

Abstract

Title	Mother in Prison – narratives of mothers and children An analysis of the children's resilience process
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This study elucidates the impact of maternal incarceration with focus on the children and their experiences. The overall aim is to identify and analyze what risk and protective factors have an impact on the process of resiliency of children. Another aim is to explore how imprisonments influence the women's prerequisites for mothering. The main sample includes nine families: nine mothers and their children (nine girls and two boys ages 13-20) interviewed regarding the childhood, relationships in the family, and the surrounding environment. Major parts of the information were given by the children in interviews about their activities, and their situation in school. The interviews explored both their challenges and their strength.

All children in the study have been exposed to stress as a result of their mother's detention. The level of stress depends on contextual conditions. For the majority of the children, the resilience process had continued for approximately one year. My interpretation of their stories forms the basis for the resilience assessment of the children – which in turn leads to the conclusions of this thesis.

Out of the three resilience functions, it is clear that behavior is the most stable function, followed by the intellectual function. This implies that the emotional function has been most strongly affected due to the detention of the mothers. At the time of the interviews, more than half of the children had not recovered from the separation. From the presentation it is also shown that when the strain is too great on an individual, all functions are negatively affected, which leads to personal breakdown.

In my thesis I emphasize the importance for children to feel that they are loved, and can obtain a continuous relationship with their mother during their childhood and their youth. It is also clear that an extended family plays an active and important role when it comes to support of the family. Due to their support, the damage that e.g. drug abuse puts on the family can be reduced. Furthermore, it is of great help if there are financial means in the family that can reduce at least the material consequences of the mother's absence. As a consequence of drug abuse in the family, many children have been forced to take a large personal responsibility during the years of growing up, and also responsibility for the family situation in total. If they have been able to cope with this involuntary task, it probably has prepared the children in a positive way for an independent life in the future. My thesis has also shown that *how* the children emotionally experience the adversity in life, to a large extent, determines how well they are able to cope with it and overcome the difficulties. Children with positive self-esteem seem to be able to deal with difficulties in life in successful ways. A majority of the children display a good behavioral and intellectual function, likely due to their mothers who deliberately have encouraged them to make appropriate choices in life in order to better adapt to society and its values.

As previously mentioned, the children are primarily emotionally affected by their mother's imprisonment. Lack of support is the main reason for several children who have not been able to emotionally recover from the stress they were exposed to when their mothers were arrested and imprisoned. Recommendations for social service, police and criminal authorities' actions and interventions are presented.