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## **Economic Impacts of Parental Imprisonment on Left Behind Children: A Quantitative Study in Dir Lower, Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

This study measures the economic impacts and constraints of parental imprisonment over the left-behind children in the District Lower Dir in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The data is collected through the interview schedule prepared in accordance with the Sekaran table (2003) of the standard sample size using the Chi-square test. The findings of the study show a highly significant association between parental imprisonment and their children having difficulty managed their expenses. Similarly, results show a significant association between parental imprisonment and their children's interest in cellular phones and luxurious equipment and facilities. Additionally, the analysis shows that due to lack of proper supervision, there is a significant association between parental imprisonment and their children's misuse of the daily expenses of the household. Likewise, the data shows a highly significant association of these children with a lazy attitude toward income generation for the livelihood of their family. Similarly, the assessment shows a significant association of these children having produced economic needs in an illegal method. Furthermore, a highly significant association is found in children of imprisoned parents having a financial background from the middle class thus waste a lot of money in parties and other gatherings with friends.

**Keywords:** Economic Impact, Parental Imprisonment, Left Behind Children, Poverty

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### **1. Introduction**

Parental imprisonment refers to “custodial confinement of parents in jail or prison”. Children with imprisoned parents are more vulnerable to psychological stress, antisocial behaviour, and financial deprivation (Farrington, Barnes & Lambert, 1996). Different researches show that the effects of parental imprisonment differ, based on whether the children's father or mother is imprisoned (Berry & Eigenberg, 2003). The duration of sentencing and residency of parents during the imprisonment have different effects on children. Widespread separations of incarcerated parents have shown a negative effect on their children (Schafer & Dellinger, 1999). Different research studies show an increase in rates of imprisonment in western developed countries, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States (Mumble, 2000). Nonetheless, the economic effects of parental imprisonment on the left-behind children have been ignored by the policymakers. According to Shaw (1987), if we do not focus on the

effects of incarceration on children, we have the risk of punishing and/or negatively affecting the left-behind children which may probably be causing wrongdoing for the future generation. The effects of parental imprisonment on children's lives remained for a longer period. The parental imprisonment does not produce a causal effect on children, but it is the cause of harmful effects on children. As one of the female prisoners in the study conducted by (Healy, Foley & Walsh, 2000) stated that "the damage was done before I came to prison". According to Hogan and Dinovitzer (1999), loss of financial and social capital following parental imprisonment might produce unfavourable outcomes for children and labelled this view as "the strain perspective". Financial strains and psychological stress on the children might be the result of unpleasant outcomes after parental imprisonment.

## **2. Literature Review**

The family members including children may be affected psychologically, emotionally and economically due to imprisonment of their main earning members i.e., the parents. Due to the absence of parents, children can face severe financial problems. From different studies, it has been concluded that parents have been the main source of formal or informal financial support for their family members (Hairston, 1998). Where the living standards are high, particularly in western societies, the loss of a mother's income can also create a greater economic problem for their family. Nonetheless, an individual's income whether male or female can affect a family because most of the criminals belong to the poor families' background before their arrest (Reed & Reed, 1997). In most of the female cases, a mother in jail is single economic support of family members. The imprisonment of a single mother has a deep effect on the economic condition of the children. Due to the loss of parents, children often face the menace poverty and bad financial conditions (Bloom & Steinhart, 1993). This worse situation of poverty becomes a major cause of financial problems. This happens in cases especially where political leaders and government policymakers have failed to create alternative livelihood programs for the families of imprisoned persons (Seymour, 1988).

Shaw (1987) conducted a research study over different nations of the world. The countries included Denmark, England, the United States and Australia which shows that a greater number of prisoners originate from low economic status. The imprisonment of such parents has negative effects on the family especially the children. Shaw investigated 415 imprisoned men in England, which were directed in 1987 and 1992. The research showed that the children of imprisoned parents had the tendency to become socially, financially and psychologically deprived of the support of parents. Consequently, the imprisonment of a father often adds psychological pressure on the children which further enhances financial hardship in addition to the existing problems. Shaw's results were more applicable to the condition of Ireland, in the context of findings on the socio-economic background of prisoners. The financial status of prisoners' family shows that their needs do not get much consideration from the government mainly due to lack of relevant institutions.

Boswell and Wedge's (2001) study found that an imprisoned person's family has the inclination to have a place with low economic status. Moreover, their requirements and rights do not get consideration among the sentencing procedure. When mothers are imprisoned, their children have no choice to take up livelihood outside the homes. Their children in this situation can receive less consideration than they had before. Different studies have highlighted that when women are incarcerated, it is possible in majority cases that their extended families take control

of their children. This puts an additional financial strain on grandparents, uncles and other guardians, who need to control and monitor the financial requirements of children (Howard, 2000). Most women in prison were single mothers and were the only economic support of their families. The imprisoned parents' children thus faced further financial hardships as they entered to a poorer caregiver family. The new addition to overloaded families may cause more financial problems, especially when policymakers fail to make access to public support programs through temporary assistance for such needy families (Seymour, 1998).

King's (2002) research revealed that children with imprisoned parents face negative impacts in the form of financial pressure. Moreover, it includes a lack of participation in social and economic activities under the supervision and support of guardians. Furthermore, Hall's (2000) also studied the situation of children with imprisoned parents in Northern Ireland. The Hall's Northern Ireland-based study provides an insight regarding the impacts of parental imprisonment on children's financial position. To him, it affected the children in the form of reduced income and shortened economic activities. According to him, one child from imprisoned parents says: "With my daddy in jail there was less money, and not very much pocket money. Mummy was hard on me because I always asked for money and she didn't have it. I wasn't allowed to stay out late because my mummy was too overprotective. What I hated most was not being able to do what other children did with their daddies – like playing football and going places - I felt left out and lonely" (Hall, 2000: 10).

Moreover, King's (2002) also concluded from the above outline that imprisonment of parents not only affected the children and their family economically but has also adversely affected the career-building and overall growth and development of the children. He added that children of imprisoned parents have been unable to find employment. Even in the post-release period of parents, the losses in income generation of the earning members may increase. In addition, the career-building of children may be given attention, or their employment may be changed to provide basic needs for children. This may contribute to decreasing the level of attention that children need to receive. On the contrary, Smith et. al., (2007) finding identify that parents may also change their careers and change priorities of life for taking care of children with commitment towards responsibilities which are above economic gain. Changing of careers by guardians including extended family members such as grandparents may be required to take care of the children within the circumstances of low income.

Rosenberg (2009) conducted a research study in the UK and the USA on the same issue. The findings of the study showed that parental imprisonment increased the risk of debt liabilities for other family members mainly due to financial irregularities. The low income and resultant financial difficulties have been experienced by prisoners' family member including children. These problems also included new expenses like sending money to the prisoner parents, charges of phone calls and travel charges for visiting prisoner parents. Furthermore, Smith et. al., (2007) argued that due to financial problems, the expenses of prisoner families couldn't be fulfilled by the remaining family member over six months period of parental imprisonment. The expenses of prisoner families included an average of £208 for the incarcerated family member. British Government provides financial schemes to the affected families such as to assist them with the costs of visiting the prisoners. But the major concern is that children of imprisoned parents are not eligible to avail of any financial assistance for personal expenses.

This is the case in relation to the Assisted Prison Visits Scheme in England and Wales, which excludes children from the eligibility criteria for financial assistance. Smith et. al., (2007) also suggest that further expenses may be afforded by families and guardians due to the imprisonment of a resident or non-resident parent who provided voluntary childcare and household maintenance before their imprisonment. The Government should give special attention to the insufficiency of economic benefit entitlements to reduce economic hardships practiced by prisoners' families and children. The government should make such policies that aim to alleviate poverty and provide better employment opportunities. Although, the prisoner's families have often given priorities to the responsibilities of caring the children than their employment opportunities.

Smith et al. (2007) pointed out in the British study that families and children of the imprisoned parents faced additional anxieties, tension, and depression. This is because obtaining welfare benefits may be time taken. Moreover, it often causes income disturbance like arrears, surcharges, debts and eviction threats. They also identified that families of prisoners have been exposed to the risk of housing disturbance if they have been living in privately rented housing and if welfare benefit transitions are delayed. They also argued that such financial and housing problem caused threats of violence, regression, hostility, revenge and created the possibility of homelessness for families of prisoners. A study conducted by Phillips et. al., (2006) found that parental imprisonment is strongly connected with the economic strains of the left-behind children. Children of low-income backgrounds become a burden on a jobless caregiver. It results in a lower standard of living and/or incapability to meet the children's basic needs. The direct connection of parental imprisonment to economic strains of the left-behind children is that it will raise the likelihood of the risk that children's households will become unbalanced. It may result in an increase in unconnected parental households, divorces, and non-routine school activities of the children. Any of these risks can affect the children's healthy life, growth, and career development.

Fishman (1990) conducted a study on the physical condition, income, and expenses of imprisoned families. Women with imprisoned spouses have faced severe financial problems due to the loss of spousal income. A major problem was faced by grandparents who had been raising grandchildren and shared that financial problems were the main difficulties of the children of imprisoned spouses. Furthermore, the findings of Cohen and Brook (1987) revealed that long-term risks were linked with the family's instability, poor housing, and poverty, and the left-behind children were exposed to all these risks. Similarly, Greene et. al., (2000) interviewed 102 imprisoned mothers in three central jails of California. They were investigated about the situation under which their children were grown up during the period of their imprisonment. On average, the mothers had 2.5 children and 76% of mothers had the lawful care of their children. Information was gathered about those children whose age was under 18 years. Questions were asked about the childhood experiences of sexual abuse, economic constraints, use of drugs and domestic hostility at home. Only a few numbers of these children were living at home during the imprisonment of parents. Results from research studies revealed that 83% of the imprisoned mothers' children had been either abused sexually, physically or faced domestic violence and financial problems at home.

### **3. Methods and Material**

The main principle of the study is to dig out the negative economic impact of parental imprisonment which produces financial problems for their children. This study is conducted

through the quantitative research method because the said problem has been identified as a reality with facts and covers the area of the knowledge of positivism. This problem exists in the Malakand division but covering of the whole administrative division which consists of five districts, is impossible for the researcher. The researcher selected District Dir Lower as the universe of the study. Data is collected from the respondents including children and guardians whose households' member was incarcerated in prisons. For the collection of the primary data, an interview schedule is used as a tool for data collection. Primary data is collected from 260 respondents, which is the sample size of the study drawn through the Sekaran table (2003). Simple random sampling is used which is further distributed through the proportional allocation method among different strata. The primary data collected has been analysed through SPSS. The chi-square test is applied to find out the relationship between the dependent variable (economic impact) and independent variable (parental imprisonment).

## **4. Results and Discussions**

### **4.1 Uni-Variate Analysis**

Phillips et. al., (2006) found that parental imprisonment is strongly connected with the economic strains of the children and other household members. It is distinct that low-income along with a jobless caregiver results in a lower standard of living or incapability to meet the children's basic needs. The connection of parental imprisonment to economic strains has a possibility that their households will become unbalanced. It includes several frequent moves like an increase in unconnected parents with the household, divorce, and non-routine school activities of the children. The table-1 indicates that 76.2% of respondents were of the view that the children of imprisoned parents could not manage their expenses. Due to the loss of earning members, children with imprisoned parents were involved in illegal activities of earning and hence, managed their expenses through illegal means. It is clear from the above table that only 17.7% of respondents believed that children of imprisoned parents could easily manage their expenses after parental imprisonment while 6.2% of respondents remained undecided.

Similarly, most of the respondents 75.0% pointed out that children of imprisoned parents took interest in the cellular phone, motorbikes, wristwatch, and other luxurious things. The table's results also show that 18.5% of respondents believed children of imprisoned parents did not take interest in the cellular phones, motorbikes, and wristwatches. It has been mainly due to the worse condition of poverty however, 6.5% of respondents remained undecided about responding to this question. Similarly, 60.4% respondents reported that children with imprisoned parents misuse the daily expenses of household because of lack of parental check and control, while 33.5% respondents were of the view that children of imprisoned parents did not misuse the daily expenses of household and the remaining 6.2% did not express their views regarding this statement.

Furthermore, 58.8% of respondents hold that children of the imprisoned parents have developed a lazy and lethargic attitude towards income generation for their family members. They did not contribute as a part-time job or as a supportive role in income generation with their guardians. However, 29.2% of respondents added that children of imprisoned parents did not have a lazy or lethargic attitude towards income-earning while 11.9% of respondents remained undecided about this question. Moreover, 75% of respondents believed that children of imprisoned parents fulfill their economic needs by illegal means. However, 18.5% of

respondents shared that children of imprisoned parents did not fulfill their economic needs by illegal means and 6.5% of respondents did not share their views on this issue. Similarly, from the above table, it is cleared that 64.2% of the respondents had the opinion that that children of imprisoned parents wasted a lot of money in parties and other gatherings with friends because they had adopted illegal means of earning and due to lack of parental proper check and control such kind of children wasted a lot of money in parties and gatherings with friends. As shown in the above table, 27.7% of respondents were of the view that children of imprisoned parents did not waste money in parties with friends while 8.1% of respondents remained undecided to answer this question.

Table-1: Frequency Distribution and Proportion of Economic Impacts

Statement	Yes		No		Total
	O.V	%V	O.V	%V	
Children of imprisoned parents managed their expenses	46	17.7	198	76.2	260
Children of imprisoned parents took interest in cellular phone, motor bikes and wrist watches	195	75	48	18.5	260
Children of imprisoned parents misused the daily expenses of household	157	60.4	87	33.5	260
Children of imprisoned parents had lazy/lethargic attitude towards supporting their guardians in income earning	153	58.8	76	29.2	260
Children of imprisoned parents produced economic needs through illegal means	195	75	48	18.5	260
Children of jailed parents wasted a lot of money in parties and gatherings with friends	175	64.2	72	27.7	260

Note: Observed Value and Percentage Value are denoted by (O.V) and (%V) in the table, respectively.

#### 4.2. Bi-Variate Analysis

A family is affected psychologically, emotionally, and economically when their leading earning family members are imprisoned. Especially due to the absence of fathers, left-behind children face severe financial problems. Children of those parents who are imprisoned are exposed to a lot of social problems i.e. economic deprivation and lack of emotional supports which has negative effects on their future (Hairston, 1998). A highly significant association ( $p=0.000$ ) was found between imprisoned parents and their children who had to manage their expenses. The results in most of the cases showed that the father is considered as a source of earning. However, due to his absence, the children often earned money through illegal means. Boswell and Wedge (2001) found that the imprisoned family has the tendency to have low status and less income because their basic requirements do not get consideration in the sentencing procedures. They also concluded that due to the lack of family control over children, they get involved in illegal activities to earn money for their families. Similarly, a significant association ( $p=0.014$ ) was found between parental imprisonment and their children who take an interest in the cellular phones, wristwatches, and other luxurious things.

It is clear from the statistical result that due to lack of parental supervision and control, children of the imprisoned parents with a background from the middle class were more exposed to wasting of the money on unnecessary and lavish items. It has further aggravated the household's economic condition. Fishman (1990) conducted a study on the physical condition of the imprisoned family. He found that wives and children of the imprisoned person face

financial problems and that loss of spousal income has been the major problem. Furthermore, a significant association ( $p=0.001$ ) was found between parental imprisonment and their children who misuse the daily expenses of the household due to lack of parental control and proper supervision. It has been concluded from the results that due to the absence of their parents, there exists no regular check and social control from the family side. Therefore, children with imprisoned parents often misuse social and economic privileges. Hairston (1998) found in a study and supported the results that there is a considerable economic effect on the entire family, especially on children when they misuse the daily income of the family.

A highly significant association ( $p=0.000$ ) was found between parental imprisonment and their children having a lazy and lethargic attitude towards income generation. Due to the absence of parents, such children are unable to play a positive and supportive role with their guardians to earn money for the remaining family members mainly due to their lazy attitude toward earning. Bloom and Steinhart (1993) concluded that a father in jail is mostly single economic support of their family members. Therefore, the imprisonment of a father has a deep effect on the economic condition of the family. Moreover, a significant association ( $p=0.014$ ) was found between parental imprisonment and their children having produced economic needs by illegal means. It has been concluded from the results that due to lack of proper check and control, children of imprisoned parents were involved in illegal and often in criminal activities to fulfill their economic needs. Reed & Reed (1997) found that most of the criminal tendency originates in children from the poor family background even prior to the arrest of their parents. Such kinds of children easily get involved in various criminal activities after the imprisonment of their parents and thus fulfill the economic needs of their family members through illegal means.

Table-2: Association between Economic Impacts on Children and Parental Imprisonment

Statement	Perception	Economic Impact of Parental Imprisonment						P value Chi-Square
		Good		Poor		Total		
		O.V	% V	O.V	% V	O.V	% V	
Children of imprisoned parents managed their expenses	Yes	30	11.5	16	6.2	46	17.7	(p=0.000) ( $\chi^2=40.464$ )
	No	128	49.9	45	17.3	198	76.2	
Children of imprisoned parents took interest in cellular phones, motor bikes and wrist watches	Yes	136	52.3	42	16.2	195	75	(p=0.014) ( $\chi^2=12.549$ )
	No	27	10.4	13	5	48	18.5	
Children of imprisoned parents misused their daily expenses	Yes	106	40.8	30	11.5	157	60.4	(p=0.001) ( $\chi^2=19.939$ )
	No	47	18.1	37	14.2	87	33.5	
Children of imprisoned parents had lazy attitude towards income generation	Yes	85	32.7	23	8.8	123	47.3	(p=0.000) ( $\chi^2=22.292$ )
	No	37	14.2	27	10.4	73	28.1	
Children of imprisoned parents fulfilled their economic needs through illegal means	Yes	43	16.5	8	3.1	52	20	(p=0.014) ( $\chi^2=12.549$ )
	No	66	25.5	38	14.6	126	48.5	
Children of imprisoned parents wasted a lot of money in parties with friends	Yes	100	38.8	49	18.8	167	64.2	(p=0.000) ( $\chi^2=20.898$ )
	No	45	17.3	18	6.9	72	27.7	

Contrary to the aforementioned examples, a highly significant association ( $p=0.000$ ) was found between parental imprisonment and children of imprisoned parents who waste a lot of money

in parties and gatherings with friends. It has been concluded from the results that due to the absence of parents and the resultant lack of proper supervision, children have been wasting the money on various un-necessary parties and other events with friends. Thus, mismanagement leads to disequilibrium of the family system especially the income vs. expenses of the household eventually. Phillips et. al., (2006) found that parental imprisonment has been strongly associated with economic aspects of children's households. Hence, children with imprisoned parents wasted a lot of money in parties and other functions with friends due to lack of proper checks and balances from parent's and guardian's side.

## 5. Conclusions

It is concluded that parental imprisonment is deleterious for the children's life. The left-behind children are deprived of their domestic needs. They are ignored and deprived of proper socialization, thus getting indulged in crimes, hostility, drug addiction. Therefore, they become victims of emotional stress, nervousness, and sadness. They are gossiping unethically and join the bad company of friends due to a lack of parental checks. They get deprived of their physical comfort and facilities. Despite social and psychological problems, the children of imprisoned parents face financial constraints. They manage their daily expenses through illegal methods. They take more interest in a motorbike, cellular phone, and other luxurious things for spending a lavish style of life. The children of middle-class families misuse the daily expenses of their household thus causing further economic constraints for family. They develop a lethargic and lazy attitude towards supporting their guardians in income generation activities. In brief, parental imprisonment has numerous impacts on the socio-economic life of the children of the imprisoned parents.

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