



HOW CHILDREN FROM 10-18 GROUP AGES EXPERIENCE PARENTAL INCARCERATION?

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Abstract:

Parents are the ones who teach children how to get in touch with the inner and outer world. Mother is the interlocutor to the child's inner-emotional world, while father is considered as the interlocutor of the outside world. However, there is no cut-off in these processes, important elements of child development and transition among growing up and maturing steps. Imprisonment is considered by literature and studies developed as a factor that interferes in functional aspects of a family with multiple negative effects on the emotional and behavioral level, placing the child in an unforeseen, stressful, ambiguous and uncertain event related to their future. This study attempts to answer the question: "*How do the children experience the father's imprisonment?*" This is a qualitative study, with phenomenological methodologies. The instruments used are: hermeneutics, semi-structured interview and participant observation. The sample involved was $n = 27$ children of the age group 10-18, where 16 were female children and 11 males. Among the findings of this study are the lack of parenting and changing roles in the family, the problems in the school sphere versus co-perpetrators, the secrecy of imprisonment, self-isolation, guilt, mistrust of authority and the social system and lack of self-esteem. Among the limits of this study, we mention: lack of a control group and the involvement of two groups: those who have a parent in pre-trial and the group who has a parent in prison, small sample, the role of language and terms.

Keywords: emotional state, emotional problem, self-esteem, life cycles, need for social contact

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1. Introduction

Our parents are the first people we know and with whom we create our first bonds. They provide (of course there are exceptions) protection, security, love and food. But society is part of a world that is constantly changing. These changes include an increase in the probability that children will live without the proper supervision of an adult and home that are volatile and violent. Children may happen to break away from family members; the situation is difficult when these members are a mother or father. Relationships are important building blocks for our families, the community, the state and the country. Thus, relations are affected by the economy, society, and individual factors of people involved. Children learn how to build and protect relationships by seeing how their parents and family interact with each other and society. Being a member of a family is important because it helps the feelings of confirmation and in developing the sense of identity and self-esteem. Changes within the family affect all family members. Domestic cohesion and harmony are defined as important variables in the development of a positive self-image, minimizing traumas and good coercive skills to cope with various problems and stressors (Napoli, Kilbride & Tebbs, 1992).

Families are unique social systems where their members are based on biological, legal, emotional, geographical and historical combinations. In contrast to other systems, entering a family system is performed through birth, adoption, development, and care or marriage and members can leave this system through death. Family members fulfill some specific roles that in themselves carry tasks ranging from physiological, emotional, security, affiliation etc. (Carr, A. (2006). *Family Therapy-Concepts, Process and Practice*, 2nd Edition, Wiley Series in Clinical Psychology).

Everyone tries to meet their own needs and those of his or her child in the family. A family in which a parent's imprisonment has occurred need to analyze their level of needs. This is evident especially in cases where the inmate parent was the one who provided financial support, but was also the main emotional support, so family members remain at the level of physiological needs (Maslow's hierarchy needs). Consequently, when a family member leaves, children may feel lost in security. The family will need to reestablish and restore the sense of security. Children who have a parent in prison experience feelings of anxiety, shame, sadness, sense of loss, social isolation, and guilt (Hagan, 2000).

In this form, the quality of parent-child relationship is a major factor in determining the extent to which parental imprisonment affects the child. Experts have agreed that positive parent-child attachment is important and essential for parents to take on their role in helping children to cooperate with social issues. The absence of parent-child relationships can cause irreparable damage to family bonds; for this reason

face-to-face contacts and written communication are encouraged. Another important factor is the parent-child relationship before the imprisonment. If the pre-existing relationship between parent and child has been positive, retention of relationships through early visits becomes essential.

Therefore, contacts with the incarcerated parent can bring benefits in long periods of time. But for various reasons, children may have little or no contact with their parent in prison. Another side is that there may be children who show ambivalence and choose to forget the visits to protect themselves from further frustration. Consequently, they are not informed of the location and situation of the parent. Families may lie or cheat on parenting because they may feel ashamed of the family member's criminal behavior or because they may try to protect the child's psychological and emotional well-being. In cases where the child is young and fails to understand the concept of imprisonment, caretakers invent different stories to protect the child. Even when the goals of the caretakers are good, they lack the insight about the negative and dangerous consequences that the lie has to the child (Johnston, 1995).

Lies lead to confusion, lack of confidence and uncertainty. Children worry that their parent may be in a very dangerous situation or may feel afraid that they themselves may disappear in the unknown. The child fills the gaps by fantasizing over the missing parent, preparing himself for the frustration that may be caused by the return of the parent who may be failing to meet the child's expectations. Caretakers may decide not to tell the truth even because of the society in which they live, because of the social stigma on criminal behavior. Depending on the cultural factors, most children are aware of the stigma that society places on criminal behavior, especially when it comes to the mother. Children with imprisoned parents feel embarrassed and may come to the conclusion that they may be rejected by others because of their parents' behavior and actions. On the other hand, refusal is not an isolated behavior in society. Family and friends can reject these children, affecting furthermore the deterioration of their psycho-emotional state. Family members may feel angry with the law abuser because of their new position as a caretaker. To protect themselves, children tend to avoid rejection by drawing on themselves from important relationships. Young people can be self-centered and often can blame themselves for the criminal behavior of their parent. They feel especially guilty when a parent is being jailed for theft, drug sales, or prostitution in order to maintain the family. Children who carry this responsibility may have long-lasting psychological problems over time if their beliefs about persecution are persistent and are taken for granted. Misleading and rebellious behavior such as emotional departure from school, abstinence and drug abuse, dropping out and low academic performance, and behavioral problems can be encountered by young people while facing emotional and psychological problems. Children look for groups in which they

are accepted, but unfortunately, this can be an adverse influence for them. Usually, these groups join gangs and engage in criminal activities with a minimum duration of two years leading to involvement in the juvenile or adult justice system. A new generation of children is at risk of intergenerational imprisonment (McQuaide & Ehrenreich, 1998). According to Springer et al. (2000), children with imprisoned parents are 5-6 times more vulnerable to involvement in the criminal justice system. Literature suggests that there is a greater probability that some of these young people will have cognitive deviations, regressions or deviations in development and improper co-operation strategies (Child Welfare League of America, 1998). They may exhibit difficulties in overcoming developmental tasks such as affiliation, development of trust, autonomy, initiative, productivity, and identity development (Seymour, 1998).

Theoretically, when children have access to resources that help them to cooperate with developmental challenges, they successfully manage to develop these tasks. When challenges overcome the child's ability to cooperate, emotional survival becomes paramount, and the achievement of specific tasks is disrupted (Child Welfare League of America, 1998). Psychological effects can be long-lasting or immediate involving neurophysiological changes such as loss of speech after a parent ends up in jail. Children may suffer from depression, anxiety, and other serious emotional problems. Children of imprisoned parents reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder analogous to those of children whose parents died (Breen, 1995). There is space for discussion whether parental imprisonment may be more difficult to be overcome compared to death, as death is a natural process and defines an end, while separation due to imprisonment is ambiguous. Children are disoriented in their feelings and are uncertain of how to suffer the loss of a parent who is still alive but emotionally and physically absent (Breen, 1995). Researchers claim that when a child witness the arrest of a parent, is more willing to suffer from mental problems. They become confused or incapable to understand the consequences of arrest. Children may also have nightmares about the event. They may lose faith in the force of law and seeing it more as a threat than a protection for society (Miller, M, K. 2006. *The Impact of Parental Incarceration on Children: An Emerging Need for Effective Interventions*. *Adolescent Social Work Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 4). Relationships with the father are more based on activities and are characterized by instrumental involvement, from childhood games to watching television at the earliest age (Umberson, 2003). Although baby-to-child relationships have multiple dimensions, national research on the level of father's home involvement has found that children spend more time with their fathers in accompanying games (Yeung et al., 2001; see also Collins, and Russell, 1991; Pleck, 2010; McBride and Mills, 1993). Hosley and Montemayor's (1997) study on father-to-child relationships also shows that young people engage in more leisure activities with fathers than with their

mothers; watching TV is a typical example. In this way, Fritsch and Burkhead's (1981) have come to the conclusion that the lack of a disciplinary person affects behavioral problems, usually abuse of alcohol. Children's react to the situation they face in the only way they know, through their behavior. Excessive stress can cause stomach and headache, boredom and health problems. When the stress level reaches its maximum, it can cause feelings of fatigue, frustration, and / or sadness or impudence (Channing, 1994).

2. Methodology

This study will consider the impact of parental imprisonment on children. The methodology will aim to answer the question: How do children experience imprisonment of their father? How are the children reacting to the new life event in their family?

2.1 Research Project

The sample of this study is intentional, with qualitative data including Phenomenological Methodology, while data collection will include semi-structured interviews and participatory observation. Parts of this study were 27 children aged 10-18 years. Child's caretaker was asked for a written permission. They were also informed on the goals and focus of the study.

To become part of this study, these children were supposed to be in the situation in which their father was in the condition of lack of freedom. Parents should not have been divorced. They had to have lived in the same house before the moment of arrest. Families should have maintained contacts with the inmate.

In terms of gender, 16 of participants were girls and 11 boys. The geographic distribution of study cases included the cities: Elbasan, Durrës, Krujë, Laç, Lezha, Shkodër.

The methodology used is phenomenological method. The reason for selecting this method is because it provides the opportunity to understand better this issue which until now is little explored. This method allows us to understand and interpret the way facts and events are experienced and give us the ability to produce concrete practices that will help improve the treatment of children and their rights to have meetings with family members. Through this method, it is aimed at identifying issues and integrating them into a larger issue.

Methods for carrying out this study will include: Semiotic Methods, Hermeneutics: Understanding derived from the used figure.

2.1.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for the applicant to hear the participant in the study as they speak of an aspect of life or a certain experience. The questions used have served as an incentive to encourage the participant to speak. The focus of the questions has been focused on the life history of the subjects involved in the study, identification of support systems, the challenges they encountered (economic problems and emotional pain), and social exclusion.

Interviews were conducted in family environment as a facility for study subjects, and near the cities in which they lived. To establish relationship with the child it was also used drawing as a secondary tool in function of the interview.

Children are asked to draw a fruit they like most, then draw their family, and then interpret it (the drawings have not been analyzed in this study but are used as a secondary one). Four types of questions have been used questions to build the interview program: descriptive, structuring, contrasting and evaluating.

2.1.2 Recording and Transcription of the Interview

To perform a thorough analysis of the data, the recording of all sessions with children and then their transcription were used. Two other researchers separately revised interviews transcripts and independently encoded on the negative and positive experiences experienced by subjects in the study as a result of the imprisonment of one parent (father).

In total, the experience of parenting was measured by counting these changes. Positive changes were coded in cases where there have been improvements in the economic situation, improvement and sustainability in academic achievements, inclusion in social groups. Negative changes include economic problems, increasing family responsibilities in family responsibilities that do not belong to their age, isolation, social stigma, school dropout, and deterioration of learning outcomes, shame and anxiety, fear of perceiving the situation in which they are, confusion. After became the identification of the effects parent detention has on the children, was passed on to the content analysis of the topic used to give a wider picture of the changes that have taken place. This process included a review of key words related to the change (or lack thereof) on which the analysis was focused. While discussing and responding to other family members, the main focus of the study was how children were affected by the parent's imprisonment.

3. Study Findings

This study attempted to answer the research questions raised at the beginning of the study through key terms. Key words: emotional state, emotional problem, self-esteem, life cycles, need for social contact.

Participants in the study describe their experiences regarding the reality of having a father in jail and how this affects their life cycle. Overall, children describe moments of lack of parenting and that their lack of family has brought about changes in family roles, in which the largest family son together with the mother already held the role of the head of the family who cares for the other members and for the prisoner.

Also, an important focus on the interview with the child has been their school life and relationships with peers. Participants in the study identified the element of being told about their father, but even in these cases they felt shame and the weight of being different as they often perceived from other children that they were being seen differently as they repeatedly ask why their father they did not appear in the school to accompany or take them after completing the class schedule. Under the perception of stigma one of the cases of study had dropped out of school (girl); 5 (five) cases kept the family situation secret and reserved in their dealings with them. The rest of the cases avoided contact with peers by saving up to two friends.

The quality of parent-child relationships was a determining factor on how the child perceived the imprisonment. The relationships that were qualified by the children as positive were kept later through the visits that the children did with their family members to the inmate parent. Visits and contact by phone calls were positively felt by children and facilitated them from the feelings of fatherlessness.

While in cases where the parent was still a pre-detainee, the visits ended in tears, feelings of helplessness to help the parent get out of the closed-ended situation; feelings of iniquity expressing disbelief to the justice system (in cases where they considered that arrest and deprivation of liberty was committed unjustly), as well as openly expressed hate of the Order Forces, especially in the cases in which the children were present at the moment of arrest. This is expressed with hostile feelings toward employees with uniform of the Institution in which the parent is kept confined, calling them bad and fearsome.

Likewise, the presence at the moment of the child's arrest was associated with the breakdown of the sleep cycle, deteriorating crying, and abandonment of games and feelings of guilty.

Children avoid contact with the outside world but also with family members, closing in on themselves. Often after returning from school, they prefer to stay in their room and away from other family members who can be found at home.

Guilty feelings also relate to prison as an institution. In the comments of the children, the prison is considered a bad place, which does not belong to the territory of Albania. There are two concepts that pertain to Kleinian theory: a good parent who has no defect that cannot be and remain with them and the institution (prison) that keeps them away from their beloved and desired person.

The child is in the dilemma of what is good and bad. Feelings are ambiguous because there is a contradiction that what needs to be fair does not appear as such, rather it appears as punitive, and their beloved object is faced with a violation that they cannot accept.

Some of the children have felt ambiguous feelings about their parent, initially identifying the positive and negative chances mixed with guilty feelings. In families in which the inmate parent is seen as the perfect image from which the model is to be taken and should serve as an example, this image has collapsed and children have experienced frustration and disillusionment with his figure. The paternal figure in this case is depreciated and is considered a figure from which it will have to be ashamed and that will affect its relations with others. They have been in rebellion against the other parent, and have questioned the family system together with its rules.

Together with them, the child doubts about the social system in which is part. The child feels betrayed, deceived, abandoned by the person who should have a protective function for the family. The child questions the whole social system, based on the feelings of distrust that arise from the new situation in their family. On the other hand, the child feels the guilt for his/her own feelings. It feels different from the others. Feelings of guilt and shame are closely related to one another. One of their determining factors was the criminal offense charged by the parent.

In cases where the parent was accused of acts that had defended the "family honor" or in the family's defense, the feelings of shame were minimized and the guilty feelings of failure to succeed in releasing the parent were strengthened. Particularly, these feelings were strengthened in the case of male children who perceived that in the absence of the father they were male family figures and, more or less, the holders of the "weight" of what happened in the family taking on the role of the governing authority. The new situation puts them in the face of economic problems. Precisely the inmate family was the main and / or sole holder of the household's economy.

Relying on Albanian cultural factors, some children experience perceived stigma in their school premises, their neighbors, and the group of friends they spend time with. Children with imprisoned parents are easily identified by the community. This in turn brings problems with school attendance as well as meeting with parents. These children are forced on certain days of the week on being absent in school for visiting their father. This difference is noted by their friends who in certain cases ask about the reason of the

absence, but also in the conflicts and quarrels that can be caused among children and used as a weapon to hurt their situation.

In this form, children are stigmatized not for the qualities they possess personally but because of the connection, they have with the person who directly suffers the stigma. All this process is accompanied by determining negative qualities such as: dangerous people, weak moral strength; violation of community rules in which he lives, idle.

Children worry about how parents and themselves will be seen from the community they live in. The child begins to experience this as a secret that should not go out of their family and should not be known by their school friends.

In this form is directly affected the image of the self. Self-assessment is a socio-psychological construct that assesses an individual's attitudes and perceptions of how he sees himself, but also of perceiving others about the way we see them. Social isolation and stigma affect negatively the self-esteem of children. On the other hand, the inability to help a parent makes these children feel bad and worthless. Children compare themselves to other children who are not experiencing the moment of family crisis.

Children appreciate themselves through interaction with others. Children learn to see themselves in the eyes of others, or as others see them. If important persons do not think in a highly valued way to them, they will begin to think in a devastating way to themselves.

This action is termed "reflection of the assessment" of self-esteem. High self-esteem is related to the possibility of adapting to the environment in which it is lived, positive emotions, personal autonomy, androgynous, internal locus of control, awareness, setting appropriate goals, fulfilling personal engagements, positive response to criticism and negative feedback, properly managing stress, and having low levels of criticism of yourself and others. Low self-esteem is related to the inability or poor ability to adapt; various mental illnesses, including depression, anxiety, drug abuse, eating disorders, difficulties in establishing and maintaining lasting relationships, poor management of stress, poor functioning of the immune system under stress conditions.

Some of the children in the study justified their poor school outcomes from the expectations that others have for them. The family focusing entirely on the inmate's family does not pay attention to the child's, attention which helps the child to look ahead and to succeed.

4. Discussions

The situation of parent detention negatively affects many aspects of child's life and development. Affecting the social life of the child by leading it to radicalization due to social stigma and indirectly to low self-esteem because of the inability to come to terms. Shame and guilt are feelings that associate each other. Children are often faced with the situation in which they have to take responsibility for the family and provide economic resources for survival of the family.

Of the cases included in the study, all children were aware of the parent's situation, but not everyone was aware of the offense for which their father was accused or sentenced.

The criminal offense also plays an important role in responding and attending children to the parent. Offences that are considered as shameful acts are accompanied by children's contempt; also acts such as theft are considered as shame and associated with the child's devaluation.

5. Ethical Aspects

While conducting this study, protecting potential participants was one of the key points. Psychological well-being and the preservation of the dignity of the participants go along with the study process. The ethical principles from which this study was conducted were:

1. Information. Inform the study participants on the study procedure and allow them to take part in the study before the data collection begins.
2. Avoiding fraud. Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study (together with the caretaker they lived with, and the parent was also informed).
3. Right to leave the study. Participants had the right to leave the study when they wanted without fear of being penalized.
4. After the data collection, the participants (their caretakers) were fully informed of the findings of the study.
5. Maintaining Confidentiality (as a very important element, reinforced and by the fact that some of the cases included in the study were under the family protection program).
6. All young people were given written permission to the parent or caretaker with whom they live.

6. Study Limit

The design of this study had its limits. One of the limits is the small champion. The age of the participants in the study was also wide, which does not allow us to look into development issues in detail.

Also, for reasons of convenience, the study included two groups: children with convicted parents and children with pre-detainees (pending a decision by the Court). It would be reasonable to channel and narrow the scope of the study to produce results that are represented by a category.

The phenomenological study limits are related to the role of language as the analysis supports the representative validity of the language. Difficulties were also faced in describing their experience of using the language in such a way as to describe their physical and emotional experience.

In some of the interviewees, there was also the primary caretaker who made the translation possible because some of the children were involved in the family protection program and have been away from Albania at an early age and for an average time of 5 (five) years.

Another difficulty encountered during this study has been in terms of language terms. The same concept appeared in different meanings for all respondents. This limit is due to the fact that the study sample was distributed in different cities of Albania. It was attempted to overcome through emphasis on meaningfulness rather than lexical comparability. In this form, it was necessary to understand what the interviewee meant to be compared to how he / she chose to do so. Also note that language cannot be indexed; which means that the meaning of words depends on the context in which they are taught.

It would also be reasonable for the study to extend over a longer period of time to see the effects in the long term.

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