daily or almost daily basis. Several of the parents who had been in prison for more than two years said that being allowed daily phone contact had had a very positive impact on their relationship with their children. Increasing the amount of time allowed for telephone calls would enable prisoners to spend more time talking to both their children and their partners/families, thereby facilitating the maintenance of contact between the two groups.

The respondents tended to use cards and letters less than phone calls as a means of keeping in contact with their children.

c) Visiting Arrangements

The common opinion of interviewer was that the visiting areas were suitable for family visits. Prisoners are allowed to have a maximum of three adult visitors at a time. Several respondents stressed the fact that their children often became bored during the visits and started to run around. Several parents referred to the lack of privacy in the visiting area as a problem:

You have an officer sitting at one end and another at the other, and then with all the people crowded in, you've no privacy at all. You just want your family to be private, you know,

The feelings of many prisoners' interviewers about the visiting facilities were summed up by one father, who stated that:

It's designed to break up families rather than hold them together...

d) Children's awareness of the prison sentence

A majority of parents stated that their children were not aware that they are in prison. Among the explanations for their absence that their children had been given

were aboard and work. One mother stated that he initially told his children she was aboard. Some of the reasons mentions by the parents were:

- Worried child might get upset
- Child is too young to understand
- Child might think it's o.k. to go to prison
- Worried what other people might think

Several of the children had been informed about their parents' sentence by people from outside their immediate family group, before the parents or caregivers had explained the situation.

A. Effects of the sentence on parent/children relationships

Parents stated that they found it difficult or very difficult to keep up a relationship with their children. Among the reasons given for the difficulties were the length of the visiting times, the conditions in the visiting areas, and their loss of authority because of their absence from home.

A father stated that he found it very difficult to keep up a relationship with his son. One of the mothers said that she found it very difficult to keep up a relationship with her young daughter, saying "*she doesn't really know me.*"

The levels of satisfaction that parents had about their level of participation in their children's lives appeared to vary according to the type of relationship they had with their children's caregiver. None of the respondents were very satisfied with their participation in making decisions about their children's lives. One father stated that he was happy with his participation, because he and his partner discussed the children and made most decisions about them together.

B. Effects of the sentence on children's financial situations

The parents believed that their children's financial situation had got a lot worse since their sentence began.

C. Changes in children's behaviour since the start of the sentence

The participants were asked about any changes that had taken place in their children's behaviour since their sentences had started, either that they had noticed or that the children's caregivers had pointed out. Some of them stated that their children's behaviour had changed in noticeable ways, the most common of which included hyperactivity, becoming more withdrawn, and "acting up" with their caregivers. Many of the parents said they felt that their absence from the home or from their children's routine was the main cause of these changes.

One father expressed his concerns about the effects of his absence on his children's behaviour. He stated that when he was at home, he usually disciplined the children. In his absence, their mother finds it difficult to take over the role: *They've got out of hand.*

D. Changes in children's behaviour with parents

The parents in prison were asked if they had noticed any changes in the way that their children behaved with them since the beginning of their sentence. One mother said that being away from her young daughter had had a big effect on their relationship. She stated that it had taken her daughter a long time to settle with her caregivers when her sentence started, but since she had settled in, her behaviour with her mother had changed a lot:

When she comes up here, she just doesn't want to do anything. She's different. When I phone, like, I can hear her in the background. She can talk and all, but she won't say anything when she comes up here.

One of the fathers had also noticed changes of this nature in his children's behaviour:

He comes to visit me, but the mind is not there. He does not speak with me as he did it before ... I feel that he is sad and angry with me.

E. Attitudes towards being a parent in prison

The participants were asked to discuss how they felt about being a parent in prison. Some expressed feelings of powerlessness because they were away from

their children and were not able to look after them or ensure that they were alright. One of the male parents stated:

A parent has to be a bit more responsible. You do notice the difference between people who have kids and people who don't.

Another concern that was highlighted by some parents was their worries about being away from their children when they were ill, especially if they had to go into hospital. The participants stated that they felt very powerless to do anything to help their children during times of sickness.

Several parents mentioned the fact that being a parent had provided them with a motivation for getting out of jail and not returning. One mother stated that she had come to realise that she couldn't "*mess up again*" because she would lose her children for good if she did.

One father stated that he had been in prison before when he had no children, but the birth of his son had had a big impact on how he viewed his sentence: *It's not for me anymore... I am making a go of it, that's all I want.*

All of them felt that the prison system should make allowances for parents who were serving long sentences and do as much as possible to encourage them to keep up contact with their families.

It is necessary that parents in prison feel the support of others. During the sentence the social workers and other professionals should inform and train the parents to be prepared for the period of release. Only in this way they can maintain and develop relationships with their children during this time. With the support offered will be aimed the improvement of relationship between parent and their children. A guide from different organizations in this issue is given below:

Supports for Incarcerated Parents

Practice	Practice Principle
Listen to families and prisoners after visits, providing respectful counselling during this stressful time.	1. Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
Build parent-child bonds by providing transportation to visits, subsidies for phone calls, and family visiting rooms with toys and play areas	2. Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members—adults, youth, and children.

Recognize strengths. Use standardized measures to acknowledge all family members' strengths as well as to assess risks.	3. Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.
Understand the role of race by researching whether certain groups in your community are over-represented in prison.	4. Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.
Make it consistent. Make sure the goals and methods of prison-based parenting education, counselling, etc., don't conflict with those of services provided in the community.	5. Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.
Promote policies That place prisoners near their families, provide phone service at-cost, and facilitate child visits.	6. Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
Prepare families for prison visits (for example, by giving them the prison's visiting regulations).	7. Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.
Build children's resilience through: strong bonds with parents / mentors, activities to build competence and confidence, and spirituality / community of faith.	8. Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.
Provide child & family development Training to correctional officers.	9. Principles of family support are modelled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

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