

# The Socio-Economic and Psycho-Social Experiences of Children of the Incarcerated Parents in Lesotho

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**Abstract** It is irrefutable that the incarceration of parents disrupts the normal upbringing of children and existing relationships between children and their parents. Apart from that, most caregivers struggle to meet the various needs of children due to the added burden on their shoulders. This study sought to examine children's experiences by their gender, looking at how the incarceration of parents affected the children socially, economically and psychologically. The study was conducted in the Maseru District of Lesotho. Research relied primarily on data gathered from interviews with 49 children of incarcerated parents and 13 caregivers. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The study unearthed that the problems confronting children were centred around shortage of finance which led to 83.7% of the children having inadequate clothes, 83.7% lacking uniforms and 40.8% of them being unable to access health facilities when sick, among others. The majority, 81.63%, were angry at their incarcerated parents. The main recommendation was that safety nets need to be improved to cushion the children of the incarcerated parents as well as their caregivers.

**Keywords** children · incarceration · incarcerated parents · caregivers

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## Introduction

The incarceration of parents invokes a need to find out the impact it has on the children left behind. Parental incarceration seems to be on the rise in Lesotho. According to the Lesotho Mounted Police Service monthly reports from July to October 2011, there has been an incredible increase in crime commission by both single and married parents. When parents are incarcerated, it follows that there are children who will be affected by that incarceration. In the USA, national observations indicate that the number of American children who have a parent in prison exceeds 1.7 million (Glaze and Maruschak, 2008). Similarly, Christian (2009) found out that, in 2007, slightly more than 1.7 million children under age 18 had a parent in state or federal prison, representing 2.3 percent of the total U.S. child population.

The number of children with a father in prison increased from 881,500 in 1991 to more than 1.5 million in 2007, a 77 percent increase, and during that time, the number of children with a mother in prison increased by 131 percent, from 63,900 to 147,400 (Christian, 2009). Furthermore, Murphey and MaeCooper (2015) note that the majority of incarcerated parents (99 percent) are fathers, adding that the number of women in prison and their percentage of the incarcerated population have both been growing. Conflict and antagonism towards mothers significantly predicted children's low pro-social behavior (Rinat, 2017). It points to a growing need to investigate the experiences of children of incarcerated parents.

This study's main objective was to find out the psycho-social and economic experiences of children of incarcerated parents in the Maseru district. This was done by looking at, *inter alia*, comparisons of children's experiences by their gender and how the length of incarceration of parent affected them socially, economically and psychologically. The study also investigated the children's reaction towards the incarcerated person in relation to the various crimes committed. Additionally, it looked at whether or not their spiritual needs were being met and their social experiences with regard to the different living arrangements after their parents' incarceration. Besides highlighting the challenges faced by the children, the study went further to bring to the fore their coping mechanisms as well as the nature of assistance they were or not getting from their surroundings.

## Literature review

The incarceration of parents affects children in numerous ways. In the United States, the incarceration of a parent affects millions of children and it is most common among children who face other barriers to opportunity, such as those who are black, live in low-income families, or have parents with low education (Murphey and MaeCooper, 2015). Christian (2009) discerns that the arrest of parents can be highly traumatic to children and their dependents, yet most police departments have no protocols to protect them, explain to them what is happening and ensure that they are properly cared for after parents' arrest. It can be added here that more often than not, in developing countries, police disregard human rights when making arrests. During arrests, a lot of force is usually used and children and dependents are not taken into consideration. Christian (2009) observes that at times, children and dependents just find their relatives missing

from home because more frequently there is lack of information concerning their parents' whereabouts.

Parental incarceration generates a wide range of problems for the child, from economic to psychological (The Joint State Government Commission, 2011; Christian, 2009). As a result, this leads to poor performance in their studies because of inadequate time and support on their studies. Furthermore, chances of sexual abuse from either their new caregivers and/or from the community members are high. Both sexual and physical abuses do not only have immediate effects but also have lifetime impacts. In Lesotho this is exacerbated by lack of safety nets, for instance governmental institutions, to accommodate such vulnerable children.

Geller (2009) carried out a population-based longitudinal family survey with a sample of 4, 895 children of incarcerated parents. The study revealed that children of incarcerated parents face more economic and residential instability than their counterparts; with sons of incarcerated fathers displaying more behaviour problems than girls. According to Johnson and Waldfogel (2002), the United States Census conducted a national inmates' survey using a sample of 6, 870 fathers and 2, 047 mothers who were incarcerated in federal prison. This survey revealed that children from the ages of 2 to 6 years were found to have impaired parent-child bonding, inappropriate separation, anxiety, and impaired socio-emotional development.

The Joint State Government Commission (2011) states that the USA compiled a report on the effects of incarceration on children and observed that incarceration of either the father or the mother usually causes major negative economic, social and psychological consequences for the child. It ought to be added that most of these repercussions have life-long impact on the children. The Joint State Government Commission further notes that while the initial arrest causes nightmares and flashbacks in young children, long term psychological effects may include insecure attachments; internalizing problems such as anxiety, withdrawal, hyper-vigilance, depression, shame and guilt; and externalizing behaviors such as anger, aggression and hostility towards caregivers and siblings. The children of incarcerated parents are also more likely to find themselves incarcerated eventually, repeating the cycle (Anderson, 2017).

Arrest and imprisonment of a parent often means loss of income for the family (The Joint State Government Commission, 2011; Dennison, Foley and Stewart, 2005). This loss creates a substantial burden on families that are already at the lower end of the financial spectrum. Parke and Clarke-Stewart (2003) highlight that some scholars and practitioners argue that losing the mother to prison is more traumatic for the child, particularly because it often involves a change in caregivers, moving to a different household and a different school. The changes in accommodation arrangements and caregivers tend to have a psychological impact on the children.

Kinner, Alati, Najman and Williams (2007) conducted a longitudinal study of mothers and their children using a sample of 7, 223 live singleton babies, followed up from 3 to 5 days, 6 months, 5 and 14 years after birth. Kinner et al (2007) unearthed that paternal imprisonment was associated with self-reported internalizing for girls only; and both paternal arrest and paternal imprisonment were associated with alcohol use at age 14, for both boys and girls. Likewise, Wildeman (2010) conducted a longitudinal birth cohort study with a sample size of 4,898 children in Britain on paternal incarceration and children's physically aggressive behaviours. The results of the study suggest that paternal incarceration may be associated with increases in physical aggression for boys and decreases for girls. Apart from that, the stigma of having a

father incarcerated might also harm children as it increases stress and depression (Wildeman, 2010).

## Methodology

This section entails the study site, population of the study, sample, sampling procedure, data collection techniques, how data was analyzed and the ethics that were observed.

### The study site

The study site was Maseru. This is one of the ten districts of Lesotho. It has urban and rural areas. Maseru has a population of 118,355. The sample size was drawn from local communities in Maseru district namely, Roma, Nazareth, Thaba-Bosiu, Mazenod, Matsieng and Thuathe as shown below.

**Table 1** Study participants by gender and their villages

Villages	Children		Caregivers		Incarcerated persons	
	Boys	Girls	Males	Females	Males	Females
Maseru local	11	10	1	2	17	2
Roma	3	7	0	2	5	0
ThabaBosiu	2	0	0	1	3	1
Mazenod	0	0	0	0	1	0
Nazareth	2	5	0	1	3	1
Thuathe	2	2	0	1	2	0
Matsieng	2	3	2	3	2	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>4</b>

### Study population

All children between 6 and 18 years of age whose parents were incarcerated and residing in Maseru district, in the lowlands of Lesotho. In addition, all caregivers of children of incarcerated parents.

### Sample and selection procedures

The sample of the incarcerated parents was drawn from the 34 males and 4 females from both the male and female Correctional Services in Maseru. The rationality for going to the correctional institutions was that there was no list of children of the incarcerated parents. The incarcerated parents were not interviewed. From the incarcerated parents, the researchers got permission and the directions to the children of the incarcerated parents. The study employed multi-stage cluster sampling with its first cluster being male and female prisons. From these clusters the study had a list of children. Further clusters were the communities where children

resided. Lastly, the study opted to utilize stratified sampling to select children for the study; hence, both males and females were represented. Thus, the study participants were composed of 49 children and 13 caregivers.

### **Methods of data collection**

The research employed quantitative research approach with a survey as the design. According to Babbie (2010), quantitative research approach is the numerical representation and manipulation of observation for the purpose of describing and explaining the phenomenon that those observations reflected. This approach allows for generalization and emphasizes the quantification of the phenomenon under study. However, Sarantakos (2003) highlights that the quantitative research favors the more restrictive option precisely because it does not allow for flexibility and freedom in the research process. Questionnaires were utilized to collect data and were administered face-to-face.

### **Data analysis techniques**

De Vos et al (2005) noted that the aim of analysis is to compress data to an intelligible and interpretable form so that the relations of research problems can be studied, tested and conclusion drawn. The research applied quantitative data analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized to analyze the data which was then presented in the form of tables. Salient features depicted in the data presentation were then described and explained. This entailed univariate, bivariate and multi-variate analyses.

### **Ethical considerations**

The study observed a number of considerations which include anonymity and confidentiality. Consent forms were given to the incarcerated parents to get approval to interview their children. The consent forms were also used to locate children's places of residence and as evidence that researchers had been given permission by the incarcerated parents to interview their children. Caregivers also signed consent forms prior to being interviewed. Researchers first explained the aim of the research and how data was to be collected. This was done to observe the social sciences' research ethics of informed consent.

### **Results and discussion**

This section involves the demographic information of children and also of the caregivers, children's socio-economic and psycho-social experiences. Finally, it dwells on visitation issues.

#### **Demographic information of children and caregivers**

This section entails the descriptive statistics of the children of the incarcerated parents. It

outlines the ages, sex, educational statuses of these children. It also presents the demographic information of their caregivers. The ages of children of the incarcerated parents ranged from 6 to 18 years, hence the range was 12. On average, the children were aged 13.2 years and the standard deviation was 3.8. The distribution of children by gender depicts that out of 49 children, there were more girls 27 (55.1%) than boys 22 (44.9%). Table 2 below gives descriptive statistics of the children of the incarcerated parents regarding their educational statuses.

**Table 2** Educational statuses of children of the incarcerated parents

Educational Status	Children	
	Frequency	Percent
Primary	20	40.8
Secondary	15	30.6
High School	13	26.5
Tertiary	0	0.0
Never attended	1	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>

Most of the children 20 (40.8%) were at primary school, 15 (30.6%) of them were in secondary level followed by 13 (26.5%) who were in high school. Only 1 (2.0%) had never attended school. None of the children were at tertiary level since children at this level are usually above the age of interest for this study. The study unearthed that almost all the children attended and some were attending school with the exception of one. The other significant observation was that the rate of school attendance was dwindling as children progressed to higher grades. This can be partly explained by the existence of the Free Primary Education Policy in Lesotho. When primary school is free, the tendency is most children attend school and they would even want to proceed to secondary as depicted in Table 2. Most of those with secondary education dropped out of school in their first and second year due to financial constraints. To note also is that the majority of the dropouts were boys. The same is true for those with high school level; they dropped out of school when the parents were incarcerated. Thus, in the absence of the incarcerated parents, boys sometimes take over the responsibility of tending animals. Thus, there is need for a policy that addresses challenges faced by children of the incarcerated parents.

Bowen (1971) states that a family is a system in which each member has a role to play, consequently, the boy children of the incarcerated parents had to take over the role of looking after animals. Since some of the incarcerated parents were employed before their incarceration, it is likely that they were able to employ herd-boys before their incarceration.

### Caregivers of children of incarcerated parents

The study looked at the characteristics of the children's caregivers. Table 3 below presents the nature of caregivers of children of the incarcerated parents.

**Table 3** The caregivers of children of the incarcerated parents

The Guardians	Frequency	Percent
Mothers	4	30.8
Uncles	1	7.7
Aunts	1	7.7
Maternal grandparents	3	23.1
Paternal grandparents	1	7.7
Self	1	7.7
Good Samaritans	2	15.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100</b>

Among the caregivers, four (30.8%) of them were mothers of the children of the incarcerated parents, clearly demonstrating that the majority of the incarcerated parents were males. Some of the children were taken care of by their grandparents either paternal or maternal. There were 23% of maternal grandparents and 7.7% of paternal grandparents. These results are consistent with those of Loureiro (2010) which revealed that most of the caregivers were mothers and grandmothers. This speaks volumes about the role of women in child rearing. Furthermore, 7.7% of the caregivers were children who were looking after themselves. This suggests that some of the children of the incarcerated parents had no one to care for them hence experienced enormous economic experiences. This is also shown by the presence of good Samaritans who constituted 7.7% of the caregivers. It is apparent that due to their pre-mature age, many of the children had not started working; consequently, it was difficult for them to support themselves economically.

Some of the caregivers as shown on the table were not relatives of the children and it added shock and trauma to the children. Sometimes the children were not even used to living with their extended family members, which ultimately complicated their situation. The study discovered that most of the caregivers were unemployed due to their low level of education hence a possible reason for not affording to meet children's basic needs. It was further revealed that most of the caregivers only engaged in piece jobs and the income they were getting was inadequate to cater for children of the incarcerated parents' needs.

The 7.7% of children who were looking after themselves indicated that they were coping through selling vegetables which took from their gardens, peaches from their yards and sweeping brooms made from local grass. Apart from that, they were coping through the assistance they were getting from the relatives and community members. Their relatives could not absorb them into their families due to shortage of houses. Again, the children did not want to leave their houses vacant fearing that the houses would be vandalised or depreciate in value. Even though residential care institutions are considered a last resort in caring for children in need of care, there is need for the government to ensure the wellbeing of those children who fend for themselves upon their parents' incarceration.

### **Children's socio-economic experiences**

With regard to the school requirements, out of the 49 children, most of them 49% lacked school uniform, 31% were in short of exercise books and pens and 12% lacked textbooks. Only 8%

had all school requirements. The challenges faced by the children emanated from lack of financial support from incarcerated parents as well as the unemployed caregivers. This usually contributes to low performance at school and dropping from school for some.

With regard to the children's coping mechanisms, 12% of them borrow textbooks from their friends and classmates. Those without adequate exercise books were coping through the use of one big exercise book or two averagely big exercise books for all the subjects. Since most of them did not have money to buy books, they pointed out that they sometimes do manual jobs during weekends and school holidays for some affluent community members who would then buy them school requirements.

As for whether the children of the incarcerated parents had enough clothes or not, the results show that of the 49 children, most of them 84% did not have enough clothes. Only 16% of children had enough clothes. Again, this challenge has its roots in the shortage of money due mainly to the absence of parents. The coping mechanisms for those without enough clothes involved going to church where they would be assisted with church leaders and other congregants. However, there were some who could not be brave enough to go to church without proper attire. Almost all of the children attested to the use of second hand clothes from either relatives or community members.

The study divulged that the majority of children of the incarcerated parents experienced financial constraints and hence did not have basic needs. Of the 49 children, 41% of them were not able to access health facilities when sick. This typically has detrimental effects on their health, school performance, and psychological wellbeing. The study also depicts that 41% of the children of the incarcerated parents sometimes access health facilities when sick. These children were still vulnerable to poor health since there was a probability of them failing to get medical treatment when it was needed. Only 18% of the children were able to access health facilities. The children who could not access health were making use of natural remedies and local herbs to cure minor ailments such as coughing and common cold. Families and communities need to be capacitated through projects in order to cope during eventualities like incarceration.

Table 4 below gives information on sex of children by whether they attend school.

**Table 4** Sex of children by whether they attend school

Sex of children	Whether they attend school	
	Yes	No
Boys	31	14
Girls	45	10

It is clear that educationally, girls were not significantly disadvantaged since more girls (45%) than boys (31%) attended school. Only 10% of girls did not attend school whereas 14% of boys did not attend school. Again, this reflects that boys usually opt to tend animals when financial challenges strike families; or just decide to drop out. However, this is contrary to most African societies where girls will not be given an opportunity to remain in school on the assumption that they will get married and leave their biological homes to join their matrimonial homes.

Table 5 below reveals the multivariate analysis of the duration of the incarcerated parents, school performance and sex of children of the incarcerated parents.



**Table 5** Duration of incarceration by school performance and sex of children of the incarcerated

Duration of incarceration	Good		Poor		Not applicable		Total
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	
0 – 5 years	0 (0.0)	3 (6.1)	3 (6.1)	1 (2.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7
5.1 – 10 years	1 (2.0)	3 (6.1)	4 (8.2)	1 (2.0)	3 (6.1)	1 (2.0)	13
10.1 – 15 years	1 (2.0)	4 (8.2)	5 (10.2)	3 (6.1)	6 (12.2)	3 (6.1)	22
15.1 – 20 years	0 (0.0)	1 (2.0)	1 (2.0)	1 (2.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (8.2)	7
20.1 – 25 years	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>49</b>

Generally, more girls were performing better than boys. The presence of mothers and grandmothers in girls' lives seem to have had a contribution to this since it appeared to stabilize their lives. It also reveals the different outcomes when fathers are incarcerated and when mothers remain as sole caregivers. Apart from that, it could be due to the fact that there were also more girls still in school than boys. The above table demonstrates that of the 49 children, 6% of the children whose parents' duration of incarceration ranging from 0 to 5 years passed the tests they wrote compared to 0.0% of boys who did not pass their tests. In the same duration of incarceration, more boys 6% performed poorly than girls 2.0%.

Thus, despite the short period of incarceration, poor performance was still evident. All children whose parents had been sentenced from 0 to 5 years attended school. Surprisingly, 6% of girls whose parents had been incarcerated for 5 to 10 years had good performance compared to only 2.0% of boys. Contrary, 4 (8.2) of boys whose parents had been incarcerated for 5-10 years performed poorly as opposed to girls 2.0%. Like the previous explanation, it might be that girls were not significantly affected by their incarcerated fathers since their mothers were around to support them. The same scenario was exhibited for parents who were incarcerated for 10 - 15 years. It also suggests that in this particular scenario, girls seemed to heal faster than boys with time.

However, 2.0% of both boys and girls whose parents had been incarcerated for 15- 20 years performed poorly. The non-applicable variable stood for those who were not attending school. More boys 10 (16.3%) than girls 7 (18.4%) were not attending school. The study unfolded that the duration of incarceration of parents had profound effects on the school performance of children of the incarcerated. Besides that, the research uncovered that a bigger number of boys failed their test compared to a small number of girls. The incarceration seemed to weigh more on boys than girls. It is probable that girls were able to express their feelings so they could easily be helped psychologically. For boys, it is conceivable that they bottled their feelings; hence, it impacted negatively on their school performance. With regard to boys, the community could not assist boys since they were not opening up to the community about the challenges they were encountering.

Table 6 below presents children's family sizes, employment statuses of the incarcerated parents before their incarceration and whether children had enough clothes.

**Table 6** Children's family sizes, employment statuses of the incarcerated parents before their incarceration and whether children had enough clothes

Family Size	Not employed before incarceration		Employed before incarceration		Total
	Had enough	Did not have enough	Had enough	Did not have enough	
1 – 3	0 (0.0)	4 (8.2)	3 (6.1)	0 (0.0)	7
4 – 6	0 (0.0)	10 (20.4)	2 (4.1)	5 (10.2)	17
7 – 10	0 (0.0)	18 (36.7)	0 (0.0)	7 (14.3)	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>49</b>

There was an association between whether children had enough clothes and the source of income for the entire family. The research divulged that more children of incarcerated parents who lived in big family sizes had the worst economic constraints, particularly of those whose incarcerated parents were not working prior to their incarceration. What is evident from the above table is that when family sizes are big, it poses a huge challenge in providing for children's clothes despite the employment status. Children from family sizes of 3 children and above did not have enough clothes whether or not the parents were employed before incarceration. Smaller families reflected a different scenario in the sense that 11% of children of family sizes ranging from one to three whose incarcerated parents were not employed before being incarcerated did not have enough clothes compared to 8.6% children who did not have enough clothes yet their parents were working before being incarcerated. For low income earners, it is usually cheaper buying clothes for a few people than buying for many children particularly for poor people.

It emerged that the burden was cumbersome for caregivers to care for the children of the incarcerated parents. Effects of a family member's imprisonment on children include deterioration in behaviour, in physical and mental health, and in social and financial circumstances (Loureiro, 2010). It was established that some of the children of the incarcerated parents were not secured by any government safety nets hence experiencing serious economic constraints. For the incarcerated parents who were informally employed prior to their incarceration, the study found that the majority of the children were no longer benefiting from those strategies; hence they ended up having inadequate clothes. There is need for the improvement of safety nets to cushion the children of the incarcerated parents as well as their caregivers.

### Children's psycho-social experiences

The crimes committed by the incarcerated parents included theft, robbery, murder, attempted murder, assault, rape, arson and kidnapping. There was a relationship between the nature of crimes committed by the incarcerated parents and how children felt. It emerged that the majority of children 40 (82%) were angry at the incarcerated parents because of the nature of crimes they committed. This finding relates to the manner in which the community members viewed the crime or how the crime affected them personally. This could be because such crimes were considered despicable by most people and left a stigma on children. Research indicates

that actions by any individual family member will influence all others in the family and their reactions will have a reciprocal effect on the individual (Corey 2005, Shlafer, and Poehlmann, 2010). Besides that, Westen (1996) and Sheafor and Horejsi (2006) point out that an individual is part of a system, a group with interdependent parts and what happens in one part of the system influences what happens in others.

The other explanation as to why the children felt angry might be that these crimes attracted longer sentences which meant more challenges for those children. Avoiding their incarcerated parents was a coping mechanism for those children who were angry at their parents. For the 4% children who were depressed, it was because most of them revealed that they considered the incarcerated parents as trustworthy and so they were depressed upon hearing that they had committed crimes that warranted prison sentences. This suggests that they felt betrayed by their parents whom they trusted very much.

Other children (10%) were indifferent towards the nature of crimes committed by the incarcerated parents. This applied mostly to those children who indicated that they were benefitting from the crimes. The crimes would have been committed on other people outside the family so it did not have a bearing on the children, hence they were unmoved by the nature of crime. However, two (4%) felt relieved and these were the ones who felt the pinch of the crimes committed by the incarcerated parents such as rape. Thulstrup and Karlsson (2017) found that some of the children preferred to maintain a distance from the imprisoned parents.

Regarding church attendance, more girls (30, 61%) than boys (eight, 16%) attended, while two (4%) girls and nine boys (18%) did not attend church. Overall, girls attended church more often than boys. Apart from that, most of the girls benefitted spiritual support from the church services as opposed to boys. For girls, they found healing and comfort at church. On the other hand, boys had a tendency of bottling up anger and loneliness. This could be attributed to the different modes of socialization imparted on boys and girls. It was also found that boys did not attend church more often because they tended livestock. Moreover, the study discovered that three of the children (5%) were not attending church because they did not have smart shoes and clothes. They felt ashamed going to church with torn clothes; hence, they decided not to attend church at all. This is a widespread belief that one should wear their best when going to church to worship. As mentioned earlier, some of these children sometimes received some second hand from relatives and community members. It was only in those circumstances that they would then be able to attend church.

Among those not attending church, five (10%) cited long distances between their homes and church as a contributing factor. They used to go to church by either cars or taxis with their parents but now their caregivers were not in a position to do the same. The other reason mentioned for not attending church was that they were shy due to the nature of crimes committed by their incarcerated parents. It is evident therefore that actions by any individual family member influence all others in the family. It is also possible that the spiritual-being of children was negatively affected by crimes their parents had committed. Unfortunately, there was no solution for children who were not able to go to church due to nature of crimes committed by their incarcerated parents.

The above findings can be viewed against the background of attachment by gender. It is likely that girls were more affected by their parents' detachments than boys. The absence of the attachment figures usually affects a child psychologically. This is supported by argued that

separation distress occurs when the child is separated from the caregiver (Bowlby and Ainsworth, 2012; Milne, 2003; Mischel, 2005). Furthermore, Western (1996) points out that an individual is part of a system, a group with interdependent parts and what happens in one part of the system influences what happens in others. The research also established that girls and boys developed friendship at church equally. The imbalances that resulted when parents were taken away forced children to create bonds with church members.

There was also a relationship between nature of crime committed by the incarcerated parents and how community members treated the children since their parents' incarceration. For those children whose parents had murdered (41%), raped (20%), and robbed (18%), community members were reported to be shunning as well as physically and emotionally abusing the children. Concerning stock theft, some of the children (10%), were not treated well. Possibly, the incarcerated parents had stolen within their localities. In cases like these, children indicated that they would avoid going to the homes of those shunning them. The remaining children (10%) found the communities being indifferent to them for crimes such as car hijacking, arson, kidnapping and assault. Community members were not concerned because the crimes might have been committed to the elite or the crime scenes were elsewhere.

All of the children alluded to the fact that they did not have access to social workers in their places of residence. This absence of social workers is often detrimental to the children's psychological development. Social workers help children to unpack their experiences and ultimately cope with their current situations. In this regard, girls were opening up to their caregivers for support. In order to holistically address the emotional challenges faced by children of the incarcerated parents, as well as caregivers and the community at large, there is need to employ more social workers at the correctional institutions. There is need for concerted effort to safeguard the rights of children of incarcerated parents and to improve their wellbeing.

## Visitation

The majority of the children 35 (71%) did not visit their incarcerated parents. This might be linked to the fact that most of the caregivers were unemployed, hence could not afford to foot transport costs. This made it impossible for the children to keep in contact with their parents despite the right of children to interact with their parents regardless of where parents are. Besides that, some children did not visit their incarcerated parents because of bitterness caused by the nature of crime committed by their incarcerated parents and to avoid opening of healed wounds. The study also unraveled that some of the incarcerated parents abused the children so eight of the children (16%) did not want to meet the incarcerated parents again. This seems to suggest that the children felt relieved that the incarcerated parents who were abusive were incarcerated. Since the visitation time was too short for them, children indicated that they made sure that they would arrive at the correctional services on time in order to utilize each minute. However, they pointed out that other relatives and church members also visited their parents hence they would end up spending very limited time with their parents.

What also came to light was that children visited their incarcerated parents to address nostalgia and maintaining family bonds. Out of the 14 children who visited their parents, the majority of the children 13 (93%), indicated that there was no privacy during their visitation to

their incarcerated parents. They cited that there were no private rooms to have conversations with their incarcerated parents. All of the children found the visiting period too short for them. The visiting period only lasts for thirty minutes. The children highlighted that they preferred to use that time to tell their parents what will be happening at home, at school, their fears, needs and expectations. Furthermore, they needed to be cuddled by their parents, something they used to enjoy before the incarceration. All this made time inadequate for the children.

The Joint State Government Commission (2011) also noted the importance of visitation opportunities and suggested that a number of private organizations have to develop visiting programs to facilitate contact between children and incarcerated parents, for instance mother-daughter troop meetings at the correctional facilities. Even though DuBois and Miley (2005) stress the importance of social workers in dealing with the vulnerable groups, all of the children 14 (100%), indicated that they did not have access to social workers when they visited their parents in prison. There is need for the placement of more social workers at correctional services.

## **Conclusion**

What came out of the study is that children of the incarcerated parents were undergoing various social and economic challenges in the absence of the incarcerated parents. In the process, their rights and basic needs were being tempered with. Lack of safety nets from the government was a major obstacle encountered by the children's caregivers. Besides that, most of the caregivers were unemployed hence it was difficult for them to provide for the children of the incarcerated parents. The findings brought an understanding of what transpires when members of families are taken away from the family system and the effect it had on their children. The study also untangled how children of the incarcerated parents were affected by the separation and the challenges involved in being cared for by different caregivers and getting used to other attachment figures. In addition, the study unearthed that for most of the children of the incarcerated parents their right to education was observed since 99% of them had an opportunity to go to school at some point. It is likely due to enforcement of Free Compulsory Primary Education.

The length of incarceration had a bearing on children's performance at school. As for some children, the longer sentences of their incarcerated parent meant poorer school performance for them. With regard to going to church, some children were no longer doing so due to either lack of money or fear that it would open wounds for them since church reminded them of their parents who used to accompany them there. For those who were attending church, they benefitted enormously from church. The study also noted with concern that the emotional problems experienced by all the children of the incarcerated parents were not addressed by professionals. This is highly likely to impact on their future lives. Lastly, the study observed that children's needs were not fully considered because some of the children were failing to access health facilities when sick, could not visit their incarcerated parents and some were emotionally abused.

## Suggestions for further studies

Since the findings revealed that there were an overwhelming number of rape and murder crimes committed by the incarcerated parents, the researchers suggest for more in-depth studies to be conducted on the children of the incarcerated parents so as to unravel more information on their experiences as well as establishing more information on the bearing of such crimes. Longitudinal studies can also be carried out to establish the bearing of the length of incarceration on children of the incarcerated parents at different intervals of the incarceration. Thus, sociologists need to carry out more research in order to influence policies that uphold the consideration of rights of children of the incarcerated parents.

## Limitations of the study

The researchers were not able to get a large sample size because most of the incarcerated parents were still young so they had children below six years of age. On the other hand, some of incarcerated parents had children who had exceeded eighteen years, thus, they did not fall within the research scope.

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