

## **Sociological Analysis of Lower Class Women's Crime and Imprisonment Impact on Women**

**(A Case Study of *Adiala Jail*)**

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### **Abstract**

Purpose of the present study was to look into various causes of lower class women's crime and the impact of imprisonment on women. Quantitative research method was applied to conduct the present study while interview schedule was used as a tool for data collection. A sample comprising 30 respondents was drawn from *Adiala Jail*, Rawalpindi through purposive sampling technique. Results of the present study demonstrate that there is a direct link between criminality and illiteracy as well as poverty. Factors such as social structure and society are interconnected with crimes. Our findings are also supported by Merton's theory of strain. Since women from lower class end up in *Jails* due to poverty and illiteracy. Such women are adversely affected by tense atmosphere, immoral behaviors of *Jail* staff, feeling of loneliness, helplessness, inner aggression and loss of relations.

**Keywords:** Poverty, Economic Inequality, Imprisonment, Women's crime, Delinquency

### **INTRODUCTION**

Poverty is the main root cause of all crimes which has become social evil for the whole world, especially for the under developed countries. In Pakistani society, poverty pushes the individual to adopt those means that are not only detrimental for their lives but also for the whole community. Fernald (1920) found that influences which are related to female delinquency include poor economic background, lack of education or training and inferior mentality. Sometimes environment shape their attitude as rebellion. Poverty influences the vulnerable fraction of the society to commit crime for unfulfilled basic needs, hopelessness, low living standard and inequality of resources.

In Pakistan, female literacy ratio is very low as compared to male. Since illiteracy has roots in poverty, most of the women in prison are either

illiterate or belong to poor families. Patriarchal power relations shape gender differences in crime, pushing women into crime through victimization, role entrapment, economic marginality and survival needs (Schwartz, 2008). Due to patriarchal structure Pakistani women are less empowered in terms of mobility and they are highly dependent on their males (Kilday, 2007). The lower class women don't have access to conventional means that lead to achieve their goals. Therefore, women commit crime for betterment of their lives and the lives of their families but later on imprisonment put harsh and detrimental effects on prisoners and their family (Quaker Council for European Affairs, 2007).

Imprisonment has different impacts on women as compared to men. In prison, women experience problems with accommodation, inappropriate staffing, lack of family contact, lack of education and lack of proper healthcare. High proportion of women prisoners were with a history of mental physical or sexual abuse (Townhead, 2006). Inadequate health-care services and lack of safety from abuse can worsen these problems. The effect of imprisonment on the physical health of women is often a direct result of the poor conditions of jail including overcrowded environment, poor sanitary facilities, lack of physical and mental activities and lack of appropriate health care. One of the primary barriers to addressing various health problems is the inability to access health-care services upon their re-entry into society, either through denial of access or inability to afford health-care insurance (Johnson, 2009). In Pakistani jails, there are rare educational and vocational programs for technical training of women to keep them mentally busy. Those that are available are less varied and of poorer quality (U.N report, 2013). Women in prison are affected by imprisonment in a particularly harsh way. The human rights and basic dignity of women in prison are systematically violated (Sundaram, 2002).

#### **Objectives:**

- ✓ To determine the factors which motivate women to commit crime
- ✓ To find the reasons of high rate of crime in lower class
- ✓ To find the impacts of imprisonment on women

#### **Research questions:**

- Why lower class women mostly involve in criminal activities?
- What circumstances they face in jail after committing crime?

**Hypothesis:**

- Higher the poverty rate more will be the criminal activities in the society
- Lengthen the time span of imprisonment greater the chance of poor mental health of women.

**Theoretical Framework**

Mathieu (2003) enclosed Merton's theory of strain in which he states that "social structure and society were equally responsible for crime causation". His emphasis on cultural goals at the expense of institutions means creates a tendency towards anomie. Merton (1949) stated that "women are prone to commit crime when they are failed to attain culturally defined goals through institutional mean". It depicts that crime relates to the goals and means provided by the society. According to Merton (1957) here is an imbalance between the goals and the means when society doesn't provide the means to everyone to accomplish the goals it sets out for them. The result of this situation is called strain, an unpleasant emotional condition which forces individual to commit crime. Piquero and Sealock (2000) found socioeconomic problems were found to be responsible factors for the criminal behavior (Bhosle, 2009). Frustration also leads to criminal attitudes in individuals. According to the frustration-aggression theory (Dollard, 1939) frustration always leads to aggression and every aggression is the result of frustration. When people perceive that they are being prevented from achieving a goal, their frustration is likely to turn to aggression. When someone is closer to achieving its goal an obstacle to his imaginary target causes more frustration and this frustration inclined him toward crime (Harris, 1974). Pakistan is one of those countries having the lowest literacy as well as employment rates of women. In a patriarchal and joint family system, her responsibilities and functions are very demanding. This multiple frustration and economic dependency makes her to involve in criminal activities in order to fulfill her need (Manzoor, 2014).

In imprisonment aspect reformative theory treats a criminal with more humanitarian manner (Donald, 1985). Reformist looks at sanction as instrument of rehabilitation and tries to mould the behavior of criminal on the premises that criminal is not born but made by the environment of society. Therefore, it is the responsibility of society to reform him by adopting certain suitable methods (Salmond, 2008). Sometimes, a crime can be committed by a

person unintentionally with ignorance of the law. So in jail, such people should be treated in a manner that they may improve themselves. The other important purpose of jail is to correct the behavior of inmates for their future life (Johnson, 1964). But in Pakistan; sometimes own relatives and blood relations deceive women to commit crime. Criminals are imprisoned to regret and not to repeat the crime again but jail environment has adverse effect on criminals. Many countries are witnessing a significantly disproportionate rate of increase of women crime being incarcerated (Jenni, 2008). Throughout the world, women prisoners face similar human rights violations related to the conditions and the consequences of their incarceration (James, 2010). Most prisons are overcrowded and very few are provided rehabilitative services in jail. Majority of the female prisoners are illiterate and unaware of their legal rights (Shah, 2011). Women in jails suffer from both physical and mental torture including the stigma of incarceration, the claustrophobia of confinement, the boredom, anxiety about one's children, lack of privacy, abuses of power, little or no choice of diet, the cacophony of radios, television, and the uncertainty about their future (Faith, 1993). Female offenders are more mentally pressurized (Pollock, 1998). The situation of women prisoners in Pakistan is not different from other countries. Women in Pakistan have low social status and a continuous discrimination by the society and Government. They are unaware about their rights. Laws are made for the protection of women but Government has failed to implement these laws (Shah, 2011).

### **Literature Review**

Taylor (1999) analyzed that social changes such as joblessness, poverty and social inequality, crisis of family and parenting are responsible for increase in both crime rates and the fear of oppression. Throughout the world women's involvement in crime is increasing. Lower class women are increasingly committing crimes due to lack of access to basic needs. Factors which are related to female delinquency are poor economic background, lack of education and inferior mentality. Criminal attitude among women is linked with illiteracy. Most of the illiterate women cannot be involved in economic activities and thus remain dependent on their families (Fernald, 1920). Poverty and unemployment has prominent effect on crime. In Pakistan, statistics of crime show that there is a rapid increase in crime because of unemployment, illiteracy, over population, urbanization and inflation (Aurangzeb, 2012). Beside poverty and illiteracy, unemployment is also an important cause which incites women to commit crime.

Sarkin (2001) stated that women prisoner's mental and physical health problems are frequent and more serious than those of their male counterparts. In Pakistani jails, women often experience poor accommodation. They don't have counseling program that stimulate the process of brain invasion, necessary for their healthy mental growth. Johnson (2009) presented that the effect of imprisonment on the physical health of women is often a direct result of the poor conditions of jail. Female prisoner not only go through the trauma of imprisonment but she also faces the boycott of her family. In Pakistani society, when a woman is imprisoned she is supposed to cut off her contact with the remaining family members including her children outside jail.

UNODC (2014) reported that women who are admitted to prison often as a result of domestic violence, physical and sexual abuse are more likely suffer from mental disabilities than men. Imprisonment generates new mental health problems or exacerbates existing ones. Thus imprisonment of a woman not only impacts her social status but also hinders in the socialization of her children inside or outside the jail (Dunifon, 2011).

## **Materials and Method**

### **1. Universe and population:**

The universe of this study was *Adiala* jail in Rawalpindi which is the only jail for women criminals in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. In order to have better understandings of imprisonment impact on those women who were involved in any offence and were imprisoned for more than a year were selected for the study. A written permission was taken from the administration of jail and purpose of the study was clearly conveyed. Although the issue of women's crime need to be studied widely but keeping in view the limitations, both financial and time period, researchers restricted this investigation only to *Adiala* jail.

### **2. Sampling:**

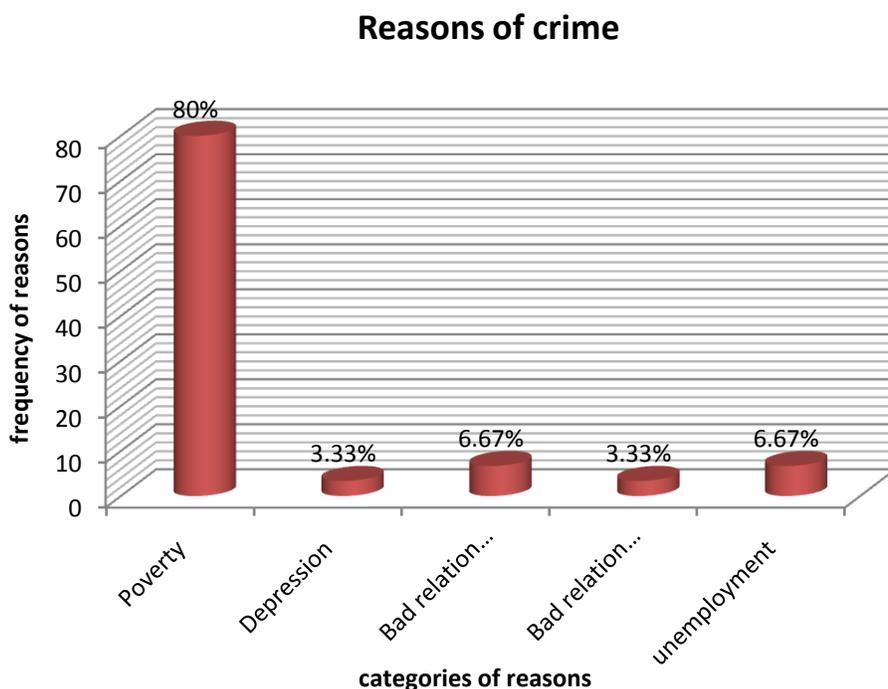
Respondents were selected through non-probability sampling technique. Through purposive sampling method, only those women were selected who belonged to lower socio economic background and committed some crime.

### 3. Data collection tool:

An interview schedule comprised of open and close ended questions was used to collect data from the respondents. Researcher personally interviewed 30 respondents with a structured interview questions with the consent of respondents and jail officials. A comprehensive interview schedule was prepared in English but questions were asked in Urdu since most of the prisoner women were illiterate and were not able to understand English. Purpose of the study was clearly conveyed to each woman informant. Interviews took place in a private room without the presence of prison guards or officials and lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

### Data Presentation and Discussion

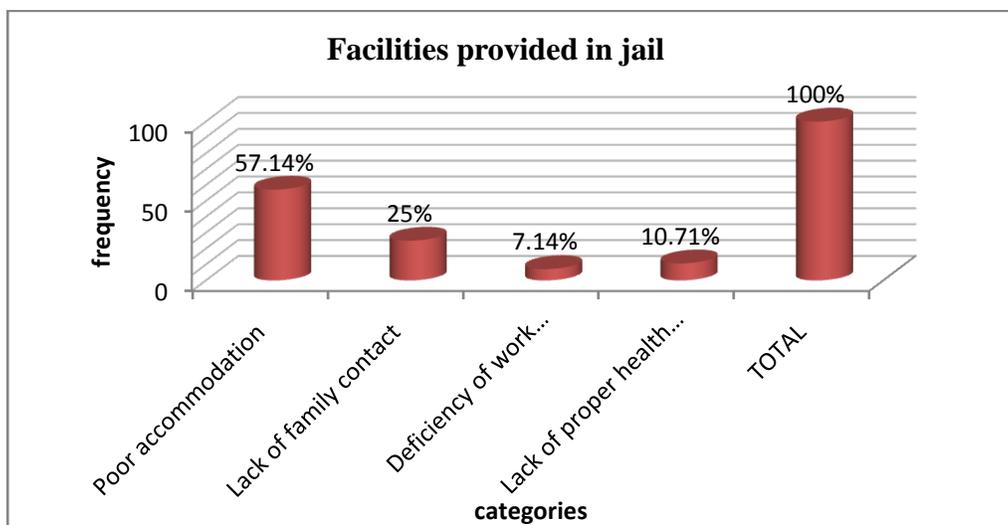
**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents regarding causes of committing crime:**



Data in Table 1 show that 80 percent respondents commit crimes because of the poverty. Low self-esteem, revenge and lack of supportive relationships are associated with delinquency (Wajid, 2010). The results of the present study show that unemployment is leading factor responsible for crime. Crime rates were higher during periods of unemployment than during periods of employment (Gallagher, 2006). If there is a culture of violence, its roots are pronounced economic inequalities especially if associated with ascribed position. The analysis reveals that socioeconomic inequality between races as well as economic inequality generally increases rates of criminal violence (Peter, 1982). Women involve in illegal activities prior to committing crime are those who don't have strong relation with their life partner. When their desires are not fulfilled, they move to criminal attitude which seldom stigmatized them as a criminal. Merton (1949) states that women are prone to commit crimes when they are failed to attain culturally defined goals through institutional means.

**Table 2: Facilities provided in Jail.**

S. No	Facilities	Frequency	Percent
1	Poor accommodation	16	57.14
2	Lack of family contact	7	25.0
3	Deficiency of work programmed facilities	2	7.14
4	Lack of proper health facilities	5	16.67
TOTAL		30	100



Data in Table 2 show that some respondents were satisfied with the protected environment in jail as they have basic necessities for themselves. They were also getting formal education. Some kind of general education was reported to be provided to the women (Pandey, 2004). However, majority of the respondents did not favor the situation. They feel deprivation related to proper accommodation, poor health facilities, lack of family contact and educational facilities. Prisons do not meet the needs of women which affect them adversely. The human rights and basic dignity of women in prison are systematically violated. In prison, women face problems of accommodation, lack of family contact, lack of education, lack of vocational training and lack of proper healthcare. High proportion of women prisoners were found to be with a history of mental, physical or sexual abuse (Townhead, 2006).

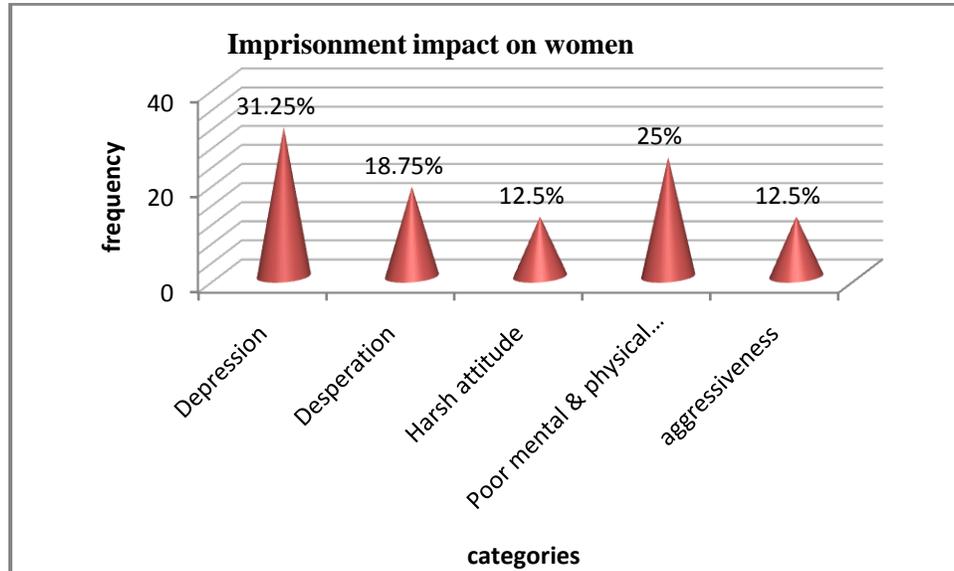
**Table 3: Jail effects mental & physical health of prisoners.**

S. No	Categories	Frequency	Percent
1	To great extent	18	60.0
2	To some extent	10	33.33
3	Never	2	6.67
TOTAL		30	100

Data in Table 3 demonstrate that jail environment greatly affects the physical and mental health of the respondent inmates. They get different disease in jail environment. Mental health problems were observed among women criminals in *Adiala* Jail. Post-traumatic stress disorder and substance use disorder affect the majority of the female prisoners. Mental illness is often both a cause and a consequence of the imprisonment (Moller, 2009). Factors such as overcrowding, various forms of violence, enforced solitude or conversely, lack of privacy, lack of meaningful activity, isolation from social networks, insecurity about future prospects (work, relationships) and inadequate health services especially mental health services in prisons have severe effects on mental health of women in prisons. The increased risk of suicide in prisons (often related to depression) is unfortunately one common manifestation of the cumulative effects of these factors (Brinded, 2001).

**Table 4: Imprisonment has negative effect on women.**

S. No	categories	Frequency	Percent
1	Depression	7	23.33
2	Desperation	5	16.67
3	Harsh attitude	5	16.67
4	Poor mental & physical health	10	33.33
5	aggressiveness	3	10.0
TOTAL		30	100



Data from Table 4 demonstrate that high rate of mental illness among female prisoners was observed in *Adiala* jail. Most of the women were suffering from depression due to guilt and loneliness. Women criminals were found to show very aggressive attitude. This stems from the fact that women in prison have a significantly greater prevalence of most mental disorders when compared with women in the community (Tye, 2007). Women prisoner's mental and physical health problems are frequent and more serious than those of their male counterparts. During incarceration, women prisoners engage more often in self-injury, experience depression and attempt suicide. In Pakistani jails, women often experience poor accommodation. They don't have counseling program that stimulate the process of brain invasion necessary for their healthy mental growth.

### Hypothesis

**Hypothesis # 1: Higher the poverty rate higher will be the criminal activities in the society.**

**Table: Association between the high poverty rate and criminal activities in society**

Variable	Variable		
	Poverty rate		
Factors of criminal activities	Yes	No	Total
Unfulfilled basic needs	18	0	18
Hopelessness	2	0	2
Low living standard	4	0	4
Inequality of resources	2	0	2
Bad relation	0	3	3
Mental stress	0	1	1
Total	26	4	30

**{Observed count(o),expected count(e)}**

**Chi-square =  $\sum (o-e)^2$  : 29.89      Significance level (SL): 0.01**

**E**

The above table shows the association between the high poverty rate and criminal activities in society. The hypothesis is tested by using chi-square test at significance level of 0.01. The value of chi-square significance at 0.01 levels confirmed the existence of strong association between the high poverty rate and criminal activities in society. The data show that those respondents, who are poor, favor the statement that poverty is the reason of committing crime. People with low socio economic background more easily incline towards criminal activities because of the deprivation of basic needs, poor living standard and inequality of resources.

**Hypothesis # 2: Lengthen the time span of women in imprisonment greater the chance of negative effect on the women personality.**

**Table: Association between the times spans of women in prison and its negative effect on the women personality.**

Variable	Variable		
	Women imprisonment		
Effect on personality	Positive	negative	Total
Confess of mistake	7	0	7
Exposure of external world	3	0	3
Courage to face difficulties	2	0	2
Learning from experience	2	0	2
Depression	0	5	5
Desperation	0	3	3
Harsh attitude	0	2	2
Poor health	0	4	4
Aggressiveness	0	2	2
Total	14	16	30

**{Observed count(o),expected count(e)}**

**Chi-square =  $\sum (o-e)^2$  : 29.07      Significance level (SL): 0.10**

**E**

The above table shows the association between times spans of women in prison and its negative effects on the women personality. The hypothesis is tested by using chi-square test at significance level of 0.10. The value of chi-square is significant at 0.10 level confirmed the existence of strong association between time spans of women in prison and its negative effect on the women's personality. The data show that those women who are living in jail from more than a year have negative impact on their personalities. In Pakistani society this aspect portrays how imprisoned women remain in stigma attached to their life. In terms of attitude, one can perhaps explain the negative response felt by female prisoners by the general stigma attached to prisoners (Wolf et al, 2007).

### **Conclusions**

High rate of poverty and economic inequality is the major cause of women's crime in Pakistan. Unemployment, illiteracy, lawlessness,

backwardness and double standards are also major determinants of crime. Merton (1949) offered a social theory that crime occurs when society sets goals for its members such as making money to buy a variety of material goods but creates barriers in achievement of these goals. This research shows that lower class in Pakistani society suffers from extreme poverty and lack of education which is the main cause of high crime rate among poor women.

Imprisonment impacts on women differently than on men. In prison, women experience problems of accommodation, lack of family contact, lack of education facilities, lack of training programs, and lack of proper healthcare. Additionally, women prisoners have history of mental, physical or sexual abuse during imprisonment. In Pakistan; the imprisoned women not only suffer from different assault but also experience the hard sentence from the prisons administration which is dangerous for their mental health. Sutherland (1960) emphasized that those women who are badly affected during imprisonment do the same crime when they are released, which may be the result of prison environment on their minds. The women's crime not only exploits the social life of women but also have dangerous impact on the lives of their family members and children.

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