



DUAL PUNISHMENT: MOTHERS IN NIGERIAN PRISONS AND THEIR CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The incarceration of women and the impact it has on children, families and the prisoner in terms of motherhood and parenting has become an increasingly prominent area of interest within the criminal justice and social welfare literature. Guided by attachment theory's perspective on separation of mother from children, this current study explored the perceived unfulfilled parental tasks by incarcerated mothers; evaluated the care and support systems for nursing mothers in prison; examined the accessibility and frequency of contacts between incarcerated mothers and children, and investigated the effects of separation on children of incarcerated mothers. Twenty-one in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted among purposively selected female inmates who are equally mothers. Meanwhile, six prison officials of Ijebu-Ode and Old Abeokuta prisons and two child psychologists were engaged as key informants of the study. In spite of their incarceration, there is high perception of parenting responsibility among the women in prison as they were largely the primary provider of welfare for their children prior to their incarceration. The main factors that inhibit the imprisoned mothers from having regular contacts with their children include stigmatisation, superstitious beliefs about children visiting prisons, relocation, and the corrupt practices of prison security agents. Children who are separated from a parent due to prison suffer multiple problems associated with their loss. Correctional services in the country should be better equipped to manage incarcerated mothers and provide appropriate resources and services. There is need to advance knowledge on the experiences of women in the justice system and allocate attention to the services offered to incarcerated mothers so they may better manage their own lives and the lives of their children.

Keywords: Attachment Theory, Children, Inmates, Incarcerated mothers, Prison.

INTRODUCTION

The interest of the criminal justice system and social welfare literature have been firmly positioned on the incarceration of women and the effects it has on the children, families, caregivers and the prisoner in respect of motherhood and parenting. It is indeed a truism that there has been a remarkable upsurge in the number of women in prison in several jurisdictions within Nigeria in recent years (Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014). This raises serious concern as regards the number of families that are adversely affected by incarceration and separation. Although, there are no official statistics of female prisoners that are mothers in Nigerian prisons, empirical studies have firmly asserted that majority of women in Nigerian prisons had been living with their children prior to their incarceration (Durosaro, 2012; Aduba, 2013; Otu, Otu, & Eteng, 2013).

Further studies have revealed that women are commonly the primary and oftentimes sole caretaker of their children prior to incarceration (Robertson, 2007; Townhead, 2007; Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014). Comparisons of male and female prisoners have shown that the children of male prisoners tend to stay in the care of their mothers whilst their father serves a prison term. However, the children of female prisoners often end up in the care of immediate or extended family (Musengzi & Staunton, 2003; Taylor, 2004; Healy, Foley, & Walsh, 2012; Otu, Otu, & Eteng, 2013). Goldberg, Lex, Mello, Mendelson, & Bower (2014), stated that many of the



arrangements resulting from separation due to incarceration were made without the intervention of courts or child protective services. Instead, mothers that are incarcerated expressed preference for their children to be placed with relatives, in an effort to minimise potential obstacles relating to contact with their children (Gursansky, Harvey, McGrath, & O'Brien, 2008).

On the part of the children, empirical studies suggest that those whose mothers have been incarcerated may have experienced the loss and trauma associated with their mothers' incarceration and other problems, and may have some attention problems and developmental impairments (Kruttschnitt, Gartner, & Miller, 2010; Beckett & Sasson, 2014; Negy, Woods, & Carlson, 2014). Young children who are forcibly separated from their mothers experience long-term developmental and emotional harm (Beckett & Sasson, 2014). In reviewing the impact of a parent's incarceration on children, Shaw (2010) claimed, "many of these children, it is clear, may suffer more pain than does their criminal parent in prison or even the original crime victim".

Further to the impact of separation on the mother and child relationship and the child's behaviour, are the rearing and other maternal responsibilities of the incarcerated mother. Incarceration would have a significant effect on the ability of the mother to fulfil many of the above parental tasks. Still, studies have found that whilst the ability of the incarcerated mother to fulfil parental tasks is reduced, these mothers perceived that it was important for them to provide for the interpersonal, physical, emotional and spiritual needs of their children (Kruttschnitt, Gartner, & Miller, 2010; Healy, Foley, & Walsh, 2012; Beckett & Sasson, 2014). Their perceptions were the same as mothers of equivalent socio-economic background, age and marital status, but who were non-offenders. Greene, Haney, & Hurtado (2013) also found that mothers generally believed they were good mothers and wanted to provide supportive homes for their children. They also found that the mothers' level of emotional distress contributed to the problematic behaviour experienced by their children.

It is common knowledge that children are significantly affected by the incarceration of a parent. Research looking at the impact of a father's imprisonment on children has found a range of social, behavioural and psychological difficulties in children (Agbaegbu, 2011). Given the effects on children of paternal incarceration, one would surmise the incarceration of the child's mother, who is commonly the primary caregiver would have even further detrimental effects to the child's overall wellbeing. In spite of the appreciable documentation of psychosocial effects of mother-child separation as a result of incarceration by several literatures, not many empirical studies have been committed to explore, understand and describe the magnitude of the effects of such separation from Nigerian perspectives. The loss and trauma associated with the separation of mother and child as a consequence of mother's incarceration have been largely ignored in Nigeria as researchers have focused more on the environmental conditions of prisons (Obioha, 2011; Aduba, 2013), punitive and reformatory capacity of correctional facilities (Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014), and coping strategies of female inmates in the prisons (Otu, Otu, & Eteng, 2013). This therefore underscores the relevance of this study that attempts to cover the gaps in literature by examining the perceived unfulfilled parental tasks by incarcerated mothers, evaluating the care and support systems for nursing mothers in prison and examined the effects of separation on children of incarcerated mothers.

Theoretical Considerations

Attachment and separation have traditionally been studied in the context of mother-infant and mother-child dyads. According to attachment theory, a secure attachment is derived from the child's appraisal of his/her mother's (or other attachment figure's) availability. Availability implies



that the mother is physically accessible to the child. Bowlby (1973) stated that the lack of accessibility could either be separation or loss, depending on whether it was temporary or permanent in nature. Though Bowlby laid emphasis on the importance of physical accessibility of the mothers, Ainsworth (1990) in his own case clarified two aspects of availability that are relevant to infant attachment. First, the child must develop a belief that the lines of communication with his/her mother are open, and second, the child must believe that his/her mother will respond if called upon for help. As children that are securely attached get older, they are better able to tolerate physical distance from their mother because they may still be able to communicate with her and they anticipate being comforted upon reunion.

Children who are separated from a parent due to prison are significantly affected by the incarceration of the parent. Disruption of the attachment bond between mother and child is particularly deleterious between the ages of 6 months and 4 years (Fuller, 2013). Other problem areas and behaviours exhibited by children of incarcerated parents include physical health problems, hostile and aggressive behaviour, use of drugs or alcohol, truancy, running away from home, disciplinary problems, withdrawal, fearfulness, bedwetting, poor school performance, excessive crying, nightmare, problems in relationships with others, anxiety and depression and attention problems (Taylor, 2004; Robertson, 2007; Townhead, 2007; Shaw, 2010; Fuller, 2013). It is noteworthy however that each individual child may differ markedly in their reaction and the behaviours they exhibit. From the foregoing, it appears entirely valid that an incarcerated mother would experience considerable difficulty and distress concerning her child's welfare and changes to their relationship.

Added to the implications that separations have for the child-mother attachment, separations may also be viewed as an indicator of family instability. A child who experiences a separation from his/her mother early in life may experience instability and chaos in other aspects of the home environment. Disorderliness, in respect of both family routines and the physical dimensions of a home (such as clutter, crowding and noise), is connected with both emotional distress and lower cognitive functioning among young children (Brooks-Gunn, Johnson, & Leventhal, 2010; Evans, 2014).

Further to the impact of separation on the mother and child relationship and the child's behaviour, is the rearing and maternal responsibility of the incarcerated mother. According to LeFlore and Holston (1989) some of the parenting responsibilities for rearing children include; provision of nurturance and physical care, teaching and skill-training in language, perceptual skills and self-care; guiding, correcting, and helping the child to formulate their goals, and plan their own activities. Incarceration would have a significant effect on the ability of the mother to fulfil many of the above parental tasks (Fieldman, Weller, Leckman, Kuint, & Eidelman, 1999). Yet, empirical studies have posited that in spite of the reduction of the ability of incarcerated mother to fulfil these functions, these mothers perceived that it was important for them to provide for the interpersonal, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of their children (LeFlore & Holston, 1989; Fuller, 2013). Their perceptions were the same as mothers of equivalent socio-economic background, age and marital status, but were non-offenders (Gabel, 2012; Goldberg *et al.*, 2014). Greene, Haney, & Hurtado (2013) also found that mother's level of emotional distress contributed to the problematic behaviour experienced by their children.

Consequent upon the theoretical analysis conducted, and the information presented therefrom, it appears evident, particularly in the area of maternal incarceration that further research is required to explore and expose the coping mechanism adopted by mothers and their children in enduring their separation due to incarceration. As the number of female prisoners continues to



grow in Nigeria, it appears that research in the area of women in corrections will continue to grow in the country.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Settings for the Study

The research setting for this study includes two purposively selected prisons in Ogun State that have provisions for female prisoners; Ijebu-Ode and Old Abeokuta Prisons. Ijebu-Ode prison was established in 1925 with a capacity for 322 inmates. As at the time of visit of the researcher (24th March- 12th April, 2015), there were 316 inmates (male: 298 and female: 18) in the prison with 267 (male 257 and female: 10) of them awaiting trial while convicted inmates were 49 (male 41; female 8). Meanwhile, the Old Abeokuta Prison was established in 1900 to house a capacity of 900 inmates. As at the time of the researcher's visit, the total inmate population was 771 (male: 741; female: 30). The awaiting trial inmates were 521 (male: 500; female 21) while those already convicted were 250 (male: 241; female: 9).

A qualitative, in-depth interview was employed to gather information from the respondents. The interview guide was validated by an experienced researcher in the Sociology department of University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The reliability of the guide was confirmed by the test-retest technique, with a reliability coefficient of 0.74 obtained by the Pearson Product Moment-Correlation. The study designed an In-depth Interview Guide (IDI) that consisted of two sections of ten (10) questions which sought to elicit responses about maternal status prior to being imprisoned, the custodian of their children while in incarceration, their perceived fear of their inability to fulfil parental tasks for their children, their coping methods with the separation from their children and their level of contacts with their children while in prison. In addition, a Key-Informant Interview (KII) Guide was designed to elicit information from prisons officials based on their job experience as correctional officers as well as child psychologists based on their informed knowledge about effects of separation on children.

Measures

Apart from the overall aim of the study that sought to conduct a qualitative exploration of the emotional difficulties faced by female inmates who are equally mothers on the separation from their children, the available number of incarcerated mothers of the two prison facilities that make up the study population does not portend the use of quantitative techniques. Therefore, the pre-test of the prisons carried out affirmed the appropriateness of the use of qualitative technique for the study. In all, the study engaged 21 incarcerated mothers of Ijebu-Ode and Old Abeokuta prisons that freely consented to being part of the study, six prison officials in both prisons (three apiece) and two child psychologists who are lecturers of Tai Solarin University of Education.

Sampling Procedure

Consequent upon the approval given by the prison authorities for the conduct of the study and involvement of the inmates in the research, the researcher solicited the participation of inmates. Prison officials who volunteered to assist the research were requested to inform and invite the participation of the inmates for the study. As a result of the low number of female inmates (who have children within or outside the prisons) in the two prisons purposively selected for the study, a specific sampling frame could not be drawn for the study; rather, selection was based on consent for participation. Twenty-one inmates indicated that they have children and they were all included in the study upon their consent. The criteria set by the researcher for respondents' participation is for them to have at least one child outside or inside the prison. The 21



purposively selected female inmates were thereafter engaged in face-to-face interviews with the aid of two research assistants who are students of sociology and social work, and were both adequately trained before the exercise. Six prison officials and two child psychologists were purposively selected for the study based on their knowledge, experience and willingness to participate in the study as key informants.

Administration of the Instruments and methods of Data Analysis

Approvals for the study were obtained from the Ethics Committee of Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State. The participants were duly informed about the purpose of the study and other rights as respondents of the study including confidentiality. Data collected from the field was analysed in order to meet with the research objectives and answer the research questions raised. Information from in-depth interview collected with electronic tapes and notes were transcribed, synthesized and organised under thematic headings using software for qualitative analysis.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

<i>Variable</i>		<i>N=21</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Age (in years)	<20	1	4.76
	21-30	11	52.38
	31-40	3	14.29
	41-50	3	14.29
	51-60	1	4.76
	>60	2	9.52
	Total	21	100
Status in the Prison	Awaiting Trial Prisoners	18	85.71
	Convicted Prisoners	3	14.29
	Condemned Prisoners	Nil	Nil
	Total	21	100
Prison facilities	Ijebu-Ode Prison	7	33.33
	Old Abeokuta Prison	14	66.67
	Total	21	100
State of family residence	Ogun	9	42.86
	Lagos	7	33.33
	Other South Western States	2	9.52
	Outside the South West	3	14.29
	Total	21	100
Marital Status	Married	8	38.10
	Divorced	2	9.52
	Separated	5	23.81
	Widow	1	4.76
	Single (Never married)	5	23.81
	Total	21	100
Number of Children	1-2	8	38.09
	3-4	9	42.86
	5-6	3	14.29
	>6	1	4.76
	Total	21	100



The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were fairly diverse (see table 1) apart from the maternal status that they all share in common. In respect of the status of the respondents in their various prisons, majority of them (18, 85.71%) are still awaiting trials while only three (14.29%) of them have their cases concluded. In order to determine the proximity level of the prisoners to their home base, their states of residence were solicited. Majority of them (9, 42.86%) resides within Ogun state, closely followed by the 7 (33.33%) whose families are resident in Lagos State. Meanwhile, only a few of them reside outside the South-Western States (3, 14.29%). This portend that the proximity could assist majority of them to have fair access to their children while incarcerated. The married ones among them are in the majority (8, 38.10%) while those that are separated from their husbands and single (never married) mothers are 5 (23.81%) apiece. The interviews were conducted in both Pidgin English and Yoruba to sooth the preferred means of communication of the respondents and to engender proper understanding of the questions asked.

Perception of Parenting Responsibilities by Incarcerated Mothers

Earlier studies have found that whilst the ability of the incarcerated mother to fulfil parental tasks is reduced, they still hold very strong perception of their need to provide for the interpersonal, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of their children (LeFlore & Holston, 1989; Gabel, 2012; Fuller, 2013). On this premise, the current study sought to examine the perception of the incarcerated mothers of their parenting responsibilities towards their children. Their responses showed significant alignment with cultural dictates of mother's roles to children. However, majority of them perceive their importance in the lives of their children to be above the normal culturally defined roles of mothers:

...I am the only one they know even though they still have a father, he is never responsible to them since he has other children from other wives...I just pray to God to console them for me as my being here will make them lack so much...I take care of all their financial needs and their general upbringing...

Respondent A/Mother of 4 Children/IDI/Ijebu-Ode

Sixteen (76.19%) of the 21 respondents of the study had similar opinion to that of respondent 'A' above. All the 10 never-married single mothers and those separated from their husbands expressed comments that indicated that they were the sole bearer of financial and material responsibilities of their children prior to their incarceration. Outside financial and material responsibilities, respondents also expressed other significant care that they provide for their children.

...it is important I stay with them to provide necessary spiritual protection. *Sebi you be* Yoruba man yourself (As a Yoruba man), you should know what I mean...this life is a battleground, mothers must be there to fight and defend her children...now my children are left vulnerable by my absence...(as partly interpreted)

Respondent B/Mother of 2 Children/IDI/Ijebu-Ode

Another respondent has this to say:

...I cannot imagine what is happening to my children right now, who will be catering for them? Even with their father alive, I was their bread winner, right now I don't know what is happening to my business with which I used to sustain the family. I just hope my husband has not married another woman who will convert my business into her own and starve my children...

Respondent E/Mother of 3 Children/IDI/Abeokuta

Conversely, the incarcerated women have strong belief that incarceration will have negative impact on the fulfilment of their parental tasks except for 3 (14.29%) of them who stated that prior to their imprisonment, their children were not in their custody.



Accessibility and Frequency of Contacts with Children while in Incarceration

Empirical studies have affirmed that one of the strongest factors that could aid or impede female prisoners' adjustment to life in the prison is accessibility and frequency of visits by families and significant others (Bastick & Townhead, 2012). The proponents of attachment theory equally laid emphasis on the importance of physical accessibility of mothers to their children. Consequently, this study moved to examine the level of physical accessibility of the respondents to their children.

Six of the eight inmates that have spent between six months to one year in the prison expressed that they have seen their children 'regularly', while the remaining two indicated that they have no appreciable contact with their children. One of the two stated:

...when my husband came and I requested that I want to see my child, he refused saying that it is bad omen for him to come with my daughter to the prison...that it can spell doom for the baby to be visiting such a place...

Respondent D/Mother of 1 Child/IDI/Ijebu-Ode

Out of the 13 inmates that have spent over one year in the prison, only three of them indicated that they remain in constant touch with their children. Seven of them stated that they have not seen their children in over a year. One of the inmates (a mother of 5 children) who had her last born in the prison expressed:

...I have not seen my last baby again after he was taken away from me (at 18 months old). I knew that is what will happen because during pregnancy, I didn't get any visit from my other children and husband, so I am not surprised that they took the last baby from me and didn't look back...

Respondent G/Mother of 4 Children/IDI/Abeokuta

This brings the inmates that feel deprived of physical accessibility to their children to 12 (57.14%), while five of the current six that still enjoy appreciable frequency of visits of their children are living in fear that the longer they stay, the farther their children will continue to draw away from them. One of them presented the reason for her fears:

...my mother (custodian of her children) is already telling me that my children are getting stigmatised as a result of their constant visit to the prison, and that coming to the prison is getting inconveniencing for her as well...It is a way of telling me ahead that the visits will soon die down...

Respondent H/Mother of 3 Children/IDI/Abeokuta

Another respondent included:

...this is just like honeymoon for married couples; this is the time when there is still a lot of sympathy for me because I am still less than 1 year here...my husband is already complaining that he spends a lot of money paying security at the gate in order to see me.

Respondent F/Mother of 2 Children/IDI/Ijebu-Ode

About six of them expressed concern about the amount that their relatives have to pay the securities as 'bribes' in order to have access to them. Meanwhile, relocation is another reason given:

...I know very soon it will be difficult for me to keep seeing my children as my husband told me that they are relocating from Ijebu-Ode to Ilorin. You know what that means, they won't be coming again and I will only see them when I see them...

Respondent I/Mother of 4 Children/IDI/Abeokuta

Care and Support Systems for Nursing Mothers in Prison

The treatment of offenders that were pregnant at the point of their arrest and those who were nursing mothers at that time was part of the purviews of this study. Therefore, the study



enquired about the care and support systems available for pregnant inmates and nursing mothers while within the walls of prisons. The results of this enquiries revealed that there are no specific care and support systems for such categories of women in the prison. The pregnant women do not enjoy special privileges aside the ones available to other inmates. One of the prison officials volunteered:

...the care and support facilities available to pregnant and nursing mother inmates are provided by Churches and other NGOs. For example, they will be the one to take the pregnant women for antenatal care, buy drugs and pay hospital bills of the women through the pregnant period. In the event of a pregnant inmate going for antenatal care or other hospital appointments, she will be in company of the Church people (sponsors), a female prison warder, a male warder and an armed mobile police. They will make use of the 'green Maria' (Prison Van) for transport...

Prison Official A/KII/Ijebu-Ode

The study learnt that there are designated hospitals where pregnant inmates will have their babies:

...upon delivery, the inmate will be under guard and chained (handcuff) to the bed once she delivers her baby with a female warder around her. The handcuffing of the newly born inmate is to prevent occurrences of the past where inmates abandon their babies and run away...therefore, we normally secure them to the beddings of their hospital ward until they are ready to leave the ward back to the prison...

Prison Official B/KII/Abeokuta

It was understood that the main problem with this approach is that of stigma and its attendant psychological effects on the inmates while in the hospital:

...what I often notice is that they are usually ashamed of being chained in the ward which usually accommodates other women that are not prisoners. So, when visitors come to the ward to visit their newly-born women, they (incarcerated nursing mothers) often cover their faces as the visitors will know (by virtue of the handcuff) that they are prisoners...some of them often insist on being taken off the hospital before their normal discharge time, but we normally decline such request, until the doctors certify them fit enough...

Prison Official C/KII/Abeokuta

The key informants informed the study that the care for the newly born baby and its mother is entirely left for the Church and other NGOs as well as their families. The baby is then allowed to stay with her mother in the same cell for a period of 12-18months while their stay together are allowed to extend to 2 years on rare occasions. Afterwards, the families are expected to come and withdraw the baby or anyone as appointed by the mother. In some instances, the mother do insists that the custody of the baby should be given to 'motherless babies home' in order to ensure that she can have unlimited and assured access to her baby whenever she wants. Meanwhile, if a nursing mother is arrested for an offence, she is allowed to come to the prison with her baby until when such a child attains the age of 18months before the mother will have to pass on the custody of such a children to her family or other appointed institutions.

Coping Mechanisms Adopted to Mitigate Separation from Children

Earlier studies conducted have pointed out that mothers who do not have access to their children during incarceration respond poorly to adjustment within the prisons as against females that are without children (Hassan, 2010; Bastick & Townhead, 2012; Durosaro, 2012).

...mothers that are well attached to their children especially those that were the main providers for their children before being imprisoned rarely cope or adjust well with their separation from their children. Some of them use symbols that will remind them of their children around them while some use such materials like their children's clothing, photographs and so on as alternative materials that will keep them company in the absence of their children...

Prison Official B/KII/Abeokuta



The study found that the case explained above is particularly strong with inmates that have no or little access to their children while in the prison. Another official related:

...it's usually difficult as these inmates are often withdrawn with a high feeling of rejection. It's a very strong psychological pain to be separated from children especially if they are still at very young age. They cannot be console as it increases the weight of their incarceration on their minds and worsens their adjustments. To tell you how serious it can get, sometimes we (prison officials) facilitate the visit of their children by prevailing on the family to come with the inmate's children to pay a couple of visits...

Prison Official D/KII/Ijebu-Ode

The inmates were very reluctant to discuss how they have been coping with their separation from their children, as they expressed deep emotional feelings toward the question. Even those that claimed they are in regular touch were not forthcoming with response on the question. One of them expressed aggressively:

...can you cope or manage without seeing your own children (throwing the question back at the interviewer)? Nothing can make us cope well, but we just resigned ourselves to faith that one day, we will be back together...

Respondent G/Mother of 4 Children/IDI/Abeokuta

A prison official who is a social worker volunteered:

...an incarcerated mother will struggle to cope based on the concerns she will have about the welfare of her child and the changes in their relationship that will occur. This is a continuous fear, so it is not very possible for the mother to get over such feeling after a while...

Prison Official E/KII/Abeokuta

...those whose children were in the prison with them before they are being taken away from them are usually worse in adjusting. Based on the presence of that child with them in the prison over some periods, the child's departure is not usually taken lightly by the mother...

Prison Official D/KII/Ijebu-Ode

Apart from the information provided by key informants on the difficulties and stress faced by incarcerated mothers in respect of their separation from their children, the researchers were able to observe the discomfort expressed by the respondents when the questions were asked. In fact, two of them terminated the interview at that point and their decisions were respected as they could no longer talk as a result of the emotional burden that such separation has placed on them.

Effects of Separation on Children of Incarcerated Mothers

The attachment theory has extensively described the process of bonding and effect of separation of children from parents, however, the research that evolved the theory was focused on children of divorced parents and other forms of separations beside incarcerations. This study therefore sought information from child psychologists on the effects of separation from parents as a result of incarceration on the children. One of them offered:

...the behavioural reaction of a child to absence of a mother as a result of incarceration has some correlation with the age group of the child when her mother is taken away. For instance, a child of between 2 and 4 years will initially react negatively through depression, incessant crying, illnesses and sleeping difficulties for a short period of time. How long the time will last depend on the level of availability of secondary attachments the child can have around him or her...also, if the environment where the infant bonded with his/her mother is retained after the separation, this condition of depression will linger for the infant...

Child Psychologist A/KII/Ijebu-Ode

The other key informant added:

...children who are conscious enough to know that their mother is their primary provider will initially have a strong feeling of vulnerability. They will fear that their lifeline is in danger of being cut. Then the emotional trauma of being stigmatised as a result of the imprisonment of their mother will set in.



It is at this point that they will start exhibiting antisocial behaviours like fighting, stealing and getting into all kinds of trouble...

Child Psychologist B/KII/Ijebu-Ode

The first key informant added to his submission:

...it is only natural for infants to form attachments with people who care for them most, therefore, the availability of people to cater for the physiological and emotional needs will make infants adjust fast to separation from their mother. Meanwhile, children that are older like those in their late teens and twenties will have the capacity to sever old attachments quickly after great strain and cope with their mother's absence without serious psychological reactions. However, this does not erase the fact that they will be emotionally disturbed by the reason behind such separation which has to do with the consequence of possible criminality of their mother. In fact, some children may abhor hatred for their mother over making them to be a subject of ridicule by her criminal involvement. Such children will have no reason to suffer from any maladjustment...

Child Psychologist A/KII/Ijebu-Ode

Also, the second child psychologist has more additions to make:

...some adolescents that are very attached to their mother, will exhibit abnormal behaviours such as anger, constant fighting, irregular sexual relationship may set in, illnesses, alcoholic drinking and smoking. This is especially heightened when the rate of stigmatisation among their peers increases...older children may have trouble concentrating at school, while adolescent often act out and may get into trouble often...

Child Psychologist A/KII/Ijebu-Ode

The child psychologists engaged in the study unequivocally expressed ominous consequences of separation of mother-child from the angle of the child. They affirmed the need for the bonding of mother-child to be sustained in order to assist the incarcerated mother cope faster with prison life and the child adjust better under the circumstance of separation from mother.

DISCUSSION

The current study was inspired by extant literature that indicated that a considerable amount of distress amongst incarcerated women is a consequence of separation from family and children. The study found that there is high perception of parenting responsibility among the women in prison as they were largely the primary provider of welfare for their children prior to their incarceration. As the study found, even in families that husbands are present, the imprisoned women were the primary caretakers of their children before being incarcerated. This therefore portends vulnerability for their children as the mothers expressed worries over how their children would fare with their absence. Hence, this study is in agreement with earlier studies that raise concern over the significant effect that the incarceration of mothers will have in the performance of parental roles that will have grave consequences on their children (Fieldman *et al*, 1999; Gabel, 2012). The women expressed regrets over their inability to fulfil roles that spans provision of nurturance and physical care, teaching and skill-training in language, physical skills and self-care, religious and spiritual development and protection, and helping their children to formulate their own goals and values.

The accessibility and frequency of contacts between the incarcerated mothers and their children were found to be quite low. This is in spite of majority of them residing in Ogun state and its environs. The main factors that stands against the inmates having regular contacts with their children include stigmatisation, superstitious beliefs about children visiting prisons, relocation, and the corrupt practices of prison security agents that insist on 'settlements'-bribery before allowing relatives to see their incarcerated members. Therefore, as against reviewed studies that stated that children under the custody of Welfare Homes have greater difficulties in seeing their mothers (Gursansky *et al.*, 2008; Fuller, 2013), this study found that children under the custody of 'motherless babies homes' have better chance of seeing their mothers consistently.



This is due to reluctance of the inmates' families to visit the prisons often for the aforementioned reasons. Consequently, some of the women, especially those that have their babies while in the prison opt for the motherless babies homes to take charge of the custody of the children rather than their families.

The study found that there is little or no support system for pregnant and nursing mothers from the prison authorities. The available support systems are designed and implemented by religious bodies and other non-governmental agencies. Right from the antenatal to the baby delivery stages, the prison authorities leave the financial and materials needs of the inmates to the religious organisations to cater for. This is an extension of the positions of earlier studies that exposed the inadequate welfare provisions for inmates of Nigerian prisons by the government (Obioha, 2011; Aduba, 2013; Otu, Otu, & Eteng, 2013; Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014). Meanwhile, the inmates are made a subject of stigma after delivery in the hospital as they are handcuffed to the beddings in the same ward that accommodates non-offenders. This could have dire psychological effects on the newly-delivered inmates and make them averse to seeking postnatal care in hospitals.

Part of the findings of this study is the feeling of deep anger, depression and frustration by the inmates over the separation from their children as a result of incarceration. This is in consonance with earlier studies that posited that mothers in prison have reported feeling anger, anxiety, sadness, depression, decreased self-esteem, shame, guilt and a sense of loss when separated from their children (Young & Jefferson, S.C, 2010; Keaveny & Zauszniewski, 2012; Pennix, 2013). Consequently, the inmates showed high sense of loss and depression with little sign of coping with the separation from their children.

Finally, the children of incarcerated mothers suffer high level of upheaval as a result of their separation from their mothers. The child psychologists who provided informed guess for the study confirmed the postulations of earlier studies on the psychological effects that could accrue from mothers separation from children as a result of incarceration (Fuller, 2013). Therefore, the findings of the study indicate that children who are separated from a parent due to imprisonment suffer multiple problems associated with their loss. These findings give rise to concern regarding the number of families adversely affected by incarceration and separation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has attempted to cover the gap in the literature focusing on the needs of the mother and issues related to her parental role during her term of incarceration. The impact of the incarceration of mothers on the children and families in terms of motherhood is enormous and long-lasting and it is deserving of more attention from criminal justice and social welfare literature. The apathy shown to the plight of mothers in Nigerian prisons need to be reversed and better attention should be paid to understand and meet these needs. Correctional services in the country should be better equipped to manage incarcerated mothers and provide appropriate resources and services.

Superstitious beliefs and stigmatisations are major reasons for the reluctance of families to visit incarcerated mothers, hence, cutting off the bonds between mothers and their children. There is need for the family to be involved in the rehabilitative processes of inmates in the prisons; therefore, the government needs to incorporate the families of incarcerated women, especially the mothers in the programme in order to hasten the adjustment process of the women to prison life. This will help in allaying the fears and feelings of stigmatisation harboured by the family and draw the children closer to their mothers while incarcerated. The act of handcuffing the newly-delivered mother to her bedding in the maternity ward is depressing and demoralisation, this



practice of the prison officials should be discontinued. The feeling of shame and stigmatisation experienced by the women under this condition has severe psychological implications.

Conclusively, based on the findings of the study, it is evident that more research interest should be paid to the issue of maternal incarceration in Nigeria. This should be part of the on-going growth in research into issues facing female offenders and their differences from the male offender population. This will no doubt ensure more knowledge into the experiences of women in the justice system and allocate attention to the services offered to incarcerated mothers so they may better manage their own lives and the lives of their children.

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