

Lived Experiences of Children with Incarcerated Parents: A Phenomenological Study

A Thesis Proposal Presented to
the Faculty of the College of Criminology
Misamis University Ozamiz City

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the degree
Bachelor of Science in Criminology

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ABSTRACT

Lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents are experiencing problems that they cannot handle individually could either be, focusing on the emotional, psychological, and social impacts they face. By adopting a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to understand the challenges, coping strategies, and support systems that influence these children's lives. In-depth interviews will be conducted to capture their subjective experiences, highlighting the complexities of their situations and identifying effective strategies for fostering resilience. The findings revealed five distinct themes that aim to inform the development of interventions tailored to the needs of these children: (1) Emotional Impact and feelings of loss; (2) Academic and Financial Challenges; (3) Stigma and Social Isolation; (4) Sources of Resilience and Support; and (5) Coping Mechanisms and Personal Growth. This study addresses a significant empirical gap in understanding the nuanced experiences of children with incarcerated parents, offering insights that can guide policymakers, educators, and social service providers in creating more effective support programs by promoting the resilience of these children, society can contribute to their positive development and help mitigate the long-term effects of parental incarceration on their lives.

Keywords:- *Children With Incarcerated Parents, Emotional Impact, Support Systems, Parental Incarceration, Social Isolation , Interventions, Coping Strategies , Stigma, Psychological Impact*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers would like to acknowledge the involvement of these people whose support and guidance have been invaluable in the completion of this research.

To Dr. Jose F. Cuevas Jr., the Dean of the College of Criminology, for his encouragement and valuable insights, this helped shape the direction of this study and contributed greatly to its success.

To Professor Elma Fe E. Gupit, the research adviser, they are deeply thankful for her expertise, constructive feedback, and continuous support.

To Dr. Markdy Y. Orong, the research instructor, for his compassionate mentorship and unwavering patience throughout this journey.

The researchers would also like to thank the study participants, who generously shared their time and experiences, making it possible to gather essential data for this study.

To the classmates, friends, and family members, who have been sources of strength and encouragement.

Acknowledgment is also given to their parents, Mrs. Melba Glodove, Mrs. Marife Lagas, Mr. and Mrs. Merlyn Murillo, and Mr. and Mrs. Carmelita Alicaya, for their constant support, both emotional and financial. Their sacrifices and belief in the researchers' abilities have been foundational to this achievement, and they are forever grateful.

Above all, the researchers are deeply grateful to the Almighty God for granting them wisdom, resilience, and guidance throughout this journey.

The Researchers

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to:
Our beloved parents, for their constant support, encouragement,
and understanding that helped us reach a milestone;
To our friends and classmates, for their companionship,
motivation, and unwavering support throughout this journey;
To the Almighty God, for His blessings, guidance,
and strength that sustained in completing this study.

The Researchers

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A. Rationale of the Study

Children whose parents are in detention often have trouble academically and miss more school because of emotional stress and instability at home (Gonzalez 2021). They may find it more difficult to perform well academically and to stay up with other students as the result, this could start the endless cycle where they struggle even more (VanLeeuwen et al., 2021). These kids might experience discouragement and overwhelm as a result, which might lead their academic performance to keep decreasing (García et al., 2020). Children who have a parent in a correctional facility may experience financial challenges such as not being able to pay for school supplies or textbooks, which could hinder their academic advancement (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2019).

By providing targeted support, resources, and assistance to affected families, collaborative efforts between schools, social agencies, and community organizations can help lessen the negative impacts of parental detainment on children's education and financial stability (Mihalec-Adkins et al., 2022). When a parent goes to jail, it can make kids feel like they've lost that special connection with them, leaving them feeling alone, sad, and confused (Axelson et al., 2020). Understanding this is important for helping these kids grow up feeling happy and secure in their emotions, and for supporting them through tough times (Brackett 2019). Giving them love, patience, and comfort can help them feel better and do well, showing them that they're not alone and that they're important and loved (Inoue 2019).

Children and guardians may not have enough money, and they may experience other difficulties such as not having food, shelter, disorientation, difficulty getting to the medical professional, or difficulty getting their education while a parent is incarcerated (Bell et al., 2020). These tasks can be quite challenging, so it is essential to support them and make sure they have all they require to succeed (Bada et al., 2019). They can get through these difficult times and stay in good health if we support them and make sure they have everything they need (Imran et al., 2020). These children people show Recovery even in trying circumstances by reaching out to their spirituality and finding positive ways to express themselves (Walsh 2020). This eventually allows them to face their problems face-to-face and be proudly and strongly (Penfold et al., 2022). By using these methods of coping, childrens not only overcome difficulties but also gain beneficial skills which provide them the determination to face challenges in the future (Crowe Et al., 2022).

Being able to ask for help from reliable people additionally makes them feel like they belong and enhances relationships with others, improving their general durability and well-being (Bowe et al., 2020). Also, their determination inspires others as well, providing them with hope and support when they confront comparable difficulties (Seyyedabbasi et al., 2023). For childrens whose parents are in prison, supportive networks are important (Hickert Et al., 2019). They receive love, support, and understanding from these networks, which makes them feel less isolated and more safe (Hauken et al., 2019). Teachers, friends, family, and community organizations can provide practical help, guidance, and emotional support (Gueldner et al., 2020). Examples of such assistance include helping with homework or offering a safe space to talk about feelings (Canning et al., 2021). These relationships support kids in developing resilience and overcoming the difficulties of having an incarcerated parent (Ashmitha et al., 2020). Additionally, they provide a sense of safety and being part of something, both of which are essential to their general growth and well-being (Torralba et al., 2020). Children of convicted parents may find it difficult to deal with their situation and may feel alone or pressured in due to the lack of parental support (McCarthy et al., 2019). In due to this goal, it is essential to provide encouragement for these young people who thrive regardless of their difficult circumstances (Anderson et al., 2019).

Helping childrens of convicted parents to be resilient and confident is essential for enabling them to take on their situation with strength and courage (Zhang et al., 2020). We can help these children build the strength they need to overcome challenges and develop in a time of adversity by providing them the resources, encouragement, and support they need (Ungar et al., 2019). This can be achieved in a number of ways, including by providing educational support that is customized to their specific needs, mental health care, and mentoring programs (Parikh et al., 2019). Giving these children an opportunity to participate in beneficial hobbies like sports, the arts, or helping others can also help them establish a feeling of agency and confidence (Strandbu et al., 2019). Creating a safe, nurturing atmosphere where youngsters with convicted parents feel heard, respected, and valued is another important aspect of empowering them (Evans et al., 2022). These children may overcome challenges and reach their full potential if we provide them with an awareness of community and opportunities for development and being yourself (de Wal Pastoor et al., 2020). In the long run, it is essential to support children with parents who have been convicted of crimes not only for their own personal health but also for the development of stronger, safer neighborhoods (La Fors 2020).

There is a significant realistic situations in understanding the lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents, particularly concerning the intricate emotional, psychological, social, and developmental impacts they face. While existing literature acknowledges the challenges and hardships encountered by these children, there is a notable lack of comprehensive research that explores their subjective experiences in depth. This gap hinders a thorough understanding of the nuances of their lived realities and highlights the need for further empirical investigation to address this gap in knowledge.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents from a phenomenological perspective. By researching into the subjective realities of these children, the study seeks to uncover the intricate emotional, psychological, social, and developmental impacts they face as a result of parental incarceration. Through in-depth interviews and analysis, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges, coping mechanisms, and support systems employed by these children in navigating their unique circumstances. Ultimately, the research intends to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this topic, informing the development of targeted interventions and support services aimed at promoting the well-being and resilience of children with incarcerated parents.

The significance in studying on the lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents is its potential to inform the development of targeted interventions and support programs tailored to meet the specific needs of this vulnerable population. By gaining insight into the nuanced challenges and coping mechanisms of these children, policymakers, educators, and social service providers can design more effective strategies to mitigate the negative impacts of parental incarceration and promote the well-being and resilience of affected children.

B. Theoretical Framework

This study will be anchored on Attachment Theory by John Bowlby (1960) and Trauma Theory by Judith Herman (1992). Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby (1960) is a psychological framework that focuses on the importance of early caregiver-child relationships in shaping emotional development and interpersonal relationships throughout life (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2022). According to attachment theory, infants form emotional bonds, or attachments, with their primary caregivers, typically their parents or other primary caregivers (Falcu et al., 2019). These early attachments serve as a foundation for the child's sense of security, trust, and ability to regulate emotions. Bowlby proposed that the quality of these early attachments influences the child's social and emotional development, affecting their future relationships, self-esteem, and ability to cope with stress and adversity.

The theory emphasizes the significance of sensitive and responsive caregiving in promoting secure attachments and fostering healthy development (Harrison et al., 2023). It explores how these experiences can deeply impact individuals' thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and overall well-being. Trauma theory recognizes that traumatic events can vary widely and may include situations like accidents, natural disasters, violence, or the incarceration of a parent (Baloglu et al., 2019). It emphasizes the importance of considering factors such as age, developmental stage, and social support in understanding the effects of trauma on individuals (Gilligan et al., 2020). Trauma theory also guides efforts to provide compassionate and effective support to those who have experienced trauma, helping them to heal and build resilience in the face of adversity (Ali et al., 2023).

A study of Murray and Farrington (2005) examined the impact of parental incarceration on children's well-being, drawing on attachment theory to understand the emotional and psychological effects of parental absence. It explores how disruptions in attachment bonds due to parental incarceration influence children's adjustment and behavior. Additionally, Arditti's (2012) study utilized attachment theory to explore the developmental outcomes of children with incarcerated parents. It highlights the importance of secure attachment relationships in mitigating the negative effects of parental incarceration and proposes recommendations for supporting these children and their families based on attachment principles (Shalev et al., 2022).

Attachment theory will be employed to understand how parental absence due to incarceration influences children's emotional responses and relationship dynamics. By applying attachment theory as a guiding framework, the research aims to explore the impact of disrupted attachment bonds on children's feelings of loss, abandonment, and insecurity. Additionally, it seeks to investigate how these disruptions affect children's sense of security, trust, and ability to form and maintain relationships. Through this theoretical lens, the study aims to gain deeper insights into the experiences of children affected by parental incarceration and contribute to our understanding of the emotional and psychological implications of this phenomenon.

Trauma theory by Judith Herman (1992) as used to children with incarcerated parents, refers to understanding the major psychological and emotional impact that imprisonment of parents can have on these children (Ali et al., 2023). It recognizes that having a parent in prison may be extremely difficult and challenging for children, potentially leading to a number of reactions to trauma such as anxiety, depression, and behavioral disorders (Milavetz et al., 2021). Trauma theory describes how seeing a parent's arrest, suffering family conflict, and dealing with the reputation of parental incarceration may significantly impact children's sense of security, stability, and well-being (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2019). This theories applies in relation to this study because these are one of the common theories that relates to this study and to children that experiences difficulty in having incarcerated parents, some of those children may able to overcome those challenges and some may not (Eddy et al., 2019).

The focal point of difficult trauma can be used to understand the effects of parental incarceration on children. According to this theory, the establishment of safe bonds and normal development is disrupted when children are exposed to ongoing stressors and traumatic childhood experiences. Children whose parents are incarcerated might show signs associated with trauma such excessive alertness, behavioral disorders, and unpleasant memories as they deal with the ongoing pressures brought on by stigma from society and parental separation.

In addition, since trauma theory, it is important to acknowledge the transmission of trauma between generations, for unresolved trauma within the family system may lead to patterns of disruption and participation in the criminal justice system. The complex psychological and emotional challenges that this vulnerable group faces must be handled with the use of trauma-informed activities, such as therapy services provided to the special needs of children whose parents are in prison. For children affected by parental incarceration, we can support healing, resilience, and positive outcomes by addressing trauma with a thorough strengths-based approach.

This theory can be applied in this study to understand the psychological and emotional impact of parental incarceration on children. By employing trauma theory as a theoretical framework, researchers can explore how the experience of parental incarceration may be perceived as a traumatic event for children. This perspective allows for an examination of the potential effects of parental incarceration on children's mental health, emotional well-being, and coping mechanisms. Trauma theory can help elucidate how children may experience symptoms of trauma, such as post-traumatic stress, anxiety, depression, or behavioral problems, as a result of parental incarceration. Additionally, trauma theory can inform the exploration of resilience factors and protective mechanisms that may mitigate the negative effects of parental incarceration on children's psychological adjustment. Overall, applying trauma theory in this study can provide a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents and inform interventions aimed at supporting their mental health and well-being.

C. Conceptual Framework

This study explores the lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents, focusing on themes such as emotional impact and feelings of loss, stigma and social isolation, academic and financial challenges, sources of resilience and support, and coping mechanisms leading to personal growth. By examining these interconnected aspects, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. Ultimately, this study seeks to inform policies and programs that address their unique needs, fostering an inclusive and supportive society where these children can thrive.

Emotional impact and feelings of loss are often immediate and profound. Children of incarcerated parents frequently experience intense emotional distress, including feelings of abandonment, sadness, and confusion, as they process the sudden absence of a parent. These emotions arise not only from the physical separation but also from the emotional gap left by a missing caregiver, which can destabilize a child's sense of security and identity. This loss is particularly hard-hitting, as children may not fully understand the circumstances surrounding their parent's incarceration. The emotional burden is compounded by a lack of closure or communication with the incarcerated parent, which deepens feelings of isolation and neglect (Hollis-Peel et al., 2020). The emotional challenges are often long-lasting, influencing various aspects of the child's development. For many, the sense of loss extends beyond the immediate absence of a parent to include feelings of fear and anxiety about the future. These children may worry about their parent's safety or whether they will ever be reunited. Additionally, they often internalize feelings of guilt or responsibility, believing that their parent's incarceration may somehow be linked to their own actions (Hartwell, 2018). The emotional toll can manifest in behavioral issues such as anger, withdrawal, or difficulty in forming trusting relationships. This sense of loss also affects their worldview, often causing them to question their own self-worth and their place in society.

Stigma and social isolation can subject children to social judgment and discrimination. Peers, teachers, and even extended family members may treat them differently, creating an environment where they feel like they do not belong. This social stigma can severely affect their self-esteem and self-worth (King, 2021). Children may internalize the shame associated with their parent's actions, leading them to withdraw from social interactions or hide the truth about their family circumstances. As a result, they may struggle to form healthy relationships, both within and outside of school. The combination of isolation and stigma can leave children feeling deeply disconnected from their peers and the larger community, which further complicates their emotional and social development (VanBuren & Cunningham, 2020).

Academic and financial challenges are often major obstacles for children of incarcerated parents. The absence of a primary caregiver often leads to financial instability, which affects their ability to meet basic needs such as school supplies, transportation, or extracurricular activities. The economic strain can cause stress and anxiety, which in turn, impacts their academic performance (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2019). Children may have difficulty focusing on schoolwork or attending classes regularly, especially if they are taking on additional responsibilities at home, such as caring for siblings. Financial insecurity, compounded by emotional instability, makes it harder for children to thrive academically, potentially leading to lower grades, school absenteeism, and even a higher likelihood of dropping out. This vicious cycle makes it difficult for children to break free from the barriers created by their parent's incarceration (Mihalec-Adkins et al., 2022).

Coping mechanisms and personal growth are key to helping children manage their circumstances. They may engage in activities such as journaling, sports, or art, which provide emotional relief and allow them to process their feelings in a healthy way. These outlets offer an escape from their daily struggles and help them regain a sense of control (Schaefer et al., 2021). As they engage in these coping mechanisms, children often experience personal growth by learning resilience, perseverance, and emotional regulation. Over time, they develop a stronger sense of self and the ability to overcome adversity. By addressing their emotional distress through healthy coping strategies, children can better manage their feelings and eventually emerge stronger, with an improved sense of confidence and emotional stability (Lipsey, 2019).

Sources of resilience and support are critical in helping children of incarcerated parents thrive. Children often rely on a network of supportive individuals, including extended family members, teachers, mentors, and community organizations. These support systems provide essential emotional stability, guidance, and encouragement, helping children to rebuild trust and maintain a sense of hope (Gueldner et al., 2020). Positive relationships with caring adults offer children an anchor, helping them to feel valued and loved despite the challenges they face. Schools and community organizations also play an essential role by providing safe spaces and resources to help children navigate their emotional and academic difficulties. These supportive environments foster a sense of belonging, which is crucial for children to thrive, both emotionally and socially, as they work through their struggles (Ashmitha & Annalakshmi, 2020).

The resilience developed through adversity can lead children to greater self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and a sense of purpose. By reflecting on their experiences and engaging in therapeutic or constructive activities, children begin to understand how to navigate difficult emotions and complex life situations. Through these experiences, they build coping skills that will serve them throughout their lives. Personal growth also includes the development of a more positive self-image and the ability to set and pursue goals, despite their challenges. This personal evolution often empowers children to break the cycle of hardship, making them more adaptable and confident in their ability to face future challenges. The long-term impact of this growth can contribute to healthier, more fulfilling lives, even in the face of adversity (Ungar et al., 2019).

In conclusion, understanding the lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents requires a multi-faceted approach. By addressing themes such as emotional impact and feelings of loss, stigma and social isolation, academic and financial challenges, sources of resilience and support, and coping mechanisms leading to personal growth, we can gain a deeper insight into the complexities of their lives. Through targeted support systems, the development of healthy coping strategies, and the fostering of resilience, these children can be empowered to overcome their circumstances, leading to personal growth and eventual reintegration into society as thriving individuals.

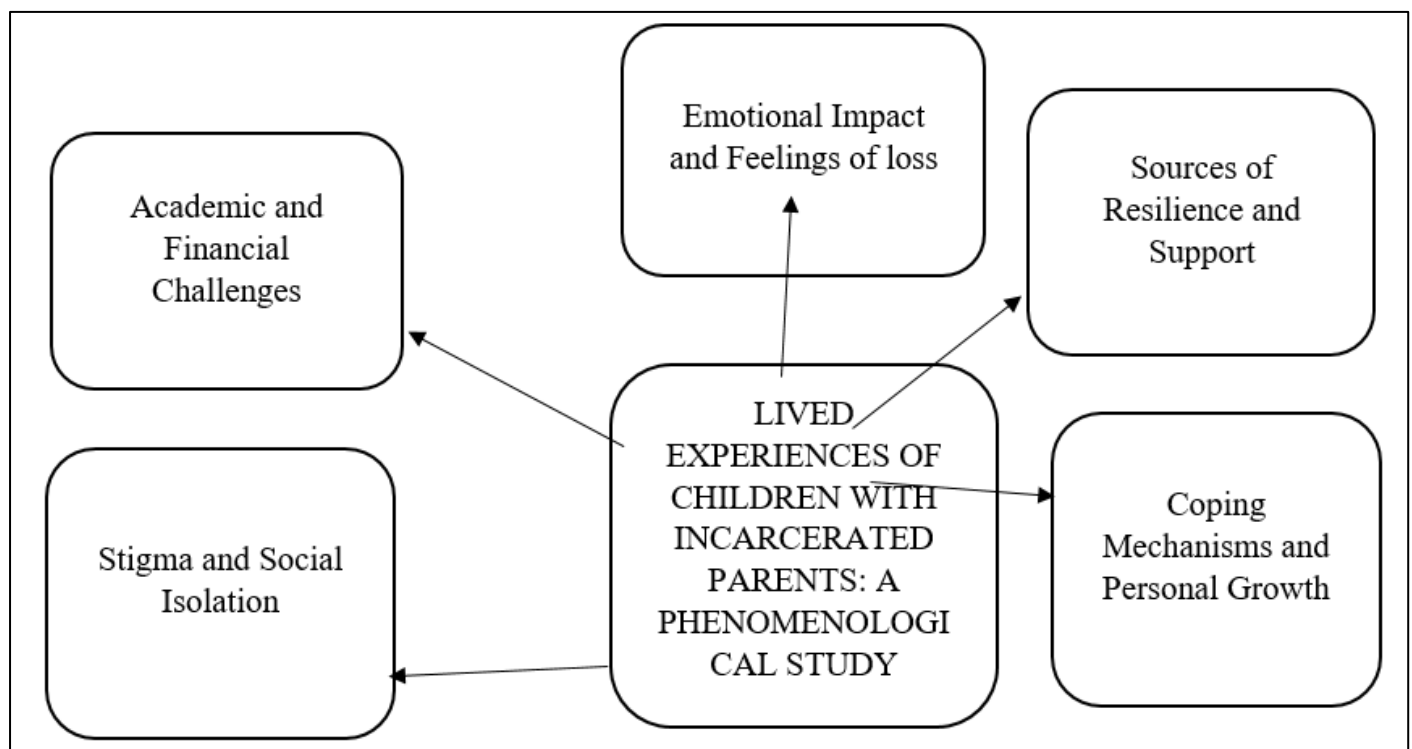


Fig 1: Schematic Diagram of the Study

D. Statement of the Problem

This study will explore the lived experiences of children having incarcerated parents impacts to their children's well-being. Specifically, it will answer the following:

- How do children with incarcerated parents perceive their family life and emotional experiences?
- What challenges do children with incarcerated parents face in their daily lives?
- How do the environments where children with incarcerated parents live affect their experiences?
- What factors contribute to the resilience of children with incarcerated parents, enabling them to thrive despite adversity?
- What strategies do children with incarcerated parents use to deal with stress and challenges?

CHAPTER TWO

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Design

This study will use the phenomenological research design. The phenomenological approach assumes that human experience is mediated through interpretation (Creswell 2009). Consequently, the core of the phenomenological approach is the interest in other people's experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences. This research design is appropriate to collect rich and detailed information about the lived experiences of the children with incarcerated parents.

B. Setting

The research will be conducted in certain barangays in Ozamis City, Misamis Occidental, Philippines. It is a friendly and busy city with lots of people. Throughout history, Ozamis City has proven essential to the growth of the area, being a key center for trade over the Spanish colonial era. The city's architecture, which includes well-preserved Spanish-era structures, is proof of its colonial past and that structures that were made by the Spaniards were called the cotta fort. Children whose parents are incarcerated gather in a safe place in the center of an Ozamis City barangay. It is a little structure with happy colors and kind faces. They play games, speak, and draw when they'll be indoors. The barangay in where the children resides serves as the focal point for the study.

C. Participants

This study will include a minimum of ten children from different households in Ozamis City, Misamis Occidental, Philippines. The participants will be chosen through snowball sampling using the following criteria: (1) 18 years old above; (2) having incarcerated parents; (3) willing to participate in the study.

Each participant adds their own history and experiences to the study, resulting in a diverse and complex tapestry of opinions. Some individuals may come from big families, while others may belong to smaller households. They represent varied socioeconomic backgrounds in the barangay, reflecting the community's different cultures. Additionally, participants may include both boys and girls, each with their own interests, strengths, and challenges. All participants share the common experience of having a parent who has been incarcerated, and they bring their voices to the forefront of the study to shed light on their lived experiences and resilience journeys.

D. Instrument

Guide questions will be used for the interviews to obtain information from the participants. The questions will be translated into the local language to facilitate greater comprehension and intercommunication among all participants. The interview consists of an introduction as well as a set of opening, core, and closing questions. Open-ended questions and narrative response formats will be used to elicit more detailed narratives from the participants during the in-depth interview.

During the in-depth interview, the researchers will record the necessary information using digital recording equipment. This method will ensure that the interview process is accurately and completely recorded. Subsequently, the recorded data will be transcribed and analyzed to identify any themes that will emerge from the participants' responses.

E. Data Procedure

The data collecting technique consists of different steps to ensure the accurate and kind collection of information from children with incarcerated parents in several households within Ozamis City. First, participants who meet the age criteria are recruited with the assistance of community leaders, schools, and local groups, emphasizing the voluntary nature of participation and the privacy of responses. Following the guidelines set forth in Republic Act 10173, popularly referred to as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, in order to guarantee the security of participants' private information. Participants are notified of how their personal information will be gathered, utilized, and stored in compliance with RA 10173's rules prior to any data collection. Also, permission to carry out the study in the community requires approval from Misamis University's Dean of Criminology.

F. Ethical Considerations

The children's emotional safety has to be the primary concern for researchers because of the sensitive character of their subject matter. It involves getting informed agreement from the children's guardians and also from the kids themselves, emphasizing that participation is completely voluntary and that there are no consequences if you stop at any moment. In addition, precaution should be made to minimize any possibility of injury or discomfort to participants during the data gathering and analysis process. Throughout the research process, researchers should make sure that children feel comfortable and guided and communicate in an age-appropriate manner. Researchers are dedicated to protecting the personal details and private information of participants, so confidentiality is also very important. Researchers can conduct study that is friendly, responsible, and cautious of the needs and vulnerabilities of children with parents who are incarcerated by following these ethical guidelines.

G. Data Analysis

The Moustakas' (1994) data analysis technique of phenomenological reduction will be used in this study. The following are Moustakas' Six Steps, namely: (1) Bracketing, (2) Horizontalization, (3) Clustering into Themes, (4) Textural Description, (5) Structural Description, and (6) Textural-Structural Synthesis.

Bracketing, the researchers will mitigate the possible effects of preconceived notions and perceptions of the participants so that there will be no biases or epochs. With the adviser's aid and supervision, they will reach a deep level of inquiry, from topic and population selection, interview design, collection and interpretation, and dissemination of research findings.

Horizontalization, the researchers will technically refer to the participants list of all the verbatim expressions that will have a bearing on the study. Initially, each statement will be looked into with equal value. Then, statements that will be found to be irrelevant, repetitive, overlapping, and outside the scope of the study will be ignored. Horizons, which will be the remaining sections after the data has been polished, will be considered constituent and meaningful parts of the phenomenon. According to Moustakas, "horizons are unlimited, and horizontalization is a never-ending process" (Moustakas, 1994).

Clustering. The researchers will obtain inferences from the study, which will involve reducing the experiences of invariant horizons, creating core themes, and validating the invariant horizons using multiple data sources. They will reduce the statements into horizons, cluster them into themes, and ensure that each theme will be implied with only one meaning. This will be considered as placing the phenomenon into a "textural language." To validate the invariant horizons obtained from the study, the researchers will review the findings of research studies using methods other than the data-gathering methods being used in the study, like observation, field note-taking, focus group interviews, and related literature. This validation process will be crucial to the accuracy and clarity of the representations.

Structural Description, or 'what occurred,' the researchers will describe the perception of the phenomenon; in obtaining the textural description of the experience of the participants, they will use the verbatim excerpts in the interview and will provide a narration of the meaning units which will be derived from the themes.

In the *textural-structural synthesis process*, the researchers will integrate imaginative variation, an ingenious outlook, and insights into the textural description. An imaginative variation will be considered a mental experiment on analyzing the details and structures of the participants' experience by being detached from natural inclination through epoche. It will be appended in each paragraph of textural descriptions to generate a structural description. In the textural-structural synthesis process, the researchers will collate the meaning units of each of the participants. They will develop from it a composite of textural and structural descriptions that are common to them. A narrative or synthesis will represent all of the participants written from a third-person perspective. The primary goal of this final step of Moustakas' method will be to obtain the essence of the phenomenon's experience.

CHAPTER THREE

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents. The results are discussed in detail, highlighting the themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with participants. Through these narratives, the study captures the emotional, psychological, and social realities faced by these children, as well as their coping strategies and sources of resilience.

Parental incarceration is a life-altering event that leaves a profound impact on children. For these children, the absence of a parent is not merely a physical void but an emotional and psychological burden that affects multiple aspects of their lives. This chapter explores how these challenges manifest in different contexts, including family life, academics, social interactions, and personal growth. It delves into the nuanced experiences of the participants, showcasing the diversity in their struggles and the resilience they demonstrate despite the adversity.

The findings are categorized into key themes that address the research questions: (1) Emotional impact and feelings of loss; (2) Academic and Financial Challenges; (3) Stigma and Social Isolation; (4) Sources of Resilience and Support; and (5) Coping Mechanisms and Personal Growth. Each theme is supported by direct quotes from the participants to provide authenticity and depth to their stories.

The discussion section compares the findings to existing literature, providing a broader perspective on the implications of parental incarceration for children. By drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Attachment Theory and Trauma Theory, this chapter sheds light on the psychological and emotional challenges faced by these children and identifies strategies to mitigate the negative effects of parental incarceration.

Ultimately, this chapter aims to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of children with incarcerated parents, emphasizing the importance of creating effective interventions and support systems to address their unique needs. The results underscore the resilience of these children and the role of supportive environments in helping them thrive despite their circumstances.

A. Emotional Impact and Feelings of Loss

Participants 1,3,6 described the profound emotional challenges they faced as a result of having an incarcerated parent, highlighting a complex mix of emotions such as abandonment, sadness, confusion, and loneliness. These feelings often emerged from the abrupt disruption of family dynamics and the absence of a parental figure, which created a sense of instability and uncertainty in their lives. The emotional impact extended beyond immediate feelings of loss, influencing their sense of identity, security, and belonging. Many participants expressed difficulty navigating these emotions, especially as they coped with the stigma, altered relationships, and societal expectations that accompanied their parent's incarceration.

These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview conducted:

"I feel like my world changed overnight. I didn't know how to explain to my classmates why my dad wasn't around anymore." (P1)

"It felt like a part of my heart was missing. I miss my mom every single day, especially when I need advice." (P3)

"Sometimes, I do not want to talk about it because people do not understand how hard it is to lose a parent like this." (P6)

The emotional impact of parental incarceration can be understood through the lens of Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which highlights the profound psychological consequences of disrupted attachment bonds. The absence of a parent often destabilizes a child's foundational sense of security and trust, leading to a cascade of emotional responses such as abandonment, anxiety, fear, and confusion. These emotions can manifest in both immediate and long-term effects, influencing the child's self-esteem, capacity to trust others, and overall emotional development. The loss of a caregiver, whether a primary or secondary attachment figure, disrupts the emotional equilibrium that children rely on for healthy growth, leaving them vulnerable to feelings of isolation and uncertainty.

Beyond the direct impact of separation, children of incarcerated parents often face additional emotional burdens stemming from societal stigma and judgment. They may internalize shame and guilt, associating their parent's situation with their own identity and worth. This stigma can discourage them from seeking support or openly discussing their feelings, further deepening their sense of isolation. For some, this leads to suppressed emotions, resulting in behavioral issues, academic struggles, or difficulty maintaining relationships. Others may develop unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as withdrawal, aggression, or denial, as a way to manage the overwhelming emotional stress.

The effects of parental incarceration are not confined to the immediate family dynamic but ripple outward, influencing the child's interactions with peers, teachers, and the community. They may encounter prejudice or lack of understanding from their social environment, which exacerbates their emotional distress. These experiences can foster a sense of mistrust in social systems and relationships, further complicating their ability to form meaningful connections and seek help when needed.

Addressing these complex emotional needs requires a multi-faceted approach. Counseling and therapeutic interventions tailored to the unique challenges of children with incarcerated parents are critical for fostering emotional resilience and psychological well-being. Programs that promote open communication, emotional expression, and skill-building for managing stress can provide a much-needed outlet for these children. Schools and communities also play a vital role in creating supportive environments that reduce stigma and encourage inclusivity. Initiatives such as mentorship programs, peer support groups, and trauma-informed education practices can help children rebuild their confidence, process their emotions, and foster a sense of belonging. By addressing these emotional needs comprehensively, society can help mitigate the long-term psychological effects of parental incarceration and provide these children with the tools to lead fulfilling lives.

B. Academic and Financial Challenges

Participants 2,4,5 emphasized the extensive financial challenges brought on by their parent's incarceration, which created significant strain on their daily lives and long-term opportunities. These financial hardships often impacted their ability to meet basic needs, such as food, housing, and healthcare, and extended to school-related expenses, including tuition fees, supplies, and extracurricular activities. For many, these economic difficulties created barriers to fully engaging in their education, leading to disruptions in academic progress, limited access to resources, and, in some cases, the necessity of prioritizing work or household responsibilities over their studies.

The psychological toll of financial instability compounded these challenges, as participants described the stress of navigating both the emotional weight of parental separation and the practical demands of supporting themselves or their families. This dual burden left many struggling to concentrate in school, maintain consistent attendance, or participate in activities that might have supported their academic and personal development. Without the financial or emotional stability needed for success, participants faced heightened risks of falling behind academically, which could have lasting implications for their future opportunities.

Beyond education, these financial difficulties also limited participants' access to supportive resources, such as counseling, tutoring, or community programs, which could have mitigated some of the negative effects of their circumstances. The lack of funds for transportation, technology, or participation in enrichment activities further isolated them from their peers and reduced their opportunities for social and emotional growth.

These findings underscore the interconnectedness of financial instability and educational challenges, revealing how the economic consequences of parental incarceration ripple across multiple areas of a child's life. Addressing these issues requires a holistic approach that not only provides financial assistance but also ensures access to supportive services, such as scholarships, school meal programs, and mentorship initiatives. By alleviating financial strain and removing barriers to education, communities can better support children with incarcerated parents in achieving stability, personal growth, and academic success.

These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview conducted:

"I had to stop attending extra classes because we couldn't afford the fees anymore." (P2)

"Sometimes, I couldn't focus on my schoolwork because I kept thinking about my mom and how she was doing." (P4)

"There were days when I just didn't want to go to school because of how people talked about my dad." (P5)

These findings align with existing research, which underscores that children with incarcerated parents frequently face significant economic instability that impacts multiple areas of their lives, including their education. The financial strain often means families struggle to afford basic necessities, let alone educational resources such as books, school supplies, or fees for extracurricular activities. This economic hardship can lead to disruptions in academic participation, reduced engagement, and even school dropout, further perpetuating cycles of disadvantage (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2019).

In addition to financial challenges, the emotional toll of parental incarceration exacerbates these academic struggles. Children often experience heightened stress, anxiety, and stigma, which can undermine their focus, motivation, and self-esteem. These emotional burdens not only affect their performance in the classroom but also their ability to form relationships with peers and teachers, further isolating them from the support networks that might help them succeed (VanLeeuwen et al., 2021).

Addressing these intertwined issues requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach. Schools, social service agencies, and community organizations must work together to provide targeted interventions that alleviate both economic and emotional challenges. Scholarships, grants, and subsidized school supplies can help ease financial burdens, while counseling, mentorship

programs, and trauma-informed teaching practices can provide the emotional and psychological support children need to thrive (Mihalec-Adkins et al., 2022). Furthermore, creating inclusive school environments that promote understanding and reduce stigma is critical to fostering a sense of belonging and resilience in children with incarcerated parents (Gueldner et al., 2020).

These efforts are not just about mitigating immediate challenges but also about breaking the cycle of disadvantage that often accompanies parental incarceration. By addressing the root causes of educational disparities and offering holistic support, communities can empower these children to overcome adversity, achieve academic success, and build a brighter future (Harrison et al., 2023).

C. Stigma and Social Isolation

Participants 3,7,8 consistently reported facing judgment and exclusion from both their peers and the broader community as a direct consequence of their parent's incarceration. This social stigma, often rooted in misconceptions and stereotypes about incarcerated individuals, intensified their sense of isolation and alienation. Many children described feeling that their parent's actions defined them in the eyes of others, leading to discrimination and exclusion in social settings, including at school and within their neighborhoods. The shame and embarrassment associated with having an incarcerated parent often caused them to withdraw from social interactions, fearing rejection or ridicule.

The stigma surrounding parental incarceration can extend beyond immediate relationships, influencing how children view themselves and how they navigate their social world. These experiences can erode their self-esteem, reinforcing feelings of worthlessness or inadequacy. As a result, these children often struggle to build trusting relationships, as they may feel that others do not understand their struggles or may judge them based on their family circumstances. This lack of connection and emotional support further compounds their sense of loneliness and distress, making it more difficult to cope with the challenges they face.

In addition, the stigma can have a long-lasting impact on a child's overall development. It affects their ability to engage fully in school activities, extracurricular programs, or even friendships, which are critical for emotional growth and well-being. The negative labeling and social exclusion often extend to the family, reinforcing the cycle of stigma and limiting opportunities for social integration and support. These children may internalize societal judgments, leading to a diminished sense of identity and belonging.

Addressing the stigma faced by children with incarcerated parents requires not only individual support but also broader societal change. Schools, communities, and social service organizations must take proactive steps to reduce stigma, foster inclusivity, and provide safe spaces for these children to express themselves without fear of judgment. Support programs, peer mentoring, and awareness campaigns can help challenge harmful stereotypes, promote empathy, and create a more understanding and accepting environment. This is essential for helping children with incarcerated parents feel valued, connected, and empowered to overcome the challenges they face.

These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview conducted:

"I stopped talking to some of my friends because they would always ask uncomfortable questions about my dad." (P3)

"It feels like everyone is watching me and waiting for me to make a mistake, like they expect me to turn out like my mom." (P7)

"The hardest part is hearing people say bad things about my family, especially when they do not know the full story." (P8)

Social stigma is a pervasive and significant challenge for children with incarcerated parents, and it often leads to profound feelings of exclusion, shame, and social marginalization. These children are frequently labeled based on their parent's criminal behavior, which can result in being ostracized by their peers and broader community. The stigma attached to having an incarcerated parent can manifest in numerous ways, including judgment, discrimination, and isolation in school, at home, and within their neighborhoods. This judgment can have a lasting impact on a child's sense of self-worth, as they may internalize the negative perceptions associated with their family situation, reinforcing feelings of inadequacy and helplessness (Axelson et al., 2020).

These experiences of exclusion and stigma can significantly hinder children's social development. They may struggle to form and maintain healthy relationships, both with peers and adults, due to the fear of rejection or misunderstanding. Moreover, the emotional toll of being stigmatized can lead to a range of psychological issues, including anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (VanLeeuwen et al., 2021). As a result, these children are often at a higher risk for social withdrawal, bullying, and academic disengagement, which can further exacerbate their feelings of isolation and alienation (Gueldner et al., 2020).

The emotional and social challenges resulting from stigma also affect their ability to navigate societal systems and pursue opportunities for personal growth. Without support, these children may feel disconnected from school activities, extracurricular programs, or even their families, further hindering their development and well-being. This lack of connection is especially detrimental in critical developmental stages when positive social interactions and emotional support are essential to healthy growth and coping (Mihalec-Adkins et al., 2022).

To address these challenges, it is crucial to implement interventions that create supportive and inclusive environments within schools, communities, and social systems. Programs that focus on raising awareness about the unique challenges faced by children with incarcerated parents and promoting empathy can reduce harmful stereotypes and combat stigma. Schools and community organizations should provide safe spaces for these children to express themselves and access mental health support. Peer mentoring programs, counseling, and peer-led support groups can help these children develop resilience and strengthen their social skills, creating networks of support that buffer the negative effects of stigma (Harrison et al., 2023). By fostering environments that prioritize inclusivity and emotional well-being, these children can better navigate societal judgment, build self-esteem, and develop the resilience necessary to overcome adversity and succeed in life.

D. Sources of Resilience and Support

Participants 2,5,9 were able to identify several important sources of strength and support that played a vital role in helping them navigate their difficult circumstances. These sources of support ranged from close-knit family relationships to institutional assistance and community-driven programs, all of which provided emotional, practical, and psychological support that contributed to their resilience.

Extended family members, particularly grandparents, aunts, uncles, and older siblings, often emerged as crucial figures in the lives of these children. For many, family members provided not only financial assistance but also emotional stability in the absence of their incarcerated parents. These caregivers frequently became primary sources of comfort and security, offering a sense of continuity in the child's life. Participants mentioned how these family members reassured them, offering guidance and love, even in the face of financial hardship or social stigma. The presence of a supportive family network was essential in providing the child with a sense of belonging, safety, and identity, especially when their immediate family structure was disrupted by incarceration.

In addition to family support, teachers and school staff also played a pivotal role in the lives of these children. Many participants highlighted the positive influence of teachers who offered both academic and emotional support, helping them to feel valued and understood. For some, teachers became trusted mentors who not only assisted with academic work but also provided a safe space for expression and emotional release. This connection was especially important when children struggled with feelings of alienation or low self-esteem. Teachers' efforts to recognize and address the unique challenges faced by children with incarcerated parents helped reduce feelings of isolation and fostered a more inclusive environment for learning and personal development.

These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview conducted:

"My grandmother has been my rock. She always tells me to stay strong and focus on my future." (P2)

"My teacher helped me a lot. She encouraged me to join a writing club where I could express my feelings." (P5)

"I found a youth group in our community, and being with them helped me feel like I wasn't alone." (P9)

The resilience displayed by participants underscores the critical role of social support in helping children overcome adversity. As highlighted by Ungar et al. (2019), the presence of supportive adults and peers can significantly enhance children's capacity to cope with challenges. For many participants, the emotional and practical support they received from family, teachers, and community programs allowed them to face their circumstances with a sense of hope and determination. These social connections provided them with the resources they needed to build coping strategies, regulate their emotions, and maintain a positive outlook despite their difficult situations. This support not only buffered the negative effects of parental incarceration but also empowered them to pursue personal growth, academic success, and stronger social relationships.

Furthermore, programs that offer mentorship, emotional support, and opportunities for self-expression have been shown to be particularly effective in promoting resilience. Through structured activities such as group counseling, art programs, and peer mentorship, children with incarcerated parents are able to gain valuable emotional coping tools, process their feelings, and develop a sense of agency over their own lives. These programs also help foster a sense of belonging and identity, allowing children to realize that they are not defined solely by their circumstances. By providing opportunities for self-expression and connection with others who may share similar experiences, these initiatives help to reduce feelings of isolation and stigma. In this way, resilience is nurtured not only through emotional support but also by giving children the space and resources to build meaningful relationships, develop life skills, and cultivate a sense of hope for the future.

E. Coping Mechanisms and Personal Growth

Participants 6,8,4 shared how they developed various coping strategies to manage the stress and challenges associated with having an incarcerated parent. These coping mechanisms helped them process difficult emotions and navigate the complexities of their circumstances. For many, engaging in activities such as journaling provided a therapeutic outlet to express feelings that were difficult to articulate in conversation. Writing allowed them to reflect on their emotions, track their personal growth, and gain clarity on their thoughts. The act of journaling provided not only emotional release but also a sense of control and self-awareness, helping

participants to better understand their experiences and move forward with a sense of purpose. This practice of self-reflection became a valuable tool for managing the emotional weight of their situation and cultivating resilience in the face of adversity.

In addition to journaling, sports and creative arts were frequently mentioned as powerful coping strategies. Many participants found that participating in sports, such as basketball or running, offered both physical and emotional relief. Engaging in physical activity helped them release built-up tension, reduce stress, and improve their mood. Sports also provided a sense of camaraderie, teamwork, and achievement, all of which contributed to their emotional well-being. Similarly, art, whether through drawing, painting, or music, served as another key outlet for emotional expression. Creative activities allowed participants to process their feelings in a non-verbal way, providing them with a sense of accomplishment and a constructive means of channeling difficult emotions. Both sports and art offered participants a sense of normalcy, allowing them to reconnect with themselves, build self-esteem, and strengthen their ability to cope with life's challenges. Through these outlets, they were able to create healthy coping mechanisms that supported their emotional resilience and overall mental health.

These are evident in the responses of the participants during the interview conducted:

"I started writing in a journal. It is like talking to someone who doesn't judge me." (P6)

"Playing basketball with my friends helps me forget my problems for a while and just have fun." (P8)

"Drawing lets me put my feelings on paper when I can't find the right words." (P4)

Engaging in creative and recreational activities is a well-documented coping mechanism for children dealing with trauma (Crowe & Sarma, 2022). These activities not only provide emotional relief but also enhance self-esteem and a sense of agency. Encouraging participation in hobbies and extracurricular activities can help children channel their emotions constructively and foster personal growth.

Moreover, engaging in creative and recreational activities allows children to cultivate essential life skills, such as problem-solving, emotional regulation, and resilience. These activities provide opportunities for children to explore their interests, develop talents, and build confidence in their abilities. As they engage in hobbies like sports, art, or music, children also learn to manage frustration, overcome setbacks, and celebrate small successes, which are crucial aspects of emotional development. By offering a structured environment for self-expression, these activities can serve as a source of stability and consistency, especially for children experiencing emotional turmoil due to their parent's incarceration. In this way, creative and recreational activities not only serve as an immediate outlet for emotional distress but also contribute to long-term personal growth, helping children build a positive sense of identity and a strong foundation for coping with future challenges.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Summary

This study employs a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents, focusing on how parental incarceration affects their emotional, social, and academic development. The research aims to achieve three key objectives: first, to understand the profile of children affected by parental incarceration; second, to examine the emotional and psychological impacts of having an incarcerated parent; and third, to explore the coping mechanisms and sources of resilience that help these children navigate their challenges. The study utilizes a purposive sampling method, selecting ten children who have experienced parental incarceration, ensuring that the participants have firsthand knowledge of the emotional and social consequences of their circumstances. Using a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to uncover the children's lived experiences, particularly how they cope with stigma, financial instability, and emotional distress.

Qualitative data will be collected through in-depth interviews, gathering detailed accounts of their struggles and resilience. Thematic analysis will be used to identify common patterns in their experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of how parental incarceration impacts children. The findings of this research can inform the development of support programs and policies aimed at addressing the specific needs of children with incarcerated parents, with the goal of promoting their emotional well-being and preventing long-term negative outcomes.

B. Findings

Based on the responses of the participants during the interview, the following are the salient findings of the study:

- The study concludes that children with incarcerated parents experience profound emotional distress, including feelings of abandonment, sadness, and confusion. The absence of a primary caregiver disrupts their sense of security and creates a sense of emotional instability, which can negatively affect their overall well-being and development. These emotional struggles are particularly evident during significant life events and daily routines, highlighting the deep psychological impact of parental incarceration.
- The study finds that the stigma associated with having an incarcerated parent is a major factor contributing to social isolation. Children with incarcerated parents often face judgment and exclusion from peers and the broader community, which makes it difficult for them to form healthy relationships and seek support. The stigma exacerbates feelings of loneliness and alienation, reinforcing the need for inclusive and supportive environments in schools and communities.
- The financial strain caused by parental incarceration has a direct impact on the academic performance and educational opportunities of children. The inability to afford school supplies, extracurricular activities, and basic needs creates additional stress, further hindering their ability to concentrate on their studies. This financial instability underscores the importance of providing targeted support to ensure these children have equal access to educational resources and opportunities.
- The study concludes that children with incarcerated parents often develop effective coping strategies, such as journaling, sports, and art, to manage their emotions and navigate the challenges they face. These coping mechanisms help children channel their emotions constructively, foster personal growth, and build resilience. Encouraging the development of these coping strategies can support children in overcoming emotional distress and navigating their circumstances with greater strength.
- The study highlights the critical role of supportive relationships with extended family members, teachers, and community programs in helping children with incarcerated parents cope with their challenges. These support networks provide emotional stability, encouragement, and a sense of belonging, which are essential for building resilience. It is clear that access to strong, positive support systems plays a significant role in helping children overcome the negative impacts of parental incarceration.

C. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were crafted by the researchers:

- Participants consistently expressed feelings of abandonment, sadness, and confusion as a result of their parent's incarceration. The sudden absence of a primary caregiver disrupted their sense of security and led to emotional distress. Many participants described feeling a deep sense of loss, particularly during significant life events or daily routines where the presence of their incarcerated parent would have been essential.
- A significant theme that emerged was the social stigma associated with having an incarcerated parent. Participants reported experiencing exclusion, judgment, and ridicule from peers and even community members. This stigma often led to social isolation, with children feeling reluctant to share their family situation with others. As a result, many withdrew from social interactions, making it difficult to build and maintain friendships.
- Participants identified financial instability as a major consequence of parental incarceration. The lack of financial support often led to difficulties in accessing school supplies, paying for extracurricular activities, and maintaining consistent academic performance. This financial strain created additional stress, which, in turn, affected their ability to focus on studies and perform well academically.

- Despite the challenges, many participants highlighted personal coping strategies that helped them navigate their difficult circumstances. Journaling, art, and sports were frequently mentioned as effective outlets for managing emotions. These activities provided a sense of control, emotional release, and self-expression, helping children cope with the emotional burden of having an incarcerated parent.
- Participants emphasized the critical role of support systems in helping them cope with the effects of parental incarceration. Extended family members, teachers, and community programs were frequently cited as vital sources of emotional and practical support. These individuals and programs provided a sense of stability, encouragement, and belonging, helping children overcome feelings of isolation and build resilience in the face of adversity.

D. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are crafted by the researchers:

- It is recommended that schools, community organizations, and social service agencies develop and implement emotional support programs tailored to children with incarcerated parents. These programs should focus on providing safe spaces for these children to express their emotions, process their feelings, and receive counseling. Peer support groups, mentorship, and trauma-informed therapy could be particularly effective in helping children manage the emotional toll of parental incarceration and combat feelings of isolation and abandonment.
- To address the stigma that children with incarcerated parents face, it is crucial to implement anti-stigma campaigns within schools, communities, and social institutions. These campaigns should aim to raise awareness about the unique challenges these children face and promote empathy, understanding, and inclusivity. Reducing societal judgment can help create more supportive environments that foster positive relationships and allow children to feel safe and valued in their communities.
- Given the financial hardships experienced by children with incarcerated parents, it is recommended that targeted financial assistance programs be established to support these children's educational needs. Scholarships, free school supplies, and access to extracurricular activities can help alleviate some of the economic burdens. Additionally, schools should be encouraged to adopt flexible policies for children facing such challenges, ensuring that they receive the necessary resources and accommodations to succeed academically.
- The study emphasizes the importance of coping strategies such as journaling, sports, and art in building resilience. It is recommended that schools and community organizations provide opportunities for children with incarcerated parents to engage in creative and recreational activities. Programs that encourage participation in sports, art therapy, and other outlets for emotional expression can help children develop positive coping mechanisms, improve self-esteem, and foster personal growth.
- It is essential to enhance support networks for children with incarcerated parents, including extended family, teachers, and community organizations. These support systems play a crucial role in providing emotional stability, guidance, and encouragement. Policymakers should prioritize the development of programs that facilitate mentorship, family counseling, and community engagement. By strengthening these networks, children will have access to the resources and support they need to overcome adversity and thrive despite the challenges posed by parental incarceration.

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APPENDIX A**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Name of the Researcher : _____
Institution : _____
Program/Subject : _____

Dear Participant:

You are being invited to participate in a research study that aims to explore the lived experiences of children with incarcerated parents. This study is being conducted as part of a research project to understand the emotional, social, and academic challenges faced by children whose parents are incarcerated. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

➤ Purpose of the Study:

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in the in-depth interview or in focus group discussion. The process of interview will be last within 15-45 minutes and all your answers will be recorded in audio recording device.

You may feel discomfort during the course of the interview because of the sensitive nature of the topic being studied. You may opt not to answer questions which make you feel any psychological or emotional distress, or you can withdraw as a participants of the study if you feel that you cannot discuss the information that is asked of you. The researcher values your participation and will place your welfare as their highest priority during the course of the study. We will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential, except if necessary to protect your rights or welfare. When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no identifiable information will be used. Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION'S CONSENT

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form. I can withdraw my consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty.

Signature above Printed Name of Participant

Date

Signature above Printed Name of Interviewer

Date

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher at the _____ through mobile phone number _____ or through email at _____; or if you need to see him, she can be located at the _____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

➤ *Before the interview begins, the participants will be informed that:*

- The interview will be recorded.
- The identity of the participants will stay confidential during the whole study and in the written systematic review.
- Participants have the right to revoke their consent at any moment.

➤ *Introduction*

- Introduce self
- Discuss the importance of the study
- Provide informed consent
- Provide structure of the interview (Audio recording and Note taking)
- Ask if they have questions
- Test audio recording equipment
- Establish rapport

➤ *Opening Questions:*

- Can you tell me a bit about your family?
- How old were you when your parent(s) went to jail?

➤ *Core Questions:*

- How did you feel when you found out your parent(s) were going to jail?
- How has your life changed since then?
- Can you describe how your family life has been impacted by having a parent who is incarcerated? How do you feel about your family situation?
- What are some of the challenges you encounter on a daily basis as a child with a parent in prison? How do these challenges affect you?
- How does the environment where you live influence your experiences as a child with an incarcerated parent? Are there specific aspects of your environment that make things more difficult or easier for you?
- Despite facing adversity, some children with incarcerated parents show resilience. Can you tell me about any factors or sources of support that have helped you cope and thrive despite the difficulties?
- When you encounter stress or challenges related to your parent's incarceration, how do you typically cope with them? Are there specific strategies or activities that help you feel better or manage your emotions?
- Has anyone helped you since your parent(s) went to jail?

➤ *Closing Question:*

- Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a child with an incarcerated parent that we haven't discussed?

APPENDIX C

TRANSCRIPTION

➤ *PARTICIPANT 1*

When my parent was incarcerated, it felt like my entire world changed overnight. At first, I didn't fully understand why this was happening, and all I knew was that my parent was no longer around. The absence created this deep feeling of loneliness and abandonment that I couldn't shake off. I felt like I was left behind, and it was hard to make sense of it all. I struggled with sadness and confusion, and those feelings followed me everywhere – at home, at school, and even when I was alone. In school, I couldn't focus. The sadness I was carrying made it almost impossible to concentrate on my assignments. My grades started slipping because all I could think about was my parent. I felt like I wasn't performing the way I should, and I could feel the distance growing between me and the other kids. It was like I was trapped in my own head, unable to escape the weight of what was happening.

At some point, I realized I needed to find a way to cope, and that's when I started journaling. Writing became my outlet. It helped me process everything I was feeling, and it was the one place where I could be completely honest with myself. Writing down my emotions gave me a sense of control that I didn't have anywhere else. It wasn't easy at first, but over time, it became a lifeline. My grandmother also played a huge role in helping me through this. She was there for me when I needed someone to talk to, and her support meant everything. She never judged me or made me feel like I was burdening her with my emotions. Instead, she showed me love and gave me stability, something I desperately needed. Knowing that I wasn't alone helped me feel more grounded, even when everything else seemed out of my control. However, the hardest part was the stigma. I felt like people saw me differently because of my parent's situation. I didn't want to tell anyone about my family, and I started pulling away from my friends. The judgment I feared was real, and it made me feel like I didn't belong. I didn't want to be labeled or misunderstood, so I kept everything to myself. It was hard, feeling so isolated from everyone else. Looking back now, I realize how important my family's support and my journaling were in helping me cope. It wasn't an easy road, but I've learned to manage my emotions in healthier ways. I've learned that even in the toughest times, there's always a way forward, whether through family, self-expression, or finding strength within yourself. My parent's incarceration may have changed my life, but it doesn't define me. What matters is how I choose to face it and move forward.

➤ *PARTICIPANT 2*

When my parent was incarcerated, everything in my life shifted, and I didn't know how to handle it. At first, I felt a sense of disbelief and shock. I couldn't understand why this was happening to our family. The absence of my parent left a huge void, and it felt like a part of me was missing. I was overwhelmed with sadness, and sometimes I would just cry for no reason, because I missed them so much. It was hard to explain these feelings to anyone because I felt like nobody could truly understand what I was going through. One of the hardest parts was the financial strain that came with my parent's incarceration. Things at home became harder. We didn't have as much money, and sometimes it was difficult to pay for things like school supplies or even basic needs. I remember feeling guilty because I knew that my family was struggling, and I didn't know how to fix it. The weight of both the emotional and financial burdens sometimes felt too much to bear. But despite everything, I found ways to cope. One of the things that really helped me was playing basketball. It became my escape. When I was on the court, I didn't think about anything else. I could just focus on the game, and that helped me clear my mind and let go of the sadness for a little while. It also gave me something to look forward to and a way to release the emotions that I couldn't always put into words. Through basketball, I felt a sense of achievement and control over something in my life, which was so important when everything else felt so chaotic. I also found support in my teachers. One teacher in particular, who had always been understanding and patient, became someone I could turn to when I needed guidance. She would check in on me, offer encouragement, and make sure I felt included, even when I was struggling to keep up in class. Her support reminded me that I wasn't alone, and that made a big difference.

Looking back, I realize that my parent's incarceration affected me in ways I never fully understood at the time. But I also see how much I've grown from it. I've learned to channel my emotions into things that help me cope, like basketball and finding trusted people to talk to. It wasn't an easy journey, but with the support of my family, teachers, and the things I love to do, I've learned to keep going. Even though things aren't perfect, I've come to understand that my situation doesn't define who I am or what I can achieve. I am more than my struggles, and I've learned to face them head-on with strength.

➤ *PARTICIPANT 3*

When my parent was incarcerated, I felt like my world fell apart. It wasn't just about missing them – it was the uncertainty and the questions I didn't have answers to. I remember feeling completely lost. I couldn't understand why this had to happen, and I couldn't figure out how to deal with the emptiness left behind. I would lay awake at night thinking about what was happening to my parent and whether they were okay. It was hard to focus on anything else, especially at school, where I was expected to just carry on like everything was normal. But nothing felt normal. At first, I didn't know who to talk to about it. I was afraid people would judge me or treat me differently if they knew what was going on at home. So, I kept everything inside. I tried to act like I was fine, but I was far from it. I'd get frustrated easily, snap at people, and I felt like I was always on edge. My grades started slipping, and I couldn't keep up with everything. There were days I would just stay home from school because it felt like too much to handle. I couldn't concentrate, and every little thing felt overwhelming. One thing that helped me was talking to my aunt. She's

been a big part of my life since I was a kid, and when this happened, she really stepped up. She didn't try to pretend everything was okay or give me empty advice. She just listened, and that made all the difference. It was like I finally had someone who understood how I felt. She didn't treat me like I was fragile or broken, but she gave me the space to open up without fear of judgment. Over time, I started to feel a little lighter, knowing that I wasn't alone in this. I also began to find some peace in small things I could control. I took up drawing, and at first, it was just something to keep my hands busy. But as I kept drawing, it became a way for me to express things I couldn't put into words. I found that the more I drew, the better I felt, even if it was just for a little while. My art gave me a safe space to channel all the pain and frustration I was holding in. It wasn't easy, and it still isn't. Some days, the sadness still hits me out of nowhere, and I still have trouble focusing on things. But I've learned to manage it better, and I've learned to ask for help when I need it. My aunt and my art have been my anchors. Looking back, I can see how much this experience has shaped me, not just in terms of my struggles, but in how I've learned to face challenges head-on. My parent's incarceration doesn't define me, and even though it is been a painful journey, it is also taught me the importance of finding strength in the people who care for you and the things that bring you peace.

➤ *PARTICIPANT 4*

When my parent was incarcerated, I felt a deep sense of confusion and loss. It was as if everything I knew about my family and my life had been turned upside down, and I didn't know how to process it. I was overwhelmed with a mixture of emotions—anger, sadness, and frustration—and I couldn't figure out how to express any of it. The hardest part was not being able to share what I was going through. I didn't want to be judged or seen as weak, so I kept everything to myself. It was like carrying a heavy burden alone, and the emotional weight of it affected everything, from my schoolwork to my relationships with friends. What helped me, though, was talking to my teacher. She noticed that I was acting out and not performing as I usually did. She didn't push me, but she gently reached out and asked if everything was okay. It was the first time someone really seemed to care about how I was doing emotionally. She didn't judge me for being distracted or upset; instead, she gave me a safe space to talk. That made a big difference. Having an adult who listened and didn't treat me like I was a problem was something I really needed at that time. I also started to find comfort in small routines, like going for walks or listening to music. Those little moments helped me clear my mind and get some relief from the constant worry. Music, in particular, became my escape. When I listened to my favorite songs, it felt like I could breathe again. It gave me a sense of peace, even if just for a few minutes, and helped me release some of the built-up anger and sadness I had been holding inside.

➤ *PARTICIPANT 5*

When my parent was incarcerated, I felt like I was suddenly thrust into a world of uncertainty and responsibility. I was no longer just a child who could rely on my parent for guidance, support, or care. I had to step up in ways I wasn't prepared for, helping take care of things at home and trying to support my family emotionally. It was overwhelming at times, and I felt like I was losing my childhood. I remember feeling like I had to be strong for everyone around me, especially for my younger siblings. I became their protector, trying to shield them from the pain I was experiencing. At school, things weren't much better. I tried to maintain my usual routine, but everything felt off. I couldn't concentrate on lessons because my mind kept drifting back to my home situation. There were days when I'd walk into school exhausted from staying up late to help at home, and I couldn't shake the worry I felt about my parent. My teachers noticed my struggles and would ask if everything was okay, but I never felt comfortable telling them the full story. I didn't want to appear weak or like I couldn't handle things. So, I kept up a brave face, even though inside I was struggling with the weight of my responsibilities. One thing that helped me through this time was my involvement in a community program. I started attending a youth group in our neighborhood, and that gave me an outlet to express myself and connect with others who understood what I was going through. Being around people who were going through similar experiences helped me feel less isolated. It gave me a sense of belonging and reminded me that I wasn't the only one facing tough times. Through the program, I also learned practical skills like time management, which helped me balance my responsibilities at home and my schoolwork more effectively. Another unexpected source of strength came from my ability to help others. It sounds strange, but focusing on helping my siblings and supporting my family actually gave me a sense of purpose. It made me feel like I was doing something meaningful, even if it was just getting my younger siblings through a tough day. I learned a lot about patience and perseverance during that time, and though it wasn't easy, it gave me a deeper understanding of what it means to be a part of a family.

Looking back, I realize how much I've grown through this experience. While my parent's incarceration has been one of the most challenging things I've ever faced, it is also taught me valuable lessons about strength, responsibility, and resilience. I've learned to juggle multiple roles, to keep going even when things get tough, and to seek help when I need it. I'm still learning, and while there are moments when the pain of it all resurfaces, I know that I am more than capable of handling whatever comes next. The challenges I've faced have shaped me into someone who knows their own strength and who will continue to persevere, no matter the obstacles.

➤ *PARTICIPANT 6*

When my parent was incarcerated, it felt like my whole life was turned upside down. I didn't know how to handle the sudden absence of my parent, and it left me feeling both lost and confused. There was this constant sense of worry, not knowing what was happening to them or how long they'd be gone. At first, I didn't really talk about it with anyone because I didn't know what to say or how to explain it. I also didn't want anyone to pity me, so I kept it all inside, trying to act like everything was normal. But it wasn't.

I struggled with school because, at the time, I was still adjusting to the changes in my life. I was still getting used to the rules at home and the new responsibilities I had to take on. It felt like I was juggling schoolwork, household duties, and the emotional weight of what was going on with my parent. I found it hard to concentrate in class because I was always thinking about my parent's situation. It was a lot for me to process, and there were days when I just couldn't keep up. I felt like I was constantly falling behind, and it was frustrating because I didn't know how to ask for help. One of the things that started helping me was getting involved in a local community program. It wasn't something I expected to be helpful, but once I started participating, I realized how much I needed it. The program gave me a sense of normalcy and routine when everything else felt so chaotic. I was able to talk to others who were going through their own struggles, and that made me feel less alone. I learned a lot from the leaders of the program, who helped me understand that I wasn't weak for feeling upset or overwhelmed. They taught me ways to cope with my feelings, like breathing exercises and journaling, which I still use today. Another important lesson I've learned is that it is okay to ask for help. At first, I didn't want to burden anyone with my problems, but I've come to realize that having a support system is essential. Whether it is a friend, a teacher, or someone from the program, reaching out has made a huge difference in how I deal with the situation. It is not easy to open up, but I've learned that sharing how I feel doesn't make me weak—it helps me heal. Looking back, I see how much I've changed through this experience. It is been tough, and there are still moments when the pain resurfaces, but I've learned to manage it better. The support I've received from the community program, along with the coping strategies I've developed, have given me the strength to move forward. I no longer feel like I'm carrying the burden of my parent's incarceration alone. I've grown stronger, more resilient, and more confident in my ability to handle whatever life throws my way.

➤ *PARTICIPANT 7*

When my parent was incarcerated, everything I once took for granted seemed to disappear. There was this sudden, overwhelming silence in our house, a void that no one could fill. I couldn't understand why it happened, why my family was torn apart like that. It wasn't just about missing my parent; it was the realization that I was now forced to grow up faster than I ever wanted to. I had to take on responsibilities that weren't mine to bear, and that felt heavy on my shoulders. I felt like I was alone in this, and for a long time, I couldn't figure out how to navigate through all the emotions I was dealing with. At school, I tried to act like everything was fine, but I couldn't escape the anxiety I carried. My grades slipped because I couldn't focus; my mind kept wandering to my parent and what they were going through. There were days I just wanted to be anywhere but school. It wasn't that I didn't care, but the weight of the situation was so much more pressing. I didn't want to burden anyone with my struggles, so I kept it all in. I didn't tell my friends, my teachers, anyone. I just dealt with it by myself, even though it was taking a toll on me. One thing that helped, though, was when I started to lean into my passions. I always loved reading, but I didn't realize how much it could offer me as an escape until after everything changed. When I picked up a book, it was like I could live in someone else's world for a while—away from the chaos, away from the uncertainty. It gave me peace when nothing else could. Reading became my refuge, and over time, it helped me gain perspective on my own life. I started to see that I wasn't defined by my parent's situation and that I could find strength in the things I loved. I learned how important it is to talk to people I trust. For the longest time, I kept everything inside, but I realized that carrying everything alone wasn't the answer. Talking to a teacher, someone who actually listened and didn't judge me, made me feel like I wasn't invisible. It was in those conversations that I started to feel a little lighter. I learned that reaching out for support doesn't make you weak—it is actually one of the strongest things you can do when you're going through a tough time. Looking back now, I see that while my parent's incarceration shaped my life in ways I never expected, it didn't break me. I'm stronger because of it. I've learned to cope with the challenges, whether through reading, seeking support, or simply allowing myself the space to process what's happened. It is not easy, and it still hurts sometimes, but I've learned that it is okay to keep going, even when things aren't perfect. I've realized that the strength I've gained is mine, and it will carry me through whatever comes next.

➤ *PARTICIPANT 8*

When my parent was incarcerated, everything I knew seemed to fall apart. At first, I couldn't comprehend the full weight of it. One minute, things were normal, and the next, my world was turned upside down. The absence of my parent left me feeling lost, overwhelmed, and unsure how to handle the flood of emotions that came with it. I struggled to understand what was happening, and I couldn't find the words to explain my feelings to anyone. I didn't want to burden anyone or have them pity me, so I kept everything inside and pretended that I was fine, even though I wasn't.

But over time, I started to realize that I couldn't keep everything inside. I needed to talk to someone. So, I opened up to one of my teachers, someone I trusted. I was surprised at how understanding and patient they were. They didn't treat me like I was a problem, but they listened and offered support. That made me feel less alone, and I began to understand that asking for help wasn't a weakness. It was actually the first step toward healing. It wasn't an immediate fix, but slowly, I started to feel like I wasn't carrying this burden all by myself. One of the things that also helped me was joining a community group that focused on art. I had always been interested in drawing, but I never took it seriously until then. Being part of the group gave me a chance to express my feelings in a way that words couldn't. Through art, I found an outlet for the emotions I didn't know how to talk about. It gave me a sense of accomplishment and relief, as I could channel my anger and frustration into something creative. Art became a way for me to process the pain and to feel like I was doing something positive despite everything going wrong. I've learned a lot from the experience. I've learned that it is okay to feel vulnerable and that asking for help is not a sign of weakness. I've learned to give myself space to grieve and to not be so hard on myself when things do not go as planned. While having an incarcerated parent is a challenge that I

never asked for, I've realized that it doesn't have to define me. It is just one part of my story, and I have the strength to move forward, to continue growing, and to keep finding ways to cope. My journey isn't over, but I've learned how to face it with more resilience and hope.

➤ *PARTICIPANT 9*

When my parent was incarcerated, everything I knew felt shattered. I didn't know how to process the sudden absence, and I kept my emotions bottled up because I didn't want anyone to pity me or treat me differently. At school, I struggled to focus. Thoughts of my parent consumed my mind, and I couldn't concentrate on my lessons. My grades dropped, and I felt disconnected from everything I once enjoyed. What really helped me was joining a support group for kids in similar situations. At first, I was skeptical, but hearing others share their experiences made me realize I wasn't alone. It gave me the courage to open up and talk about my struggles, which was a big step for me. I also learned valuable coping strategies, like journaling and breathing exercises, that have helped me manage my emotions. Over time, I learned the importance of expressing my feelings and asking for help when I need it. Although it hasn't been easy, I've grown stronger and more resilient through this experience. I've learned to face my challenges with more courage, knowing I do not have to go through it alone.

➤ *PARTICIPANT 10*

When my parent was incarcerated, it felt like my whole world shifted. At first, I didn't know how to deal with it. There was this overwhelming sense of loss and confusion. It wasn't just missing my parent—it was the feeling that everything I once relied on was no longer there. At school, I tried to act like everything was normal, but it was hard to focus on anything. My mind was always racing with thoughts about my parent, and it felt like I couldn't escape the sadness. One of the things that helped me cope was learning how to stay focused on the positive. I joined a support group for kids who had parents in prison, and it made a huge difference. Hearing other kids talk about their experiences helped me realize that I wasn't alone. For the first time, I felt like people understood me. The group also taught me how to deal with my emotions more healthily. I started using creative outlets, like writing and drawing, to express what I was feeling. It gave me a sense of control over my emotions and helped me release the pain I was holding inside. The support from the group and the ability to express myself through art made me feel stronger. It was still tough, and there are days when I still miss my parent deeply, but I've learned that I can handle it. I've learned that I do not have to hide my feelings and that it is okay to reach out for support when I need it. I've also realized that my parent's incarceration doesn't define who I am or what I can become. I am more than my struggles, and I can overcome them, one step at a time.