

Social and Economic Implications faced by the families with incarcerated individuals: A study of district Srinagar in Kashmir.

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Abstract

Incarceration severely affects the families associated with the imprisoned individual. The families while maintaining contact with the prisoner experience the secondary effects of imprisonment. The families face social as well as economic burden of having a loved one inside the prison spaces. Using semi-structured interviews with the family members, belonging to different families, we try to understand the social and economic challenges faced by them as a result of incarceration of a family member. The paper employs a qualitative methodology to understand the implications of maintaining contact with the incarcerated loved ones. The paper emphasizes on the fact that the effects of incarceration are tremendously bore by families who deal with the worsening of financial situation, loans and mortgages, debts as well as the social challenges post incarceration of a family member. The findings highlight that these families face a significant disadvantage, decrease in social and economic resources and an additional strain for the families who live on the bottom of social scale exacerbating their vulnerabilities.

Key words: *Incarceration, Family, Social Implications, Financial Challenges, Vulnerability*

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Introduction

The consequences of Incarceration are not only put up by incarcerated individuals, mostly, as they do not exist in vacuum but while they serve the sentence and are completing it, their families back home live in the shadow of the prison. Though incarceration as a punishment is meant for the incarcerated person, nevertheless their families are not immune to its far-reaching effects and live through a period of immense chaos and struggle (Codd, 2013).

Incarceration of a family member disrupts the whole family structure. Thereby, fragmenting the family and putting them in a state of disadvantage. It severely affects the familial ties and burdens the family with additional roles and responsibilities. The repercussions of incarceration of a loved one are tremendously bore by the families. They visibly live outside the prison walls but their lives are intrinsically affected by those residing inside the prison spaces (Granja, 2016).

Research literature had emphasised the plight of the families who maintain contact with their loved ones who are in prison. These families serve a sentence of their own alongside the incarcerated family member (Condry, 2013). They are the ‘hidden victims’ who constantly and continuously bear the brunt of having a family member in prison (Martin, 2017). The families are ‘labelled’ as criminals because of their relation with an incarcerated individual (Shaw, 2016). Thus, the families, as stated by Condry (2013), bear the burden of being ‘guilty by association’. The families are, at times, mentioned, blamed or assumed to have known but the question of ‘what about the families’ is never asked in a sensitive way (Codd, 2013).

Families bear social as well as economic costs of maintaining ties with an incarcerated loved one. They bear the familial taint of offending though, not being the offenders themselves (Codd, 2013). Incarceration of a family member leaves the rest of them with a ‘void’ in place of the individual and an additional set of challenges and costs in place of all the contributions the person made. Such costs, be it the emotional or financial, paid by the affected families need to be accounted as they can have profound and long-term implications for societal wellbeing (Comfort et al., 2016).

Families are forced to sell or mortgage their assets in order to meet the daily expenses and visiting the incarcerated member also adds to the financial drain (Sukhramani & Gupta, 2020). Family members are forced to take on additional financial burden and multiple roles and responsibilities. It encompasses increased family expenditure on the court trials, prison visits and more so in cases where the incarcerated member used to be the primary earner of the family who are rendered income less and vulnerable post incarceration (Halemani & Venumadhava, 2017). As a result, when a family member is imprisoned, family problems are exacerbated and serves to elevate poverty (Hardy, 2018).

Incarceration of a family member leads to an array of difficulties for the rest of the family. Moving homes due to a family member's incarceration and the stigmatisation that follows also drains finances. Limited resources might also have an impact on parenting. It may lead to emotions of hopelessness and boredom in daily life. Feelings of stigma, loneliness, and

exclusion can be exacerbated by a lack of participation in leisure activities, a lack of social interaction, a lack of the proper material possessions, and the perception that one is socially different from others (Dickie, 2013).

Incarceration of a family member unsettles the whole family structure, absence of a member becomes the normality of daily routine and thus, with the assimilation of a ‘reversal of norms’, their lives remain no longer the same (Rabaia, Kassis, Amro, Giacaman, & Reis, 2018). It enforces a number of barriers to reciprocal familial relations whose maintenance takes significant efforts on the part of family residing outside including their social marginality (Jardine, 2015). The stigmatization, as a result of incarceration, can spread to the rest of the family, limiting their present as well as future status. This, in turn, can result into ‘intergenerational effect’ and an additional strain for the families who live on the bottom of social scale exacerbating inequality and vulnerability (Shaw, 2016).

Keeping all this in mind, the present research tries to understand the social and economic challenges faced by the families as a result of incarceration of a family member. The researchers tried to understand the implications of maintaining contact with the incarcerated loved ones. Thus, the paper aimed to explore these key research questions:

1. What are the social challenges faced by the families of incarcerated individuals?
2. What are the financial constraints faced by the families of incarcerated individuals?
3. What are the implications of maintaining contact with an incarcerated loved one?

Research Methodology

Sample

The researchers interviewed fifteen family members of different families with a loved one presently serving prison. The family members include five women who had their sons incarcerated, two women having their brothers incarcerated, two men having their sons incarcerated, two women whose husbands are incarcerated, one boy who had his father incarcerated and three girls having their fathers languishing in prisons. The table below provides the basic details:

S. No.	Relationship with the incarcerated individual	Age
1.	Mother	55 years
2.	Mother	65 years
3.	Mother	67 years
4.	Mother	58 years
5.	Mother	59 years
6.	Sister	45 years
7.	Sister	21 years
8.	Father	60 years
9.	Father	60 years
10.	Wife	35 years
11.	Wife	35 years
12.	Son	19 years
13.	Daughter	17 years
14.	Daughter	19 years
15.	Daughter	20 years

Research Instrument

The researchers employed observation and a semi-structured interview guide as the research instruments for the present study. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions and prompts were also used. The questions that were asked included:

- i. The social challenges faced by the families after the incarceration of a loved one.
- ii. The financial constraints faced by the families of incarcerated individuals.
- iii. The implications of maintaining contact with an incarcerated loved one.

Procedure

The qualitative data included fifteen interviews with the family members of incarcerated individuals, belonging to different families. The researchers explained the research questions to the family members and the interviews were conducted only after obtaining prior oral consent from the participants. Prior to the interview, permission to record the conversation was requested. In some cases, the permission was granted, while in a few others, they exhibited reluctance and thus respecting their confidentiality such interviews were only recorded in written form. Names of all the participants have been substituted with pseudonyms to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality. The incarcerated individual's familial residences served as the locations for all of the interviews. The researchers themselves conducted each interview personally. Purposive and Snowball Sampling was employed for the paper. The research was conducted in the district Srinagar of Jammu and Kashmir.

Keeping in view the sensitivity of the issue and stigma associated with incarceration, it is quite difficult to find families who will agree to talk about their incarcerated loved one. Thus, it was quite a challenge for the researchers to identify these families. Mostly families were

identified with the help of some key persons and after assuring the families that the information they provide would be kept confidential and their identities anonymous, they finally agreed to conduct the interview.

These interviews lasted from one-two hours (on average). The semi-structured interview guide consisted of open-ended questions and asked the family members questions regarding their relationship with the incarcerated individual and the social as well as the financial implications of having a family member incarcerated.

Results and Discussion

Primary data was collected by interviewing the family members of the incarcerated individuals, which was translated into English. Names of all participants were substituted with pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality. Inductive analysis of the data was employed to look for emerging themes. It started with rereading each transcript to gain a deeper understanding of the information, and it ended with the identification of an overall pattern. Axial coding was employed to identify overarching themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Finally, "keyness", or how well a developing theme addressed a particular research issue, was evaluated.

Emerging Themes

The prominent themes which emerged from the data analysis are Social implications (Constant Stigmatisation and shame), financial implications and additional disadvantages among families of imprisoned individuals.

Theme 1: Social implications

The first research question explored the social challenges faced by the families of incarcerated individuals. When addressing this area, the participants revealed that the stigmatisation as a result of the imprisonment of a loved one was a norm. Out of the fifteen interviews we conducted, thirteen participants revealed that incarceration related stigma spreads to the rest of the family as well and limits their present and future status. The taint of familial offending stays with them wherever they go, as is stated by one of the participants:

Labelling and taunts follow us everywhere....people look at you and pass hushing remarks...(sighs)... it hurts.... We even shifted to another place so as to get some respite... (sister of incarcerated individual)

Home moves due to constant stigmatization of the family members of incarcerated individuals have been testified by Noble (1995) as cited in Halemani and Venumadhawa (2017). Codd (2013) in her book, 'In the Shadow of Prison' also reveals that the families are stigmatized and continuously live with the 'familial taint' of offending though they themselves are not guilty or inside the prison spaces. Braman (2004) also affirms that the

stigma of incarceration potentially spreads to the rest of the family members. Thus, the families bear the cost of a crime they seldom commit and bear its consequences.

Another participant stated:

Our lives are marked with stigma and shame... even the toddlers are not spared... people look at you with utter humiliation.... (sighs)...(Wife of incarcerated individual)

The shame associated with the incarceration of a family member severely affects the lives of rest of the family members. This is testified by Condry (2013) wherein she reveals that the families are caught in a 'web of shame' as a result of imprisonment of a loved one.

The interviews revealed that stigmatization of family members was a major commonality which the majority of families (n=13) have faced. These families have to live with new reality of facing hushed remarks, disdain and shame.

In Kashmir, as a close knit society, labeling a family 'guilty' and shunning them, severely affects all the aspects of their lives. It impacts their daily routines wherein the constant gawking looks have a severe impact on their psyche. The stigma of having a family member imprisoned has indelible imprints on their domestic worlds.

Theme 2: Financial implications

Once a family member is incarcerated, the rest of the family members suffer a lot. Financial difficulties may either arise for the family due to the loss of sole breadwinner of the family or in taking care of the travel and visitation expenses as well as prison expenditure and other expenses of the family. Out of the fifteen interviews we conducted, thirteen (n=13) revealed that the family has taken debts and loans in order to take care of the fiscal needs of the family and the imprisoned individual. One of the participants stated:

My son was an ironsmith...after his incarceration all the iron stuff is lying there (pointing towards it)... getting wasted... it costed him a large sum of money for which he took a loan, now he is behind bars and loan is still to be repaid... (cries)... (father of incarcerated individual)

In Kashmir, son is often thought of as *bujruk sahare*, which means someone who will take care of the parents once they reach old age. The incarceration of son snatches their only hope, more so because of the fact that aged parents are unable to support themselves and have no source of income generation. Thus, they are left with no option but to mortgage or sell their possessions, if any, or take debts to make ends meet.

Another participant stated:

Our lives changed drastically (sighs)... we used to go on vacations, spend time together, enjoy life to the fullest but now things are different, we hardly are able to manage our basic needs... (sister of incarcerated individual)

Majority of the families talked about the decline in economic status post incarceration of a family member (n=14). Worsening of family's finances affected their lives to a great extent and further exacerbated their vulnerabilities. Same has been testified by Hairston (2001), Hardy (2018), Ashraf and Farhad (2021) & De hart, Shapiro and Hardin (2017) wherein they state that families endure fiscal challenges and severe disadvantage after the imprisonment of a loved one.

Another participant stated:

He (referring to her husband) is lodged at a very far off place. It gets difficult to reach there. I already have a toddler to take care of, managing our expenses and visitation expenditure is quite difficult (sighs)... I am unemployed and sold my inherited land (from her natal home) to take care of our expenses...(wife of incarcerated individual)

Dickie (2013) confirms that the families face an increase in financial pressure after the imprisonment of a loved one. Smith, Grimshaw, Romeo and Knapp (2007) also reveal that supporting the incarcerated loved ones incurs additional costs on the families, thus further worsening their condition. Breen (2008) also confirms that incarceration of a loved one has the potential to drain family financially and thus acting as a contributing factor for poverty, crime and imprisonment.

Theme 3: Additional Disadvantages

The third research objective explored the implications of having a loved one behind bars. When addressing this area, the participants revealed that the imprisonment of a family member disrupts the whole family structure. They face emotional upheaval and issues related to their physical as well as mental health like asthma, depression, irritability, loneliness, sleep disturbances and intense emotional feelings. One of the participants stated:

I feel his (father's) absence daily ...(sighs).... We are never together and this feeling begins in the morning itself.... And continues for the day.... (sighs).... Whatever we do there is always this one person missing..... the void is always there.... Where my father used to be..... (sighs)....(son of incarcerated individual)

Comfort et al (2016) affirm that the non-incarcerated family members experience a feeling of emptiness or void in place of the incarcerated individual. Braman (2004) also confirms that incarceration of a loved one takes a toll on the rest of the family members emotionally. Petersilia (2005) & Fang, Liu, Kuan and Lee (2021) also testify that emotional costs of a loved one's incarceration are endured by the other members of the family. Another participant stated:

Ever since he is behind bars, I am unable to sleep... I can't breathe (sighs) ...I keep tossing and turning during nights... doctors tell me to stay happy but how can I?.... (mother of incarcerated individual)

The exacerbation of physical illness and emotional upheaval has been a disadvantage for the families with incarcerated individuals as stated by Smith, Grimshaw, Romeo and Knapp (2007). It becomes quite a challenge to live with an altogether new reality wherein a loved one is absent. All the participants (n=15) revealed that they face some kind of physical or emotional discomfort following incarceration of a family member. Their lives have no longer been the same post incarceration of a family member. The families while trying to maintain contact with the incarcerated individual pay little or no attention to themselves, thus, jeopardizing their mental and physical health.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to analyse the social and economic issues experienced by families as a result of an incarcerated family member, based on the premise that the effects of imprisonment are not limited to the physical limits of a prison. The researchers tried to understand the implications of keeping in touch with the loved ones who are behind bars.

The findings identify that the families of incarcerated individuals face a lot of stigma and shame. Their lives are intertwined with the lives of their incarcerated kin. The blot of offending stays with them wherever they go, though, they are not offenders themselves. They, as stated by Granja (2016) live a 'parallel sentence' beyond the prison walls. The families of imprisoned individuals live metaphorically shady lives, being legally free but yet treated as guilty by the society.

The families, while maintaining contact with the incarcerated kin, face numerous fiscal challenges. They strive to meet their needs, take care of family expenses, bear additional roles and responsibilities, take care of travel and visitation expenditure and in doing so, and often risk their own health and needs. The scarcity of resources takes a toll on their emotional and physical health. The absence of a family member encumbers a number of mental health issues and they live forlorn lives.

Nonetheless, their narratives highlight the untold and unshared tales of sheer struggle. The families face an array of challenges, particularly those from the bottom scale, but yet strive to maintain contact with the imprisoned family members and continue their lives. The findings also confirm that the 'parallel sentence' is endured by these families. The families bear the burden of facing socio-economic disparities and emotional trauma which further pressurizes their lives and vulnerabilities.

Implications for future Research

The study tried to understand the social and economic challenges bore by the families of incarcerated individuals. These families have largely been invisible in research, particularly owing to the sensitivity of the topic in Kashmir. The study is based on the interviews conducted with family members of incarcerated individuals, yet there is a limitation to this

study. The sampling strategy used was Purposive and Snowball and thus, the study participants are not representative of the particular population. Therefore, the findings mentioned in this study cannot be generalized.

There is a wide spectrum wherein further research can be conducted in this area. Extensive research needs to be conducted on the mental and physical health issues of these families. Research can also be conducted aiming at understanding the other consequences of incarceration of a family member.

These families are often an afterthought and future research needs to focus on their health and financial needs, especially when the primary caretaker is imprisoned and the families have no one else to take care of them.

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