



PHENOMENOLOGY OF INCARCERATED MOTHERS: WHAT ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN?

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Abstract:

This study focused on the lived experiences of children with incarcerated mothers, how they cope with their present situation, and the insights they can share with other children who are going through the same experiences they have. This study used the qualitative phenomenological method of research to explore in-depth the experiences, coping strategies, and personal insights which can be shared by the participants. The research study purposely identified seven individuals from ages 15-21, for the in-depth interview who are all residents of the Municipality of Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur. The results show that the children-participants struggled so much in their daily endeavors as they felt the impact of living without their mother. They were forced to deal with worries, sadness, and even quitting from studies and going into vicious life. However, amidst everything they were able to cope and continue to live as they turned adversities to optimism, uphold mental health, and strengthened their faith in God. Faith in God, prevent prayers, optimism and resiliency were the coping strategies employed by the participants with some efforts to look for alternative sources of income to augment the family's income and do better in their studies. The insights shared by participants are to remain positive always, to keep a strong faith in God, and always bear in mind that there is always light and hope after the pain and sorrow.

Keywords: children, incarcerated mothers, social studies, phenomenology, Davao del Sur, Philippines

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1. Introduction

Most women prisoners are the primary caregivers of their children and their incarceration increases marginalization from the family unit and from society. Struggles faced by incarcerated mothers include mother-child relationship, health, and well-being, issues, and barriers in regaining custody of their children, among others. Incarceration of parents is associated with poor outcomes for children. The negative consequences and other vulnerabilities that endanger children include family instability, parental substance abuse, poverty, and living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. These children also suffer impairments across four domains of well-being namely: education, health, behavior, and deprivation (Turney & Goodsell, 2018). The forbidden physical contact between the incarcerated parent and child leads to children experiencing insecurity, disorganization, vulnerability, isolation, tension, emotional distance, and even anger. The experience of parental incarceration is a significant family stressor that may negatively impact the feelings of safety and security of children (Dallaire, Zeman & Thrash, 2015).

Moreover, children who experience parental incarceration most probably live in families that are already disproportionately struggling with many issues as aforementioned. The damages that arise from having an incarcerated parent add up to the vast number of difficulties that children already face. Research on children with incarcerated parents differs, however, affirms that parental incarceration is indeed a consequential source of harm for an already vulnerable child (Wakefield & Wildeman, 2018). Also, the willingness of parents to engage in treatment may it be for mental health or addiction recovery services may directly be impacted by their concerns on who would look after their children. The majority of incarcerated mothers have histories of drug abuse and physical and mental health issues. Normally, these mothers returned to poverty and face the challenges of dealing with addictions while trying to regain custody of their children. Not only that, but women also experience more significant trauma, vulnerability, and disadvantages than men in prison (Stone, Liddell & Martinovic, 2015).

There are only a few studies on incarcerated mothers and their children in the Philippine setting. I also did not come across any study on mothers in prison and their children and there is no similar or existing study being conducted in the local or regional setting. Existing studies focus only on mothers in prison and their children in the international setting while in this study, I discussed the children with incarcerated mothers, their experiences, coping mechanisms and insights to share with other children with similar experiences with the participants, specifically in Davao Del Sur. Therefore, it is necessary and urgent to conduct this study and contribute to the existing body of knowledge in policymaking toward mothers in prison and their children. It was my intention to conduct this study as it may provide all stakeholders full perspective of the plight of children of incarcerated mothers and most especially its impact on these children. The result of this study is desperately needed to better address the issues faced by these children with incarcerated mothers who are more likely to experience socioemotional problems and disorders such as depression, anxiety, and delinquent conduct. Families with an incarcerated parent are often caught in a cycle where

cumulative disadvantage predicts carceral involvement which worsens economic and family well-being over time (Morgan et al., 2021).

Furthermore, this study is unique in the sense that it involved detailed experiences of children of incarcerated mothers (not fathers who normally committed crimes) whose lives and bright futures are doomed and curtailed because of situations which were uncontrollable by the participants. More so, this study has provided in detail the lived experiences of the participants from the time they were separated from their mothers.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Experiences of Children with Incarcerated Mothers

It was suggested that for most of the twentieth century an idealized model of motherhood, derived from the situation of the white, American, middle class, has been projected as universal. In this model, responsibility for mothering rests almost exclusively on one woman. It was suggested that a hegemonic perception of mothering consists of the following ideas: Mothers are completely engaged with their priceless children and totally absorbed by this work; mothering takes priority over all other work and is the ultimate fulfillment for women; mothers are all-powerful and direct the development and future of their children, and a failure here will replace the future of children at risk; mothers face motherhood with adequate time and resources and mothers perform the emotional work necessary to maintain happy families. Also, mothers significantly report more stress because of the lack of communication and support. Mothers spend twice as much time on household work than fathers, and they show more physiological stress responses after work (Anwar et al., 2017).

For many women, a prison sentence creates a childcare gap. The separation due to incarceration results more often in the need for non-parental care for the child since mothers tend to be the child's primary caretaker. While most of the mothers will be able to arrange childcare by a relative or friend, a significant minority of children end up in state care either as a result of parental behaviors that preceded incarceration or as a result of the incarceration. Role conflicts, role strains, and role overload are then experienced by mothers while trying to parent and therefore interventions must be provided for their children (Kaniamattam & Oxley, 2021). It is evident that non-residential mothers have a greater likelihood of incarceration as this differential treatment may be shaped by assumptions that someone else is the primary caretaker or readily available in the mothers' absence, presumably mediating the impact of their incarceration. The foster care system may also impose social constructions of motherhood onto women in the criminal justice system (Garcia, 2016).

Additionally, the major findings of a study by Lopez-Cid and Menjivar (2014) stated that the majority of children with an incarcerated mother remain in the care of the extended family. Children exhibit behavioral issues regardless of whether the kinship or foster care was consistent and visitations were regular. To prevent intergenerational trauma resulting in unnecessary involvement with drug abuse, it's not only a cause-saving mechanism but a humanistic approach, by investing in stable and consistent

contact with mothers and children who are either in out-of-home placement or kinship care. Incarcerated mothers are unique in such a way that their incarceration has a negative outcome on their relationship with their children. The mother's incarceration was the second most frequent topic of conflict when the conflict ended negatively. Incarcerated mothers also took responsibility for the conflict when it ended negatively, either blaming themselves for the conflict topic or their behavior during the conflict. Overwhelming roles and responsibilities across numerous different areas can be a source of stress for incarcerated mothers. For example, a mother who is responsible for the health and well-being of herself, her children, and even other family members are likely to be overwhelmed and experience a higher level of stress compared to mothers with lesser roles and responsibilities (Hashim et al., 2015).

Further, the degree and duration that a child was in contact with the incarcerated parent prior to imprisonment have implications for the level of disruption the child experienced due to the parent's incarceration. Incarcerated mothers were far more likely to have lived with their children in the month prior to incarceration. Children with an incarcerated mother lived with their fathers roughly a third of the time while most lived with a grandparent or another relative. If mothers are not able to meet the child's needs properly, their parenting may be less effective in preventing a child from experiencing social-emotional problems (Okorn et al., 2021). An assessment by Dworsky et al. (2020) highlighted four key challenges to building relationships between incarcerated mothers and their children namely: the prison was neither staffed nor designed to support child-friendly visitation, women had limited opportunities to call their children or other family members, the only state-funded program that provided transportation for children to visit their mothers in prison had been eliminated, and enrollment in the prison nursery had plummeted despite a zero percent recidivism rate among participants.

Also, Baldwin (2017) stated that prison magnifies challenges to mothering. Many mothers reflected on the significance of being separated, of not being at home where a sense of place, sense of self, and feelings of safety were all inextricably linked to their mothering role. Prison space is indeed not home, but research shows that there are spaces within the prison where mothers feel safer discussing their children and mothering emotions, especially those related to guilt, remorse, and hopelessness. Similarly, the rising incarceration of women impacts reproductive health and reproductive experiences, including breastfeeding which is also a role of a mother. The incarceration of women in the perinatal period challenges the very possibility of initiating breastfeeding. Imprisoned women even have complex feelings towards breastfeeding depending on their experiences and the support available (Paynter & Snelgrove-Clarke, 2019)

The number of children with a parent in prison has increased and children now see their incarcerated parents less frequently than previously. Numerous problems are likely to worsen as maternal incarceration continues to rise. While mothers are in prison, their family members struggle with the physical absence of their loved one, the monetary and practical contributions which that person made to the household, and the challenges

and costs associated with maintaining a relationship with a prisoner (Comfort et al., 2016).

The incarceration of mothers is especially disruptive because mothers are usually the primary caregivers prior to their arrest. Their children then become placed with other caregivers such as other family members. Thus, children of incarcerated women are at high risk for receiving poor parenting prior to incarceration for a number of reasons including poverty, instability in family life that often involves living with multiple caregivers, substance abuse, and criminal behavior (Kamptner et al., 2017). Like other adverse childhood experiences, the incarceration of a parent often results in exposure to other risk factors that can compromise health and development. The transition out of prison and back into society can be stressful and defeating to both the mother and the child. The difficulties of finding housing and employment often result in recidivism (Porter, 2018).

Offenses committed by women are closely linked to poverty and are usually a means of survival to support their families and children. Women mainly commit petty crimes, theft, and fraud wherein studies have demonstrated that prior emotional, physical, and sexual abuse contributed to women's criminal behavior. Visitation is also perceived as negative by incarcerated women. It should be recognized by correctional staff that visitation can also be a difficult experience needing more effort to assist both the visitor and the woman (Greenfelder et al., 2021). These may then cause risk factors in a child's social interactions including parents' lack of support toward their children, engagement in criminal behavior by parents or close family members, hampering the development of a positive parent-child relationship, exposure to discipline that is based on physical violence rather than on verbal punishment, exposure to violence between parents, contact with peers who commit crimes, among others (Safranoff & Tiravassi, 2018).

2.2 Coping Strategies of Children of Incarcerated Mothers

For the children, the impact of parental imprisonment goes far wider than just the relationship between the child and imprisoned parent. It affects all aspects of a child's life, from where they live and how they cope at school to their relationships with other family members and their standing in the local community. Many of these changes can be particularly hard to deal with when they follow the loss of a parent to prison. Caregivers of children who experienced parental incarceration are at an increased risk of physical and mental health problems. Incarceration has been associated with an increased risk of depression among the caregivers of children affected (Bradshaw et al., 2021).

Self-regulation of children includes finding ways to cope with strong feelings; learning to focus and shift attention, and successfully controlling behaviors required to work towards goals. Supporting self-regulation development in early childhood is an investment in later success because stronger self-regulation predicts better performance in school, better relationships with others, and fewer behavioral difficulties. By providing opportunities to make decisions and choices and attributing inner control to children, these strategies support self-regulation, since they increase children's awareness of the

decision-making process and the results of their behavior. On the other hand, mother interaction styles that overwhelm or belittle, or are erratic or unpredictable, make the child feel confused, angry, or helpless and undermine the development of inner control in social situations. The environment mediates the growing understanding of acceptable behavior (Dan, 2016). The ability to regulate thoughts, feelings, and actions helps children successfully negotiate many of the challenges they face, promoting resilience in the face of adversity (Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017).

In addition, it was stated by various authors (Bellis et al., 2017) that turning adversity into positivity is associated with resilience in children and young adults. It has been correlated with individual characteristics, such as problem-solving ability, self-efficacy, optimism, and autonomy. Resilience has also been associated with the presence of close relationships with others such as parents, friends, and romantic partners. While fundamentally, safe, stable, and nurturing relationships are considered the cornerstone of resilience in children, the typical attachment of the mother-child relationship may make the development of resilience difficult for children. Disruptions in the household may require children to be more heavily dependent on their own individual traits, in addition to family and community-based support.

The resiliency of the people would often be faith-based and reliant on traditional support systems such as the family. Filipino resiliency would also be described as founded on a Filipino sense of humor and positivity towards life. The Filipinos believe that they have a way of dealing with problems no matter how grave those may be. Hardiness to stress is perhaps most closely affiliated to the Filipino quality of having inner strength. There is a strong belief that there is God that would help recover from calamities and other misfortunes. This spirituality allows the resiliency to come forth in times of crises and extreme life experiences. This is also the major coping mechanism of Filipinos when they have to actively manage the distress that stretches their limits of endurance. Many people use religion as a positive coping strategy to hurdle challenges. Religiosity has numerous dimensions, including different aspects of the person's behavior, beliefs, and practices (Edara et al., 2021).

Self-care skills are one of the independent life skills, the foundations of which are laid during the preschool period, and which should be acquired by children at an early age. It is important for children to use their self-care skills in order to get involved and gain acceptance into society. Thus, it has become important for children to express their opinions about their own life skills (Koksalan et al., 2017). The majority of children who experience parental incarceration employ a combination of coping strategies to manage the situation including de-sensitization to incarceration and strength through control. Frequent contact visits and quality communication with the incarcerated parent can serve as protective factors for the child (Cramer et al., 2017). Access to positive influences, engagement in leadership opportunities through school or community organizations, social-emotional skill development, and maintaining faith and hope also are factors that help mitigate the impact of incarceration.

Certain adaptive coping skills may be facilitated by frequent service attendance, such as heightened perceptions of meaning in life, and a sense of spiritual peace.

Engagement of children with a religious community as a component of service attendance may protect against negative mental health outcomes, perhaps via perceptions of an expanded social network, and greater perceived and received social support as stated by various authors (Davis, 2017; Pugh, 2019). Religious coping can be helpful for relief from stressful situations. Specifically, it can give children the confidence to endure and it can give meaning to hardships. It was found out that faith acted as a buffer for stress, and provided meaning and purpose to life, as well as comfort. Faith, or a life's purpose, was predictive in viewing stress as an opportunity for growth. Religiosity, or a belief in God, was positively correlated with children feeling in control and able to handle life's stressors.

Additionally, resilience, the ability of children to overcome social, emotional, developmental, economic, and environmental challenges, changes depending on innate factors including personality traits such as patience, and environmental factors like family, school, and the environment. The capacity of the individual to be resilient arises as a result of the level of interactions between personality and environmental factors. Definitions linked to resilience have emphasized risk factors at an individual and environmental level. Risk factors trigger or cause stress that individuals may encounter. The risk factors for children include socio-economic variables such as low socio-economic background and poverty; family variables like negative parental attitudes, separation from parents or having a single parent, death of parents, and sick parents; genetic conditions; child abuse or neglect; and negative life experiences including terrorism, immigration, war, natural disasters, among others (Masten, 2015; Yoleri, 2020).

Individual differences concerning the negative impact of incarceration are mediated by a number of unique risk and resilience factors. These include the child's development, impact on the family, and family resources. Particularly, it is important to note how parents deal with the stressors that confinement imposes and how they help their children to adapt to these challenges. Resilience identified several promotive and protective parenting behaviors that can foster adaptation and decrease the negative consequences of adversity on children's mental health. A caregiving relationship, characterized by structure, warmth, and supportive practices that help the child express and regulate their emotions, is protective (Balter & Jordan, 2017; Pereira et al., 2021).

Resilience describes the Filipino people in times of adversity. In Filipino tradition and social media, Filipinos often portray themselves as a bunch of people smiling in the face of adversity. In some way, it promotes a national image of a strong nation, one that can quickly make a joke, and a smile is an asset. Seeing this kind of way to lighten the situation somehow uplifts the spirit and leaves a message that life is every day and resumes soon (Jocson, 2016).

The Filipino people, with these kinds of experiences, have managed to cultivate their coping mechanisms. Coping is the manner of engaging the struggles in the community that is perceived as stressful or highly problematic and exceeds their capacity and community resources. Furthermore, these catastrophes stress the urge of Filipinos to be more proactively resistant to adversities that have shaped the psyche of Filipinos. Filipinos need to cope with anxiety through active and passive coping strategies. When

in their second homes or workplaces, mentors or employers must continuously provide conducive environments to ensure better well-being as stated by various authors (Camitan & Bajin, 2021; Yazon et al., 2017). Thus, identifying protective factors is an integral part, along with vulnerability factors, of understanding resilience. Resilience appears to be receptive to the influence of various situations such as war and other occurrences. Filipinos have identified some protective factors across local literature, with strong faith being the most common protective factor according to various authors (Ang & Diaz, 2017; Hechanova et al., 2015; Rillo & Buslon, 2019). Several more have been identified as a Filipino protective factor, including a strong sense of collectivism and family, optimism, rationalization, resourcefulness, and the well-known Filipino sense of humor that exists as a practice linked to national identity and cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, spirituality affects important cognitive assessments in the coping process by targeting one's beliefs and helps create a stronger sense of control. Studies have shown that by training children's spiritual and psychological skills, it is possible to improve anxiety and distress associated with their relationships with family members and their quality of life. Consistent with the spiritual child movement, children may be more interested to connect with their spirituality and their ability for spiritual engagement (Moore et al., 2016). Compared with children reared in nonreligious households, children in religious homes have been reported to be better adjusted socially, have higher self-esteem and social responsibility, and show lower levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Bornstein et al., 2017).

It has also been recognized that religion/spirituality affects how people deal with adversities. Especially in the Philippines, people tend to subscribe to faith as a resort to seek help for problems that they deem impossible to confront. This is expressed through prayers, rituals, and attendance during preaching periods to find answers or wait for miracles, which may solve adversities or find comfort (Straiton et al., 2017). A lot of Filipino Catholic youth utilize positive religious coping methods more frequently than negative strategies (Castillo & Alino, 2020).

The value for God or a supernatural being is a well-rooted one. The Filipinos fully trust in God, regardless of religion, as expressed in the *bahala na* attitude. It is an expression of full trust in the fate that everything will turn out for the best. Etymologically, *bahala* came from *Bathala*, the native Filipino name for God. *Bahala na* comes from complete trust in divine power. It is uttered when one faces a challenge, like before performing, competing, or taking a difficult test. In a healthy situation, the person did all the necessary steps to prepare for the occasion but still lacks confidence. It is a wish that the divine will do the rest, or will make possible something the human faculty cannot achieve. It is uttered by farmers when before harvest, unexpected bad weather comes. In this context, it is uttered with "*may awa ang Diyos*" or God is merciful. Despite having different kinds of religious beliefs, it cannot be denied that religion also has an impact on parenting (Quejada, 2017).

2.3 Insights of Children of Incarcerated Mothers

In a local setting, unlike Davao City, Sta. Cruz and Digos did not enact City Ordinance No. 5004 and Executive Order No. 24, an ordinance providing for a women's development code of Davao City which states that the right of all women detainees shall be protected including a speedy trial of their cases shall be ensured by all concerned, an appropriate program shall be designed to respond to their specific needs and problems as detainees, and separate structure and space for detention and rehabilitation shall be provided (City Government of Davao, 2011; Rivera, 2021). Unlike the rest of the country, Davao City has a more comprehensive anti-discrimination ordinance as discrimination against women, persons with disability, Lumad, and Muslims are considered criminal acts. Not hiring a person because of her gender or religious belief is tantamount to discrimination (Tordecilla, 2016).

The impacts of incarceration are spread across communities in areas such as physical and mental health, education, and family services and to effectively address such, there is a need to develop networks of interventions (DeHart et al., 2017). It is then vital that correctional practitioners partner with law enforcement, schools, and child welfare agencies to ensure a safety net for children and successful re-entry for incarcerated parents (Martin, 2017).

3. Material and Methods

In this study, I used a qualitative-phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that is used to describe how human beings experience a certain phenomenon. A phenomenological study attempts to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions about human experiences, feelings, and responses to a particular situation. I am allowed to delve into the perceptions, perspectives, understandings, and feelings of those 7 children-participants who have actually experienced or lived the phenomenon or situation of interest (Vagle, 2018).

In this study, my aim was to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon as experienced by the children of incarcerated mothers refraining from any pre-given framework but remaining true to the facts. The experiences of the children of incarcerated mothers were a phenomenon that I find very relevant at the present times because this was not only an eye-opener to incarcerated mothers and their children who suffered the trauma and pain brought about by the situation of their mothers but also provided good inputs for the authorities (government and non-governmental organizations) for future action, may it be policy formulation or programs and interventions related to the study. In this study, I utilized the Cebuano language, as my medium of facilitating the in-depth interview.

As a researcher, I played several roles to facilitate the study. These roles were considered inherent in a qualitative-phenomenology study. I am the principal researcher, main facilitator, documenter, and translator of the study and from the transcribed responses, I was able to translate the verbatim statements in vernacular to the English language. From the results of the analysis prepared by the professional data analyst, and

upon consultation, I was able to come up with the core ideas from the responses of the participants which core ideas correspond to the theme identified by the data analyst. As the principal researcher, I was able to prepare the whole qualitative paper as a requirement for my master's degree.

This is a phenomenological study and as the researcher, I used in-depth interview (IDI) in my data gathering. There were originally 12 participants for the IDI who were purposely selected to be participants of the study as they were children of incarcerated mothers. However, due to some unavoidable circumstances personal to the participants, only 7 appeared on the set schedules for IDI. With the substantial theory of Creswell (2007); Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), in qualitative research such as phenomenology, it is suggested that for a in-depth interview, researchers could interview 5-25 participants who had experienced the same phenomenon, if one would need to reach the goal of representativeness and generalizability as a standard, from a small number of research participants. However, sample sizes of 10-15 are suitable, provided participants are able to provide rich descriptions of the phenomena (Speziale and Carpenter, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), it is recommended that researchers could adopt 5-25 individuals who had experienced the same phenomenon for an in-depth interview.

My study followed some procedures in data collection. As part of the process of documentation, I submitted a letter request to the Dean, Professional Schools, the University of Mindanao asking permission to conduct my study. Another formal letter request was submitted to the Municipal Social Services, Municipality of Sta. Cruz, Davao del Sur to allow me to proceed with my study with the request on the use of an available room, preferably a private counseling room where I can facilitate my IDI for the 7 participants.

Also, during this pandemic, I made sure that I have followed and strictly observed the requirements of the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) for the Emerging Infectious Disease (COVID 19) on the personal safety practices such as physical/social distancing, wearing face masks, and face shields, frequent hand washing, cough/sneeze etiquette, proper tissue usage and disposal, avoidance of touching their face, and respecting others. Furthermore, I made sure that my informants were well prepared and understood through my initial orientation on their involvement in my study. At the preliminary meeting, I explained to them that in the actual IDI process, the emotional memories and experiences were inevitable so they have to prepare their heart and mind to fight those negative bursts of emotions. I assured them that I understood all their doubts and apprehensions and I ensured them that I did not intend any harm to them. (Shank, 2006; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2007). Moreover, I made use of field notes which were secondary data storage methods in qualitative research. I understand that the human mind tends to forget quickly, that is why I used field notes to confirm the statements in the audio recording. I believed that as a researcher, it was very crucial in qualitative research to retain the data gathered (Mack, et.al, 2005). Confidentiality was observed in all sessions and with all informants (Bhutta, 2002; Bricki & Green, 2007), consistently addressing them by their pseudonyms to conceal their real identity.

This audio recording of the interview was transcribed verbatim and checked by the participants for confirmation if everything was taken as it was. Its English translation was also prepared. The draft 'transcription' and 'analysis' of the IDI was presented to the participants for validation and confirmation as to the correctness and/or comments the participants about the transcript and analyses of the IDI proceeding (LeCompte, 2000). At this point, the researcher conducted a 'validity check' by returning to the informants to determine if the essence of the IDI has been correctly captured. Any modification necessary was done as a result of this 'validity check'.

As to data storage, all the audio recordings, field notes, and filing of hard copy documentation were kept in a safe cabinet including the transcriptions and field notes which were also stored electronically on multiple hard drives. The analysis of data involved summarizing the mass of data collected through the verbatim statements of the participants. The results were presented in a way that communicated the most important features of the study. The data was analyzed using a method that includes data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification (LeCompte, 2000; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2007) adding that qualitative content analysis is any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings.

There were four components to establish the trustworthiness of the study, these are the following: credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability (Gunawan, 2015). To establish the credibility of my study, I ensured that rigor in research was properly observed during the data collection, especially during the IDI proceedings. I deviated from drawing conclusions from the IDI but based everything on factual data directly from the participants. To address confirmability in my study, I set aside my personal opinions, assumptions, and judgments in order to guard against the distortion of data. The use of audio-taped interviews, note-taking, and journals was consistent all throughout the facilitation of the IDI. To address transferability, I described in detail the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research and showed all data as transparent as possible. I made sure that the data were rich with descriptions so that the person who wishes to "transfer" the results to a different context is then responsible for making the judgment of how sensible the transfer is. Transferability refers to how well the findings apply to other school settings and depends upon the similarities between two compared settings and allows readers to make conclusions regarding transferability. Detailed descriptions may allow readers to transfer information (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). To establish the dependability and reliability of my study, I ensured consistency during the data collection and analysis by doing the code-recode system during data reduction and applying the peer examination and investigator triangulation of the data collected and analyzed. Dependability is a criterion that is considered equivalent to reliability and is similarly concerned with the stability of the results over time (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Moreover, Golafshani, (2003) Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007) cited that dependability is improved by common qualitative strategies such as audit trails, a rich documentation, triangulation, and also by traditional methods

such as inter-coder or inter-observer agreement and code-recode consistency using the same “human instrument”.

I made sure that my study is guided by ethical principles as described by Mack et al. (2005), namely: respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent, and confidentiality. The consideration of respect for persons requires a commitment to ensure the autonomy of research participants and where autonomy may be decreased, to protect people from the exploitation of their weakness. Data collection and permissions to gather data from the participants were obtained at an early stage in the research (Creswell, 2007). Informed and voluntary consent is a mechanism for ensuring that people understand what it means to participate in a particular research study so they can decide in a conscious, deliberate way whether they want to participate. Informed consent is one of the most important requirements in the conduct of IDI considering that the participants are minor.

Beneficence requires a commitment to minimizing the risks associated with research, including psychological and social risks, and maximizing the benefits that are due to research participants (Mack et al, 2005). To minimize the risks or harm that may come to the participants, I used pseudo names so that the anonymity of the participants in relation to the information shared will be maintained (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). The participants were protected at all times so data or files of information were kept in a safe and secret place that was not known to everyone (Bricki and Green, 2007).

The coding system was used to ensure confidentiality of the findings and protection of the identities of the informants and hide their true identities. This was explained to them (Maree and Van der Westhuizen, 2007). I had recognized that some of the informants is a bit hesitant to be interviewed at first for emotional and personal reasons but I assured them of the confidentiality of all the information.

As a researcher, I considered the safety of the research participants and thought about the emotional and stressful experiences they felt during the conduct of the in-depth interview. Therefore, I had observed care and caution with my questions so as not to trigger their feelings and was ready to provide support and comfort as they experienced again the hardships they went through. Respect for the right to privacy was given due importance in this study. Participants were informed that they have the right to refuse to answer any of the interview questions if they do not feel comfortable (Bricki and Green, 2007). Justice requires a commitment to ensuring a fair distribution of the risks and benefits resulting from research. It is important to build into the research plan a method of acknowledging the contributions that participants make to the success of the research process and to reimburse them in various ways for their efforts (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). In my study, I made it a point that the participants did not spend any amount on the IDI and their comfort was my priority. Research should enrich the freedom of the participants more than it improves the author’s career (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Carcary, 2015).

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Root and Branch codes (Major themes) and Core Ideas on Lived Experiences of Children of Incarcerated Mothers

Root Codes	Branch Codes	Core Ideas
Exceedingly arduous	Feeling of helplessness	<i>Having an imprisoned mother has made my life extremely difficult.</i>
	Life is not easy without a mother	<i>It's difficult for me to be motherless because I'm accustomed to seeing her at home.</i>
	Life is totally different	<i>As the child of an incarcerated mother, I faced numerous difficulties. Growing up without a mother is difficult.</i>
	Struggling how to balance the life	<i>The life of a child whose mother is incarcerated is not an easy one. I've gone through a lot of difficulties. I feel worried realizing that I don't have a mother by my side.</i>
	Childhood is robbed from them	<i>Growing up, I was in a very difficult situation because I didn't have my mother to guide me. I have been through numerous trials. It's difficult to go through life without our mothers by our sides.</i> <i>My childhood was robbed of me. I envy other kids who play outside.</i>
Living without a mother figure	Feeling of indifference without a mother	<i>There are times when I need the care of a mother, but she is not present. I couldn't do anything because she was in jail. When my mother was imprisoned, I began to lose my self-confidence.</i>
	Left to look after the younger siblings	<i>I no longer have time for myself because I am responsible for my siblings while my father is at work.</i>
	Loneliness and neglected studies	<i>I have lost my desire to go to school. I've lost interest in going to school since I got failing grades. As a result, I decided to stop attending school because I no longer enjoy it.</i>
	Resorted into vicious life	<i>I was also badly influenced by my friends because I hadn't got my mother to restrict me. I also learned about vices such as smoking, drinking, and gambling. I was also badly influence by my friend.</i>
Living in mortification	Embarrassed and humiliated by peers	<i>I'd feel humiliated in front of other people as a result of our situation. I can't stand up for my mother because they see my mother as bad person.</i>
	Lost interest in attending to and failed in the class	<i>I have taken my studies for granted. I've lost interest in going to school since I got failing grades.</i>
	Feeling sorry for the predicament and disappointed with the treatment of the family members	<i>I was also disappointed by the fact that our neighbors, particularly our relatives, treated us very differently. We also have other relatives who treat us differently, but we just let them because we don't know how they perceive our family.</i>
Learning to be self-regulated	Look for part time job to sustain daily needs	<i>While I was in school, I also looked for a part-time job so that I wouldn't have to rely on my grandmother for financial support, as my father no longer provides for our household</i>

	Being self-sufficient and self-reliant Determined with positivity in life	<hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <i>I began searching for work so that I could provide for my family. I also took on part-time jobs so that I would have my own money and not have to rely on my father.</i> <i>Just keep a positive mindset. My part-time job is also a source of joy for me. Because I didn't want to experience the life I had before, I've tried to find ways to take care of myself without my mother.</i>
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A. Exceedingly Arduous

The impact of parental imprisonment on children can be profound and long-lasting. Numerous problems are likely to worsen as maternal incarceration continues to rise. The number of children with a parent in prison has increased and children now see their incarcerated parents less frequently than previously. The proportion of incarcerated individuals who are parents has decreased slightly, but the alarming increase in the number of parents in prison is likely to have lasting effects on families and communities (Comfort et al., 2016).

The study reveals from the participants that the imprisonment of their mother has significantly affected them as they feel helpless, lonely, and struggling daily to balance life. Life is totally different. To mention, life at home, while the mother takes care of everything from food, personal necessities, budgeting, household chores, and assistance to school assignments and daily needs. Particularly, children whose parents are involved in the criminal justice system face multiple challenges including, but not limited to psychological strain, suspension or expulsion from school, antisocial behavior, criminal activity, and economic impediments (DeHart et al., 2017; Martin, 2017). Incarcerated mothers are unique in such a way that their incarceration has a negative outcome on their relationship with their children (Hashim et al., 2015). It affects all aspects of a child's life, from where they live and how they cope at school to their relationships with other family members and their standing in the local community.

B. Living without a Mother Figure

Incarceration of parents is associated with poor outcomes for children. The participants in this study feel indifference without a mother, they neglected their studies and even resorted to vicious life. The negative consequences and other vulnerabilities that endanger children include family instability, parental substance abuse, poverty, and living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. These children also suffer impairments across four domains of well-being namely: education, health, behavior, and deprivation (Turney & Goodsell, 2018). Relationships with other family members frequently suffer. Some children become withdrawn, are affected by *“increased health problems and regressive behavior such as bed-wetting”*, suffer worsening performance and attendance rates at school or display increased aggression, antisocial or criminal tendencies.

Thus, children of incarcerated women are at high risk for receiving poor parenting prior to incarceration for a number of reasons including poverty, instability in family life that often involves living with multiple caregivers, substance abuse, and criminal

behavior (Kamptner et al., 2017; Porter, 2018). Like other adverse childhood experiences, the incarceration of a parent often results in exposure to other risk factors that can compromise health and development. Although incarceration is likely not the cause of these compromised outcomes, it instead serves as one indicator of other related risks and vulnerabilities that make these families particularly fragile.

C. Living in Mortification

Unlike other contexts of loss such as death or illness, the loss of a family member because of incarceration seldom elicits sympathy and support from others and the stigma and feelings of isolation associated with being in the family of a prisoner, of being contaminated in some way by the deeds of the offender, is central to many of the difficulties that children and families face. Parental imprisonment sometimes has so severe an impact on children that it damages their physical or mental health. The perceived extent and severity of the health impact varies between studies but noted problems have included: changes in sleep patterns or eating behavior; starting or increasing their use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco; stress; depression; and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder such as flashbacks about the crimes or arrests (Crawford, 2003).

D. Learned to be Self-regulating

Despite the traumatic experiences of the participants brought about by the imprisonment of their mother, they become self-regulating and self-reliant. They are able to turn all the negative emotions into positive ones and are able to learn the significance of self-care. Filipinos are known to be resilient people. Filipino resiliency would also be described as founded on a Filipino sense of humor and positivity towards life. The participants believe that they have a way of dealing with problems no matter how grave those may be. Hardiness to stress is perhaps most closely affiliated to the Filipino quality of having courage (Edara et al., 2021). Most of the participants strongly believe that there is God that would help them recover from their misfortunes. Further, the same author said that this spirituality allows their resilience to come forth in times of crises and extreme life experiences. This is also the major coping mechanism of Filipinos when they have to actively manage the distress that stretches their limits of endurance.

It has also been recognized that religion/spirituality affect how people deal with adversities. Especially in the Philippines, people tend to subscribe to faith as a resort to seek help for problems that they deem impossible to confront. This is expressed through prayers, rituals, and attendance during preaching periods to find answers or wait for miracles, which may solve adversities or find comfort (Castillo & Alino, 2020; Straiton et al., 2017).

Table 2: Root and Branch Codes (Major Themes) and Core Ideas on the Coping Strategies Used by the Participants in Order to Survive from the Said Experiences

Root Codes	Branch Codes	Core Ideas
Turning Adversities into Optimisms	Focused on the positive	<i>A positive attitude towards life. I also concentrate on the things that will make my mother and me happy. Just keep a positive mindset</i>
	Refrained from getting affected	<i>I don't allow myself to be distracted by other people's opinions. I kept going and concentrated on my studies.</i>
	Devoted attention to matters deserves their time	<i>I was looking for something that would keep me happy. I didn't let the negative opinions that people would say affect myself and I don't let my emotions affect me.</i>
	Concentrate on the studies despite turbulence in life	<i>I concentrate on my studies in order to avoid receiving failing grades.</i>
Self-Care and Catharsis	Entertain positive thoughts	<i>Focus on the positive, and believe that our family will endure these trials. I instead choose to concentrate on the things that bring me happiness in life.</i>
	Looking for fun and enjoyment amidst life's toils	<i>Also, find ways to have fun so that I won't be worried about our situation or my mother's situation in prison.</i>
	Constant communication with incarcerated mother	<i>We have constant communication. And our father is also there to remind me of the things I must concentrate on.</i>
Turn on to the Almighty Father	Total surrender to God all the quandaries	<i>Ask the Lord for help and guidance because He is the only one who has the power to help us.</i>
	Putting trust in the Lord	<i>I put my trust in the Lord because I know He will never leave us in a bind.</i>
	Pray, pray and pray	<i>Don't be affected by other people's negative statements because it won't help. And pray to our Lord at all times.</i>

A. Turning Adversities into Optimisms

As a coping strategy, they are able to turn this crisis into something with optimism. They look at the brighter side of the situation and manage not to be totally affected by it and devote their time to matters that deserve more of their time, particularly their studies and their daily survival. Optimism, humor, and positivity are valued traits in the Philippines. At the same time, in the face of difficult or challenging situations, members of the community are encouraged to look at the brighter side of things. As revealed by the participants, they try to ignore all the negative accusations, the gossip, and the blame against their mother (Ang & Diaz, 2017).

B. Self-care and Catharsis

Self-care skills are one of the independent life skills, the foundations of which are laid during the preschool period, and which should be acquired by children at an early age. It is important for children to use their self-care skills in order to get involved and gain

acceptance into society. Thus, it has become important for children to express their opinions about their own life skills according to various authors (Cramer et al., 2017; Koksalan et al., 2017). Moreover, self-regulation of children also includes finding ways to cope with strong feelings; learning to focus and shift attention, and successfully controlling behaviors required to work towards goals. The ability to regulate thoughts, feelings, and actions helps children successfully negotiate many of the challenges they face, promoting resilience in the face of adversity (Dan, 2016; Rosanbalm & Murray, 2017).

C. Turn on to the Almighty Father

As shared by the participants, they totally surrender to God all the problems they encountered with their mother. They never let their trials put them totally down but they let their faith in God controls everything they experienced. It has been recognized that religion/spirituality affect how people deal with adversities. (Castillo & Alino, 2020; Straiton et al., 2017). Religion and spirituality also provide interpersonal support from people who subscribe to the same belief or are avid members of the same religion. This gives feelings of belongingness, understanding, and reassurance, which may boost confidence in confronting a problem.

Engagement of children with a religious community as a component of service attendance may protect against negative mental health outcomes, perhaps via perceptions of an expanded social network, and greater perceived and received social support (Pugh, 2019). Religious coping can be helpful for relief from stressful situations. Specifically, it can give children the confidence to endure and it can give meaning to hardships. It was found out that faith acted as a buffer for stress, and provided meaning and purpose to life, as well as comfort. Faith, or a life's purpose, was predictive in viewing stress as an opportunity for growth. Religiosity, or a belief in God, was positively correlated with children feeling in control and able to handle life's stressors (Davis, 2017).

Table 3: Root and Branch Codes (Major Themes) and Core Ideas on Insights Shared by the Participants to Others who have the same Experiences They Have

Root Codes	Branch Codes	Core Ideas
Resiliency of Life	Focus on the positive	<i>Always keep a positive mindset. Let us keep a positive attitude toward life.</i>
	Focus on overcoming loneliness	<i>Let us keep a positive attitude toward life.</i>
	Genuinely optimistic in life	<i>Let us continue living our lives and doing what we can to make ourselves and our mother happy.</i>
	Focus on things that will bring peace of mind	<i>Being genuinely optimistic in life because it has a profound effect on one's mental and emotional well-being.</i> <i>In order to live peacefully, we must refrain from constantly thinking about what is going on in our lives.</i>

Uphold Mental Health	Avoidance of negativity in life	<i>We should avoid negative thoughts because they can result in stress and depression. Avoid being influenced by negative thoughts, worries, or sadness.</i>
	Avoidance of overthinking	<i>Since it has already occurred, the best advice I can give to others in similar situations is to not overthink things and to not be easily influenced by what others say.</i>
	Concentrate on things that will make them happy	<i>Keep yourself occupied with activities that will bring us joy. Let us continue living our lives and doing what we can to make ourselves and our mother happy.</i>
	Communicate with your incarcerated mother	<i>Maintain communication with our mother in order to overcome our loneliness towards her.</i>
Living in Spirituality	Pray for guidance and assistance	<i>We must pray to the Lord to help us overcome our problems and provide us with the necessary strength to overcome these obstacles.</i>
	Pray for those who speak ill against them	<i>We don't pay attention to the negative opinions of other people. Let us include in our prayers those who speak ill of us.</i>

A. Resiliency in Life

Resilience describes the Filipino people in times of adversity. The participants focus on the positive side of life and remain optimistic in everything they do. This is a way of overcoming the loneliness of their mother. In Filipino tradition and social media, Filipinos often portray themselves as a bunch of people smiling in the face of adversity. In some way, it promotes a national image of a strong nation, one that can quickly make a joke, and a smile is an asset. Seeing this kind of way to lighten the situation somehow uplifts the spirit and leaves a message that life is every day and resumes soon (Jocson, 2016).

In addition, it was stated by various authors (Bellis et al., 2017; Heard-Garris et al., 2018) that turning adversity into positivity is associated with resilience in children and young adults. It has been correlated with individual characteristics, such as problem-solving ability, self-efficacy, optimism, and autonomy. Resilience has also been associated with the presence of close relationships with others such as parents, friends, and romantic partners. Additionally, resilience, the ability of children to overcome social, emotional, developmental, economic, and environmental challenges, changes depending on innate factors including personality traits such as patience, and environmental factors like family, school, and the environment. The risk factors for children include socio-economic variables such as low socio-economic background and poverty; family variables like negative parental attitudes, separation from parents or having a single parent, death of parents, and sick parents; genetic conditions; child abuse or neglect; and negative life experiences including terrorism, immigration, war, natural disasters, among others (Masten, 2015; Yoleri, 2020).

B. Uphold Mental Health

This insight shared by the participants of upholding mental health can be considered a piece of remarkable advice considering that despite the challenges encountered by the participants they are still able to stay mentally active and productive. While we know for a fact that paternal incarceration leads to a host of behavioral problems for children (Stone et al., 2015; Wildeman, 2010). Relatedly, mental health and well-being are just as important as your physical health. Positive mental health and well-being enable you to function well, have meaningful social connections, and positive self-esteem, and be better able to cope with life's ups and downs. Keeping our minds healthy is an important part of our overall health and wellbeing (Mental Health Commission, 2016). For the participants, there are a few tips that can help maintain your mental health and wellbeing: spend time with friends, loved ones, and people you trust, talk about or express your feelings regularly, reduce alcohol consumption, avoid illicit drug use, keep active and eat well, develop new skills and challenge your capabilities.

C. Living in Spirituality

The value for God or a supernatural being is a well-rooted one. The Filipinos fully trust in God, regardless of religion, as expressed in the *bahala na* attitude. It is an expression of full trust in the fate that everything will turn out for the best. Etymologically, *bahala* came from *Bathala*, the native Filipino name for God (before colonizers came). *Bahala na* comes from complete trust in divine power. It is uttered when one faces a challenge, like before performing, competing, or taking a difficult test. In a healthy situation, the person did all the necessary steps to prepare for the occasion but still lacks confidence. It is a wish that the divine will do the rest, or will make possible something the human faculty cannot achieve. It is uttered by farmers when before harvest, unexpected bad weather comes. In this context, it is uttered with "*may awa ang Diyos*" or God is merciful (Quejada, 2017).

Lastly, spirituality affects important cognitive assessments in the coping process by targeting one's beliefs and helps create a stronger sense of control. Whenever the human ability to control stressful events is high, fewer complications such as stress, depression, and anxiety will appear. Studies by various authors (Bornstein et al., 2017; Moore et al., 2016) have shown that by training children's spiritual psychological skills, it is possible to improve anxiety and distress associated with their relationships with family members and their quality of life.

5. Recommendations/Implications for Practice and Future Researches

Children of incarcerated parents are some of our nation's most at-risk individuals. Children whose parents are involved in the criminal justice system, in particular, face a host of challenges and difficulties: psychological strain, antisocial behavior, suspension or expulsion from school, economic hardship, and criminal activity. On child criminal involvement, there is particular concern that a parent's imprisonment will lead to a cycle of intergenerational criminal behavior. The psychological problems and antisocial

behavior and the most common consequence of parental incarceration appear to fall under the umbrella of antisocial behavior, which describes any number of behaviors that go against social norms, including criminal acts and persistent dishonesty. On the problem of educational attainment, children of incarcerated parents are significantly more likely to be suspended and expelled from school and on the children's economic well-being, the overwhelming majority of children with incarcerated parents have restricted economic resources available for their support. They may experience financial hardship that results from the loss of that parent's income. These children require support from the government, schools, and communities to serve their needs.

In the Philippines, the national and local government has initiated some programs of activities that are intended to help these children with incarcerated parents. With regards to dealing with drug addiction, there is an extensive drug education program that these children may have to undergo in order to understand drug abuse disease development and maintenance as well as the necessary efforts for successful ongoing treatment. It is also of great help to determine whether drug treatment services are accessible to the children and learn whether they obtained regular and consistent care. Furthermore, an information drive on mental health awareness is regularly conducted which would aim to understand children's symptoms, help a child find professional treatment, and break the mental health stigma that leaves a child suffering alone. The promotion of mental health awareness through an information drive would ensure that children feel supported throughout the entire program.

Specifically, the government's support, particularly at the level of the local government units (LGUs) to these children with incarcerated parents may include services such as after-school programs, community projects, and youth workshops that address the psychological effects of parental incarceration and seek to improve the community. The program encourages active skill-building. Children build resilience through academic, athletic, cultural, or other challenging activities. These activities teach children to develop problem-solving skills in a fun setting.

The presence of mentors can play an important role in addressing the needs of children of incarcerated parents. Mentors are caring adults who work with youth as positive role models in a formal or informal way, offering consistent guidance and support. Youth connect with mentors through youth-serving organizations, including community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, businesses, and after-school programs. Counseling services may be provided to the children of incarcerated mothers at both the school and community levels. Children can achieve a sense of security when they have an idea of what will and will not happen emotionally. Law enforcement, and child welfare practitioners, educators are often involved with the child before the correctional system is involved with the parent. We need enhanced and streamlined communication between the various government entities to maximize the potential to provide the child with whatever support is available. Schools have roles to play as far as children with incarcerated parents are concerned. These children may feel safest in the school environment and more comfortable talking about their home life, relationships with incarcerated parents, and quality of care in their parents' absences. Moreover, school

counselors can work with teachers and administrators to develop social justice curricula that promote positive interactions between children of incarcerated parents and other students. Developing social justice curricula will involve creating an environment that fosters various student learning styles and readjusts as student awareness and processing increase.

As a researcher and an educator, I see many reasons why students/children have to learn social studies. Students/children need an understanding of history, political science, culture, and all humanities to be able to understand why it is important to be a good citizen. How can we expect young people to contribute positively to society, engage in discourse, and thrive in a democratic society if they are not exposed to the topics and aspects of history and life that made society the way it is? Students should be exposed to cultures far beyond what they experience personally every day. Not every student has the opportunity to interact with other cultures on a daily basis.

As to implication on future researches, a few researches deal with interventions, may it be from the government or private institutions which are provided to victim children and which among these interventions have a great impact on the surviving stage of the children. Good research topics can be studied to focus on the various interventions to support the survival stages of children with incarcerated parents. This study may be in a form of qualitative-phenomenological research with participants coming from the law enforcement groups, social workers, educators other concerned parties involved in the implementation of interventions for children showing their best practices about the interventions and which interventions are found to be helpful in addressing the complex lives and circumstances of these families. Continued research will help policymakers and corrections practitioners better understand these complex and competing issues and make critical policy and program decisions to help children have positive life outcomes and avoid the criminal justice system.

6. Conclusion

As a researcher, I have seen how these children are affected by the absence of their mothers. The participants understand that the mother's role is to love her children with all her heart and to understand them. When a mother nurtures her children, she shows love and goodness. This is the prime reason why the participants feel so much loneliness and sadness about the loss of a mother. The mother maintains the physical aspects of her family life and also the intangible elements such as creating a lively environment for her husband and children for her entire life. Amidst all these tribulations, the participants are able to survive with the different coping mechanisms they used like staying positive and optimistic, looking for some enjoyment and fun by studying and maintaining good grades, and above all keeping the faith in our Almighty God. Prayer is the best weapon that brings peace of mind and upholds mental health.

As to the conduct of the study, my greatest realization as a researcher and as an educator is that I have an important role to perform especially in the concept of providing valuable information and discussion to all students about how to become better people

and citizens of our country. I am grateful to everyone who devotes significant parts of their lives to the development and practice of social science. Because working together, we have a tremendous capacity to improve the quality of life for our families, our communities, our nation, and people around the world.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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