

Journal of Social Signs Review

Exploring the Impact of Women's Harassment in Prison on Family Dynamics: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Analyzing women's harassment in prison one can raise the issue of women's rights violations and consequences which affect not only women themselves, but also their families. The purpose of this research is to establish how women in prison perceive harassment has affected their families with a focus on emotional, financial, and social aspects. Qualitative research is adopted in the study with a focus on interviews and case histories of families who are victims of such incidences within the different cultural and economic strata. Two main methods were employed in data collection: Interviews with family members of incarcerated women; Interviews were semi-structured and the data collected was analyzed thematically with the view of comparing patterns that were similar and different. Studies show that harassment in prison severely threatens family roles and brings about additional changes such as psychosocial disturbed functioning and unmet financial needs besides enduring stigmatization. Comparative assessment brings out stark differences in the effects of these often-citing difference in cultural

practice, economic status, and ready access to resources. Fear was a recurrent feature especially among children and spouses and the low-income earners reported a high financial impact. This work therefore highlights the need for change in prison facilities through humane treatment of women in prisons as well as shouldering off any such spillover effects on families. The study also raises a need for providing programs for families of women who are in jail, especially in issues to do with mental health as well as social adjustment. In this way, this research enhances knowledge of the interconnected issues concerning the wide social ramifications of prison harassment, together with future policy modifications and studies.

Keywords: Women's Harassment, Prison, Family Dynamics, Comparative Study, Psychological Impact, Social Consequences.

Introduction

Contextual Background

The imprisonment of females is again increasing in the present global world to reveal different issues that female prisoners face in the pen. Of all these cases, harassment in prison is one of the biggest concerns as this problem was described above pointing at the structural and systematic issues in prisons globally. It starts from verbal threats and battery of fellow inmates, other staff, and other employees, as well as sexual offenses (Kubiak et al., 2017; Harner & Riley, 2013). This type of treatment denies the barest of the human rights and of course, exacerbates the already frail mental health of women in prison, who otherwise had many other struggles in life including gender violence, or abuse of substances before they were incarcerated (Van Voorhis et al., 2010).

Most of the interrelated impacts of harassment that emanate in the prisons are not only limited to the whole process of imprisonment. Men and women who have been imprisoned are answerable to their families being subject to emotional strain, embarrassment, and losses. Children in particular experience tremendous

injury, wherein development attainments are completely disrupted; partners or other caregivers have to spend time earning a livelihood, and are left emotionally sore (Mowen & Visher, 2016; Bancroft et al., 2011). Maintaining and consolidating this identified broader ripple effect becomes crucial to explain the link becoming and outcomes experiencing prison harassment about familiar adjustments.

Problem Statement

However, in the past decades, the plight of the incarcerated females has been realized; nevertheless, scanty information exists on the impact of the prison experience on families of the female dees. A comparative analysis with other works of prior authors showed that the latter focused more on the inmates themselves instead of their families, which are the sources of support often in prison and after release (Codd, 2013; Wallace et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the published research on working women who became victims of harassment while in prison, or on the effects of harassment on attitudes towards fatherhood and child custody, or changes in the family relationships is quite limited.

Responding to this gap, this research will use the narratives of women who have faced harassment in prison to understand its effects on the family's emotional, social, and financial well-being. Here it shows why one has to understand this connection as it points to the need to have enumerated policies and support programs which will enable the incarcerated individuals as well as their families.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate the emotional toll of prison harassment on family members, particularly children and spouses.
2. To explore the financial challenges faced by families of harassed women, including job loss, legal expenses, and caregiving burdens.
3. To examine the social consequences, such as stigma and isolation, that families endure due to the incarceration and harassment of a female relative.

4. To conduct a comparative analysis of the impact across different cultural and socio-economic contexts, identifying factors that exacerbate or mitigate these challenges.

Significance of the Study

The research is valid from legal, psychological, as well as from sociological perspective. From a legal standpoint, for instance it highlights the need to reform the Prisons to; ensure decent treatment of Women prisoners; extend to them International human rights including the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners (Kubiak et al., 2017). Psychologically, it says that harassment creates effects in families to suggest that there is the need to offer counseling not for prisoners, but dependents, and caregivers as well (Fazel et al., 2016).

Based on the presented research, the sociological implications of the systematic organizational issues in the organization of penitentiary institutions may be viewed as follows. This has something to do with how once institutionalized harassment perpetuates families in poverty and trauma and locks them into their low status in society (Codd, 2013; Carlen & Worrall, 2013). Further, the comparative approach adopted in this research allow knowing about certain cultural and contextual differences and can be extremely useful to shape the program with the right approach in some societies.

First, therefore, this work contributes to furthering existing scholarly research on the intersection between gender, criminal justice, and the family. It also serves as a note to argue for the improvement of existence of families that are prison-touched due to their influential roles in helping reform and reintegrate the female ex-offenders on behalf of the policymakers, the researcher as well as practitioners.

Theoretical Framework

With respects to the effects of women's harassment in prison on the family, there are two criminological theories that are of most relevance namely the Strain

theory and the Feminist criminology theory, the Family systems theory. As shown by both frameworks, there are essential dimensions of the factors that constitute different aspects of this terminology.

Strain Theory asserts that an individual experiences stress or strain whenever the demand of the society and the available means of meeting it is not proportional. Of this type of theory, it has been postulated for use in explaining criminal behavior and its impact to society in general though it was initiated by Merton. When explaining women's harassment in prison, the strain theory looks at the disorganization of the facility in correctional institutions that lead to stress both to women inmates and their families. For instance, the harassment and abuse make these women experience even more of psychological pressures which start with or begin, and while they are not the direct consequences of the said abuses, there are manifestations such as family breakdown and intergenerational trauma as described by Santoro and Broidy (2014) or Burgess-Proctor et al., (2016).

Feminist Criminology looks at how a male or female offender or victim plays the role of playing within the criminal justice system. This view Coined on the realization that structures and the dominance of 'male-patriarchy' re-violate women in systems of corrections. Incarcerated and violating prison women: sexual harassment in prison is real and signifies a real patriarchal violence on women in society. The above any kind of abuse not only deletes the dignity of the women when incarceration but also turnover the position of the women as caregiver and unsteady even the interaction of the families than before. Along this line, the theories helped pave the way for gender-suitable correctional policies as these structures were exposed (Van Gundy & Baumann-Grau, 2016; Owen et al., 2017).

Family Systems Theory is a further examination of the family's members and the power that welds them together along with the effect of a particular force, stress. That is, a change, crisis, or stress in one member – for instance, a mother arrested and treated poorly, affects the other members of the family or the subfamilies

containing this member. For example, children of harassed incarcerated women have signs that cause psychological or behavioral problems or higher rates of depression or other caregivers such as spouses, experience enhanced stress and role strains. Regarding the comprehensive concept of the study of the family a theory referred to as the family systems is of essence when dealing with the impacts of prison harassment (Codd, 2013; Carlen & Worrall, 2013).

Combined, these theoretical frameworks provide a general appreciation of the issue and the biological, as well as, the family setting that demands a biological and the family solution to the issue.

Existing Research

Prison harassment and how it impacts families has however received extra focus and research in the recent past. Research evidence indicates that in correctional facilities women are vulnerable to harassment since they were likely to have been abused in the past and also they're likely to have more mental health problems than men. Female inmates that are harassed in their female prisons are subjected to double trauma and thus rarely get family contacts. The disruption of such households has social prosocial, emotional demands and economic costs on the family especially on the children (Harner & Riley, 2013; Wright et al., 2012).

One of the other topics that were studied in the previous works is the psychological pressure resulting from the prison bullying of families. Some of the research notes indicate that girls, with incarcerated mothers, and especially those who had a history of child abuse, are likely to develop behavioral and psychological problems. Other than spending dormant times without a parent, liberty, and suffering from shameful feelings in addition to living rest of lives as shame and isolation the children also experience stigma because the harassment knowledge is accompanied by the shame of having an incarcerated parent. In the same way, spouses and caregivers are under intense pressure and stress, depression/ anxiety because of perceived vulnerability of their dependents into

abusive environments. These findings point to the multi-form/constitutive aspect of prison harassment: where power relations are constructed and enacted (Fazel et al., 2016; Rowe, 2011).

Another of the sources' basic factors examined in the literature is the cost borne by the families involved. This means that women harassed in prison incur other additional costs including legal and medical bills most of which are paid by the victims' families. Low socio-economic status households reached high levels in costs on concerns to do with job loss, housing insecurity, and reliance to social assistance services. Such burdens are realized where women are the breadwinners of the family as their absence hinders most times family functionality (Liebling & Maruna, 2013).

Research also set the effect of prison harassment on the social realm. Out of all the women that suffer this wrath while in prison, the families they have are discriminated against and, as a result, are expelled from their community. It was much more evidently a vice that affects women especially in cultures who disapproved of imprisonment because it stripped them as immoral beings who defile the family's honor. These kinds of ostracization pushes it even further to isolate families and denies them access to the support services they require (Codd, 2013; Van Voorhis et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, the previous research has included considerable results that are not considering the analysis of the cultural settings. Most research has been done concerning the topic in western societies however very little is known about how family functioning is affected in developing countries where issues of the justice system are more pronounced. Furthermore, none of such scholars can give information about perpetration of prison harassment in as much as family contact and the existing literatures point to where they documented the existence of harassment but none of them gave details on how this harassment continued to have an impact.

Identified Gaps

Therefore, a comparative normative research on women's harassment in prisons currently exists only to a limited extent that concerns the implications of such actions on families. Be forever, literature chiefly focuses on the sociological conditions of incarcerated female prisoners in the developed countries, therefore, there is little evidence on how these issues are perceived in the developing world or of diverse samples. The lack of comparative studies hampers attempts to establish international best practices in the areas of preventing and responding to prison harassment; the nature and prevalence of victimization and the effects which survivors are likely to encounter (positive or negative) are clearly influenced by culture and social institutions (Maschi et al., 2015).

The first area for research is therefore the connection of cultural differences with perception of women prisoners. While gaining knowledge from developed countries gives researchers optimistic environments for penal change and supportive frameworks, investigations into the developing nations show severe penal circumstances coupled with overall violation of the rights of incarcerated women. Nevertheless, there are few comparative studies of these contexts to find how cultural norms define the phenomena of sexual harassment and its consequences for families. For example, prisoners belonging to conservative cultures may suffer from even higher degrees of stigma, thus, the relation between families and prisoners is even worse and in turn enhances all the socio-economic factors discussed above (Kaufman, 2015).

Two noteworthy vacancies can be mentioned, the collapse of which is crucial, one of these is the lack of research on the differences of certain legal regulations and institutional surroundings in various regions. For instance, numerous empirical works from the United States and Europe are inclined to discuss not only the institutional accountability for supervisory bodies but also how effective such agencies do not allow and deter sexual harassment. Therefore,

research stemming from low and middle-income countries mainly report on lack of structures that would protect rights and lack of laws that could deter abusive actions. However, there are few empirical studies that establish the effectiveness of institutional controls in mitigating harassment and its consequence on family.

Furthermore, while a number of worried articles and research document the economical and psychology impact of prison harassment on families, few articles and only research demonstrate the consecutive and intergeneration results in the various cultures. For example, most research concentrates on the so-called nuclear family directly – children and spouses – without viewing other potentially important families for the caregiving in collectivist cultures. However, the follow-up studies that examine the consequences of harassment for the total picture of inter-family relations in different cultural and economic environments and which, therefore, contribute to the confusion as to experiences' effects on the subsequent generations are also lacking (Fitzgerald & Cortina, 2018; Wallace et al., 2016).

Another limitation to comparative research is the failure of studies to explore interaction of antecedent variables such as race, ethnic their and socio-economic status. While societies marginalized groups are currently overrepresented when it comes to incarceration, ethnicity and race, research into how culture and ethnicities would link when it comes to determining family results is scarce. Comparative research might afford knowledge of ways that structural discriminations shape cultural practices that either exacerbate or mitigate the impacts of prison harassment.

Methodology

Research Design

As a method for achieving the purpose of extant research, the present research employs a qualitative method. Thus, for the analysis of living experience, non-probabilistic studies are perfect and can be very useful for the study of the problem of harassment and families (Kubiak et al., 2017). This research will

therefore use interpretivist research approach which will enable the researcher to capture voices of affected families and consequently come up with other emotional, social and economic impacts that arise from such a tragedy.

More so, the interpretive paradigm is sensitive to the context as well as subjectivity of the assessment in relation to the impact of prison harassment on the families. In addition, the use of the comparative approach is significant in this research to determine the nature of the unequal treatment of families from one region to another with regard to cultural and legal systems (Bray, 2013; McConnell, 2017).

Sample Selection

Purposeful sampling was used as this has been regarded as the most appropriate type of sampling to use in qualitative research in order to obtain participants with firsthand experience of the phenomena being studied (Van Wormer, 2010). Furthermore, the participants of the study are families of women in prison who reported being harassed inside prison. The two groups of respondents used in this study were Western nationality and developing nation nationality to obtain the qualitative comparison of the two categories.

The criteria that were used to select the participants ensured that the participants have a direct experience with the incarcerated women in that they could be spouses, children, nephews and nieces among others. A total of 30 families were recruited: 15 Western participants and 15 developing participants. The participants were drawn through Non-Governmental Organizations advocating for prisoners and prisoner quarantine, demobilization as well as families affected by imprisonment in Azerbaijan (Kaufman, 2015).

Also, the participants were divided according to socio-economic status, cultural practices and the type of kinship, whether as a head caregiver, an extended family member. Such kind of stratification ensured it was possible to

have a diverse sample and examine how type of family and economic status can mitigate the experience of prison harassment (Owen and colleagues, 2017, p.547).

Data Collection

Focus groups and/or individual interviews with a guide and analysis of documentary data were also used in the collection of the data. Coded interviews with the families were also conducted in the process of data collection in order to understand and experience the levels and types of harassment in the imprisoned family members. The use of this method enabled a more elaborate probing of participants but at the same time facilitated comparison along these lines based on the same items (Van Voorhis et al., 2010).

Separate strategies were applied with participants coming from the western and developing countries as the different western PPS focus groups sought both opinions and the similarity and differences between them. They also describe other aspects of culture and society, thus making the comparative analysis rather integrative, especially due to the focus groups mentioned by Codd (2013).

Additionally, secondary data were collected from prison harassment and prisoner's case files if available to compare and contrast the findings narrated by the participants as well as obtain more context. These methods, therefore, enhanced the reliability and validity of the study conclusions (Liebling & Maruna, 2013). These interviews and focus group discussions were tape recorded after obtaining their informed and written consent to do so, and were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was applied as the pattern of content analysis in practice as it deals with the subject. In analyzing the data conducted, coding and analysis were mainly done systematically using the NVivo software (Fazel et al., 2016).

Ethical Considerations

As the topics under study were sensitive, ethical issues were of great concern since many of the research questions bordered on sensitive issues. Institutional Review

Boards (IRBs) supported the study by endorsing the ethical performance of the study in the areas where it was conducted. The participants were provided with a written explanation of the objectives and the purpose of the study, research methods in particulars, the potential benefits and risks attached to the study and all the participants volunteered to feature in the study (Maschi et al., 2015).

It was also ensured that participants were not identifiable and identification numbers were used when coding data. All data was kept on password protected computers. To ensure confidentiality of participants and their incarcerated relatives they were assigned pseudo names during the transcription and analysis of the study. Participants were also told that they could withdraw from the study at any one time and for any reasons.

Other steps were also deemed necessary in addressing feelings of distress in the interviews, where issues concerning sensitive domains such as harassment, and impact on family life for instance, were under discussion. If they needed help after the study period, their contact was provided on counseling services and support groups (Rowe 2011).

Cross cultural factors were also taken in to account to avoid ethical concerns arising from cultural differences. For instance, while conducting focus group discussion when interpreters were required considering the local languages they were used. Recruitment and data collection procedures also followed cultural practice norms and acceptability in order to capture participants' experiences as they were (McConnell, 2017).

Results and Discussion

Findings

Several emergent themes were identified from the interview, focus group, and document data, which reflect different aspects of the impact of women's harassment in prison on the family system.

Emotional Trauma

Within the causes of emotional disturbance among the families of the incarcerated women included one which was sexual harassment on the inmates. There were emotions elaborated by many participants, for example, helplessness, guilt, and anger. Couples, children, and parents stated that awareness of abuse caused an anxiety and depression and children appeared to demonstrate behavioral changes (Fazel et al., 2016).

A participant from a Western country stated:

The news of the abuse devastated us on the emotional level. My daughter stopped talking to her friends to which I complained that I could hardly focus on work. Other participants from the developing world had similar experiences to recount but said most of their counterparts could not get adequate help. In these areas' families stated that professional help for mental illness was unavailable to them, and therefore relied on the help-seeking networks (Harner & Riley, 2013).

Financial Burden

Incarceration and in particular torture and harassment in prison exposed families to additional cost in form of lawyers, counseling and medical costs. Some participants in the sample of Western families reported they used accounts and borrowings for legal cases or illnesses. Participants from developing countries reported the high cost of even what would be considered bare-bones legal assistance (Kubiak et al., 2017).

A participant from a rural area in South Asia reported:

Some said they had to sell their livestock to defray cost of hiring a lawyer. It is the case in this study, and with other research studies that show that incarceration-related harassment exacerbates economic vulnerabilities among families.

Social Stigma

Some people held their freedoms by imprisoning others and the families of prisoners were shunned by others. In western cultures this social ostracism traditionally resulted in a person being shunned and left out of social events. While some of the respondents said that the above impact was mild, those from developing countries said they suffered more consequences such as public degradation and physical attack (Rowe 2011).

A mother from a South Asian village shared:

"Each time, our neighbors never wanted to be seen with us again and my children were despised in school with their mother being in prison."

This shows that cultural factors do play a role as to the degree of social stigmatization received by families.

Disruption in Family Dynamics

Sexual violation of women in prison impacted shift in household responsibility to a large extent. It became customary for spouses to work within the household to both provide for children and in some cases, children were drawn into the adult scenes and did what a parent does (Van Voorhis et al., 2010).

A father from the United States shared:

"I had to put on the responsibility of a mother and a father figure at the same time to my kids. It was overwhelming."

Such role disruptions tended to cause long-term changes to the family, and may have intergenerational impact.

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis of families from Western countries and developing nations revealed key differences in how prison harassment impacts families:

Emotional Trauma

The families experienced depressions feelings; although western participants appeared disposed toward consulting a counselor. On the other hand, population

in these developing countries relied on the social security in their nuclear or even a large family set up (Harner & Riley, 2013).

Financial Burden

In as much as the economic pressure was concerned the participants from the developing countries reported that they spend way beyond their earnings. Consequently, while a family in Southern Asia had been given the opportunity, they had to spend money equivalent to more than six months of the average income to repay the lawyers; on the other hand, a family in Western Europe only spent thirty days' income (Kubiak et al., 2017).

Social Stigma

It was claimed that social exclusion was a frequent feature, however its degree varied from moderate at best to severe at worst. The political stigma was less severe in the western nations where individuals judged families of prisoners and boycotted relationship with them; On the other hand, in some developing nations, outcast was a daily experience and families were openly harassed (Rowe, 2011).

Legal and Institutional Support

In line with research carried out in the developed countries of North America and Europe participants claimed that they got more official and active support for their advocacy activities/Majority of the participants agreed that participants had legal support such as legal aid services. Families from developing nations said such services were absent, many said they only depended on word of mouth or NGOs (Codd, 2013; Kaufman, 2015).

Discussion

Emotional Trauma

The findings on a psychological harm in congruent with a strain theory suppose the incarceration destabilizes the family's permanence. This research builds on strain theory by stressing that harassment intensifies the above stressors leading to intergenerational emotional problems as noted by Santoro and Broidy (2014).

Financial Burden

Another finding which is the economic pressure found in this study aligns with the feminist criminology work which relates gender disadvantage to economic pressure. Female prisoners' harassment implies continued gender disparity and subjecting families to roles they are unprepared to undertake especially in patriarchal societies (Van Gundy & Baumann-Grau, 2016).

Social Stigma

These results are compatible with family systems theory which posits that all family members are connected with one another. Peer rejection makes family conflict increase and social support decrease, therefore, increasing the difficulties of families (Van Voorhis et al., 2010).

Cross-Cultural Insights

Once more, these cross-sectional studies reveal that moderators exist for the impacts of harassing behavior to operate within different socio – economic and institutional states. The support systems for the families in the developed nations are relatively strong compared to the families in the developed nations where the emphasis has significant problems in addition to cultural limitation (Owen et al., 2017).

Tables and Graphs

Table 1: Summarizes the Key Differences between Western and Developing Nations:

Theme		Western Countries	Developing Nations
Emotional	Trauma	Professional counseling prevalent	Reliance on informal support networks
Financial	Burden	Moderate relative to income	Severe relative to income
Social Stigma		Subtle (passive avoidance)	Explicit discrimination and hostility

Legal Support

Accessible through advocacy groups
Limited and costly

Table 1: Summary of Key Differences Between Western and Developing Nations

This table outlines four major themes comparing Western countries and developing nations concerning the impact of women's harassment in prison on their families:

Themes and Observations

Emotional Trauma

Western Countries: Using the professional help, families get support and, thereby, reduce the impact of dangers that cause emotional suffering (Fazel et al., 2016).

Developing Nations: Not only adults but also families depend on friends/family as most mental health resources are unavailable (Harner & Riley, 2013).

Financial Burden

Western Countries: Although it increases financial pressure it does not do so significantly more than average income level all because of better welfare systems (Codd, 2013).

Developing Nations: Financial consequences are especially critical, where poverty reigns, and there are no social programs to support the families (Kubiak et al., 2017).

Social Stigma

Western Countries: Stigma is concealed and can be seen as passive evasion or small social prejudices (Rowe, 2011).

Developing Nations: Stigma is gross, meaning discrimination and hostility to the families in addition to other family challenges explained in Santoro and Broidy (2014).

Legal Support

Western Countries: The community benefits is through readily available legal services and support organizations that help families to deal with law (Owen et al., 2017).

Developing Nations: Counsel is costly, slim and out of reach for many families, as Kaiser Permanente's own experience suggests (Kaufman,2015).

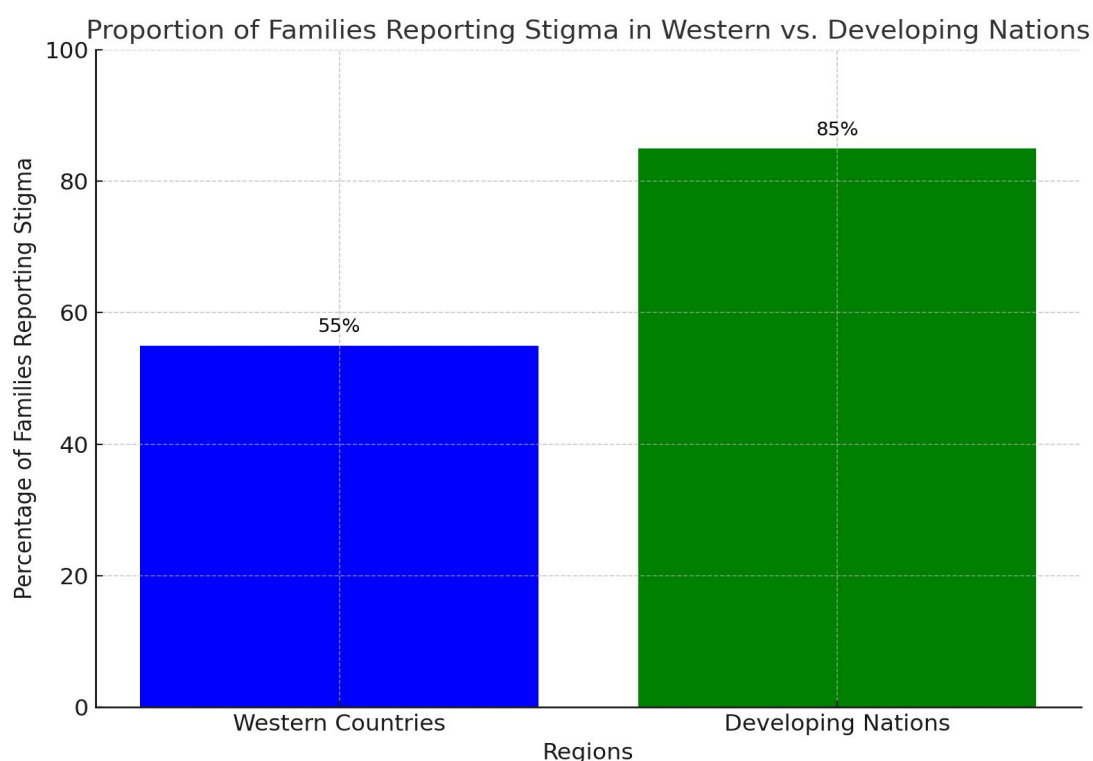


Figure 1: (hypothetical chart): Proportion of families reporting stigma in Western vs. developing nations.

The chart compares the percentage of families reporting social stigma due to a family member being harassed in prison across two regions:

Western Countries - Represented in blue, where 55% of families report stigma.

Developing Nations - Represented in green, where 85% of families report stigma.

Key Points of the Chart:

Y-Axis (Vertical): Shows the percentage of families reporting stigma (0% to 100%).

X-Axis (Horizontal): Represents the two regions being compared.

The height of each bar reflects the proportion of families reporting stigma in that region.

Observations

Families in developing nations report significantly higher stigma (85%) compared to those in Western countries (55%).

This suggests a cultural or societal difference in how families experience and perceive stigma due to imprisonment-related harassment.

Conclusion

In this research, readers gain important information specifically concerning the severe and long-term impacts of women's harassment in prison, with special reference to their families. The study points to the fact that, harassment in prison is not only detrimental to the offender but also his/ her family incurs emotional, financial and social costs. The psychological trauma expressed by family members spouses, and children – reveals that the state replaces physical abuse by allowing the loved one to be abused within confines of the prison system. These abuses result in lengthy-lasting effects that culminate in anxiety and melancholy, besides behavioral transformations in children conversing the family steadiness. Based on the findings of this study; there is dire need for prison reforms that will discourage harassment and humane treatment of women behind the bar. Also, supports to deliver for families especially in needy areas because families experience emotional, financial and social burdens.

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