

Pathways of Women Prisoners to Jail in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Background: The present study aimed to examine pathways to imprisonment for women in Pakistan. It was hypothesized that early life victimization in women, problematic family relationship and economical deprivation would be significantly associated with criminal activities of women prisoners.

Method: To identify the pathways to prison, structured interview was devised by the researchers. Sample comprised of 114 women prisoners enlisted from KotLakhpat jail, Lahore, Pakistan.

Results: Poverty, revenge, anger and lack of empowerment were significantly associated with criminal activities of women offender.

Conclusion: The umbrella of rehabilitation should also cover social and legal matters of women offenders along with tackling their psychological issues.

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Introduction

The understanding of women offending in criminological research framework has emerged in the form of "Pathway Perspective" in recent years. Women's entry into the world of crime is due to different reasons in comparison to their counterpart¹.

Becker and McCorkel² have used the terms "Gender Typical" for crimes, which are related to the female gender, and "Gender Atypical" for crimes that are related to males and

very small proportion of females commit those crimes. Erez and Berko³ have also identified pathways to crime and imprisonment for Palestinian/Arab women. These pathways include abusive homes and women's attempts to resist gender oppression, relation with criminal men or forbidden potential mates, and managing family-honor expectations. Estrada and Nilsson⁴ found that women prisoners are from poor families and have other problems like addiction

problem, mental disorders, neglected childhood and physical and sexual abuse. Banwell⁷ spotlighted the role of dynamics of marital life in women's criminal act. Salisbury and Voorhis⁵ quantitatively explored the women probationers' pathways to prison. These pathways include mental illness, dysfunctional relationships and recurrent involvement in criminal act, and women's social and human capital or its lack and its linkage to recidivism. Cherukuri, Britton, and Subramaniam⁶ studied women in Indian state prison to examine the context of women prisoners' lives and their paths to jail. According to them four paths, lead women of India towards jail. These paths were; (a) the practice of dowry, (b) spousal mistreatment, (c) the patriarchal family organization, and (d) financial nonconformity. In short, different researchers have identified specific pathways for women prisoners. These pathways are greatly determined by the culture and societal norms. In third world country like Pakistan, no research work has been done to identify the specific factors that lead a woman towards crime per literature review. According to a comprehensive report by UNODC⁷ (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Country Office Pakistan) at 2011 a large proportion of women prisoners in Pakistan were in the cases of murder (about 40%) while 24% was convicted of drug related offenses. While kidnapping cases constitute 13% of women prisoners, commercial sex workers comprised of 12%, theft cases 7% and other offenses were found to be the main reasons for imprisonment of the 4% of total women prison population.

This research will contribute in better understanding of those factors that lead a woman to criminal acts and by identifying possible risk factors and needs of women prisoners, preventive measures can be suggested which would ultimately lead to decrease in the ratio of crimes.

Materials and Methods

Structured interview was devised by the researcher to have a deeper look of path-

ways that leads females to criminal acts. The information for constructing interview was extracted from literature review. The interviews covered many areas like demographic information, nature of relationships, economic stressors, addiction histories, incidents of childhood abuse and other possible reasons the research participants may have behind the criminal acts. Each question consisted of specific set of options. Structured interview was reviewed by two experts before administering.

Procedure

Purposive sampling technique was used. The site of research was Central Jail Lahore. The inclusion criteria for the research participants was; 1) The women prisoners of age 17 to 60 years 2) They had committed crime (theft, fraud, runaway, sex crime, murder, and drug related crimes) 3) They are convicted under Pakistan Penal Code or under trial. No strict exclusion criteria were set due to constraints in the availability of sample. The sample size was calculated with the help of G power analysis. Determined sample size was 111 at 90% power, 0.05 alpha level and medium effect size, 0.5. Interviews were conducted with 114 women prisoners. The formal permission for conducting interviews was obtained from the superintendent of Central Jail Lahore. The pilot study was conducted to test the logistics of the study design and to improve the quality of structured interview. Ethics of research were considered throughout the research procedure by clearly stating the nature and purpose of the research, assuring informed consent and by maintaining confidentiality. The interviews were completed in three months period of April, May and June of 2012. The interviews were conducted in Punjabi or Urdu language, depending on research participants' preference. The results were synthesized by using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS 17).

Results

Table 1 outlines the demographic characteristics of the sample. Almost 80% of women were facing the awful condition in imprisonment. The relatives of twenty seven percent of women were imprisoned as well. Only 6% of women had history of theft in their childhood. The addiction problem before imprisonment was found in 13 percent of women.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the sample

Variables	f	%
Age		
17-30 (Years)	55	48
30-40 (Years)	22	19
40-50 (Years)	18	16
50-60(Years)	12	11
60-70(years)	7	6
Language		
Urdu	48	42
Punjabi	66	57
Residence		
Lahore	61	53.5
Other City	30	26.3
Village	22	19.3
Other	2	1.8
Marital Status		
Single	7	6.1
Married	79	69.3
Divorced	9	7.9
Widowed	19	16.7
Education		
Below Primary	68	59.6
Up till Matriculation	38	33.3
Intermediate	6	5.3
BA and Above	2	1.8
Family Income		
0-5000 PKR	16	14.0
5000-10000 PKR	39	34.2
10000-15000 PKR	21	18.4
15000-20000 PKR	17	14.9
20000-30000 PKR	11	9.6
30000-above PKR	10	8.8

Forty-three percent women have social support and their family members come to visit them and give them emotional support. Fischer Exact Test was applied to identify the pathways of women prisoners to jail. Only pathway of poverty was significantly supported by this test.

Discussion

The aim of present study was to investigate the pathways of women offenders to jail. To the best of our knowledge, this study was a first effort to explore the pathways to jail for women in the context of Pakistani socio-economical culture.

Demographic profile indicated that most of the women were young, uneducated, married, unemployed and from economically marginalized strata of the society. The level of unemployment before incarceration was reported 64% among women offenders. The patriarchal culture of Pakistan makes women inferior, bound to serve men in homes, and less autonomous. They are selected for the job as the last option and fired as first choice⁸. The women offenders who have first experience of imprisonment comprised 87% of the sample. These women described their subjective feelings of shame, anger, repentance and grief with regard to their offense. Some offender women had family history of jail imprisonment. Their relatives were co-offenders and were serving their sentence in male portion of jail as well.

Through detailed structured interview, the pathway to the crime for Pakistani women that was marked out includes poverty. Half of the sample admitted that they had committed the crime, so researchers have taken the participants on their face value.

Mostly women who committed crimes like drug dealing, smuggling, theft and prostitution were from economically disadvantaged strata of the society. They were indulged in criminal activities for making the both ends

meet. They were earning hands of their families, as most of the women were divorced, separated, widowed or single. The economical burden of the family lies over their shoulders. They have chosen drug dealing, theft and prostitution as the way to earn money. These pathways have been confirmed in earlier studies. Cherukuri et al.⁶ have identified economical marginalization a common pathway for women offenders to enter in the world of crime. The consensus between these two studies is found because of similarity of sample characteristics. In both studies, the women were from Asian countries, poor, uneducated and unemployed. The re-offending behaviors (theft) were also reported by the women who were poor, divorced and have to raise their children.

The sample was consisted of both convicted and under trial women prisoners. Interestingly exact half of the sample (under trial) has reported that they are being trapped. They reported that they were being accused for crime by their family members, neighbors, authority figure at work place and police. Their cases were under trial so they were spending time in Jail awaiting verdict from court. Conducting a research in prison environment poses certain difficulties and limitations. This study has certain limitations. Measurements taken for the security purpose of the researcher, like presence of matron may have affected the participant's responses. They may have concealed the true story behind their crime. The women offenders have no exposure of the research culture, so some of the prisoners were threatened about the information asked from them initially. Another limitation was logistics for interviews conducted. Some interviews were conducted in barracks where prisoners were narrating their crime stories more comfortably. Interviews conducted in the office of superintendant may have threatened the confidentiality and so there are chances that prisoners have masked their motives behind crime.

This was the first study of its kind in Pakistani socio-economical context to find out the pathways of women offenders to jail. Qualitative researches in this regard would make a better understanding of the true causes behind committing a crime by women. In the light of current study, certain suggestions are proposed. In third world, country of Pakistan, where rights of women are limited, and their general status is low, a women offender's survival become difficult even after release from jail. Considering the sample's characteristics there is a dire need to elevate the educational and economical status of women in Pakistan. Psychological intervention should also be aimed to reduce the re-offending behaviors of women prisoners. Keeping in view the gender related issues, reasons and concerns, a potential effort is required to make incarcerated women confident and empower enough to lift up the social and domestic barriers to live their lives after imprisonment lawfully. Steps for providing psychological help to the women offenders are required on urgent basis. Transitional support should be arranged to protect women from entering the social circle that is associated with crime. The risk-need-response model is a core theoretical model, which is used in correctional systems for rehabilitation of offenders' internationally⁹. Efforts should be made to translate this model into Pakistani culture practically at least as a first step towards supporting the offenders. Considering the pathways of offending behaviors in women, it is suggested that the umbrella of rehabilitation should also cover social and legal matters of women offenders along with tackling their psychological issues. This research also high lights the need for forensic psychologists in jails. Training for psychological intervention in forensic settings should be provided in universities' departments of clinical psychology. In addition a prison should not be left unattended to be a breeding ground for the development of psychiatric disorders so the need for improving the psychological health enhance which also highlight

the importance of psychological intervention and health promotory activities behind bars.

Conclusion

This research has revealed that in Pakistan the driving forces behind the criminal acts of women offenders are emotional factors, poverty and lack of empowerment, which demands the attention of psychological help.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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