

Original Article**Health Problems in Children of Imprisoned Mothers****1. Ibad Ali 2. Muhammad Waqar Rabbani 3. Waqas Imran Khan****4. Muhammad Aslam Sheikh**

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ABSTRACT**Objectives:** To describe the health problems faced by children who accompanied their mothers in the prison.**Design:** An observational cross-sectional study.**Duration & Setting:** 30 children who accompanied their mothers in women jail Multan were examined from 1 October 2009 to 30 December 2009.**Patients and Methods:** The department of preventive and social pediatrics visited the woman jail Multan fortnightly for regular medical checkup and support to the children who were residing with their mothers in the jail. All the information regarding their ailments was recorded on a pre-designed questioner.**Results:** 17 children were male and 13 were female. Mostly children were between 1 to 5 years. Anemia and malnutrition was common. Other illnesses like ARI, scabies Diarrhea and asthma were also noted in these children. One child was suffering from Epilepsy. 26 children were fully vaccinated and 4 were partially vaccinated. Children's environmental condition was inadequate.**Conclusion:** The children who accompany their mothers in the prison have to face multiple medical and social problems like anemia, malnutrition, infections, asthma and Immunization. These disorders can be prevented by providing adequate living conditions, avoiding overcrowding, providing sufficient & balanced diet, sterilized water, proper Immunization and proper hand washing.**Key words:** imprisoned mothers, jail, children.**INTRODUCTION**

Over half the women serving prison sentences are mothers.¹ Imprisonment of parents causes many suffering to children. Disturbance of the home environment and child-care provision, are worse when the imprisoned parent is the mother.² The imprisonment of a woman who is a mother can lead to the violation of rights of her accompanying children in the jail. When a mother is imprisoned, her baby and/or young children may go into prison which can put the child at risk of multiple medical and social problems³. It is not advisable to separate babies and young children from their mothers. Jail environment is a homeless situation. Homeless children are more likely to have different health problems, so should be considered a high-risk group. They often live in crowded conditions, which increase the risk of acquiring common infectious diseases of the childhood, such as upper respiratory tract infections, ear infections, and diarrhea. Lice and scabies infestations are particularly high in these circumstances. The lack of access to adequate amounts of nutritious food may explain the evidence of anemia, malnutrition and stunting observed in the growth of homeless children. Incomplete immunization rates, asthma and psychosocial problems have been reported among these children.⁴ The psychological effects of separation during childhood are well documented^{5, 6}

while less so are the adverse effects of growing up in a prison environment⁷. Several studies have shown the risk of criminal behavior in children of imprisoned parents⁸.

PATIENTS AND METHODS

This study was conducted in women jail Multan from 1 October 2009 to 30 December 2009. We visited the prison fortnightly during this period. All children living in prison with their mothers were evaluated and information regarding, age, nutrition, weight, height, anemia and illnesses of the children especially respiratory tract infections, ear infections, diarrhea, scabies, asthma and immunization status, were recorded on a pre-designed questioner. All conditions were diagnosed by history and clinical examination. Living conditions of the children were also observed.

RESULTS

The children were housed in a special dormitory with their mothers. They were active and interacting well. 17 children were male and 13 were female. Age distribution is shown in table 1. Living conditions for the children in prison are shown in table 2. Children accompanied their mothers in overcrowded prison cells and were sleeping on the floor of the room. No separate menu was available for the children, they shared the

meals served to the mothers at specified times. Table 3 shows the general health and nutritional status of the children, first degree malnutrition was noted in 7(23%)⁷, second degree in 1(3%) and third degree in 1(3%). As far as infections are concerned, ARI was present in 2(6%) children, diarrhea in 3(10%) and scabies in 4(13%) children. In our study 20(66%) children were anemic and one child was epileptic. Immunization was complete in 26 (86%) children and 4(13%) children partially vaccinated and health records were maintained by medical officers of the prison hospital. There was adequate play space

Table 1. Age distribution

age	no
<1year	1
1 to 5 year	19
5 to 10 year	10

Table 2. Conditions faced by children inside prison

Persons per toilet	30
drinking water	Unboiled unchlorinated tap water
special food	Nil
exposure to bad language	frequently
risk of accidental injury	minimal
Presence of mother	continuous

Table 3. General health of children in prison

growth	infections	asthma	anemia	Epilepsy	Immunization status
NORMAL 21(70%)	ARI 2(6%)	3 (10%)	20 (66%)	1 (3%)	Fully vaccinated 26(86%)
PCM 1 st degree 7(23%)	Diarrhea 3(10%)				Partially vaccinated 4(13%)
PCM 2 nd degree 1(3%)	Scabies 4(13%)				
PCM 3 rd degree 1(3%)					

DISCUSSION

A large number of children accompany their imprisoned mothers; not only in developing nations but all over the world. A large number of women prisoners throughout the world are mothers, an estimated 80 percent of imprisoned women in the UK jails are mothers. Over 60 percent of women prisoners have young children, and 3 percent have children living in

prison with them. The phenomenon that is causing worldwide concern is the number of children who are living in jail with their mothers. Relevant raw data and information relating to needs of women in prison with their children are negligible in a developing country like Pakistan. In Pakistani jails, children are grown up in conditions of deprivation and criminality, lack of proper nutrition, inadequate medical care and little opportunity for education³. In this study, 30% of the children were malnourished, similar finding has been described in a report by child family health international⁹ but the rate of malnutrition is high (64%) in children of imprisoned mothers as shown in a study conducted at Srilanka². In our study, anemia was found in 20(66%) babies but it was seen in 32.7% children of imprisoned mothers in a report by child family health international⁹. It may be due to lack of adequate food, insufficient parasite treatment, neglect by mothers, who are more concerned with their personal situation and work all the day. The children receive three meals a day from the jail; however, this often does not satisfy the daily requirements of a growing child, who should eat at least 4 to 5 times a day. Our study shows ARI in 6%, scabies in 13%, asthma³ (10%) and diarrhea in 3(10%) babies, these findings are comparable with the study done at Srilanka², these communicable diseases may be due to overcrowding and poor personal hygiene. In our study 26 (86%) children were fully vaccinated and 4(13%) were partially vaccinated and almost similar state of immunization was observed in a Srilankan study.²

CONCLUSIONS

Children living in prison with their mothers represent a vulnerable group with particular healthcare needs. The children who accompanied their mothers in the prison enjoy close bonds but they have to face multiple medical and social problems like growth, malnutrition, infections e.g. ARI, Diarrhea, & scabies, asthma, anemia and Immunization. These pathologies are treatable and preventable. These disorders can be prevented by providing adequate living conditions, avoiding overcrowding, providing sufficient & balanced diet, sterilized water, proper Immunization and proper hand washing. We recommend that child centered expertise should be available in the prison hospital and should be provided by a Pediatrician of the nearest hospital. The stay in prison should be minimized for many mothers by expediting the legal process and improving the legal aid system. A coordinated effort by the departments of health and social services and the legal authorities is necessary to prevent these innocent children from being punished along with their mothers.

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