

EFFECTS OF IMPRISONMENT ON INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG FEMALE INMATES IN SELECTED PRISONS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the relationship between imprisonment and interpersonal relationship among female inmates in selected prisons in Kenya. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. A total of 295 respondents formed the survey sample. The sample comprised of 291 female inmates' and 4 prison staff. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling methods were used to select the respondents. The study utilized questionnaires, interview schedules and an observation guide as instruments for data collection. Piloting was conducted in one selected prison to enable the researcher to improve on the reliability and validity of the research instruments. The reliability of the research instruments was estimated using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. The instruments yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.857 which was considered appropriate for the study. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. The study established that there was a statistically significant relationship between imprisonment and interpersonal relationship among female inmates in Kenyan prisons.

Key Words: Imprisonment, Interpersonal Relationships, Female Inmates

1. Introduction.

Interpersonal relationship is the ability to create good relationships between a person and others through interaction. Contact with other human beings is so important that when a person is deprived of it for long durations, depression may set in, self-doubt could surface and one may find it difficult to manage even the basics of daily life. Large prison populations mean that prisoners are in constant contact with one another, making privacy rare and interpersonal contact unavoidable. Researchers have demonstrated that such environments are prone to more frequent interpersonal conflicts, aggression, and even violence (Gaes, 1985; Lawrence & Andrews, 2004). However, it is important to acknowledge that inmates' personal relationships and interactions with others are complex and are not always negative. While fights and other conflicts do occur in prisons, these are not the only

social contacts among inmates. Some inmates have reported positive interactions with peers, staff and significant others (Propper, 1989). Although more positive relationships may also influence inmates' prison experiences, the link between inmates' friendships or positive social experiences and imprisonment are rarely studied. In order for the prison authorities to conceptualize the interaction processes in prisons; administrators need to understand the entire context in which inmates interact. This points to the significance of understanding how social interactions, both positive and negative, may influence inmates' behaviour. Therefore, it is essential to study inmates' interpersonal interactions with one another, staff, family members and friends during visitation and how these interactions influence inmates' behaviour.

In contrast to numerous studies of male inmates' social relationships, researchers have scarcely examined female inmates' close interpersonal relationships. Since prisons were not established with female inmates in mind, little attention has been given to these institutions in terms of how imprisonment affects the female inmates interactions with peers, staff and significant others. Incarcerated women are reported to participate in positive relationships, such as supportive homosexual and false family relationships (Giallombardo, 1966; Severance, 2005). Scholars have argued that female inmates' interpersonal relationships may be changing and that ignoring the change is an important omission. Thus, there is need for future researchers to examine female inmates' interpersonal relationships in the context of prison environment (Greer, 2000). In spite of numerous reforms initiated by the Kenyan government in the country's prisons, the level of interaction among inmates, family members, friends and significant others has been hindered by the unfriendly prison environment and the location of most of the female prisons. As such, this study sought to investigate the effects of imprisonment on interpersonal relationships among female inmates in selected Kenyan prisons.

2. Objectives

The objective of this study was to examine the effects of imprisonment on interpersonal relationships among female inmates in selected Kenyan prisons.

3. Methodology

The study employed the descriptive survey research design. A sample of 291 female inmates and 4 prison wardens from 4 selected prisons participated in the study. The selection of the prisons and inmates who participated in the study was done using simple random sampling. The inmates were distributed among the 4 selected prisons using proportionate sampling. The prison wardens were purposefully selected. The total number of study participants was 295. Data from the sampled subjects was collected by use of questionnaires, interview guides and observation schedules. The questionnaires were used to collect data from the respondents. The rationale of using questionnaires is due to the large numbers of inmates. The Interview schedules were used to gather in depth information from the prison wardens. Observation schedules were used to supplement the information gathered from the respondents through questionnaire and interview guides. A pilot study was conducted in one prison with similar characteristics but not included in the study prisons. The data from the pilot study was used to compute the reliability of the instruments using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. The items were considered reliable if they yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.07 and above. In this study the reliability coefficient was 0.857. Quantitative data was coded, entered into the computer and analyzed by use of inferential and descriptive statistics with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0. Qualitative analysis was done by determining patterns and trends from the information gathered through interviews and

observation methods. Eventually, the data analysis results were represented on tables and by prose narrations.

4. Results of the Study

The study was set to test whether there were significant relationship between imprisonment and interpersonal relationships among female inmates in selected prisons in Kenya. Information was obtained from 291 female inmates and 4 prison wardens and the data analysis generated the following results:

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Majority of the inmates comprising 46.4% were below 30 years old while 45.6% were aged between 31 years and 50 years. A large proportion of the female inmates constituting 48.4% were single, 30% were married, 9.2% were widowed while 12.4% were divorced. Most of the female inmates (54.8%) had between 1 to 3 children, 34.8% had 4 or more children while 10.4% were childfree. Regarding the female inmates' highest level of education, 55% had primary school education certificates, 29.3% had secondary school education certificates, 3.2% had bachelor's degree, 2% had attended college while 10.4% had never attended school. Majority of the inmates 44.8% had served less than one year in prison, 20.4% had served between 1 and 2 years, 16.4% had served between 3 and 5 years, 11.2% between 6 and 10 years while 7.2% had served for more than 10 years. Information was sought about the female inmates' religious affiliation and the data analysis results indicated that 54.8% were Protestants, 37.34% were Catholics while 10.4% were Muslims. Majority of the prison wardens comprising 75% were female while 25% were male with 50% being in the age bracket 30 years to 45 years. Regarding the work experience, 50% of the wardens had worked for a range of 1 year to 10 years and the rest had a work experience of more than 10 years. Majority of the prison wardens (75%) were in the rank of an inspector while 25% were in the rank of a corporal. Most (50%) of the prison wardens were Protestants, 25% were Catholics and 25% belonged to the Muslim faithful.

4.2 Effects of Imprisonment on Interpersonal Relationships among Female Inmates

To determine whether the effects of imprisonment on interpersonal relationships among female inmates were significant, Chi Square test was conducted on 10 test items rated on a 5 level likert scale where 5 = Strongly Disagree, 4 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 2 = Agree and 1 = Strongly Agree. The results of data analysis were represented on Table 1 below.

Table 1: Chi Square Test on Effects of Imprisonment on Interpersonal Relationships among Female Inmates

| Statements on Interpersonal Relationships | Chi-Square | Df | Asymp. Sig. |
|--|---------------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| My friends treat me with suspicion since imprisonment | 39.480 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| My family members became distant since imprisonment | 55.520 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| I do not trust my fellow prisoners | 60.040 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| Prison staff are not friendly | 43.080 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| I have no friends in prison | 50.920 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| Prison rules and regulations are socially restricting | 81.080 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| I am never happy while in prison | 121.640 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| I hardly make friends in prison | 56.040 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| I am often uninterested in the feelings of others since imprisonment | 32.920 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| I like staying alone in prison | 53.280 ^a | 4 | .000 |
| Effects of imprisonment on interpersonal relationships among female inmates | 91.392^b | 37 | .000 |

As indicated in Table 1, the P-Value (0.000) was less than the set Alpha Value of 0.05 for all the test items. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected meaning that imprisonment had a statistically significant effect on interpersonal relationships among female inmates in selected prisons in Kenya. Therefore, it was necessary to determine the trends of these effects. In this case, mean perceptions of the respondents and the Standard Deviations were computed. A mean analysis between 1 and 2.5 indicated low interpersonal relationship, between 2.5 and 3.5 indicated modest interpersonal relationship and 3.5 to 5 indicated high interpersonal relationship. Results of data analysis were represented on Table 2 below.

Table 2: Mean Perceptions and Standard Deviations on Effects of Imprisonment on Interpersonal Relationships among Female Inmates

| Statements on Interpersonal Relationships | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--|------------|---------------|-----------------------|
| My friends treat me with suspicion since imprisonment | 250 | 2.89 | 1.503 |
| My family members became distant since imprisonment | 250 | 2.90 | 1.477 |
| I do not trust my fellow prisoners | 250 | 2.61 | 1.390 |
| Prison staff are not friendly | 250 | 2.85 | 1.557 |
| I have no friends in prison | 250 | 3.29 | 1.422 |
| Prison rules and regulations are socially restricting | 250 | 2.52 | 1.468 |
| I am never happy while in prison | 250 | 2.19 | 1.357 |
| I hardly make friends in prison | 250 | 2.98 | 1.529 |
| I am often uninterested in the feelings of others since imprisonment | 250 | 2.87 | 1.529 |
| I like staying alone in prison | 250 | 3.27 | 1.561 |
| Effects of imprisonment on interpersonal relationship | 250 | 2.8368 | .90559 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 250 | | |

Key: M-Mean SD- Standard Deviation N- Number of Respondents

As indicated on Table 2, imprisonment had moderate effects on interpersonal relationships among female inmates in selected prisons in Kenya with an overall mean of 2.8368 and a Standard Deviation of .90559. The test item with the lowest mean score of 2.19 and a Standard Deviation of 1.357 indicated that female inmates were never happy in prison. In spite of the unhappy state of the female inmates while in prison, majority of the female inmates attested to having friends in prison and not inclined to staying alone while in prison. This concern was indicated by the test item with the highest mean score of 3.29 and a Standard Deviation of 1.422 and the next highest mean score of 3.27 and a Standard Deviation of 1.561 respectively. Emanating from these data analysis results, it may be inferred that the female inmates had an innate desire for friendly interpersonal relationships and interactions.

Responses from the in-depth prison warden interviews allowed for exploration of what friendship meant for female inmates and how the female inmates helped and interacted with each other in prison. The findings indicated that female inmates who maintained strong family ties were able to withstand challenges in prison. Interaction with family members was possible through weekly or monthly visits by the family members, communication through mobile phones provided by the prison or by writing letters. The prison wardens attributed lack of visits from family members for some female inmates to long distances from home. In addition, the female inmates who were not visited tended to feel lonely and rejected by family members and friends. The prison wardens also perceived those female inmates who had left children under the care of relatives and friends as most affected in interpersonal relationships. This category of female inmates tended to withdraw from social interactions into deep thoughts that seemed disturbing. Female inmates who had served a long duration in prison were perceived by prison wardens as being more cooperative during communal work compared to those who had served a shorter duration in prison. This was credited to familiarity and the ease of keeping the prison rules and regulations acquired through experience.

Generally, effective interpersonal relationships among female inmates reflected a feeling of strength derived from the resultant social support, affection and cooperation.

Data generated through observation method indicated that female inmates interacted freely among themselves and with the prison staff. Activities that facilitated such interactions were noted and included cooking, tailoring, sporting, feeding children, studies, religious fellowships and communal work. Most female inmates were observed as being friendly both to visitors and prison staff.

5. Discussion

The study findings indicated that imprisonment had a moderate effect on interpersonal relationships among female inmates in selected Kenyan prisons. The female inmates preferred having friends and interacting instead of staying alone. This was an indication of innate desire for intimate interpersonal relationships. These results are in line with Hart (1995) who demonstrated that strong social support among female inmates was related to inmates' mental well-being since social support or friendship in prison helped them to avoid conflict. In support of these findings, Timbre (2013) pointed out that a wide variety of inmates found comfort and support in personal relationships. In retrospect, Trammell (2009) noted that confinement in prison may be a more difficult experience for women than men because women are more likely to find the social isolation insufferable. The prison wardens observed that female inmates who had not served for a long time in prison had difficulties in adhering to prison rules and regulations. This sentiment was echoed by Hampton (2012) who asserted that women do not as readily become part of the inmate subculture and do not adhere as rigidly to an inmate code. However, in this study a positive relationship was observed between the length of stay in prison and female inmates' adherence to inmate subculture and code of conduct. This was reflected in the prison wardens' view that female inmates who had served a long duration in prison were more cooperative during communal work compared to those who had served a shorter duration in prison. The prison wardens credited this to familiarity and the ease of keeping the prison rules and regulations gained through experience.

Results of this study revealed that female inmates who had left children under the care of relatives and friends were more likely to be negatively affected in their interpersonal interactions. Previous research has demonstrated that mothers consider isolation and separation from children to be the hardest aspects of imprisonment (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001). Boudin (1998) notes that incarcerated women feel enormous grief about time lost with their children. Others have found that women prisoners' primary concern is on the effects of separation and incarceration on their children's live and psychological development (Cooper & Berwick, 2001). Nevertheless, the study findings indicated that female inmates who maintained strong family ties were able to withstand difficulties in prison an aspect that reflected a feeling of strength among the inmates since they were able to experience social support, cooperation and affection among themselves and staff.

Findings from this study also revealed that female inmates in selected prisons in Kenya interacted freely in prison activities which included cooking, tailoring, sporting, feeding children, studies and communal work. This may be attributed to prison reforms initiated by the Government of Kenya. Contrary to these findings, McCain *et al.*, (1980), Gaes 1985 as well as Lawrence and Andrews (2004) suggest that large prison populations where inmates are in constant contact with each other making privacy rare are conducive to more frequent interpersonal conflict, aggression, and even violence. Although female inmates in Kenyan prisons interacted freely in prison, majority of the

inmates were never happy within the prison environment. This potential gap in the body of knowledge may be explored through further research.

6. Recommendations

Based on the study findings, there was need for enhancement of female inmates' interpersonal relationships which were moderately affected by imprisonment. This may be achieved by increasing visitation schedules and opening other channels through which inmates may interact with their children and loved ones without compromising security. The prison environment could also be modified to allow for more social support groups and home like environment where female inmates may nurture a sense of belongingness especially those serving long sentences.

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