

Effect of Fathers' Imprisonment on Family Members of Ahvaz Prisoners

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Abstract---The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of fathers' imprisonment on the academic achievement and tendency towards delinquency of their family members, and the social interaction of the families of prisoners in Ahvaz during 2009. The study was based on the theory of social control. An exploratory research method used a questionnaire to collect data. The statistical universe included wives of all prisoners who were incarcerated in the prisons of Karoun and Sepidar (Ahvaz, Iran) for 2 years. Proportional allocation was used for the sampling frame. Criminal subgroups were detected with respect to the type of crime committed. The sample size was 189 people. Two statistical analyses - t test and ANOVA - were applied to analyse the data. Results showed that there was a significant difference in the families of the prisoners before and after imprisonment. Also it was found that the type of crime committed by the fathers had an effect on the academic achievement of the children and the tendency toward delinquent behaviour of the family members, and on the social interaction of family members. Families of the subgroup imprisoned for drug offenses were affected more compared to the other criminal subgroups.

Keywords---family; imprisonment; father; crime; Ahvaz; Iran

I INTRODUCTION

Family is one of the most important structures of society, and acts as a medium between people and their community. The family, during its history, has played several roles, and one of the most important of them is child rearing [1]. Undoubtedly, the family needs a calm situation to perform this duty, and whenever a deficiency in its structure occurs, the role will be disturbed. There are several variables which disturb the process, but a father's absence due to imprisonment is a well-known variable in this regard [2, 3]. In this situation, children are the most vulnerable group. However, the problem is not limited only to children; all the family members are affected by the problem.

Absence of fathers affects the family in several different areas. The theory of social control explains the situation as follows: a parent's imprisonment can lead to delinquency due to low quality of parenthood and supervision at home [4,5 and 6]. Humans are social creatures by their nature. According to the concept of social contracts, people follow

social rules and laws in order to have a normal life; but not all humans accept the contracts and rules, a situation which is called deviance [7]. As societies have trended towards industrialization, the frequency and types of deviances and abnormalities have increased [8].

According to a national survey related to prisoners in the United States, an increasing proportion of children in the country have a parent in prison. For instance, the number of prisoners was 945,600 in 1990 and this had increased to 1,706,600 in 2007 [3]. In Iran, crime is also a social problem, and the increasing number of prisoners can be counted as clear evidence of it [9]. For example, in the period 1980-2007, the number of prisoners increased 7 times from 22,400 in 1980 to 156,600 in 2007 [10]. On the other hand, during the same period, the population of the country increased less than 2 times, from 36 million in 1980 to 70 million [11]. The index of prisoners per 100,000 population during the period changed dramatically; in 1980, the index was 25/100,000 [10], but it had risen to 356/100,000 in 2008 [12].

A group which is usually ignored by practitioners and also professionals in the judiciary field is the prisoners' family members [13, 4]. Whenever a man is sentenced to imprisonment, his family is also punished as a side effect of his imprisonment. In Iran, there are 116,000 married prisoners with 313,000 children who do not have any source of income [10]. Of the married prisoners, more than 97% were men [14]. The situation can lead to a vicious cycle of insufficient supervision at home, and the tendency to deviancy, crime, and imprisonment which can be transmitted to the next generation.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

Social control theory holds that people learn to fulfil their needs at home, and in the case of boys, fathers are the main source of the process [2, 15]. An earlier study [16] found that the family's relations with relatives, children's tendency towards delinquency, and the children's academic achievement were all affected by the father's imprisonment. In a study of married prisoners, a marked reduction in their social ability was noted; before the imprisonment period

41.5% of the sample could fulfil the family's needs, but after the period of imprisonment, they were only able to fulfil 12.5% of the family's needs [17]. In other study, it was found that a father's imprisonment affected family in different aspects, such as an increasing incidence of children's delinquency, unemployment in the family, low income, and limited social interaction [3].

III METHODOLOGY

The statistical universe in this study included wives of prisoners who were in the prisons of Karun and/or Sepidar at least for 2 years. Three criminal subgroups were determined with respect to imprisonment time and type of crime; stealing, homicide and addiction. The sample consisted of 189 wives whose husbands were in prison for at least 2 years. Data were collected via a self-constructed questionnaire with 22 items. The questionnaire was validated by applying Law she's formula in terms of content validity, $r = 0.67$, which is considered high [18]. Reliability of the instrument was measured by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, $r=0.73$, $p<0.05$.

IV FINDINGS

Subjects ranged in age from 20-40 years, with the majority aged 30-40 years old (31.2%). Most of the prisoners who were included in this study had committed thefts (62%). One of the children's life dimensions which has been found to be affected by a fathers' imprisonment was academic achievement. In this study, academic achievement of the children was assessed in the periods of pre- and post-imprisonment. To determine the dimension's affectability, a t test was applied which showed, $t=19.957$, $df=188$, $p<0.001$. This value indicated that there was a significant difference in academic achievement of children in the two periods. With respect to the mean difference between the times, 7.95, the trend was decreasing; thus, it can be said that father's imprisonment had a negative effect on their children's academic achievement.

To determine the effect of the type of crime on academic achievement, an ANOVA was applied, $F=7.203$, $df=186$, $p<0.00$. Thus, a significant difference was observed between the children of the criminal subgroups. To determine which subgroup was most affected by the variable, a Duncan test was applied as a post hoc test. The means were 16.1, 16.35 and 20.65 for stealing, homicide and addiction, respectively. With respect to significance level, $p<0.004$, it can be said that the maximum difference was recorded for the addiction subgroup. In other words, children whose fathers were imprisoned for addiction problems, were more affected by the imprisonment experience.

Another variable which was assessed in this study was the tendency of family members to exhibit delinquent behaviour before and after their father's imprisonment. A matched pair t test was applied to test the related hypothesis. The achieved value was, $t = -7.38$, $df =188$, $p<0.001$. The mean difference for the periods before and after imprisonment increased by 6.06, from 17.62 and 23.68 for the pre- and post-imprisonment periods, respectively. The values indicated a negative effect of imprisonment on the tendency for the period after imprisonment. In other words,

there was a greater tendency for family members to commit crimes and delinquent acts. The type of crime of the father also had an effect on the trend. An ANOVA showed a significant effect for criminal subgroups in terms of their family members' tendency towards committing crimes after father's imprisonment. The result was, $F= 4.624$, $df =186$, $p<0.001$. A Duncan test was used as a post hoc test to determine which criminal subgroups were affected more by the fathers' imprisonment. Again it was observed that children of the addiction subgroup were more affected by their fathers' imprisonment, 26.16, 21.27 and 22.32 for subgroups of addiction, stealing and homicide respectively. The difference between the groups was significant at $p<0.05$. Social interaction is one of the aspects of family life that can be affected by the father's imprisonment. In this study, the hypothesis was tested, and it was found that there was a significant difference between social interaction in the periods before and after the fathers' imprisonment. The achieved values were, $t =16.23$, $df=188$, $p<0.001$. In particular, there was a reduction in interactions between the family and relatives during the fathers' imprisonment period. An ANOVA was applied to determine the effect of the imprisonment on the family's social interaction among the subgroups. The achieved results were, $F =1.96$, $df =186$, $p =.144$, which were not significant. Thus, it can be said that all criminal subgroups were similarly affected by the fathers' imprisonment.

V DISCUSSION

Imprisonment is a destructive experience for all members of the prisoner's family, especially in case of father's imprisonment. The problem can affect many broader social aspects of the family, such as children's academic achievement, delinquent tendencies of family members, and the family's social interaction with relatives. Findings in this study are in line with previous studies [16, 2, 15]. The findings also support the social control theory which states that parents' imprisonment can increase the children's tendency towards delinquency, exacerbated by weak parenthood and a low level of supervision at home.

VI RECOMMENDATIONS

With regard to the findings, all members of families in which the father in prison should be considered to be at risk of falling into the trap of crime and delinquency. Thus, preventive activities should be put in place to prevent them from becoming involved in the problems. Designing some educational compensatory plans for the children of imprisoned fathers is one positive step which can help prevent the groups from engaging in the deviant behaviours. With regard to the social interaction of the families, which can drive them towards groups facing similar problems, which in turn can result in criminalization, some plans should be designed. The prison, as an organization with which the group is in regular touch (through visiting the prisoner), can play a critical role in this regard. Setting up associations for the family members which offer supportive services such as counselling and professional help can be

helpful in preventing them from falling into deviant ways and perpetuating the cycle of crime.

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