

Psychological Impact of Incarceration on Women Prisoners: A Review of Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

Prison usually changes people as it alters their spatial, temporal, and bodily dimensions, although it weakens their emotional life and undermines their identity. Prison as a home of captives with its strict rules and an environment of distress are detrimental to the inmates. Prisons aim is to cure crime and criminal however their record has not been encouraging. Instead, prison does more harm to people than do good to them. So, the question arises here why do we need prison and what psychological impact prison does have on incarcerated women? Does it have a negative impact? Does it result in mental illness? These are a few questions whose answers we are looking into in this paper. A considerable amount of research has been directed to assess the impact of incarceration on prisoners after their release but very few studies have been done to look into their condition during incarceration. A systematic review of literature has been done in order to assess the prison environment and its psychological effect. The study also highlighted some of the negative impacts on the mental health of especially women prisoners and how to cope with them.

Keywords: *Psychological, Incarceration, Mental health, Prisons, Depression*

About a half-century ago Gresham Sykes wrote that "life in the maximum-security prison is depriving or frustrating in the extreme," and there is no change that can be seen even after so many years (Sykes,). Over the past few years although incarceration rates have increased significantly still medical sociology is spending little time in exploring the health issues of prisoners especially mental or psychological health issues. Many early researches concluded that Imprisonment had a more negative effect on the mental health of prisoners rather than on their physical health. To garner public sympathy and to raise issues related to prisoners' rights is difficult as they themselves are the ones who have ignored the basic rules of society. Most of the prisoners who are not involved in heinous crimes and ultimately released till the time they have developed mental health issues in prison environment then it is difficult for them to reenter the normal life as productive participants of society. (A good number of studies have been done to assess the life of prisoners when they return to the outside world but very few studies have been done to examine their psychological condition when they spend their time in jail. According to former prison governor John Podmore: "Sadly, many people with mental illness are swept

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Psychological Impact of Incarceration on Women Prisoners: A Review of Appraisal

inappropriately into the criminal justice system. And the failure to tackle widespread mental illness among prisoners is storing up huge social and public health problems for the future." (Podmore, 2000).

It is seen that many prisons contain those factors that have negative effects on mental health, these negative effect includes issues like overcrowding, different forms of violence, enforced loneliness, lack of privacy, absence of meaningful activity, enforced separation from social networks, insecurity about future prospects (work, relationships etc), and insufficient health services, especially mental health services, in prisons. The growing risk of suicide inside prisons is often related to depression, and, sadly, it is one common expression of the overall effects of these factors (Beynon & Drew, 2005). Many women enter prison with significant mental health conditions without appropriate intervention during incarceration, and so there is potential to become these conditions even more severely. Incarceration affects one person's mental health. Especially in the case of women, things are worse because they have gone through more emotional stress, separation from children, social stigma, abuse, torture. All of these factors affect the mental health of women prisoners. After several years of focusing on incarcerated men, for the first time, Kreager and his research team have explored the social landscape in women's prisons. "There hasn't been a lot of research into women's experiences of being incarcerated, released, or being reincarcerated," Kreager explained. "We also don't know about the kind of effects incarceration has on their families, including their children, as many of the women prisoners are mothers."(Bauer, 2016). Jails and prisons must ensure the availability of necessary health facilities for inmates, but the services which are present inside prison have low quality. Often, the type of prison-based mental health services available they emphasize mostly on sustaining, rather than treating, inmates. A person who has felt the experience of hallucinations or psychosis may control the most severe symptoms with the treatment they receive. Still, prisoners with apprehension issues, depression, having post-traumatic stress, and having a different kind of mental health condition does not show radical changes in their behavior and perhaps go outside unwell. Prisoners, in rare cases, if anytime, receive therapeutic or absolute treatment. Then their mental health issues that were previously present in them and which were already controlled with medicine and therapy can become extremely worse during incarceration. (Villiness 2013)

Prison and Punishment

Prisons are an environment that is likely to incorporate an excessive number of socially excluded human beings. However, the prisoners do no longer exist in a vacuum as they have got lives earlier than Imprisonment and go back to their lives on release. The simple purpose for the existence of jail is that the society which explicit its desires through the manner of courts, locate it essential to separate and isolate some people who've broken the law (Madhurima, 2009). Extensively speakme punishment is an act that deliberately inflicts ache on every other individual. The sentence in truth is meant for intentionally inflicting somebody else harming and struggling, possibly in reaction to an illegal act (Scott, 2008).

In every society, Imprisonment is the most common way of punishment by keeping undesirable people away from society as well as maintaining conformity in the community. During the early period of the evolution of corrections, two significant changes were made. The first time switch was made from the mode of vigilante justice to state justice. In primordial times, almost every place vigilante or watching committee was the most common form of justice, which gives authority to the victim or the family member of the victim to have reprisal from either accuse or any of his kin for the crime he has committed. This

Psychological Impact of Incarceration on Women Prisoners: A Review of Appraisal

proceeding was based on the ideology of retribution explained in the theory of criminal punishment, This practice has a simple meaning of this act that each criminal must have the same type of punishment as of its crime like for murder the punishment should be the murder of either accused or of his family member. It is actually based on the ideology of an eye for an eye. After a period when the era of organized governments came into existence it stepped in making in the government justice system. According to the new rule, the governing body of the state has the power to recognize an act as a crime and it is the duty of the government to punish the criminal accordingly. A crime committed in any one society was considered to be a crime and deviant behavior in all society. This is considered as the complete and acceptable doctrine regarding crime and punishment in all parts of the world till present time.

While looking into the evolution of punishment we found that In 17th and 18th centuries England's evolution of punishment took place, where confinement as a mode of punishment was rarely applicable, and prisons generally were used to detain those people whose crime was yet not proved and those who are waiting for their trials that mean under trials. During that period the mode of punishment mainly includes flogging the strips, hanging, etc. The hanging was carried out publicly basically to demonstrate the power and authority of the king and lawmakers. It actually implicated to spread a message to common people in the form of warning not to dare to disobey the rules and law of the state and they should learn a lesson from it. Imprisonment as a mode of punishment originated in 19th century and continued to the 20th century, during this period most of the development in the penal system took place.

The Indian penal code system has different modes of punishment which include in most heinous crimes death by hanging, for other crime it has lifetime imprisonment either with or without labor, the duration of this Imprisonment may have fourteen years or confinement till death, in other cases relinquishment of property and fine. Imprisonment as a form of punishment is most prominent in India, Imprisonment is applicable to almost all the offenses which is recognize under Indian Penal Code and to those offences which is come under special and local laws. The modes of punishment later convert into rehabilitation of prisoners. The history of rehabilitation for criminals can be seen by the work of prominent social reformers of the 18th century. In Britain, John Howard (1726-1790) and Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) made an attempt to change prisons from institutions of deep sorrow, pain and cruel punishment to places that were humane and held the potential to reform prisoners' lives. As efforts to rehabilitate criminals became more prevalent worldwide during the early 19th century, precipitating changes in social and welfare policy for prisons and prisoners, so psychologists were at pains to offer treatment as a means to rehabilitation to the prisoners. (Hollin, 2012)

The primary function of Imprisonment is to punish the individual for committing the deviant criminal activity in society. The significance of Imprisonment among reactions to crime lies in the preservation of the criminal under control in an artificial community isolated from the general public (Taft, 1964). In the time immemorial prisons have been and prisons in the present time are widely used as a form of punishment, These are considered as the more humane version of complete incapacitation as the pain one gets in prison not inflicted physically anymore, but rather psychologically upon the person's mind while incarcerated.(Foucault,1979) Imprisonment in the form of punishment may be beneficial for society as it keeps and isolate the deviant people away from society and helps in the smooth functioning of society. But it leaves a long-term and sometimes damaging impact on prisoners' physical

Psychological Impact of Incarceration on Women Prisoners: A Review of Appraisal

and Psychological health Offenders in prison environments faced severe maladjustment issues. Punishment as a form of discipline puts more pressure on their mental health.

Women and Crime

According to National Crime Record Bureau data of 2019, the total number of jail inmates are 4, 19623 out of which male constitutes 4, 01,789 i.e. (95.7 percent) whereas female constitutes a relatively lesser number i.e. 17,834 (4.3 percent) only. (Prison statistics, 2015). The number of women lodged in prison is still a minority their number has however increased in the last few years. When gender difference in crime was seen it is found that women offenders have relatively lesser arrest rates than male offenders. Most of the attempts which are made to assess the difference in the sex ratio of crime rate are traditional and they analyze physical, psychological, and sociological factors which actually cause such a difference. The biological factor is most widely used as an argument to explain this gender difference and it permeates the other two factors. (Haggort 1973) Moreover, women do not much involved in heinous crimes as that males in most countries except prostitution. Apart from prostitution, female offenders participate in committing minor property crimes such as theft, fraud, forgery and embezzlement, human trafficking, etc. As culprit women have constituted a far smaller percentage than their proportion within the total populace. The styles of offences for which ladies are imprisoned and the lengths of sentence they acquire, advise that they possess little threat to the society. The last decade has however visible a surge in both the wide variety and the proportion of incarcerated women despite the fact that they nonetheless make up a small populace, but they are the fastest developing populace.

The reasons behind the commission of a crime by women inmates reveal that most of the women offenders belong to poor families, uneducated and in some cases have undergone through sexual violence. In case of educated and well of offenders mostly suffers from family disorganization. Other major reason is the dissolution of the two-parent family structure as a factor contributing to greater violence among women (Harvey, 1986) many researchers also find out that social pressure such as unemployment, poverty, income inequality, substandard housing and inferior education disproportionately afflicted minority population lead to greater level frustration and aggression. (Hawkins, 1986) However marital discord, high aspirations which are not fulfilled, domestic violence are some other major reasons for involvement of women more and more in criminal activities.

Psychological effect of Imprisonment on Women Prisoners

Prisons are established to transform and rehabilitate the criminals into responsible citizens of the country. But unfortunately, the system of prison and correctional institutions were become a form of torture because they ended up in adverse psychological effects in many prisoners. (Samyukhta, and Sowmyya 2015). The adaptation to Imprisonment is almost difficult and can effect on prisoner's thinking and acting power. It can be even seen dysfunctional in post prison life. (Haney C.2001). In addition to the general disruption in relation to time, there are a number of different factors which can create or boom mental difficulties in prisons. they've already been nicely-documented: overcrowding, loss of privacy, violence, racketeering, the obligation to "provide offerings", drugs, the lack of sexuality, compelled homosexuality, the deterioration of some prison buildings, and fear of kingpins, and terrible relationships with some of the jail staff, mental isolation... these can lead to pressure, tension, agitation, depression, thoughts of suicide, and "jail psychoses" which includes "gate fever", in which inmates revel in extreme tension as soon as the cell door closes (Englebert, 2013). Prisons' rules and standards are strict and they are mainly concerned with security. Thus, while looking into the contrast between the closed and

Psychological Impact of Incarceration on Women Prisoners: A Review of Appraisal

restricted environment in prison and the freedom they have in outside society, prisoners experience the feeling of profound loss as they are now move to a different kind of community the one with very strict hierarchy and having strict rules to obey . Some Research also suggests that the prison regime have negative effect on the mental health wellbeing of inmates as it snatches their power and freedom from them. Also, the time they spend in isolation away from their family and normal society leads them to a habit of overthinking, loss of motivation, loss of the desire to live, feeling of sadness, anger, insomnia, depression, and paranoia. Furthermore, many of them have indicated that they have had strong feelings of anger and mistrust toward people when certain objects were restricted from their cells. (Spasova, 2017)

The psychological impact of incarceration can vary from person to person, gender to gender. Not everyone can be equally affected by the unwanted conditions of prison. Men are more physically and emotionally strong and do not feel more about humility, shame, and pain, but women as a delicate and emotional creation of nature are more physically and psychologically affected by the prison environment than men. The number of women lodged in prison is still a minority their number has however increased in the last few years. It is internationally accepted that women in prison are very vulnerable. Mental sickness extensively substance misuse and post- strain disease are commonplace in them, together with illiteracy, undiagnosed autism, and intellectual incapacity. better prices of self-harm and suicide whilst as compared with male prisoners are recorded. The restricted intellectual health offerings to be had are based both on modern psychiatric analysis or gender-precise interventions (Barlett & Hollins 2018).

Although women constitute a relatively smaller number their condition is pathetic in terms of the prison environment. The treatment meted out to them in the jail and the social ostracism which they suffer from greater disabilities in comparison to their male counterparts. The psychological stress caused by the separation from children, the unhelpful attitude of close relatives, and the uncertainty about the future are all factors that make their life miserable during incarceration. Unfortunately, even after three decades of the passing of historic orders by the highest court of the country, the situation in most of the Indian prisons remains unchanged. Prisons are still overcrowded with criminal charges and the threat of a prison sentence hanging over the head of the innocent defendant. The situation with women undertrials is all the more piteous due to their poor educational background, legal ignorance, financial dependence, and lack of family support (Sadiq, 2013).

As per the survey conducted in U.S. jails over 100,000 men and women in hundreds of U.S. jails and prisons asked about whether they have been ever diagnosed with any kind of mental health issue it is found that 39 percent of survey reports show that they had been diagnosing with a mental health disorder. The data when divided on a gender basis gives an astonishing result which shows that 66 percent of women prisoners reported having a mental health disorder which is almost twice then the percentage of men in prison and one in five women in prison had experienced serious psychological distress while only one in seven men had. (Villa, 2017).

Following are some adverse psychological effects that prisoners face:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Claustrophobia

Psychological Impact of Incarceration on Women Prisoners: A Review of Appraisal

- Delusion
- Feeling of panic
- Sometime madness
- Nightmare and inability to sleep
- Phobias
- Substance abuse
- Criminal activity
- Some form of self-destructive behavior
- Suicide
- Delusion

These are the some of the common effects which both men women face as a psychological outcome of their incarceration period apart from above women as being the much sensitive and emotional human being have undergone few more issues as an impact of their incarceration

Separation from children

The effect of Imprisonment in respect of separation from family and children is seen to be more felt by women than men. This will be especially true if the mother of a small child is sent to prison, in some countries, there is the provision of keeping babies until they reach to a particular age. But the deleterious effect that growing up in a prison has on the personal development of a young girl or boy has to be weighed as harm than the benefit of closeness to the mother (Shankardass, 2000). Some studies revealed that in most of the cases the mother is the only or primary caregiver of the children so for them separately from their children is an emotional outburst.

While looking into the recent research it is observed that a considerable amount of distress amongst Incarcerated women is a consequence of separation from family and especially from their children. Mothers in prison have reported feeling anger, anxiety, sadness, depression, shame, guilt, decreased self-esteem, and a sense of loss when separated from their children (Keaveny and Zauszniewski, 1999; Pennix, 1999; Young & Smith, 2000). The degree to which the incarcerated mother experiences these types of distress has implications for both the child's emotional development and the mother's mental health (Hock and Schirtzinger, 1992).

Fear, Shock, and Risk

Shock and fear are two expressions that almost all prisoners have during incarceration and for women the degree of both increases significantly. It is reported in many pieces of research that women prisoners are ready and keen to talk about their feeling of shock, disbelief and isolation when they enter into prison. They have worries about who was taking care of their dependent family members. Women prisoners were also afraid and feel risky about what actually awaited for them inside prison, what kind of treatment they may receive from jail staff and co-prisoners. Fears of intimidation, bullying and violence are the most common fear among women prisoners. Insecurity or risk is a part of prisoner's life, imposed by the uncertain condition of the prison. It is also observed that every prison has 500 rules; they enforce 50 of them; and you never know which rule they will decide to enforce. The bereavement of personal responsibility makes prisoners vulnerable, leads them to a condition of depression and a reduced ability or will to communicate. These feelings are

aggravated by the uncertain length of custody for people on remand and serving indeterminate sentences.

Depression

Depression is the most common psychological effect among both male and female prisoners during their period of incarceration. According to a study conducted in the state of Brazil named as Paraiba jail used a depression screening scale to assess the level of depression among men and women prisoners and result shows that depression level is higher among females than males. It can be seen as around 22.9% male and 33.1% female prisoners had moderate depression whereas about 10.5% male and 17.2% female suffered from severe depression. (Constantino, Calves deasis and Pinto, 2016). For female prisoners poor socio economic conditions and unfavorable prison environment are not only the reasons associated with their condition of depression but apart from that previous history of incarceration, thinking about difficulties after release, feeling of guilt, insecurity about loss of job opportunities after release, Type of crime they committed and prevalence of mental illness in any family member or even having self past mental illness record are some of the major reasons associated with feeling of depression among women prisoners. (Abdu, Kabeta, Dube, Tessema and Abera, 2018)

Mental health issues

Mental health issues are the most serious impact of incarceration among both men and women but as women are more emotional and are not strong enough to handle stress and fear are more prone to have mental health issues. Findings suggest that incarceration is directly responsible to induce negative emotional reactions like anxiety and also it is proven that longer or repetitive imprisonment results in even more detrimental reactions. In addition, imprisoned populations have much higher levels of different mental health problems and even after release many mental health issues remain unrecognized and inmates continue to carry the burden of the high rate of psychiatric or mental health disorders. (Spasova 2017). There is a significant mental health difference that can be seen between incarcerated women and women in general. It is found that only 12% of general women have symptoms of mental disorder as compared to 73% of women in state prison, 61% in federal prison, and around 75% in local jails. Women are more likely than their male counterparts are reported to have an extensive history of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse which affects their psychological health. So, it is found that incarcerated women have a greater incidence of schizophrenia, major depression, substance use disorder, psychosocial dysfunction, and antisocial personality disorder. (Bloom and Covington, 2008)

Resilience and Coping Difficulties

The most common psychological impact of Imprisonment among women prisoners is the difficulties in coping up with undesirable conditions of prison. Given the psychological stresses of Imprisonment it is seen that separation from families, loss of control of their own lives and living close to those with having severe mental illness or other significant health problems women understood that coping with Imprisonment was like a test to their emotional strength. Indeed, resilience was a sign of good mental health for these women. However, others find it very difficult struggling to cope, and leading to depression and ultimately results into suicide attempts. Several women also gave rare accounts of having successful suicides during other sentences and enduring psychological trauma because of coping difficulties. (Douglas, Plugge and Fitzpatrick, 2009)

Suicide

Suicide is another major concern among prisoners it found both in men and women. However this is also a matter of concern suicide among women prisoners is almost equal to that of men. NHRC study suggested that the two primary causes for suicides in prisons included "the environment in the jail, which is apparently "conducive" to suicidal behavior, and the second is the crisis situation faced by an inmate. (Sawant, 2018) The number of women prisoners having characteristics related to the risk of suicide are usually having a history of psychiatric treatment, alcohol or drug abuse, previous suicidal attempts or they belong to socially or economically disadvantaged group. A history of physical or sexual abuse is one of the most important factors which increase the risk of suicide attempts by women prisoners. The second factor which makes women prisoners more vulnerable to suicidal attempts is the impact of prison sentence upon the psychology of women. In case of dependent family members especially children, the family ties and emotional stress is the main reason of their suicide. This argument is strengthened by few examples where women prisoners mostly talk about visits and family problems more as compare to men and it creates a feeling of depression and anxiety which further brings them to a stage where they attempt suicide. (Liebling ,2009)

Implications for Coping and Adjustment

There is no evidence found across the countries which shows that prison system in any way is worth or meaningful in coping with the psychological issues either inside prison or at post-prison life. So, there is a strong need for meaningful implications which can help in coping and adjustment with psychological issues a prisoner had. Adjustment to Imprisonment is not easy task it required a lot of social, political, and psychological efforts. Social exclusion, violence, aggression, anxiety are some common factors experienced by inmates affect their mental strength while coping with the prison environment. The extent to which an inmate's adjustment to Imprisonment is influenced by the prison environment itself (indigenous) or influenced by the prisoner's pre-prison characteristics has long been of considerable debate (Tomar 2013).

The two individuals react in two different ways while coping with the unwanted conditions of prison. In some cases, one person can sink into depression whereas the other can might become aggressive and rebellious to encounter the problems. Research has shown that there is a need to produce a positive environment and positive habits which can shift their focus to a positive approach. The Vermont Department of Corrections is implementing a successful positive intervention for female inmates. This program is designed to organize around the Habits of Mind (HOM) curriculum, program teaches inmates a few life skills through everyday environments, work living units, school. The inmates have undergone a training program called "Challenging Choices" which helps them in inducing intentional thought and present mindedness regarding choices, which they could make at critical moments. The results of this program have been promising. Recidivism has declined by almost 40 percent in participants and the life satisfaction rate has been increasing significantly. (Tomar 2013).

A wise, humane response to the statistics approximately the consequences of modern jail existence should arise on at least levels. We should simultaneously cope with the detrimental prison guidelines and situations of confinement that have created mental issues and at the identical time provide psychological resources and social offerings for people who have been adversely tormented by them. Both things need to arise if the successful transition from prison to home is arising on a regular and effective foundation. (Haney, 2001)

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

No significant amount of progress and change can be seen in the life of prisoners until the changes were not made in the behavior and mindset of people with whom they live inside prison and after returning to their homes. Prison itself is a form of punishment so no more physical and mental punishment is required. We need to address the adverse prison policies and prison conditions which create problems in the physical and mental condition of inmates. It is essential for policymakers, justice systems, and societies to understand that prisons should not be used as a place to "dump" individuals with mental illnesses but rather should promote rehabilitation. (Spasova, 2017).

A mental health professional can help the prisoner to overcome their mental health issues. Psychological therapy like counseling is a safe and confidential method for them. Help from therapists and emotional support from their loved ones can be a great help for the women prisoner to establish a bond with their family and friend and reentry into life outside prison. Prison should be a more rehabilitative institution than correctional centers. Moreover, psychological assistance to cope with their stress and fear is required like prisons like meditation training, spiritual healing, yoga etc. Religious chaplains can also do great work as a counselor by showing them the profane aspects and results of criminal activities and help to induce positive energy into them. No doubt it is time consuming and required a lot of dedication from the prison staff to create a healthy and peaceful environment inside prison but with the support of NGO's, Government policies, jail authorities and staff we can change the life of prisoners in a positive way and ultimately contribute in establishment of a crime free and healthy society.

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Psychological Impact of Incarceration on Women Prisoners: A Review of Appraisal

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Conflict of Interest

I hereby declare that no competing interests exist.

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