



Examining the Plight of Imprisoned Women in Balochistan A Critical Analysis of Socioeconomic Challenges and Gender Inequality

Shaheer Abdullah

Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences
Quetta

*Correspondence: Shaheer_abdullah442@gmail.com

Citation | Abdullah S, "Examining the Plight of Imprisoned Women in Balochistan

A Critical Analysis of Socioeconomic Challenges and Gender Inequality", JIRSD, Vol. 1, Issue. 2, pp. 59-68, July 2022

Received | May 02, 2022 **Revised** | Jun 09, 2022 **Accepted** | June 23, 2022 **Published** | July 19, 2022.

Examining the circumstances and needs of incarcerated women in jails, with a specific focus on the case of Balochistan province, constitutes a crucial analysis. Nearly half of Pakistan's population consists of women, a demographic facing not only economic hardships but also a dual form of marginalization. The majority of these women grapple with limited literacy skills and depend on others for financial support. The dire situation is underscored by social and economic indicators, such as Balochistan's staggeringly low female literacy rate of only 21%. Multiple studies provide evidence of heightened rates of mother and infant mortality and morbidity, along with prevalent chronic malnutrition among girls. This nutritional inadequacy contributes to a high mortality rate among women. Women, as a majority in society, often find themselves in a position of reliance and lack authority, a circumstance perpetuated by prevailing cultural norms. These norms, accompanied by distinct standards of honor and disgrace, restrict women's engagement in various aspects of life. Male domination is a prevailing characteristic nationwide, notably evident in the tribal community of Balochistan. This male dominance translates into discrimination against females, particularly in realms like health and education. Balochistan lags significantly in all four areas—social, economic, health, and education leading to limited prospects for both male and female populations, with notably fewer opportunities for women.

Keywords: Infant mortality, undernutrition, cultural practices, indigenous community

Introduction:

Women incarcerated in Balochistan, Pakistan, face a myriad of challenges that reflect broader societal issues. Balochistan, known for its rich cultural tapestry, presents a complex scenario for women within its prison system. Despite comprising approximately half of the population, women in jails grapple with economic hardships and a dual form of marginalization. Many lack adequate literacy skills and find themselves dependent on others for financial support, amplifying their vulnerability. The social and economic landscape further compounds their situation, with Balochistan exhibiting a remarkably low female literacy rate. Within the confines of prisons, evidence from studies reveals elevated rates of mother and infant mortality, chronic malnutrition among girls, and a high mortality rate among incarcerated women. Beyond the bars, prevailing cultural norms restrict the authority and engagement of women in various aspects of life. This restriction is particularly evident in the tribal community of Balochistan, where male dominance permeates all facets of society, leading to discrimination against females, especially in the realms of health and education.

Addressing the plight of incarcerated women in Balochistan necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected challenges they face, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive reforms within the criminal justice system and broader society.

There is a widely held belief that women, who face both social and economic disadvantages, are more vulnerable to being victims of crime. This vulnerability makes them an easy target for individuals seeking opportunities to exploit them. The topic is too intricate to be readily examined due to its number of factors: social, economic, political, and institutional factors[1]. According to the report "Females Behind Bars Situation and Needs Assessment in Female Prisons and Barracks," the global proportion of female prisoners in 2006 was around 5% of the total prison population. Globally, at any given time, about 500,000 women and girls were incarcerated in jails. The IG Prison Karachi's report reveals that Pakistan has a total of 97 prisons. Among them, there are four jails dedicated solely to women, situated in Multan, Karachi, Larkana, and Hyderabad[2]. Additionally, several prisons have specialized facilities specifically designed for housing women. Women convicts in Balochistan are primarily incarcerated in Central Jail, Dist Lasbela and District Jail Quetta. However, there is a little presence of women prisoners in district jail Turbat and Dera Murad Jamali. The female prison population in Pakistan is significantly low[3]. The limited incarceration rate of women does not necessarily imply that women are less susceptible to involvement in criminal activities. There is a remarkably low number of documented crime cases in Balochistan, and an even lower number when it comes to crimes against women. The persons found in jails are unique cases who, unfortunately, caught the attention of the authorities. However, it seems that the incidence of crime among women in Balochistan is relatively low[4].

Female inmates require specialized care as a result of their detachment from their communities, residences, and loved ones. Women typically require additional psycho-social assistance compared to men, mostly due to the detrimental effects of familial disconnection on women, as well as their common experiences as victims of domestic violence or other forms of abuse. Due to their low literacy levels or limited education, the majority of them are unaware of their rights and lack self-assurance[5]. The jail personnel take advantage of their illiteracy and lack of confidence, and they barely receive the facilities that they are entitled to according to the jail manual. The inmates primarily reside in deplorable conditions, with even their fundamental necessities being unmet within correctional facilities. The research from the "Jail Administration" highlights that an effective rehabilitation program for convicts is crucial in facilitating their swift reintegration into society, hence reducing the likelihood of recidivism[6].

Study Objective:

The primary aim of the study is to examine the severity and prevalence of issues in female correctional facilities. Analyze the circumstances in which these prisoners were residing in the correctional facilities.

Extent and Importance:

Consequently, the region had hitherto not been thoroughly investigated. Additionally, the study aims to determine the extent of the challenges faced by female convicts throughout their incarceration and to implement suitable interventions to address these issues[7]. Given the absence of prior study on this matter, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Women Development, and Special Education can potentially employ these findings to inform their future policy formulation and planning related to gender development and equity.

Material and Method:

Information was collected from female inmates housed in prisons across four distinct regions – namely Quetta, Dera Murad Jamali, Turbat, and Lasbela – employing a carefully structured interview methodology. The commencement of this data collection process involved the creation of a meticulously crafted questionnaire designed to facilitate interviews with the female inmates. This questionnaire was specifically tailored to encompass various aspects relevant to their circumstances, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. In recognition of the ethnic diversity within the province, a deliberate effort was made to include participants from various ethnic groups. A total of 27 women, representing different ethnic backgrounds, were purposively selected to contribute to this survey. This approach ensures a more nuanced and inclusive perspective, acknowledging the diversity of experiences among female inmates in the given regions.[8].

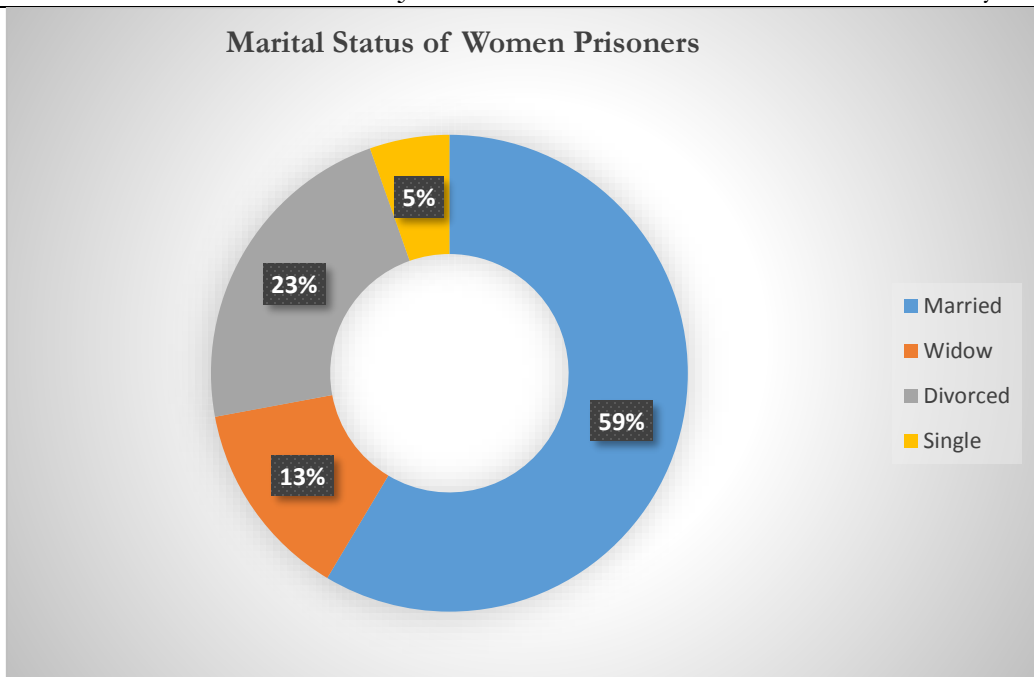
The subsequent stage in the research process centered around the training of the survey staff, with a specific focus on enhancing the skills of the enumerators. In this phase, an inaugural survey was carried out, concentrating on conducting interviews with female inmates at Quetta jail. The insights obtained from this initial survey were instrumental in refining and finalizing the questionnaire. This iterative process ensured that the survey instrument was comprehensive and effective in capturing the nuances of the experiences of female inmates. The concluding phase of the study entailed a thorough analysis and synthesis of the amassed data. This involved delving into the patterns, correlations, and significant findings derived from the survey responses. Additionally, there was a concerted effort to underscore the resultant implications and consequences inferred from the data, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the realities faced by female inmates in the context of the study.[9]. No advanced software was utilized for the purpose of data processing and analysis. The Microsoft Office suite was utilized for the purposes of tabulating data, conducting data analysis, and creating diagrammatic presentations[9].

The outcomes or findings. Understanding the socio-economic characteristics of respondents is crucial for identifying the elements that influence their access to facilities in jails. Regarding this matter, data was collected on the age distribution, marital status, geographical origin of the respondents, and their educational attainment. Providing this background information will enable us to manage the variability of the study and streamline the process of analyzing the data. The survey data suggests that a significant proportion of offenders fall within the age range of 18 to 27 years[10]. According to the demographics data, the age group with the lowest crime rate is 46-55. Out of the total of 27 women, 13 were married, 5 were divorced, 3 were widows, and 6 were single. Among the sample of 27 women, a majority of 25 indicated their contentment with their life prior to incarceration.

Results and Discussion:

Figure 1

Marital Status of Women Prisoners (n=27);



Educational qualifications of the respondents: Approximately 78% of the convicts were unable to read or write, 22% had completed primary education, and 2.7% possessed upper secondary education certifications. Out of the 27 women convicts, only 6 were able to read and write. 21 individuals expressed their inability to read and write as a result of their illiteracy[11].

Imprisonment Duration: 3 female convicts were incarcerated for a duration ranging from one to four weeks. 18 individuals were incarcerated for durations ranging from one month to one year (12 months). Months. 6 individuals were incarcerated for durations ranging from one year to six years. The majority of female convicts were afflicted with many medical ailments. Several responders were reported to have multiple ailments. Out of 27 respondents, 17.07% reported having a Diabetes and BP issues, whereas, 14.63% of the participants said that they had some sort of Skin Allergies, whereas, 11.34% of the female prisoners are facing Gynecological Issues. [12].

The quality of the food is unsatisfactory and there is a lack of milk for the newborn infants. A female inmate in Turbat prison expressed dissatisfaction with the cramped quarters, which made her and her newborn baby feel uncomfortable[13]. The Lasbela Jail experienced the most unfavorable conditions. The room measured 8 feet by 12 feet and accommodated all 10 women. The room was both small and crowded with women, and despite the intense heat, there was no fan provided. There were numerous instances of electricity load shedding. The physical conditions were direr and pitiful. There was an absence of a container for holding water. There was a lack of plates, glasses, and cups for serving food and water. In addition, there were no educational or healthcare amenities accessible. The food was of abysmal quality and the lack of room severely restricted children's mobility. Approximately 27% of individuals expressed dissatisfaction with the scarcity of water, while 13% voiced concerns about power outages. Additionally, 14% of respondents complained about the inadequate quality of food.[14]. Furthermore, 19% of participants chose not to provide a response, indicating their disdain for the system[15].

Overview of Imprisoned Individuals and Health Issues in a Correctional Setting:

Approximately 14.81% of the incarcerated individuals were sentenced to a term of life imprisonment for lasting from 24 to 255 years. The second category comprised 22.22%

of individuals who had been imprisoned for a duration of 3 – 5 years. The third category comprised 11.11% of women prisoner who had been imprisoned for a duration of 5 – 10 years. The fourth and last category comprises 18.52% who had been imprisoned for a duration of 6 months to one year. A total of 9 inmates were undergoing trial, representing the largest proportion, specifically 33.33%.

Table.1

Overview of Imprisoned Individuals (n=27):

Duration	No. of Women	Percentage	Nature of Crime
6 Months – 1 Year	4	14.81%	Drug Offences
3 to 5 years	6	22.22%	Non-Violent Offences
5 to 10 years	3	11.11%	White Collar Crimes
Life Imprisonment	5	18.52%	Various (Murder etc)
Undergoing Trial	9	33.33%	Pending Legal Proceedings
Total	27	100%	

The Prison administration should enhance their sensitivity and responsiveness towards the issues faced by the children of female convicts[16]. Correctional facilities should allocate sufficient resources to guarantee the well-being and development of small children residing with their mothers behind bars. Among the incarcerated individuals, 14.81% reported facing gynecological issues, 7.40% had diabetes, another 18.51% were dealing with Skin related problems, and an additional 11.11% experienced complications related to stomach functioning. A notable 14.81% of participants mentioned having headaches, while 18.51% reported diverse health issues like allergies, fever, liver dysfunction, abnormalities, and infectious illnesses etc. Interestingly, 29.63% of respondents stated that they did not encounter any health problems during their incarceration. When asked about the adequacy of their medical care, approximately 59.25% responded affirmatively, expressing satisfaction with the provided healthcare. However, a concerning 22.22% indicated that they are not receiving adequate medical care within the prison environment. Moreover, 18.51% of participants chose not to provide a response to the query. These findings underscore the importance of addressing health and medical care concerns within prison settings, particularly for female inmates and their children. Allocating ample resources for their care, protection, and welfare is crucial for ensuring a healthier and more supportive environment during imprisonment[17]. According to 62.963% of the detainees, the Jail Authorities promptly transfer individuals who sustain injuries or experience severe illness to the hospital. 14.81% reported not being promptly transported to the hospital. 22.22% of the participants did not provide a response[18].

Table 2:

Challenges and Health Concerns Among Women Prisoners:

Aspect	Percentage	No of Prisoners
Health Issues		
Gynecological issues	14.81%	4
Diabetes	7.40%	2
Skin-related problems	18.51%	5
Stomach complications	11.11%	3
Headache	14.81%	4
Other health issues	18.51%	5
No reported health issues	29.63%	8
Adequacy of Medical Care		
Affirmative response	59.25%	16
Inadequate medical care	22.22%	6
No response	18.51%	5

Promptness of Hospital Transfers

Prompt transfers to hospitals	62.96%	17
Not promptly transported	14.81%	4
No response	22.22%	6

Contentment regarding the amenities provided in prison:

When asked about the facilities in the prison, female inmates shared their opinions as follows:

Regarding the quality of drinking water, 73.89% of respondents were satisfied, while 26.11% expressed dissatisfaction.

As for the quality of food, 59.25% were satisfied, but 40.74% were dissatisfied. Additionally, 86.11% expressed contentment with the quantity of food provided [19].

29.63% indicated that pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers do not receive additional nourishment and attention. 36.11% expressed satisfaction with the additional food and attention provided to pregnant or nursing mothers. 35.26 of the respondents did not provide any comments. [20].

Around 77.68% of female inmates noted that their children are not receiving sufficient foundational education, with 22.22% of participants choosing not to respond. Regarding the quality of the jail environment in terms of healthiness, 69.67% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction. Furthermore, 23.78% of participants mentioned experiencing a conducive jail environment but were unable to offer a precise definition of what qualifies as "healthy." A small percentage (2.56%) refrained from responding due to an unclear understanding of a healthy environment.[21].

Children receive no toys while in prison, but children receive toys in jail from visitors and occasionally from rich philanthropists. the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the bedding condition of the jail[22]. A solitary bathroom, which doubles as a toilet, is maintained by the women. They assert that their efforts keep it in a hygienic condition, yet they highlight the absence of detergents and essential cleaning tools. Of the respondents, 17.22% are content with the current situation, while 62.78% find it unsatisfactory and advocate for additional toilets, bathrooms, and cleaning equipment. Moreover, a significant 98.22% of female inmates believe that promoting religious awareness can positively impact the prison environment[23]. They had the belief that cultivating religious consciousness can contribute to the establishment of a harmonious and humble atmosphere within the premises. 1.78% reported religious consciousness is insufficient in fostering a more harmonious, equitable, and restrained atmosphere within the prison.

Aspect of Prison Conditions	Satisfaction %	Dissatisfaction %
Quality of Drinking Water	73.89%	26.11%
Quality of Food	59.25%	40.74%
Quantity of Food	86.11%	-
Additional Nourishment for Pregnant/Breastfeeding Women	36.11% satisfied	29.63% dissatisfied
Educational Provision for Children	22.22% did not respond	77.68% dissatisfied
Jail Environment Healthiness	23.78% experienced conducive environment	69.67% dissatisfied
Provision of Toys for Children	-	Respondents expressed dissatisfaction
Bedding Condition	-	Respondents expressed dissatisfaction
Bathroom Hygiene	17.22% satisfied, 62.78% dissatisfied	-

Prisoner's Recommendations:

Here is a list of recommendations provided by imprisoned individuals:

- Enhance the quality and availability of medication, with a focus on ensuring a proper supply within the correctional facility.
- Improve accessibility to doctors, and consider appointing a female physician regularly in the female prison ward.
- Propose appointment recommendation for specialists and surgeons within the prison.
- Request improved medical care.
- Suggest transferring individuals to hospitals outside the prison for treatment.
- Advocate for enhancements in water facilities for female inmates.
- Recommend providing educational facilities in jail and improving overall living circumstances.
- Advocate for the provision and enhancement of religious education.
- Express the need for a tranquil setting within the correctional facility.
- Believe in fostering a climate of mutual collaboration among inmates in the prison.
- Propose that women allocate more time for religious activities and fulfill their obligations.
- Advocate for skill upgrading in jail, particularly focusing on implementing cutting and sewing training.
- Emphasize the necessity to segregate convicted inmates from those still awaiting trial for a healthier jail environment.
- Propose that individuals awaiting trial and convicted inmates should be segregated due to psychological disparities.
- Recommend modifying the conduct of Jail Authorities by providing comprehensive training for a more accommodating demeanor towards prisoners.
- Suggest the provision of essential needs.
- Recommend counseling women to avoid engaging in disputes with each other.
- Acknowledge female prisoners displaying apathy and claiming to be unaffected by issues, likely due to their apathetic mindset.

Admission of culpability:

When queried about their culpability, around 47.56% of the female inmates admitted to being guilty, while 52.44% maintained their innocence. Within the population of incarcerated women, the majority of individuals who faced charges related to homicide vehemently denied their involvement in the alleged crimes.

The study conducted has brought to light a significant determinant contributing to criminal activities the prevailing authoritarian mindset embedded within both personal and societal realms. In the contemporary age of advanced satellite media, there has been a discernible evolution in the mindset of women. This transformation has given rise to opposition against unions involving individuals of disparate age groups, particularly the elderly or minors. The consequences of such opposition manifest in associated offenses, including instances of individuals fleeing from their households, seeking assistance from younger acquaintances, and eventually succumbing to undesirable criminal behavior.

An intriguing revelation from the research pertains to the prominent role that literacy, or the lack thereof, plays in criminal involvement. A substantial majority of incarcerated individuals disclosed their deficiency in literacy skills, attributing their current

predicament to this educational shortfall. Their admissions suggest a vulnerability stemming from a lack of self-evaluation and situational analysis, as they either fell victim to manipulative individuals or were unable to discern the unfavorable circumstances leading to their involvement in criminal activities.

Of particular concern are the children who accompany female inmates in jail, representing the future leadership of the nation. It is imperative for both society and the government to ensure that even within the confines of a correctional facility, these young individuals are provided with humane living conditions and the focused care necessary for their holistic development.

Another critical facet illuminated by the study pertains to the outdated nature of the Jail Manual. This essential document, governing the operations and regulations within the correctional facility, requires a comprehensive evaluation and rewrite for amendment. The changing dynamics of contemporary society necessitate an adaptation of the manual to align with current circumstances, ensuring the efficacy of its provisions in fostering a rehabilitative and supportive environment within the prison system. Therefore, a revision of the Jail Manual emerges as a crucial step towards promoting a more responsive and humane correctional system.

Conclusion:

Ensuring the well-being and fundamental needs of female inmates, particularly those who are pregnant, is of utmost importance. It is imperative to provide essential amenities, including nutritious food produced under sanitary conditions. Female convicts, irrespective of their circumstances, should have access to basic necessities such as cold water, electric fans, electric/gas heaters, medical services, toilets, bathrooms, as well as adequate clothing and bedding.

In every prison, the presence of a competent female medical officer and the availability of necessary medications are vital components of a comprehensive healthcare system. Special provisions should be in place to guarantee that pregnant inmates receive appropriate medical treatment both before and after giving birth while incarcerated. Equality in access to educational facilities is a fundamental right that should be extended to all incarcerated women. Adult literacy initiatives can play a crucial role in providing education to illiterate women in central jails.

Religious education is another aspect that deserves prioritization for female convicts in jail. The implementation of a work culture, coupled with active promotion of cottage enterprises by the private sector within correctional facilities, is essential. It is crucial to ensure fair salaries for incarcerated individuals engaged in such enterprises. Regular unannounced inspections by authorized personnel are necessary to guarantee effective administration and adherence to established standards within prisons.

Indoor recreational facilities, including games such as Ludo and carom board, should be made available to enhance the overall well-being of incarcerated individuals. Moreover, prisoners should be permitted to possess certain items, such as radios, wristwatches, books, paper, and pens, to maintain a semblance of normalcy while serving their sentences in prison. These measures collectively contribute to creating a humane and rehabilitative environment within correctional facilities.

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