



JEDIDIAH

Empowering Lives And
Building Broken Dreams

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**Norton Junior Councillors, VFU
attending a stakeholder engagement
meeting organised by Jedidiah**



MECHANISMS THROUGH WHICH PARENTAL INCARCERATION HARM CHILDREN'S EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

A family is a system of individuals committed to staying together over an extended period of time, thus maintaining continuity. A healthy family provides strong foundation for children's brain development and well-being. Sadly, there are numerous disruptors to the family fabric, thereby putting children at high risk. One such grand social disruptor is parental incarceration. It tears the family fabric which affect children's overall well-being. Parental incarceration creates an unstable and unhealthy environment for kids. Think of children who are born and raised in prison. Can their brain development be the same with those born in a safe environment and staying in healthy family set up?

Research shows that children's early brain development depends on proper nutrition starting in pregnancy, exposure to toxins or infections, and the child's experience with other people and the world. Nurturing and responsive care for the child's body and mind is the key to supporting healthy brain development. Positive or negative experiences can add up to shape a child's development and can have lifelong effects. Parental incarceration manifests numerous negative experiences for kids. Sadly, children born in prison are deprived of an environment that support their total development.

Children who experience parental incarceration suffer impairments across four domains of well-being: behavior, education, health, hardship, and deprivation. Can a child get access to these four domains while staying with incarcerated parents in prison? Prison environment is traumatic for adults, what more for children. How about those children whose parent(s) are absent due to incarceration? Without doubt, parents' physical absence is traumatic for children. The trauma of experiencing absent parents does hinder children's behavioral and cognitive development.

"Sadly, children born in prison are deprived of an environment that support their total development"

Children need ample dosages of protection; hence, to grow and learn best, children need a safe environment where they are protected from neglect, shame, and extreme stress. Such an environment is not possible in prison or when parents are incarcerated? Infants will die if not fed and protected; hence, when children are little, the amount of protection has to be total. Too much and too little protection is damaging. This damaging environment is what children born in prison experience. Therefore, it is accurate to reiterate that parental incarceration limits the dosages of protection. When parents are incarcerated, their children have a higher risk of experiencing emotional and behavioral problems, as well as reduced cognitive and academic performance.

In addition, children of incarcerated parents suffer from significant uncertainty and instability. Stigmatization deepens negative emotional and behavioral impacts on these children. The stigma and shame impede social interactions and learning. Such is more pronounced in a prison environment. Therefore, children with incarcerated parents need to be supported with bonding, connection, and healthy relationships. This is because trauma, stigma, and strain are the mechanisms through which parental incarceration harm children's early brain development and well-being.

What should be done to support children's brain development? As we collectively face this grand social challenge, we must co-create sustainable, system-wide approaches. Our approaches should enhance the dosages of protection to children of incarcerated parents. We must face head on the mechanisms of trauma, stigma, and strain that affect children's brain development. As we shape the future, we must be humane and give healthy attention to grand challenges of this nature. May a new leadership and social influence consciousness emerge and manifest positive change on children of incarcerated parents.



Dr. Justine Chinoperekweyi
An Organization Development practitioner
advocating for the elevation of humanity

ENTWINED LIFE EVENTS: THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL INCARCERATION TIMING ON CHILDREN'S ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.

Parental incarceration has unfavourable effects on children let alone their academic performance and outcomes which rob them of the benefits which education brings. It is digging another pit to fill another pit which greatly affect those who might have not committed crimes. Understanding how children are affected by parental imprisonment should not be limited to parental loss but a double edged sword, where on one end children suffer the trauma of being left alone and on the other end becoming that parent. Resultantly, children are often exposed to the harsh realities of life at an early stage, they end up being breadwinners, exposed to drug abuses amongst many other vulnerabilities which combined undoubtedly lead to poor academic performance and or even absconding from school.

There are three key indicators used to track child performance in school. The indicators include attendance, retention and progression. However, children of imprisoned parents are at the very least of the expected outcomes of these indicators. In most cases, due to the child assuming the duties of the caregiver, their attendance is decreased, retention is low and they often fail to progress to the next level of education. A child with a caregiver who was the sole provider of financial support is likely to decrease in progression due to lack of financial support. Resultant are financial strains leading the family to focus on other needs rather than educational needs. Some children will end living with abusive relatives which further affects the victim.

Additionally, older children of the incarcerated parents may fall victims of assuming the role of adults in order to take care of the younger siblings (child headed families). This is one of the most dangerous element which exacerbate vulnerability to these children. They may resort to prostitution, drug and substance abuse and suffer from child labour which automatically affect their academic performance.

Children of incarcerated parents may also develop anti-social behaviour if they did not go through proper counselling and psychosocial support. There is high probability that when the parent is incarcerated the child will be moved to a foster care home or the extended families. However, the child may decide to copy with the situation negatively as he or she changes the environment. This anti-social behaviour may lead to absconding from school.

The children of imprisoned parents are victims of stigma. This is especially when the parent was incarcerated due to murder or theft. In a society, there are value, norms and morals which guide human behaviours and also define what is good and bad. Even though, stigma is not a rehabilitative measure and not encouraged it is continue happening in the societies where children of the incarcerated parents continue to suffer trauma.



Simbarashe Mukwada

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“Since parental imprisonment may lead to financial, emotional, and social strain at home, children can be affected thus displaying behavioural disorders, criminal tendencies and drop out of school”

From the CEO's Desk

The number of inmates in Zimbabwe has increased dramatically, from 17000 to 22000 {World Prison Brief, 2021}. The number of children with imprisoned parents is estimated to be at least 15 000. However, what is known about these children, their statistical numbers, identities and problems, is very limited. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that we are unable to find any existing studies of imprisoned parents concerning the effects of imprisonment on their children's education in Zimbabwe.

Speaking metaphorically, when it comes to successfully providing an education, it is desirable to fill any existing gaps, at the local, national and international levels, without smoothing out the peaks. One of the most serious problems in education is the inequity of educational opportunity. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2011) defines educational equity as existing when personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background are not obstacles to achieving educational potential and that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills. Those who are not able to obtain educational services equal in both content and quality are disadvantaged. A disadvantaged group of children have fewer educational opportunities than advantaged ones. Without a doubt, children with an imprisoned parent, or even parents, are one of the disadvantaged groups of children.

Once a parent goes to prison, children are exposed to certain side effects. Having a parent in prison may result in behavioural and emotional problems. Though they are not guilty themselves, they are strongly affected by the parental imprisonment. Yet, the goal of prison is to punish the criminals and offenders, not their children. Those children are known to have a higher risk of antisocial and aggressive behaviour, alcohol and substance addiction, school truancy, academic failure and so on. When children fall into such a disadvantaged situation, they do so suddenly. Children with an imprisoned parent {orphans of justice} not only have a stressful life but also experience tough conditions. If the peer group of these children knows that they have an imprisoned parent, they are exposed to victimisation and may even drop out of school. At the same time, they are ignored within the policies that are otherwise applied to disadvantaged groups.

Normally, children with an imprisoned parent feel stigmatized in the school setting. And, the most difficult aspect of stigma is that the feeling of stigma felt by children of an imprisoned parent is not a result of their own fault and neither are they capable of changing the situation. Because of stigmatization and a lack of proper services from agencies, the number and identities of these children are unknown. This creates obstacles concerning educational service and support for such children including scholarships. One of the major challenges facing children with an imprisoned parent and/or the parent left behind is financial difficulties. The relation between a child's socio economic level and academic success is widely recognized. In order to overcome the problem created by the imprisonment of a parent, children may have to work. Since parental imprisonment may lead to financial, emotional, and social strain at home, children can be affected thus displaying behavioural disorders, criminal tendencies and drop out of school. Because of financial problems, strain within the family loads more responsibilities on children and can lead to less parental supervision, and this may end in the child's staying away from school.

“Due to parental incarceration, most school going children are forced into transactional sex which often leads to teenage pregnancies, early child marriages and also putting them at a higher risk of HIV infection. With the parent in prison, caregivers struggle to afford the cost of educating the children in their care thus many drop out of school and become more vulnerable to contracting HIV & AIDS.

#jedidiahtrust

**#empoweringleaves&buildingbrok
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We want to thank you all for the feedback we have been receiving. All feedback is positive to us as it makes us grow and improve in conducting the work we are doing.

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