

# The Implications Of Imprisonment Of Husbands Towards The Wives: A Qualitative Study In Malaysia

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## **ABSTRACT**

Based on recent studies, it could be indicated that more than 10.9 million prisoners are imprisoned throughout the world. In other words, it could be said that the prison population has been increasing from year to year. In Malaysia, the National Prison Administration reported in 2021 a total of 68 603 prisoners were reported and half of them are aged between 30 years old to 45 years old. These figures indicated that many of the imprisoned people have families and partners outside. Many pieces of research were reported on prisoners but minority research was done on prisoners' wives. This study discovers the implications of imprisonment of husbands towards their wives. A qualitative approach was implemented in this study by having fifteen in-depth interviews. The findings propose that the wives of prisoners are impacted not just by the tag of being the wife of a prisoner, but mostly by the selfishness of their husbands concerning the emotions and destitutions the women experience after the imprisonment of their husbands.

**Keywords:** women, prisoners, imprisonment, impacts.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Prison is a place where an individual will have no contact with the outside world. Hence, it is also a place where none of the human beings wants to belong to as being a prisoner could affect the individual both physically and mentally. Thus, it is very important for each and every human to practice healthy and harmony lifestyle to have a developed society and nation. Mostly, the perceptions that our netizens have for anyone who goes to prison would be; bad people, evil people, people who deserve to be

punished. Recently, the tendency to focus on life in prison has been dismantled. The growing and sophisticated prison systems and equipment have turned attention to perspectives that challenge their physical boundaries and to the need to place correctional facilities at permanent intersections with social implications behind and outside prison walls (Granja, 2016). Imprisonment of a man or woman has a significant impact on family institutions, relative individual relationships, and an influence on the emotional and physical effects on family members who have members who are in prison

(Mitchell et al., 2017). A woman who becomes a prisoner's wife has to deal with major changes in her life style including finding a job or establishing a new social relationships. Prisoners have a negative reputation in society due to the suspicion or worry that they will commit crimes again. This view influences the acceptability of convicts and their families by society. Additionally, many people do refer to people in prison as "scary and evil", although the accused person might not belongs to the crime the he have been charged. Time and the passage of time are important aspects of a prisoner's experience, particularly when the sentence is lengthy. Metaphors such as Dead Time (Rives, 1989), Doing Time (Matthews, 2009), and Out of Time is frequently used to describe imprisonment (McKeown, 2001). Long sentences may be especially painful for long-term prisoners (Cohen and Taylor, 1972; Hulley et al., 2016) because they represent the loss of a long period (Wright et al., 2017). Although we are aware that the pain of imprisonment is unbelievable (Sykes, 1958) where it could be like losing a hand and adding more burden, (see Condry, Kotova, and Minson, 2016 for an overview) there were very little discussion of how these families experience the temporal pains of imprisonment. Foster concluded in a recent study of prisoners' families and waiting that, while we know a lot about the financial, practical, emotional, and social effects of a prison sentence on the family, "what remains lacking is a thorough exploration on the temporal impact of this prison sentence." (Foster (2019, 474).

As far as the research and publications are concerned, many studies about the penal sphere have mainly focused on the happenings and occurrences behind prison walls, but the life of the wives of a prisoner is less presented. More recently, this inclination to focus on life inside prison has been reviewed. The amplified regulation and control exercised by external organizations, the gradual similarity promoted between the prison environment and external contexts, based on the principle of normalization, and the increasing flow of goods, services and people circulating between the inside and the outside of prisons all problematize approaches solely focused on the internal

dynamics of the prison (Cunha, 2014). Based on the several groups of people that move behind and beyond prison walls, prisoners' families are especially significant because what binds them to prison is not based on professional commitments legal obligations. Their engagement with the criminal justice system results from their families 'internment. This positioning thus invites us to reflect upon how prisoners experience the separation from their families' right after their sentence and attribute meanings to imprisonment.

As for our own country Malaysia, although our country Malaysia is developing from day to day, in trend with millennium era of globalization, the rate of crime keeps on increasing. There isn't any decrease in criminal cases in Malaysia although many efforts and actions have been implemented by our government. In the recent statistics presented by the Malaysian Federal Bureau of Prison dated 22 January 2022, there are altogether 154 831 prisoners in Malaysia. 144 317 (93.2%) of them are male and the remaining 10, 460 (6.8%) are female prisoners. Additionally, the same bureau has also indicated that the highest sentence period among the prisoners in Malaysia is between 5 to 10 years, and they are aged between 36 to 40 years old. As for the types of offenses committed, the drug offenses are the highest with 45.3%.

The primary aim of this paper is to explore the impact of imprisonment on marital relationships and the well-being of Malaysian wives of prisoners. The paper is timely as it will make an original contribution to knowledge at a time where could explain to the readers the exact feelings and emotions that the wives of the prisoners undergo once their spouse is sent behind the bars. Additionally, it would also open up the prisoners' eyes where they will know the value of their family members during the separation period.

#### Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is fast becoming a threatening danger in many homes across the globe thus has attracted attention of many researchers, couples parents, religious leaders and the counsellors. Husband battering is a form of domestic violence that is perpetuated by wives against their husbands. It simply means

wives behaving violently and abusively toward their husbands. It is an inhuman way that some wives handle their husbands; this could either be mental, emotional, or physical form of battering. Husband battering is a form of domestic violence experienced by men in an intimate relationship. Battered husbands cut across all ages, educational levels, and socioeconomic classes. UNICEF (2000), Adebayo (2014) and Timothy (2016) opined that domestic violence is of various categories and forms. It is a form of violence which appears in form of spousal abuse, battering, dating abuse, intimate partner violence and family violence among others. Domestic violence could also be regarded as various form of negative and abusive behaviours which occurs within intimate relationship such as marriage, cohabitation, dating or within family (Oyedokun, 2007; Adebayo, 2014 & Timothy, 2016). Spousal abuse is equally a form of domestic violence within the intricacies of an intimate relationship of husbands and wife (Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, 2000). Different notions among researchers about the nature of intimate partner violence have long been the subjects of popular and academic debate. Research findings are contradictory and point in two directions, with some revealing that women are as likely as men to perpetrate violence against an intimate partner (symmetry) and others showing that it is overwhelmingly men who perpetrate violence against women partners (asymmetry). The puzzle about who perpetrates intimate partner violence not only concerns researchers but also policy makers and community advocates who, in different ways, have a stake in the answer to this question, since it shapes the focus of public concern, legislation, public policy and interventions for victims and offenders. The question of who the most usual victims and perpetrators rests are, to a large extent, on 'what counts' as violence. Domestic violence can also be known as spousal violence when it occurs between couples. It is a pattern of abusive behaviour which one member of a relationship uses to secure dominance over the other (Timothy, 2016). Most African societies are predominantly patriarchal and as such, violence against men is not something

significant because men are believed to be strong enough to defend themselves. Those men who report abuse by women are viewed as weak (Maboreke, 2009). This explains the reason domestic violence is commonly studied and understood from the perspective of women victims and men batterers. Domestic violence against men therefore, tends to go unrecognized since men are less likely to admit to or report such incidence because of embarrassment, fear of ridicule, and lack of support services. It is rather a taboo subject that is often ignored or trivialized by society, which means that the extent of the problem remains unknown. Watts and Zimmermann (2002), McKeown and Kidd (2003) and Barber (2008) revealed in their studies that women are also perpetrators of violence as much as the men, however men are highly not believed as victims of domestic violence and battering because the society believes men are strong and are always in control. Naturally, men are egoistic and any form of battering from their wives affects them psychologically (Barber, 2008).

Although, the concept 'husband battering' sounds strange and unrealistic but it is true and common in the Nigerian society, but data concerning it are rarely available because most men prefer to die in silence rather than cry out for help for fear of losing their pride. Amazingly, domestic violence had always been perceived as a one-way traffic, with the arrow pointing always at the men (Ilika, Okonkwo & Adogu, 2002). But the situation seems to be changing rapidly, as numerous other cases of battered men abound. Battered husbands have historically been ignored or subjected to ridicule and abuse. In France, a battered husband "was made to wear an outlandish outfit and ride backwards around the village on a donkey" (Adebayo, 2014). Even for many people who consider themselves liberated and open-minded, they often have a tough time imagining that husband battering could take place. Although, feminism has opened many eyes about the existence of domestic violence, and newspaper reports often include incidents of abuse of wives. The abuse of husbands is a rarely discussed phenomenon and according to

Watts and Zimmermann (2002), the under reporting of husband battering is almost universal and may be due to the sensitive nature of the subject. Husband punching, slapping, kicking, nail scratching and killing are realities that occur in Nigeria (Adebayo, 2014). Husband battering comes in various patterns. It might range from beating, slapping, locking of tie, turning the man to a 'slave', denying him of the rights to play the role of man in the home, just to mention a few. Patterns of husband battering could also include sleep deprivation (slapping, nudging, and so on to keep the husband awake), taunts about sexual prowess, hiding car keys, and damaging clothes. The main forms/patterns of husband battering are physical abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, sexual and economic abuse (Cleary, 2003; McKeown & Kidd, 2003). Physical pattern of abuse includes pushing, punching, twisting of limbs, strangulating, breaking of bones and damage of properties (Cork Rape Crisis Centre, 2002). In addition, Adebayo (2014) opined that physical aggression and assaults by educated married adults' women towards their marital counterparts is a coercive behaviour. Coercive behaviour from married women towards their husband are few or unpopular occasion and involves throwing object at them. However, psychological abuse unlike physical battering is that form of assaults which is also melted towards men, to have intimidating psychological and emotional effects on them (Adebayo, 2014). Psychological abuse is that form of domestic violence which could further take various forms such as verbal and non-verbal (use of words and none use of words) all having negative, psychological effects and damage on its victims (Abu Bakar, 2014). Verbal form of abuse is the assault which is perpetrated through the negative manipulation and the use of words to humiliate victims. Verbal abuse is also defined as the excessive use of language to undermine someone's dignity and security through insults or humiliation, in a sudden or repeated manner (Timothy, 2016). This includes calling the man names such as; 'foolish man, stupid man, useless man, good-for-nothing, lazy' and many more degrading names. It also includes unnecessary yelling and screaming by wives at their husbands, constant

harassment, consistent belittling, intimidation, and humiliation among others. According to Abu Bakar (2014), emotional assault is similar to psychological abuse, and it is defined as a pattern of degrading or humiliating conduct towards a partner and includes repeated insults, ridicule or name calling as well as repeated threats to cause emotional pain. It is however, a practice which brings about emotional stress and imbalance on the victims either male or females. Russell and Emerson (2004) also opined that not only women are emotionally victimized, but men can equally become victims of such emotional instability resulting from emotional abuse from their partners. Abu Bakar (2004) believed that emotional assaults could be inflicted against victims through the use of blackmailing which could result in embarrassment. Furthermore, economic abuse is a pattern of domestic violence against men which involves the unreasonable deprivation of economic or financial resources to which one is entitled and requires out of necessity. It also refers to controlling of all financial income (Cork Rape Crisis Centre, 2002). Sexual abuse is the forcing of anyone against their will to have sex or perform any sexual act. This also includes the demoralizing of a person through sexual comments (Cork Rape Crisis Centre, 2002). It is very hard for a man to disclose this form of abuse (Cleary, 2004). Sexual abuse is one of the most intrusive forms of abuse, making it one of the hardest to disclose (Cork Rape Crisis Centre, 2002). Husbands in marriage can occasionally experience sexual violence and oppression against them by their wives and putting them as victims of such negative activities.

#### Trauma

Trauma-informed care is a newer development in the field of treatment. Its primary goals are accurate identification of trauma and related symptoms, training all staff to be aware of the impact of trauma, traumatization reduction, and a fundamental "do no harm" approach that is sensitive to how institutions may inadvertently reenact traumatic dynamics (Harris & Fallot, 2001; Hodes, 2006). For trauma-informed care,

prisons are difficult settings. Prisons are built to house perpetrators rather than victims. Inmates arrive shackled and crammed into overcrowded housing units; lights stay on all night, loudspeakers blare without warning, and privacy is severely limited. Security personnel are concerned with maintaining order and must assume that each inmate has the potential to be violent. There are numerous unavoidable triggers in the correctional environment, such as pat-downs and strip searches, frequent disciplinary action from authority figures, and limited movement (Owens, Wells, Pollock, Muscat & Torres, 2008). This is likely to increase trauma-related behaviours and symptoms, which can be difficult for prison staff to manage (Covington, 2008). However, if trauma-informed principles are implemented, all staff can play a significant role in minimizing triggers, stabilizing offenders, reducing critical incidents, de-escalating situations, and avoiding restraint, seclusion, or other measures that may repeat aspects of past abuse (Blanch, 2003; CMHS, 2005).. In addition to general trauma-informed principles, clinical staff can offer trauma-specific therapies, which are actual counselling models and curricula designed to promote trauma recovery. There is an understanding that staff-inmate relationships are the daily fabric of both trauma recovery and re-traumatization. The most successful prison interventions have goals that are congruent with the primary responsibilities of prison officers: public safety, inmate safety in incarceration, rehabilitation and staff, and organisational stability. This article examines the role of trauma in the lives of inmates and delves into the components of what we will refer to as trauma-informed correctional care (TICC). TICC is the adaptation of trauma-informed care for specific correctional settings, each with its own set of challenges, strengths, culture, and needs. We will cover a wide range of TICC-related topics, such as institutional and personal safety, staff training, cultural change, and relevant clinical approaches. We also concentrate on gender differences in trauma and criminal justice.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A few studies have reported that ST in spouses is correlated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptom severity in combat veterans (e.g. Riggs et al., 1998) and ex-POWs (Dekel, 2007). One possible mechanism that might contribute to the above-mentioned association is the partner's cognitions regarding the individual with PTSD. The cognitive theory highlights the importance of interpretations of situations to individuals' actual functioning (e.g. Beck, 1995). In recent years, many studies have shown that spouses' perceptions of veterans' symptom severity were positively associated with spouses' psychological and marital distress (Renshaw, Rodrigues, and Rodrigues, 2010). Furthermore, spouses' perceptions of the burden related to living with someone with PTSD (e.g. Calhoun et al., 2002) or veterans' symptoms severity (Renshaw, Rodebaugh, and Rodrigues, 2008) mediated the effects of veterans' PTSD on spouses' psychological distress.

In addition, several studies indicated the effectiveness of Solution-Focused Therapy (SFT) for a family problem, for families coping with suicide (de Castro & Guterman, 2008), for families who have a child with intellectual disabilities (Lloyd & Dallos, 2006), for families with aggressive children (Conoley et al., 2003). Several studies have indicated the efficacy of SFBT in improving marital adjustment, for example, Stewart (2011) conducted a pilot study to test the feasibility and impact of a brief intervention using a solution-focused approach (SFBT) for couples. This study showed that Solution-Focused Brief Couple Therapy (SFBCT) is a useful treatment for individual well-being and relationship knowledge. In 2006, Russell conducted a study to determine the effectiveness of Equine-Facilitated Therapy (EFT) and SFT to treat couples. This research supports the idea that EFT and SFT are both effective modes for increasing rational adjustment in couples. Stewart, in a pilot study in 2011, tested the feasibility and the impact of a brief intervention using a solution-focused approach (SFBT) for couples. The results of his study indicated that there were no significant differences in terms of marital satisfaction, communication skills, and readiness to change. Hajian and Mohammadi (2013) surveyed the

effect of SFBT on marital intimacy. Their study was a clinical trial. Also, other studies indicated the efficacy of Solution-Focused Couple Therapy in reducing marital conflict. Nelson and Kelley (2001) tested the effectiveness of the solution-focused program on a couples' group in 2001. They used a single-case design, Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale, and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale for their study. Chromy (2007) indicated that SFBT is an effective approach to help couples.

Most of the empirical research on marital relations during the past decade focused on African American families, although some important work occurred on the Latino front, especially on a theoretical level. The lack of empirical study on marital relations among Asian Americans stands in marked contrast and provides a challenge for researchers in the coming decade. Indeed, although the importance of family to Asian Americans is cited quite extensively in the literature (Lee, 1998), surprisingly few empirical studies have analyzed the nature and impact of marital and family processes among Asian Americans or the role that families play in shaping how and when Asian American children develop particular social and psychological characteristics. When statistical differences are found between Asian Americans and other ethnic groups, social and cultural factors such as family values are invoked to explain the findings without systematic observations of these constructs. This problem plagues much research on people and families of color (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Cauce, Coronado, & Watson, 1998)

However, not all marriages break the following imprisonment. Research on marital relations underlines three main periods of imprisonment that may cause changes at an individual level as well as within the couple as a result of incarceration: pre-sentence, keeping contact during imprisonment, and living through incarceration (Fishman 1981; Hong Chui 2010). The trial period bears significant consequences on the couple as it can last from days to months and even years. During this period the couple faces emotional stress caused by the imminence of the temporary marital rupture, by questions

related to actual guilt, the financial burden due to large expenses on lawyers' fees and other additional trial costs, and also by the long waiting for the sentence (Lowenstein 1986; Codd 2008). Previous studies by Mackendy and Ricciardelli (2021) found that the experiences of male prisoners had an emotional impact on heartache (remembering loved ones) and adaptation to a new culture. Fishman (1990) has looked into the marital relationships using the point of view of the prisoners' wives in a qualitative study comprising interviews with 30 women from Vermont, United States of America. One aspect arising from Fishman's study is the quality of the intimate relationship between the spouses during imprisonment. Due to prison policies and rules, most often couples are not allowed to have sexual relations or to exhibit their affection through touches. Their sole resources of intimate contact thus remain verbal communication while visiting, letters, and phone calls. This has repercussions on the quality of the relationship, sexual deprivation being the most common reason for frustration not just for the prisoners, but also for their wives on the outside. Jealousy from the imprisoned men and also the infidelity of their wives represent responses to this sexual deprivation that in turn leads to the deterioration of the couple's relationship. Prison visitation is a topic underlining traumatic and shameful experiences for the women due to body searches, disrespectful behavior of the prison staff towards the wives, or lack of privacy.

However, prison visitation has also been described as having positive effects such as increased quality of communication and a period of renewed courtship where the couples begin making plans for the future. These plans however are not approached realistically since they include easy getting jobs or being a united family without detailed discussions on how will these be put into practice. The findings are similar to those mentioned by Comfort et al. (2005) in a study on 20 women that were visiting men at a California prison: couples make use of the imprisonment period to place their relationship in a romanticized and rather non-realistic fantasy where each leaves behind past mistakes and create the picture of a future

based on mutual love and support. The family economic hardship, single parenthood, stigma, shame, relationship challenges, confusion, stress, or depression that are experienced by the women have a cumulative effect making the period of imprisonment a difficult time to cope (Arditti, Burton & Neeves-Botelho, 2010). In Lowenstein's view, the way women handle this period depends on the characteristics of the wife and those of the family. Her research on 118 Jewish prisoners' wives concludes: "The better-educated wife had a more realistic perception of her situation and more marketable employment skills. The basic element of family systems resources affecting coping was role division and family cohesiveness." (Lowenstein 1984, p. 707). Fishman on the other hand, describes the imprisonment period as a very difficult time due to lack of family support, difficulties in finding or maintaining a job as well as in childrearing and discipline. But the imprisonment may also trigger positive changes in women as they learn to become more independent in handling the household and the family financial matters (Fishman 1990; Wildeman & Western 2010). A systematic reviewed by Venema et al. (2022) on incarceration of family relationships have found that, experiences of children and wives felt lack of family-friendly space, uncomfortable visitation space, short visit duration, lack of physical and emotional contact during visits and separation. Studied on the experience of imprisoned husbands also found that feeling the experience of family loss, loss of identity, and loss of life narrative was satisfying (Crowley & Sparks, 2006). Therefore, the experience of a wife who has an imprisoned husband will feel the loss of family ties and the pain of living without a partner. As has been mentioned above, prisoners' wives experience challenging conditions while their husbands are in the prison. Long distances, harsh prison conditions, and problems caused by the imprisonment of the husband decrease marital satisfaction for wives. It does not focus on the past. Instead, it focuses on the present and the future (Bannink, 2007). For these reasons, the research of this article decided to conduct a study to explore the challenges and breakdowns that have been faced by women who are called "prisoners' wives".

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study took the form of in-depth interviews adopting the qualitative method. A total of 15 participants were chosen to participate in this research. The study took place in a few states in Malaysia that including Negeri Sembilan, Malacca, Selangor, and Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur. The study took place from 15th January 2022 until 28th February 2022. Thus, this research was designed to find answers on the impact of imprisonment on the wives of the prisoners and presents the findings using data from fifteen interviews with the women whose husbands are imprisoned in one of the prisons in Malaysia. A total of five questions were prepared and asked by the researchers to the participants. The questions that have been asked are as below.

1. What was the pre-imprisonment marital context?
2. How do marital relationships change during imprisonment?
3. What are the factors that produce the changes?
4. How do women perceive the return of their imprisoned partners in the context of their romantic relationship?
5. How do the women face society after the imprisonment of their husbands?

All the chosen participants for this study are women. Additionally, other criteria' of the participants chosen for this study include; to have had a minimum of five years of married life with the imprisoned partner before the imprisonment; having children aged between 2 to 18; aged between 25 years to 45 years old, and being willing to participate wholeheartedly in this study. All the participants of this study were currently living with their children. The surprising fact in this research is; ten of the participants are degree holders and the rest were Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) leavers. They are all well-educated women.

Before beginning the interview session, all the participants have been briefed about the research topic and the content. Additionally, all the participants were asked to sign the consent

forms formally before beginning the interview session. All the interview sessions were conducted separately in each of the participants' places after checking on their availability. Each of the interviews took about 45 minutes to an hour. Hereby the themes of the interview include socio-demographic characteristics of the wife and open-ended questions on the history of the romantic relationships, changes that have occurred throughout time and during imprisonment, perceived level of satisfaction on the current relationship, prospects with regards to family reunification. The interviews were then digitally recorded and transcribed.

This study was designed to explore the impact of imprisonment on marital relationships and on the well-being of Malaysian wives of prisoners, its purpose was not to respond extensively to questions related to the consequences of imprisonment on the quality of the romantic relationship, but rather to make a start on the subject. In short, the selection of the participants was purposive and the very small sample most certainly does not represent the entirety of women who are married to a prisoner.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this research could be divided into three main categories that are; pre-imprisonment relationship; coping with imprisonment; and chances for reintegration. These categories were determined after completing the fifteen in-depth interviews.

### **Pre-imprisonment relationship**

All women in the study have characterized their first year of relationship based on mutual affection where all the fifteen participants belong to love marriage. According to all the participants, as the years passed by there were up and downs in their marriage life that they felt normal. Some of the phrases by the prisoners' wives are;

"We used to be a very happy couple. He used to surprise and make me laugh. We were good together. We do argue and fight, but we were together, as a family." (28 years old)

"At the beginning, we were ok, where he was very gentle and smooth with me. I felt grateful because my husband has never beat me in our

four years of marriage. But, in the fifth year of our marriage, he was a different man. Before his arrest, we went through a tough time where both of us were jobless and we frequently quarrel. Although that was the scenario, I was still okay because he was still with me." (32 years old)

On the other hand, the participants also did mention that the arrival of children has brought drastic changes in their relationships in terms of expenses where it has been doubled up. Thus, things became even worse when both the husband and wives tend to have different interests where the women were focused on raising the children and bringing food to the table, while the men tended to avoid their responsibilities by coming home late and enjoying their night lives with their friends. Thus, this is when domestic violence comes in.

"We got married in 1999. Our marriage was a love marriage, but he is too lazy. He was jobless and things became even worse when we had children. His ego and temper started the beatings. I was patient because of my children because I do not want them to lose their father's love" (42 years old)

Other women recall their early romantic years were fruitful when they were not a stable couple. The stability of life has enhance their husbands to detach themselves from the family by having scandals or by making friends with people involved in criminal activities.

"3 years after our marriage, we had our daughter. We had good and bad moments.. I knew he was having an affair because he shows it in front of me by texting and calling the woman. But I was stupid because I thought he loves me and he'd come back to me no matter what." (38 years old)

„He used to like alcohol and women. Thus, he became friends with some trouble-making people. I did not agree with him and I told him so and we'd start big fights and every time, he will beat me and leave home. What could I do? Where would I go with my son?" (31 years old)

Although the relationship of the women in this study had started with love, soon in their marriage they have experienced domestic violence, men drinking alcohol, having affairs,

and cheating. However, still, the women remained with their husbands for the sake of their children where they want their children to be raised by a father, or simply because they had no other place to go to while hoping their spouse would, someday, change and appreciate them.

### **Coping with imprisonment**

Due to financial issues, women could not go and visit their imprisoned husbands often, and telephone calls are very rare. This kind of scenario is disturbing for the wives who hope to hear from their husbands.

"I am very stressed, and depressed, where I have become very sensitive. I became quiet to the villagers because they do look at me negatively. It is because I am a prisoner's wife. I work all day long just not to think of him. I'm felt envious because he could call his family from the prison, but why not me? It's been a year since I last saw him. I feel as if he's evading me when I am supposed to do so." (36 years old)

For other women, sustaining the relationship is difficult because they feel burdened with house chores, utilities, and raising the children alone. At the same time, the demands of their husbands make them feel outraged:

„This is no long-lasting relationship... I had to face a lot of problems... I feel pity for him knowing he is alone in that cell... but I have no more patience to listen... I don't have any patience anymore... I have to help my children. I just feel that he is a useless husband and dad." (44 years old)

„He is no longer connected with the life here. It is all on my head now. He advises me a lot because he is too free and has nothing to do. But, I have no time to breathe due to heavy chores." (42 years old)

„I have not visited him for three months because he always asks something whenever I go there. But, not a single word about my feelings and health. He is selfish. I told him I can hardly manage the money, the bills, and the children and there's nothing to renounce to bring things to him" (40 years old)

On the other hand, some women seem to cope with the imprisonment in better terms:

„Our relationship is still the same because I think he has realized his mistakes. We talked about rebuilding our own small world..." (37 years old)

„When he got arrested, I felt ashamed and shy. As the years passed, I started to accept it as my fate and he is also changing in a good way... my husband was convicted for 6 years and another 2 years to go for him to meet me in person..." (30 years old)

For other women the imprisonment of their husband has brought positivity:

"I feel relieved because he is in the prison, and I'm having a peaceful life. There is no longer fights, arguments, and yelling in the house. I just hope he remains there forever.." (41 years old)

„I have been married for 10 years, but I do not have anything nice to be shared. He is just a burden as he was lazy and only good at talking. Thank god he is in the jail, and I am working out with the documents to free my life from the useless man" (36 years old)

### **Prospects for reintegration**

The experiences of women who took part in this research vary considerably. Those women who did not experience domestic violence could not wait for their husband to be released and start a new happy life together. On the other hand, the women who suffered from domestic violence are afraid of the day their husband would be released from prison:

"I always dream if he comes back, he will kill me. It is a nightmare. I am traumatic of what I have undergone" (29 years old)

"I no longer hope to be a family as we once were... I have come to a point where I decided that I should stand on my own feet and I don't need him anymore in my life." (42 years old)

"I just want him to be in the prison forever as I am having a peaceful life without him being around. He is just a nuisance". (30 years old)

Auxiliary changes occur in the women and their perception of the relationship during imprisonment. These changes seem to be caused by the feeling of being overwhelmed with house chores and financial issues. In this situation, not being supported by their husbands who are, in return, very demanding and selfish in satiating their own needs build a double reaction: on one

hand, the women feel angry of such irresponsible behavior, and on the other hand, they display consideration towards their husbands for their situation. The long waiting for their husbands' release makes most women reluctant in imagining the future of their relationships. Imprisonment may have fetched a positive change in their lives with the absenteeism of their abusive husband, but the future of their marriages is described with fear.

### **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Our analysis of interviews conducted with the wives of the prisoners concluded that all relationships started with a good beginning, but changes occurred even before the imprisonment: domestic violence, having affairs, alcoholic, wrong mixing, and irresponsible behavior seem to change women's perception of their relationship. This is concordant with other research emphasizing pre-existing factors causing parental imprisonment (Murray 2008; Phillips et al. 2006; Murray and Murray 2010). Lastly, to recapitulate, it could be said that this study shows the attention towards women's needs while coping with the imprisonment of their husbands. The need for amenities showed in this study points towards individual or women support groups, but family interventions also represent a place to begin. Intimidating for wives to continue living after the absence of their husbands. Financial issues, children's education, family care, future management and the needs of the family left behind by the husband need to get due attention from various parties. Respective NGOs, social services, and policymakers should not overlook or ignore the families of prisoners where they would need continuous support to continue their lives. For the purpose of formulating a rehabilitation programme for marriage prisoners and the community of their incarcerated families, it is essential for the prisoners, policy makers, and researchers to be aware of the existence of impacts and efforts done to preserve the integrity of the family unit. The present analysis is based on samples drawn from a particular regional context in Malaysia. Thus, more wide research should be done in-depth into the lives of the women and the families of prisoners based on

larger samples. Future research should also consider the father-child relationship when their paternal figures are imprisoned to assess the behavioral and emotional problems of the children.

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