Unanticipated Consequences of Imprisonment on Families of Prison Inmates of Kumasi Central Prison of Ghana

Kwadwo Ofori-Dua[1], Kofi Osei Akuoko[1] & Vincent de Paul Kanwetuu[1]

[1] Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.

Correspondence: Kofi Osei Akuoko, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana.

Abstract

Prisons in Ghana, like most prisons the world over, are established to keep offenders from society and to try and reform them so that they will become useful citizens. Prisons are considered as crime fighting-devices which govern penal policy. However, there are many social, psychological and financial costs of imprisonment on the spouse and children of the prisoner. For instance, how do the remaining spouses and children cope with the social, psychological and financial problems resulting from incarceration? What social support systems exist in Ghana for the benefit of the families of the incarcerated? These questions and a few others formed the bases for which 25 families of prisoners in the Kumasi Central Prisons were purposively sampled and interviewed to examine the unintended consequences of imprisonment on the families of the incarcerated. The results of the study indicated that the incarceration of family members led to social stigma of the spouses and children, reduction in family fortunes, emotional and psychological trauma, infidelity and family breakdown. Consequently, the spouses and their children resorted to prayers from churches and pastors to cope with the situation, quitting their residences, relocating to cheaper and affordable accommodation and reducing their expenditure and 'luxury' in order to survive, owing to unavailability of social support systems except temporary financial assistance from friends, close relatives and religious organizations. The study made some recommendations.

Keywords: Incarceration, unintended consequences, coping mechanisms, social support systems, imprisonment.

1. Introduction

In Africa and in Ghana specifically, until colonization prisons were largely unheard of. People who committed crimes were usually punished by their communities through banishment, flogging, beheading and other such capital punishments. It was not until the mid-19th century that the British council of merchants established a harsh network of prisons in forts such as the Cape Coast Castle. These prisons were managed under no particular laws. In 1860 however, the Prisons Ordinance Act was developed to outline regulations for the safekeeping of prisoners. Later ordinances further defined the nature of the country's prison system, which required solitary confinement by night, penal labour and a minimum diet (Owusu, 2012). The global prison population has skyrocketed in the last three decades with ten million people worldwide now in jails and prisons. The extraordinary increase in the number of people now incarcerated has had tremendous implications for state and national governments dealing with global recession and a range of economic, social and political challenges (Stevenson, 2011). Incarceration rates in the United States of America are nearly the highest in the world, and are by far the highest of any Western democratic state. The U.S. locks up over 700 people per 100,000, a rate of incarceration that is one of the truly distinguishing characteristics of the American criminal justice system (Clear, 2009). Globally human beings do not live in isolation. They live in an array of interdependent relationships and networking. Research has consistently shown that incarceration affects the individuals confined, their families and other close associates who are seen as passive victims, and by aggregation, the economic and social conditions in their local community. While some research has focused on the individual and community effects of incarceration, little analysis has attempted to examine how they work together (Watts & Nightingale, 1996). In Ghana, little is known about the ripple effects of imprisonment on prisoners' families and the communities from which they originate. This study thus sought to examine the effect of incarceration on the families of inmates. This was based on the premise that incarceration has unintended consequences not only on the incarcerated but their immediate relations as

well.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Prisons in Ghana, like most prisons the world over, are established to keep offenders from society and to try and reform them so that they will become useful citizens in society. According to Regoli (2011), the purpose of punishment is primarily to control and change behaviour. In the popular point of view, prisons are thought of as crime fighting-devices: Exposing offenders to prison reduces crime. This viewpoint began governing penal policy in the early 1970s (Clear, 2009). Traditionally it has been understood by most Ghanaians that when all criminals are imprisoned, society will be safe, crimes will reduce and the rest of the society will have their peace of mind to undertake their daily activities without any disturbances, fear or troubles. Thus, what the prison system in Ghana has done, with the support of some public opinion is to put offenders in prison, separate from human contact to reduce further crime while they are incarcerated (Agboka, 2008).

Statistics on inmate population in the various prisons in Ghana indicates that though the number of convicts for the years 2010 (13,945), 2011 (13,565) and 2012 (13,469) does not show a seemingly increasing trend in the number of inmates, the percentage (23%) of second time offenders and recidivists is alarming. This is a clear indication that one of the rationale of the prison system which is to serve as a reformation centre is not achieving that objective (Ghana Prison Service, 2012).

Because incarceration removes an individual from society, it is expected that ties between offenders and members of their networks will be weakened (Haley et al., 2006 cited in Khan, 2008). Debates about the increased use of incarceration have focused principally on its value in reducing crime rates and intervention strategies have been directed at the incarcerated at the expense of others who are passive victims of incarceration. These discussions have, by and large, ignored the ways in which the heavy use of incarceration affects individuals, families, and communities across prison walls (Clear, 2009). These unforeseen effects of incarceration are subtle and in some ways modest, but over time they combine to counteract the positive effects of prison. Interesting enough, there is paucity of research in relation to incarceration and its effects on families of the incarcerated in the Ghanaian literature. The very few available have concentrated on the prison system and the incarcerated to the detriment of the passive victims of incarceration. There is, therefore, a need to examine the effects of incarceration on the passive victims (family members) in order to obtain a more complete understanding of the effects of incarceration on the limits of using prison as a crime-prevention strategy (Clear, 2009). An examination of the unintended consequences of incarceration would give a better perspective of how people other than the incarcerated suffer as a result of incarceration.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to examine the unanticipated consequences on the families of prison inmates. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the changes that had occurred in the family as a result of the incarceration.

2. Find out how such changes had affected the lives of families of the incarcerated.

3. Examine the coping mechanisms adopted by the families to deal with effects of incarceration of spouses.

4. Find out the social support systems available to families of incarcerated persons.

2. Literature Review

A prison is an institution designed to securely house people who have been convicted of crimes. These individuals, known as prisoners or inmates, are kept in continuous custody on a short or long term basis. The gravity of the offense determines the duration of the prison term imposed. For certain crimes, such as murder, offenders may be sentenced to prison for the remainder of their lifetime. Although prison structures have been in existence since ancient civilizations, the widespread and persistent use of long-term confinement as a form of criminal punishment began only in the 15th century. In the contemporary world every industrialized nation has prisons and the role of prisons throughout the world is to punish criminals by restricting their freedom. In most countries, prison systems are constructed and operated by governments. However, several countries including the United States, also authorize private corporations to build and run prisons under contract for the government (Gibbons, 1987 cited in Ajayi, 2012). Imprisonment has several universal functions, which include the protection of society, the prevention of crime, retribution (revenge) against criminals, and the rehabilitation of inmates. Additional goals of imprisonment may include the assurance of justice based on a philosophy of just deserts (getting what one deserves) and the reintegration of inmates into the community following their sentences. Different countries place greater emphasis on one or more of these goals than others do.

In general, a loss of a parent can cause emotional behaviours, psychological and economic problems for a child. In particular, arrest and incarceration have a negative effect on the health and welfare of the child (Sack & Seidler, 1978).

For example, Sack found that pubescent males exhibited anti-social behaviour when a parent, (the father), was incarcerated (Sack, Seidler & Thomas, 1976). When a parent is incarcerated, such a loss has been described to be as traumatic to a child as when a parent dies or there is a divorce. However, when a parent dies or there is a divorce, there are opportunities to openly discuss that loss and receive sympathy from others. But when a parent is incarcerated, the topic is often considered a taboo and the stigma associated with it precludes open discussion and elicits little sympathy (Fritsch & Burkhead, 1981). This inability to communicate or the failure to explain to the child what happened to their parent may create anxiety for the child and impact his or her ability to cope. The effects of parental incarceration on children are discussed below.

In some instances, the arrest itself is traumatic because the children may have been present when their parents were arrested, with no explanation provided to the child of what is happening. More distressing, children may be left by themselves after the arrest without a social support system and fall through the cracks (Sacks & Seidel, 1978). When a parent is imprisoned and taken out of the child's life, it can have permanent social, emotional and developmental impacts resulting in aggressive behaviour, withdrawal, criminal involvement, peer isolation and depression. Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) also summarize these impacts as strain, socialization and stigmatization.

Goldstein (1984) used data collected from the Health Examination Survey conducted by the National Centre for Health Statistics to study the relationship between families with absent fathers, parental supervision, and conduct disorder in the youth. Findings from Goldstein's study revealed that the police had questioned boys from absent father families significantly more than boys whose fathers were present. Also, boys with absent fathers tended to have more contact with the police than girls with absent fathers. In terms of parental supervision Goldstein (1984) found that boys, but not girls, in homes with no supervision, had a greater chance of having contact with the police. Finally, this study indicated that boys with absent fathers showed a greater chance of having disciplinary problems at school than boys from father present homes. Another study by the Survey of Youth in Custody conducted by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2000) found that more than half of all juveniles and young adults in custody reported a family member serving time in jail or prison. Furthermore, adolescent children of incarcerated parents are one-half to three times more likely than their peers to get arrested (Eddy & Heid, 2003).

In addition to behavioural problems, children with incarcerated parents may have school related problems and problems with peer relationships. Stanton (1980) reported that 70% of 166 children of incarcerated parents studied show poor school performance and 50% exhibited classroom behavioural problems following the incarceration of their parents. Additionally, Sack et al. (1976) conducted a study of 31 families of prisoners, 20 imprisoned fathers and 11 imprisoned mothers. Wives of male prisoners reported that their children had problems in schools following their father's incarceration which included poor grades or instances of aggression. Furthermore, Sack et al. (1976) found that the children of 6-8 years of age had developed school phobia. Four of the 20 children did not want to go to school for a four to six week period after the confinement of their parent. Trice (1997) compared the school performance of 219 children of incarcerated mothers in a state prison in Virginia with their same-gender best friends, whose parents were not incarcerated. This data was collected using reports of the caregiver of the target child and the mother of the peer child. The investigation revealed that children of incarcerated mothers were more likely than their peers to experience suspension, mandated school visits by the guardian, extensive school absences and failing classes. Furthermore, the study revealed that the drop-out rate of children with incarcerated mothers was 34% compared to 10% of their best-friend peers (Myers et al., 1999).

Studies by Hagen and Dinovitzer (1999) and Bilchik, Seymour and Kreisher (2001) stated that children of imprisoned parents are at a greater risk for alcohol and drug abuse. Reed and Reed (1998) also noted that children whose parents are incarcerated might be exposed to enduring trauma that leads them to abuse substances as a coping mechanism. According to Butters (2002), the experience of family stressors such as a family unit disruption, may affect the patterns of drug use among adolescents. Butters (2002) found that the youth who were reported as coming from a disrupted family were 79% more likely to use cannabis than those who had not experienced family disruption.

When a parent is sent to prison, many dimensions of family undergo significant changes. The family structure, financial relationships, income levels, emotional support systems and living arrangements may be affected (Travis & Solomon, 2005). Incarceration can also damage the financial situations of the families left behind. This is because one parent is left to shoulder the financial obligations of the family since the incarcerated cannot do any income earning job to assist the other. However, in some cases, parental incarceration may temporarily improve a family's circumstances. For example, if the incarcerated parent was abusive, then a period of separation may bring relief to the family and improve living conditions. Similarly, the incarceration of a drug-addicted family member who stole money and property from his or her relatives may stop the drain on family resources. But more typically, the separation due to imprisonment has a negative impact on the family (Travis & Solomon 2005).

It is difficult to carry out intimate relationships from prison. Barriers to contact and communication, transformations in family roles, and psychological changes due to detainment impede the development and maintenance of intimacy and commitment (Travis & Solomon, 2005). Many prisoners are housed far away from their families. The cost of visitation and the unfriendly prison environment may further inhibit efforts to maintain contact. Limited visiting hours, lack of privacy and restrictions on movement and physical contact diminish the efforts of men and women to stay connected (Fishman, 1990; Hairston, Rollin, & Jo, 2004). Thus, the incarcerated are more or less cut off from family intimacy.

Fishman (1990) found that relationships were sometimes compromised by the changes in roles that resulted from men's absence. Women often became the major decision maker and head of the household, although some women tried to mitigate these changes by saving decisions for discussion during prison visits. To counter changes in traditional gender roles, imprisoned men may seek unhealthy ways to assert their power, including entangling their partner in criminal activities by demanding that they bring in contraband or that they step into their former role in the drug trade. Men also may use dominance and threats to control women. Harassment and even violence have been reported during prison visits as men worry about losing their roles as husband and father in the family (Nurse, 2002).

Harsh prison policies, rigid routines, deprivation of privacy and liberty, and a stressful environment take their toll on men's psychological development. Inmates must adapt to unnatural living conditions, and these changes often conflict with the personality characteristics needed to sustain intimate relationships with partners and children. Because of the loss of autonomy, many men experience diminished capacity for decision making and greater dependence on outside sources. The prison environment also leads to hyper-vigilance as men worry about their safety, and this may result in interpersonal distrust and psychological distancing. The "prison mask" is a common syndrome that develops; the mask is the emotional flatness men take on when they suppress emotions and withdraw from healthy social interactions. To survive in an often brutal environment, prisoners may develop hyper-masculinity, which glorifies force and domination in relations with others. Finally, many prisoners are plagued by feelings of low self-worth and symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder (Haney, 2001). All these psychological changes, which may be necessary for survival in the prison environment, can impede intimate relationships. Many women with incarcerated partners see reduction in available social support to cope with the stress associated with their partner's imprisonment as friends and family withdraw because of the stigma (Arditti et al., 2003). In addition, incarceration is marked as an "ambiguous loss" because the partner's absence is not publicly mourned or socially validated. This can lead to exacerbated grief and the phenomenon of being a "prison widow" (Arditti et al., 2003).

During difficult times or times of transition, individuals rely on a variety of coping mechanisms and support systems to deal with increased pressure and anxiety from looking within one's spirituality to turning outward to family, friends, or support groups such as one's church or mosque. Numerous coping strategies have been identified and attempts made to classify them into conceptual domains (Moos & Billings, 1982). There appears to be no current consensus about a coping typology. However, three common dimensions of coping responses seem to include those that modify the situation from which the strainful experience arises; control the meaning of the problem; and manage the stress (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). These three dimensions are not considered mutually exclusive and can be applied simultaneously or sequentially to a given problem. Available literature on coping mechanisms adopted by individuals and families to stressful life situations indicates that a person's well being may be enhanced by certain dimensions of spirituality (Ellison, 1991). Research has also shown that religious coping mechanisms, when compared to other coping mechanisms, help individuals to better react to stressful situations (Seeman, 1996). Furthermore, religious groups can be important emotional and tangible support systems (Bradley, 1995). Lane (2012) found that religion is functional as a coping mechanism for prison wives and girlfriends. Therefore, religious and spiritual beliefs are important sources of strength for prisoner wives and pen girlfriends during the incarceration of their partners. On the other hand, non-criminal justice research indicates that drug and alcohol use is related to stressful life situations and may be used as a negative coping mechanism (Butters, 2002). These issues have been virtually unexplored when it comes to understanding how families deal with the additional stress associated with incarceration.

Communities can play an active role in improving the outcomes of released inmates and their families. Community based organizations are well positioned to provide assistance with housing, substance abuse treatment, health care, employment, child care, counseling, and vocational training. They can make contact with prisoners prior to release to assist in the re-entry process. These groups also play an important role in preparing the community for a prisoner's return (Travis & Solomon, 2005). Many social service agencies provide services to former prisoners and their families. For instance, a public school may offer counseling to students experiencing difficult life crises (Travis & Solomon, 2005).

2.1 Conceptual Framework on the Unintended Consequences of Incarceration

When an individual engages in a criminal behaviour, the person is fined or incarcerated after being tried in a court of

competent jurisdiction and having been found to be guilty. The essence of incarceration could be retributive, reformative or for rehabilitation purposes. The incarceration of a person has ripple effects on their relationships which could be positive or negative and networks who are the passive victims of incarceration. The incarceration of a person, therefore, has repercussions on their family. The spouses and children of the incarcerated are the most affected.   The effects of incarceration on the immediate family of inmates could be numerous including financial, psychological and behavioural.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Research Design

The research design for this study was a descriptive survey that employed an interview guide for the collection of qualitative data.

3.2 Sampling Procedure

3.2.1 Target Population

Families of incarcerated persons who were in custody at the Kumasi Central Prisons constituted the population of the study. The study targeted nuclear families of inmates who had been incarcerated for the past two years and had spouses and at least one child before incarceration. Prisoners who have been in custody for a minimum of two years were targeted because it was anticipated that the consequences of incarceration would mostly be felt by their families. This is because the longer period an inmate spent in custody the likelihood the severity of the effects of incarceration on his/her family and the community.

3.2.3 Sample Selection

The purposive sampling technique was used to select 25 prisoners from the Kumasi Central Prisons who lived in the Kumasi metropolis. The selected inmates directed the researchers to their various families. Contacts were made with the prison authorities after going through all the necessary protocols. The prison officers assisted the researchers to select the inmates whose families served as respondents in the study. Since the prison was a security institution the researchers were not given the sole responsibility of selecting the inmates but were rather given a list of all inmates who met the criteria for the study population. Based on this a meeting was scheduled between the researchers and the inmates. After explaining the intent of the study to the categorised inmates, over 50 of them readily agreed to allow their families to be part of the study but 25 inmates were selected for the study.

3.3 Data collection

In-depth interview was the main tool for data collection. An interview guide was used when conducting interviews with respondents. This method was selected and used for several reasons. The interview guide approach allows the interviewer to have full control and to select the order in which questions are asked and to modify the phrasing of questions to best suit the particular interview (Rubin & Babbie, 2008 cited in Abraham, 2011). Thus, the use of the interview guide approach helped the interviewer to establish some level of rapport and trust with respondents by encouraging interaction rather than just asking for answers to specific questions. It also enhanced the opportunity for the interviewer to convey empathy to participants and also to share in their emotions. As the researchers were very conversant with the study area in relation to language, culture and socio-economic characteristics, they intended to do all interviews, transcriptions and translations by themselves to ensure that data collected were valid. However, preliminary visits to the field revealed that the variety of languages spoken by respondent families could not be managed by the researchers. Accordingly two postgraduate students in the Department of Sociology and Social Work, KNUST who were familiar with the spoken languages in the study area were recruited and trained to assist in the research. All the interviews were conducted in the homes of respondents. After approval from the inmates to allow their families to participate in the research, initial contact was made with the spouses through telephone calls. Thereafter appointments were made for face-to-face interaction at which the purpose and intent of the research was made known to respondents. Upon respondents consent to take part in the research, interview appointments were booked for the interview sections. Twenty (20) out of the 25 interviews were conducted in the homes of respondents while the remaining five (5) were conducted at the liaison office of the Kumasi Central Prisons because respondents preferred there to their homes. Each interview section lasted for between forty five (45) minutes and one hour.

3.4 Data Management

Social research generates information that must be coded, analyzed and interpreted. In order to interpret the data, the researcher had to organize all observation and collate all data into meaningful forms. The initial qualitative data was managed manually. This process consisted of transcribing and translating answers from respondents and organizing them into meaningful categories. Coding was used to classify the data in a way that allowed the researchers to look for

patterns and to create a retrieval system for later review of specific pieces of data. The data collected was analyzed qualitatively. The Nvivo (Version 7) software was employed for the analysis and interpretation of data. The raw data collected from the field using the interview guide were entered into the programme to create a data file. In the analysis, responses were grouped under various themes by identifying key ideas of the research questions and relating them to the objectives of the study.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

The study sought approval from the Ethics Committee of the University and the Faculty to ensure that it conformed to the standards of social science research. Ethical clearance was sought from all the major stakeholders before data collection. To satisfy ethical considerations in relation to intellectual or academic property and honesty, all secondary data used in the study were cited and acknowledged accordingly. Informed consent was obtained from individual respondents before conducting the interviews. In order to ensure anonymity of interviewees, they did not provide any form of personal identification. Confidentiality of information provided by the respondents was ensured by not sharing the data collected with those who were not closely associated with the study.

4. Presentation of Data and Analysis of Results

4.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents and Incarcerated Spouses

Interviews were conducted with the spouses of the incarcerated who were the key respondents in the research. The purpose of the interview was to solicit information on how the incarceration of their spouses had affected them and their children. All the twenty-five spouses of the incarcerated persons were interviewed. Their ages ranged between 23 and 57 years with majority of them being within the age bracket of 20 – 35 years. The majority of the spouses interviewed were females (22) while the remaining 3 were males. While majority of the respondents had some level of education but never completed basic school, 2 of them had completed their basic education with another 2 having fully completed secondary school education. There was only one respondent who had attended a university. With regard to their occupation, majority of the respondents had learnt a trade but they never practiced them and had resorted to petty trading for their livelihood especially among the women respondents. But the remaining were unemployed while one respondent was working as an accountant in a private firm. In relation to their religious affiliation, it was revealed that the majority of the respondents (21) were Muslims and four (4) were Christians. Majority of the respondents had four or fewer than four children with their spouses although there was a respondent who had nine children.

The socio-demographic information was also sought from the 25 inmates whose spouses were the key respondents. They were within the age bracket of 22 - 57 years, with the majority of them falling within the ages of 20 to 45 years. Twenty-two (22) of the inmates were males while only three (3) were females. It is worthy of note that the few responses from the spouses of female inmates had been solicited with a lot of efforts since spouses of female inmates were not ready to be part of the research which confirmed an earlier comment by a prison officer who doubted if I could get any spouse of a female inmate to interview since the men abandoned their spouses immediately they were convicted of crimes. While majority of the inmates had attained some level of education, majority of them never completed basic education with just one inmate having completed secondary education while a female inmate had completed tertiary education. Thus, the findings on the educational levels of the selected inmates were a true reflection of the general inmates' population where it had revealed that majority of the inmates had low educational backgrounds. Besides, the poor educational background of inmates rendered them jobless except a few who could find some menial jobs. But there were a few of them who were self-employed and were engaged in their private businesses. The crime categories of inmates were varied but per the standards of the prison service and the legal systems of Ghana, the following breakdown of crime category was determined. There were four inmates convicted of fraud, three inmates were convicted of stealing, another three were convicted of unlawful entry, four were convicted of armed robbery and three were convicted of rape. Another three were convicted of indecent assault, three were also convicted of post narcotic drugs and the remaining two were charged with dishonest receiving of stolen items.

4.2 Relationship between the Family and the Prisoner before Incarceration

Majority of the spouses who were interviewed stated that they lived with their spouses and children happily until the arrest and conviction of their spouses. They insisted that their spouses were nice and good people to live with but their absence created vacuum in their lives. This was even more profound as their spouses were the breadwinners of their homes. Asked if they had memories of their spouses, the general response was that even though some of the memories could be bad, there could be no bitter memory than having your spouse in jail. Florence a 41-year old trader insisted: *"My husband sometimes beat me up and was a mess but it was better than having him than in jail. After all, he provided the house keeping money and kept the home going".*

A greater number of the spouses insisted that their partners should be released to join them at home since they felt they

had been wrongfully convicted. There were a few, however, who wished the duration of the sentences was reduced to ensure early return to the home. In other few cases they wished they had resources to engage the services of lawyers to go for an appeal against their conviction. Adisa a 20-year old mother of two, whose husband was serving a 30-year sentence for fraud, had this to say: *"What else can I wish for my husband? He must be released or at least his sentence should be reduced after an appeal. How do I wait for a husband who will be away for 30 years?"*

The respondents had insisted that the incarcerated spouses were nice to their children and that they did everything in common like brothers and sisters. For some of the female respondents, their spouses bathed and played with the children while they prepared the evening meal every day. Portia, a 20-year old woman insisted: "My husband was the housekeeper while I was the breadwinner. Since he closed early from work he did virtually all the household chores including cooking, washing and taking the children to school. But now that he is not there".

The absence of the incarcerated spouses in the homes of the respondents had created different reactions amongst the children. While the children who were not aware of the situation kept on asking when their parents would come back home, those who were aware had become reserved and did not want to join the company of their peers for fear of being laughed at. The others had accepted it in good faith and saw themselves as single parent children who must assist the remaining spouse to get the home running. Owusu, a 50-year old husband of a convicted female spouse noted: "What else can they do? I told the children and they had taken it in good faith. They have decided to help me run the home as a single parent father by taking on the responsibilities their mother shouldered".

4.3 Changes that have occurred in the family as a result of Incarceration

The study revealed that majority of the children, were not aware of the incarceration of their parents. It was either they were too young to understand the incident or their remaining parents never told them about the incarceration. Therefore, for such children, there were no initial changes to their behaviours. However, the persistent absence of the spouse engendered enquiries from the children which led to different behavioural changes ranging from refusal to eat to persistent visits to the hospital as a result of varied sicknesses. The category of children who were aware of the incarceration of the parent had responded negatively in diverse ways by showing negative attitude to almost everything they did. While some had become reserved and would not participate in any meaningful activity others would not eat. The situation was worsened when some of these children were sent to the prison to visit the incarcerated parent for reunification. The reactions of these children ranging from crying to insisting on staying with the imprisoned spouse in the prison prevented the remaining spouses from visiting the prison with their children. Auntie Hannah, a 38-year old wife of a rape convict serving a ten-year sentence had this to say: "I took my children to visit my husband in the prison with the hope of calming them down because they were always crying, would not eat and were always visiting the hospital. I have decided never to send them there again because the situation worsened".

For the very few children who had been able to manage themselves when they visited their incarcerated parents and had therefore had the opportunity to visit on many occasions, they had been quiet and had withdrawn from the company of friends as well as becoming partially recalcitrant and had refused to obey simple home regulations and difficult to control. Thus, majority of the spouses who were interviewed shared the view that the absence of the other parent made parenting more difficult and that carelessness and negligence on the part of the parents could lead to disobedience and possible delinquency of the children. For some of them, it was even more profound when the remaining spouse was a female who had to cater for male children. Such situations could lead to involvement in social vices by the children and possible rift with the law. Auntie Hannah, a 38-year old wife of a rape convict serving a 10-year sentence had this to say: "My boys are always arrested by the police for their involvement in drug usage and criminal activity. But for their father who is already in prison and the sympathy of the local police, they would have all joined their father in prison".

Esther a 32-year old trader with a husband serving fifteen years jail term for fraud had this to say: "My children after knowing that their father had been imprisoned and would not come home today or tomorrow, and were now difficult to control and had become more irritating than I expected of them. I realized they were going to change a little with that incident but never knew it will be that much". While a greater number of the children had increased their visits to the hospital as a result of the initial shock associated with the incarceration, they had reverted to normalcy and did not visit the hospital persistently as it used to be from the onset of the crises.

Majority of the parents indicated that the academic performance of their wards had become worse as a result of the stigma and subsequent withdrawal of their children from their peers, there were others who indicated that their children had been compelled to drop out of school due to their inability to continue to cater for them as a result of financial challenges they were going through because of the absence of their spouses. There was however another category of children with incarcerated parents who had been withdrawn from the expensive schools to less endowed and affordable schools and this had negatively affected the academic performance of their children. Mohammed, a 37-year old businessman with a wife serving a five year jail term for her involvement in narcotics retorted: "I have withdrawn my

children from the good school they were attending because I cannot afford to pay with the absence of my wife and how will you expect them to academically perform well in that poor and dilapidated school".

Asked if there had been any changes in the nuclear family as a result of incarceration, respondents admitted that once the incarcerated person was an absolute family member, his or her absence would definitely create some changes, some of which respondents enumerated and discussed. Almost all respondents noted financial challenges as one of the major changes that took place in their families. Since majority of the incarcerated persons were meaningful contributors to their family incomes, the absence of such persons and their contribution had reduced family income. To a greater number of them the situation was even aggravated when quite apart from the absence of their contributions towards family income, there was further expenditure on the incarcerated person while in jail. This cost ranged from everyday maintenance from food to regular visits to prisons as well as the cost for paying for legal services and arrangement for appeal court appearances to ensure early release and possible discharge. In a few cases some remaining had to sacrifice all their income and accumulated capital to ensure that they had their spouses discharged which proved futile.

Furthermore, majority of the respondents indicated that the incarceration of the family member had led to reduction in the dignity and worth associated with the family. To them in African societies, any person who is incarcerated has himself or herself and other family members looked down upon by other members of the society irrespective of the cause of the incarceration. In some communities while some considered incarceration as a taboo and would not want to talk about it, others perceive it as a social stigma and would not want to associate with family members of the incarcerated. The stigma associated with incarceration had made some families lose important social networks they relied upon. Their children had lost the important friends because their parents would not allow them to associate with children of prisoners.

Notwithstanding the fact that majority of the respondents had insisted on negative or bad changes in their families as a result of incarceration, a few of them insisted that the incarceration of their spouses had resulted in some positive changes in the family even though they did not share the view that incarceration was the best for the family. Some of these spouses had emphasised that their spouses were persistent drug addicts and a drain on family resources and that their absence had created some financial stability in their homes while others insisted their spouses were a menace to them and so their incarceration had created some level of peace in the home. Saadia narrates: *"I was always frequenting police station whenever my husband was arrested and I spent all my money on him. Now that he is gone for ten years, even though I am not happy, I will be free from police trouble for a while and he will not be here to beat me in addition whenever I get him out of police cells".*

4.4 Effect of Changes in the family on the lives of Family Members

Majority of the spouses who were left behind indicated that the incarceration of their spouses had serious repercussions on their emotional and psychological composures since there were no other people they looked up to for comfort and companionship. For the category of respondents who witnessed the arrest of their spouses with the children, they indicated that the incident had created some form of trauma, tension and anxiety within the family. Furthermore, one of the key changes that had affected the family was the lack of companionship and the children which had impacted negatively on the family's socialization process. There had also been a reduction in the economic strength of the family with its financial and material challenges as a result of reduction in family income and the cost of maintaining the incarcerated person. It was pertinent to note that majority of the female respondents had stated categorically that one of the major costs of incarceration on them was that they had been unfaithful to their incarcerated spouses and had committed adultery at one time or the other. They insisted they had slept with people other than their spouses to enable them to maintain the home. A few of them had slept with other people to satisfy their sexual desires.

4.5 Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Families to deal with Incarceration

Almost all the families had indicated that after going through the initial stages of trauma and the arrest and incarceration of their spouses, the first thing they had to do was to accept the situation in good faith and stand up to the test and reality of it. Others resorted to religiosity in the form of fasting and prayer as well as attending religious activities like church services, prayer and counselling sections to make them emotionally stable even though they knew those mechanisms were not the practical solutions to the problems at hand. Some respondents also revealed that they consulted shrines and witch doctors for advice and spiritual charms to intercede on their behalf. Though the respondents accepted the fact that the spiritual involvement never found solutions to their predicaments they had been a form of psychological relief and healing for them. Esther, a 32- year old trader with a husband serving 15 years jail term for fraud had this to say: *"Even though I knew that prayer was not the solution to the problem I had no option since these spiritualists were the only ones who were ready to listen to me and console me and when they did so it actually helped and it is still helping".*

The respondents had also revealed that one of the key mechanisms adopted by the family was to reduce family

expenditure to enable them to cope with the reduced family income. These included moving children out of expensive schools to affordable ones as well as moving out of expensive rented accommodation to affordable ones. In some rare cases where the accommodation belonged to them, they rented some apartments out to be able to generate enough money for the family. This, however, led to congestion in the few rooms left. Some families had to relocate to a new area to avert the stigma attached to the family as result of incarceration while others had to relocate to their hometowns (villages) where cost of living as well as accommodation and education was comparatively cheaper and affordable.

4.6 Social support systems available to families of incarcerated persons: One of the key areas of this investigation was to find out the forms of social support systems that were available to the families of inmates both at the micro and macro level. The respondents had indicated that the reaction of the immediate community members had been diverse. Some of the respondents stated that the community pretended as if they had not heard of the incarceration and had therefore kept quiet over the issue whilst those who were aware and had given moral support in the initial stages of the arrest but did not received any material or financial assistance from any community member.

The family members of the incarcerated had been very helpful from the initial stages of the arrest in terms of material and financial assistance but stopped immediately after the final determination of the case. A few of them picked some of the children and stayed with them. While some of the spouses reported that friends of the incarcerated had been helpful in certain circumstances, majority of them insisted they had not been helpful and in peculiar cases wanted to take advantage of the situation to have sex with them. Adisa who was staying with the husband and a friend in the friend's father's house had stated that after the incarceration of the husband, the friend called one morning and said: "You sleep with me from now on or count yourself ejected by tomorrow morning". When she refused to sleep with the husband's friend, she was eventually ejected from the house.   Some respondents indicated that they never received any form of assistance from anywhere apart from close relatives and family members. However, there were a category of respondents who had received some form of assistance from religious organisations when they had became members of the religious groups and had narrated their predicaments to the group.

5. Discussion of Major Findings

It was found out that majority of the children who had observed the arrest and trial of their parents without any explanations and understanding of the incidence remained traumatized and lived in perpetual fear and anxiety. This finding confirms early findings in which one in five children who had witnessed the police arrest their parents had lived thereafter in fear (Myers et al., 1999). Some of those children, after witnessing the arrest had been experiencing hallucinations and nightmares about the incident. This also corroborates the results of a study by Kampfner (1995) in which all 30 children who witnessed the arrest of their mothers experienced flashbacks and nightmares about the incident.

A key finding of the study revealed that children of incarcerated parents felt stigmatized from the company of their peers, school mates, family members and the general community. There was a general expression of shame, anger and resentment about the incarceration and most children naturally withdrew from the company of peers and other significant others for fear of being labelled as coming from homes of imprisoned parents. The children and the spouses also withdrew from the relevant social networks and the general community also shunned their company since nobody wanted to associate with relations of incarcerated persons. This corroborates various research findings including Travis (2005), Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) and Braman and Wood (2003).

As a result of emotional and psychological stress, children encountered problems at school and this indirectly led to poor school performance. Coupled with the above finding was that children of incarcerated parents were more likely to drop out of school than their peers with non-incarcerated parents. This finding also validates Trice's (1997) research which compared the school performance of 219 children of incarcerated mothers in a state prison in Virginia with their same-gender best friends, whose parents were not incarcerated. The study revealed that the drop-out rate of children with incarcerated mothers was 34% compared to 10% of their best-friend peers (Myers et al., 1999).

Another finding was that incarceration automatically led to changes in the composition of the family because some of the children went to stay with other relatives due to the inability of the remaining spouse to cater for the children alone which may lead to loss of ties among siblings and the spouse. The final change in the family was a result of the introduction of a new partner into the family due to divorce or separation

It was found out that imprisonment of a spouse led to changes in the role of the remaining spouse. In most cases the remaining spouse had to perform the roles of the incarcerated spouse in addition to his or her original roles within the family. The change in roles in most cases led to a compromise of the relationship and possible divorce. Thus, the finding confirms Fishman's (1990) qualitative interview results which revealed that relationships were sometimes compromised by the changes in roles that resulted from the spouse's absence.

Also, a finding was that the absence of the spouse equally meant the absence of his or her contribution to family's income as earlier on found by Arditti (2005) in a qualitative work which indicates that the loss of direct income can create a significant burden on struggling families, especially when it is combined with the additional costs associated with arrest and imprisonment, including attorney fees, collect-calls from prison, and the expenses of travelling to the prison and providing material goods for the inmate.

Another major finding from the study was that it was very difficult to maintain intimate marital relationship with a spouse in prison because of the restricted nature of the prisons. This normally created emotional and psychological problems for the remaining spouses compelling them to look for companionship from elsewhere and possible divorce with their partners in prison. This finding corroborates studies by Travis (2005) who asserts that it is difficult to carry out intimate relationships from prison. Barriers to contact and communication, transformations in family roles, and psychological changes due to detainment impede the development and maintenance of intimacy and commitment.

It was found out that most families resorted to active participation in religious activities as well as guidance and counseling from religious leaders. This finding consolidates Lane's (2012) study on "the function of religion as a coping mechanism for prisoners' wives and girlfriends" which revealed that religious and spiritual beliefs are important sources of strength for prisoners' wives and girlfriends during the incarceration of their partners.

One of the key findings of this study was that children of incarcerated parents and the remaining spouses resorted to the use of alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms even though they were negative coping mechanisms as noted in a study by Butters (2002) who indicated that, non-criminal justice research states that drug and alcohol use is related to stressful life situations and may be used as a negative coping mechanism. This finding also supports studies by Reed and Reed (1997) who noted that children whose parents were incarcerated might be exposed to enduring trauma that leads them to abuse substances as a coping mechanism.

6. Recommendations

It was found that most spouses of incarcerated persons resorted to spiritual leaders to seek much needed counseling services while under duress rather than seeking professional counseling services. It is, therefore, recommended that stakeholders in the social service sector as well as the prison system should make professional counseling services available to families of the incarcerated to enhance their coping mechanisms.

Economic problems are major challenges facing families of incarcerated persons. Prison authorities should enhance the ability of inmates to work while in prison so that they could remain economically active and remit their families at home.

Since the majority of spouses of prisoners resorted to spirituality (churches and pastors) for counselling and consolation, the study recommends that pastoral formation centres should incorporate courses in professional counselling into their curricula. This will equip pastors with the skills in professional counselling so that they will be better placed to offer services to spouses of prisoners who approach them for prayer support.

7. Conclusion

Incarceration has telly consequences on the lives of both spouses and children of the incarcerated. In fact, it creates social and psychological imbalances in families and communities because of the stigma and economic costs it brings. Some cases of incarceration result in infidelity and divorce, fragmentation and breakdown of the nuclear family. Other unwanted behaviours such as school dropouts, poor academic performance and drug abuse come about as a result of effects of incarceration. The main forms of social support available to families of the incarcerated were informal sources such as family members and friends as well as religious bodies. The support from these sources, however, gradually dwindles and has to be sustained. Thus, evidence shows that other people are increasingly affected in various ways because of the use of incarceration to control deviant behaviour. Society, however, is more or less mute because these passive victims of incarceration suffer silently and indirectly.

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