

**PERSPECTIVES OF INCARCERATED MOTHERS IN GREECE
WITH RESPECT TO THEIR MINOR CHILDREN GROWING INSIDE AND
OUTSIDE OF PRISON¹**

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ABSTRACT

The imprisonment of women implies a punishment with multiple recipients. The fate of incarcerated women's offspring is a subject not really discussed in the Greek literature. The increase in the population of incarcerated women indicates that there is also a growing number of children experiencing the imprisonment of their mother. On the other hand, the small percentage of women compared to male inmates, results in the detainment of women in Greece, in two correctional facilities, either of which is usually bound to lie within significant distance from the place where the inmate's

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family is established. This article explores the perspectives of incarcerated women with respect to their offspring growing inside and outside of prison. A total number of 134 interview sessions were carried out, accounting for approximately 25% of women penitentiary inmates in Greece, during the year 2018. Women rearing their infants in prison, until the age of three according to Greek legislation, consider their children to be a source of strength, albeit at the same time expressing their concerns about the appropriateness of the prison environment as well as reporting a series of issues that affect the maternal role. Regarding their children growing outside of prison, the mother's imprisonment is a condition of vulnerability for minor children which is exacerbated by the difficulties stemming from parenting within a penitentiary context.

Key words: incarcerated mothers, children of incarcerated parents, young female inmates as mothers, parenting from within a prison.

ΑΠΟΨΕΙΣ ΤΩΝ ΚΡΑΤΟΥΜΕΝΩΝ ΜΗΤΕΡΩΝ ΣΤΗΝ ΕΛΛΑΔΑ ΓΙΑ ΤΑ ΑΝΗΛΙΚΑ ΠΑΙΔΙΑ ΤΟΥΣ ΠΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΩΝΟΥΝ ΕΝΤΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΚΤΟΣ ΤΗΣ ΦΥΛΑΚΗΣ

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ο εγκλεισμός για τις γυναίκες αποτελεί μια ποινή με πολλαπλούς αποδέκτες. Τα παιδιά των κρατούμενων αφορούν ένα ζήτημα, που έχει παραμεληθεί από την ελληνική βιβλιογραφία. Παράλληλα, η αύξηση του αριθμού των κρατούμενων γυναικών, αντανακλά και τον αυξανόμενο αριθμό των παιδιών που βιώνουν τον εγκλεισμό της μητέρας τους. Από την άλλη, το μικρό ποσοστό των γυναικών σε σχέση με τους άνδρες κρατούμενους, έχει ως αποτέλεσμα η πλειοψηφία των γυναικών να συγκεντρώνεται σε δυο φυλακές, στη χώρα μας, που συχνά βρίσκονται σε σημαντική απόσταση από τους τόπους διαμονής των οικογενειών τους. Το παρόν άρθρο επιχειρεί να εξετάσει τις απόψεις των κρατούμενων γυναικών για τα παιδιά τους, που μεγαλώνουν εντός και εκτός της φυλακής. Τα δεδομένα αντλούνται από έρευνα που διεξήχθη σε 134 κρατούμενες, που κατά την περίοδο τέλεσης της έρευνας αποτελούσαν το 25% των κρατούμενων γυναικών στην Ελλάδα. Οι μητέρες κρατούμενες που κρατούν τα νήπιά τους μέσα στη φυλακή, μέχρι την ηλικία των τριών ετών σύμφωνα με την ελληνική νομοθεσία, δηλώνουν ότι αντιλαμβάνονται τα παιδιά τους ως πηγή υποστήριξης. Ωστόσο, η ανατροφή ενός παιδιού στη φυλακή συνοδεύεται συχνά από ανησυχία για την καταλληλότητα των συνθηκών και τις στερήσεις στις οποίες υποβάλλονται τα παιδιά. Επιπροσθέτως, οι συμμετέχουσες αναφέρουν μια σειρά από ζητήματα που επηρεάζουν την άσκηση του μητρικού ρόλου. Όσον αφορά τις μητέρες, των οποίων τα παιδιά ζουν εκτός της φυλακής, ο εγκλεισμός της μητέρας αποτελεί μια συνθήκη ευαλωτότητας για τα ανήλικα παιδιά, η οποία επιτείνεται από τις δυσκολίες διατήρησης των σχέσεων μητέρας -παιδιού, μέσα από τη φυλακή.

Λέξεις κλειδιά: κρατούμενες μητέρες, παιδιά κρατούμενων γυναικών, νεαρές μητέρες κρατούμενες, άσκηση του γονεϊκού ρόλου μέσα από τη φυλακή

I. Introduction

The principle of gender equality is a fundamental constitutional principle that permeates all areas of political action with the aim of eliminating inequalities and discrimination against women. When it comes to policymaking, women's needs and expectations must be considered on an equal footing with those of men. The fact that the proportion of male inmates has always been vastly larger than that of women in the penitentiary system has resulted in a general disregard to the gender-specific needs of women, as well as a denial of many services and opportunities, accessible to male inmates (Miloni, Anitsi & Lempesi, 2019). Importantly, women are typically understood to have needs and vulnerabilities which differ from those of men. With such differences already in the background, the fact that women are far fewer in number poses a variety of challenges for prison administrations, often resulting in less favorable treatment compared to that in store for male inmates. Such reality stems from the fact that prison rules and facilities have been developed for a prison population in which the male inmate is the norm. So, women, as a small minority - whether inmates or ex-inmates - experience discrimination, both as a consequence of their incarceration and because of their gender, a fact that requires planning a gender-sensitive approach to prison management and "female-friendly" policies for imprisoned women and in the process of reintegration.

According to official data published by the Hellenic Ministry of Justice, Transparency & Human Rights, in 01.01.2018, out of a total number of 10.011 inmates in Greek prisons, 551 were female, namely 5,5% of the total number of inmates' population.⁵ Moreover, the proportion of female inmates among convicts as well as inmates awaiting trial is a fraction of the corresponding proportion of men. The low representation of women compared to men in prisons is mainly due to the commission of less or violent serious crimes while women tend to mostly commit crimes against property, as well as to the relatively rare existence of previous convictions (Thanopoulou, Fronimou & Tsilimigaki, 1997). Moreover, women inmates in Greek prisons, are very often mothers of minors, for who they are the main and perhaps the only caregivers. Research shows that the exercise of the maternal role, although not forbidden upon the mothers' entry in the prison environment, is nevertheless limited, all the more since, once in penitentiary, the mother is struggling to adapt whilst also

⁵ It has to be mentioned that now the prisons are under the authority of Ministry of Citizen Protection

trying to modulate the exercise of her role under the new conditions (Makrisopoulou, 2013).

In Greece there are only two closed type (i.e., featuring security and control measures), female prisons, to which most women inmates are allocated; as a result, population in such establishments is typified by heterogeneity in age, cultural and criminal background. According to the Hellenic legislation in the matter of the Penitentiary, mothers that give birth to their children in prison or keep the infants (up to 3 years old) therein, are to be referred to the Mothers' Detention Department of the Eleonas Thebes Women's Prison. The existence of only two prisons in Greece means that there is a serious possibility for women to serve their sentences away from their homes and families (Lempesi, 2019). Under such circumstances, imprisonment hinders family relationships and ties, in violation of international standards.

The impact of the imprisonment of the mother can be extremely severe if the inmate is the primary carer of the child -a role that is still overwhelmingly held by mothers. Moreover, even a short period in prison may have damaging, long-term consequences for the children concerned (UN Human Rights Office, 2014: 1). Once in jail, the mother is automatically confronted with two conflicting roles, namely the role of the mother – itself a source of positive meaning - and that of the inmate which is primarily a male phenomenon (Eljdupovic & Bromwich, 2013: 1).

Research data from Greece have demonstrated that, when it comes to women, punishment exceeds the sphere of the individual, so much so that it is actually bound to affect multiple addressees (Panousis, Karagiannidou & Tsakotelli 2003; Mitrosili & Fronimou, 2008). For the incarcerated mother, incarceration stigmatizes not just herself but, consequently, her family. Research has it that, for a mother experiencing incarceration, the main loss is that of her family rather than that of her freedom (Milioni, 2009a: 604; Marangopoulou, 1999). There are two facets of the problem of jailed mothers (Milioni, 2009b:198): one aspect has to do with the mother whose child or children live outside of prison whereas the other is about the mother choosing to raise her infant (up to the age of 3) within prison, according to the Hellenic Penitentiary Law.

The legal framework in place

On the level of international rules, UN Bangkok Rules on Women Offenders and Inmates encourage women inmates' contact with their families whilst leaving it to the competent authorities to take all measures necessary to counterbalance disadvantages faced by women detained in institutions located far from their homes (Rule 26). Furthermore, the same Rules (Rule 28) stipulate that visits involving children, preferably for an extended contact time, shall take place within an appropriately modulated premises whilst stressing the contribution of staff attitudes to the shaping of an environment that is conducive to a positive visiting experience. Finally, these Rules (43 and 44 respectively) stress that, for women inmates, visits are an important prerequisite to ensuring their mental well-being and social reintegration; however, in view of women inmates' disproportionate experience of domestic violence, they shall be properly consulted as to who - including which family members - can visit them.

Recommendation 1340 (1997) encourages Member States of the Council of Europe to impose non-custodial sentences, and to often qualify prison leaves to inmate parents, to enable prison visits by families and to form and provide privacy spaces. What is more, Recommendation 1469 (2000), concerning mothers and babies in prison, encourages the governments of Member States to implement measures that: a) guarantee good living conditions and proper care and b) to avoid imposing custodial sentences to mothers and when they do so, to make sure that the use of prison custody is avoided. Pursuant to the spirit of the recommendation, mother inmates with babies and infants constitute a vulnerable social group, like the disabled, the severely ill persons and the senior citizens.

Pursuant to the Hellenic Penal Code (Art.105, L.4619/2019) currently in effect, convicted mothers may, regardless of their sentence and provided they are awarded [exercise] full custody of their minor children (under the age of eight) - serve their sentence at home, unless the court, having produced a special reasoning, judges that they should serve their sentence in a penitentiary as a necessary precaution to prevent them from committing similarly severe crimes.

The Greek Penitentiary Code features special provisions concerning the detention of the mothers in custody, as follows: there will be a specially designed space within the premises of detention center or prison department to enable the living conditions of mothers in custody who have their children with them – said provision concerning

children up to three years of age. Children above the age of three are referred to Child Protection Services that operate under the aegis of the Hellenic Ministries of Health and of Labor and Social Security, provided that there is no appropriate family network available to take care of them, the whole issue to be assessed by the competent court following due hearing with the genitors present. As already mentioned, mothers that give birth to their children in prison or keep the infants (up to 3 years of age) while in custody are according to the Hellenic Penitentiary Law. Held in a dedicated section of the Eleonas Thebes Women's Prison, designated as the "Mothers' Detention Department".

II. Literature review

i. The effects of maternal incarceration on the children and the maternal role

The impact of imprisonment on the families and children of inmates has not yet been efficiently examined by the scientific community (Murray & Farrington, 2008; Boswell, 2012; Shlafer et. al. 2013). When it comes to the effects of imprisonment to children, relevant literature refers to the children of inmates as the "forgotten victims of crime" (Matthews, 1983; Boswell, 2012) or the "hidden victims" (Murray, 2005) since there are very few countries that keep accurate records of the actual number of minors whose parents are incarcerated.

Parental imprisonment has been studied in relation to factors concerning antisocial and delinquent behavior, mental health issues, drug use and school failure of the child (Murray, 2005). Among those factors the risk for antisocial behavior of the child was found to have the strongest correlation with parental incarceration (Murray, Farrington & Sekol, 2012). Although risk for mental health problems including those of internalizing (depression and anxiety) and externalizing (drug abuse, fighting) problems was also present in children of incarcerated parents (Myers et. al., 1999; Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010). Other risk factors that are linked to maternal imprisonment concern the child's witnessing of mother's criminal activity and arrest and the prenatal exposure of the child to alcohol and other drugs since many women are involved with the law because of drug abuse (Dallaire, 2007). Maternal

imprisonment is also linked to early school leaving, due to financial difficulties that force children to find a job, or due to a lack of supervision (Milioni, 2009a: 606).

Institutionalization is also a possible risk, including foster care and placement, as the extended family may not be able to assume the responsibility of the child (Ashdown & James, 2010; Townhead, 2004). The child's remaining in the family context of the mother, is also to be regarded as a potential risk, as many incarcerated women come from poor social-educational backgrounds, in which conflictual relationships, drug abuse and mental health problems prevail (Jiménez, & Palacios, 2003).

Regarding the link between juvenile delinquency and parental incarceration, the following points are stressed (Murray & Farrington, 2008): (a) The trauma of the parent-child separation. Separation is often unexpected for the child, since it can take place at the moment of the arrest and most of the times without the necessary explanations; (b) Incarceration brings to surface the criminal activity of the parent, something that could potentially turn into an object of imitation; (c) The frequent rotation of care-takers taking over once a parent is incarcerated is associated with poor supervision or lack of proper child-minding; (d) Parental imprisonment can be a reason for stigma upon or bullying to the detriment of the child; (e) Imprisonment can affect the child's perception of punishment and its consequences; especially if the children believe their parent's incarceration to be unjust, they are prone to developing a hostile behavior towards the authorities; (f) The effects of visitation sessions: When it comes to children already experiencing vulnerable circumstances, visitations are described as having "contagious effects". As a counterweight to all of the above, one should just as well consider the "positive effects" that placing a distance from an inappropriate parent is bound to have, while the latter remains in custody. In the case of an abusive parent, imprisonment may turn out to be a life-saving factor for the child.

Regarding the gender of the incarcerated parent and how such factor is bound to reflect on the children, research data tend to agree on the fact of the mother's incarceration being far more damaging to the children than that of father (Murray & Farrington, 2008). Several reasons may be held accountable for that: children are likely to live with their mother, to have stronger bonds with her, to be placed in an institution or to have a third person – other, that is, than the father - taking care of

them and finally, for practical reasons, to have significantly limited visitations, since female prisons are fewer in numbers.

On the other hand, motherhood during custody is also an issue literature had not focused upon so much (Freitas, Inácio & Saavedra, 2016; Celinska & Siegel, 2010). As concerns the consequences of imprisonment to the mother, one of the most painful conditions is separation from her children (Baunach, 1985; Haiston, 1991). Research shows that female inmates seem to attach great importance to their maternal role and motherhood seems to be a means of self-affirmation and personal recognition (Milioni, 2009a: 606; Henriques, 1996: 80).

The initial separation from the child can cause intense distress and depressive symptoms (Poehlmann, 2005). The violent separation caused by the incarceration can destroy the image that the woman has of herself, experiencing the loss of a significant part of her identity (Eljdupovic & Bromwich, 2013: 165). According to relevant literature, as a result of becoming deprived of their children, some parents experience symptoms of alienation, emptiness, a sense of helplessness, anger, guilt, fear of losing the bond with their child and rejection (Henriques, 1996: 80; Milioni, 2009a: 607; Karveli, Petroulaki & Nikolaidis, 2012). Moreover, incarceration brings severe disruption to the mother and child relationship and challenges to the maternal role (Stanton, 1980). Contacts with children are shaped and delimited by the visitation framework, the rules, and procedures of the prison. Although child visitation has a positive influence upon the mother's self-esteem, empathy, and maternal role (Thompson and Harm, 2000; Poehlmann, 2005), evidence from the literature shows that only a very small percentage of the mothers receives visits (Jensen & DuDeck-Biondo, 2005).

Usually, mothers try to maintain their bonds with their children and do so (a) either to prove that they are capable as mothers, or (b) to improve their image in the eyes of others, in those outside, c) or because the experience of incarceration became an opportunity for them to reflect and redefine their relationship with their children (Milioni, 2009a: 608). Celinska and Siegel (2010) identified seven main strategies that mothers used in order to cope with the separation from their children: (1) "Being a good mother" mechanism, (2) Mothering from prison, which included maintaining contact with children and the surrogate caregivers, (3) Role redefinition, by which

children were given a more mature identity in order to neutralize the harm caused by the mother's actions, (4) Disassociation from inmate identity, a mechanism that included distancing from other inmates in order to cope with the threats incarceration posed to their maternal identity (5) Self-transformation, an adaptive process in order to deal with the disappointment brought to the children by the incarceration, (6) Planning and preparation, that refers to the imprisoned mother's dreams and plans about the future and (7) "Self-blame", which is linked to the acceptance of responsibility on behalf of the mother hence its importance as a strategy towards the mother's transformation.

According to relevant research the disturbed mother-child relationship can hardly be restored after the mother's release, with the restoration of their relationship being highly dependent on the development of those mother-child self-defense mechanisms and defense capabilities (Miloni, 2009a: 608).

ii. Children growing up in prison

In literature children detained along with their mothers, are often seen as "innocent inmates" (Matsika, et. al., 2013) whereas the statistics regarding the number of children living with their mothers in prison are limited (Ashdown & James, 2010).

Although not a recently emerged issue, this particular aspect seems to have been largely disregarded amongst scholars in Greece. Public debate in the matter, however dates back at the turn of the previous century. An article published in 1926 by Petros Pikros in a newspaper, refers to the "*most under-privileged children of the world*" that "*nobody thinks of, while they live in their slum*" [...] "*young children that have to bear the punishment of a crime they never committed*", the author eventually putting emphasis on the detention of children along with their mothers (Varvatakos, 2021). Furthermore, the esteemed biographical study of M. Daliani-Karampatzaki under the title "Children in Turmoil during the Greek Civil War 1946-49: Present Day Adults", discusses the multiple aspects of this extreme mother-child coexistence. The author – having herself dwelt in custody for 21 months (1939-1950) in the Averoff Prison - managed to track down and follow up, several years later, those children, later adults, who had been detained along with their mothers, in order to record the impact that such childhood imprisonment wrought upon the rest of their lives. That arduous

research lasted for several years and resulted in shedding light on various aspects of the children's life inside prison, the excruciating separation from their mothers, as well as on their post-custodial development. The children of these mothers in custody lived in an exclusively female environment (mother, fellow inmates, female wardens), under very restricted conditions, confined in cells during sixteen hours per day, without any opportunity for physical exercise and other stimuli. Most of these children have experienced a state of violent separation when, in August 1950, the higher administration of the Prison decided, in the context of punishment, to remove children from their mothers (93 out of 119 children) and have them transferred to the so-called Children Towns (historical term: "paidoupolis") and to foster families. The study concludes that, despite the repeated traumatic experiences (detention under very challenging conditions, violent separation from the mother, feeble ties with the rest of the family and detachment from the mother) these children, as later adults, managed to create their own families, to conduct a normal social life and to have many professional achievements, proving wrong all scientific forecasts to the contrary. The features of these children's personality, the contextual factors of the family, the plexus of relations, as well as their positive interaction impacted positively upon their lives, afterwards.

Recent research findings regarding the effects of children growing in prison are contradictory. On the one hand, the very closely knit mother-and-child bond (early bonding) is recognized as crucial on children's development (Bowlby, 1951; Bastick & Townhead, 2008: 50-51). Moreover, Jiménez, & Palacios (2003) found that the development of children in prison shows similar patterns with the children growing out of prison, observe though they did that the level of development is significantly linked to the quality of stimulation received by the mother.

On the other hand, however, there are strong and well-founded objections as to the appropriateness of a deprived environment, such as that of a prison for the proper upbringing of infants and toddlers (Miloni, 2009a: 605; Miloni, 2009b: 198; Schoeman & Basson, 2006: 13). Mitrosili and Fronimou (2008:53) suggest that institutionalization is one of the biggest threats to children being raised in prison by their mothers. As they point out, prison makes children nervous and fearful. According to Ashdown & James, (2010) children within a custodial environment are unlikely to socialize with children outside of prison or have access to other places in

the community. Furthermore, health care and educational facilities for children are usually limited in prison.

Concerning the mothers' perspective in raising a child in prison, research is also limited. In a qualitative study conducted by Freitas, Inácio, & Saavedra (2016) both women in custody that chose to keep their children in prison and outside of prison acknowledged the negative influences of the prison environment, to the child. In the first case, women that kept their children in prison considered the positive effects raising the child in prison has upon the mother in custody, amongst which the strength and courage she drew from her child. In the second case women in custody were found to be equally aware of the positive effects of such experience, yet prioritized the child's wellbeing, as they believed that the child would have had a better life outside of prison. Regarding the positive effects to the child, the building of a relationship between the infant and the mother was described by the mothers. Another qualitative study conducted in Greece, showed that the maternal role inside the prison is shaped by the penitentiary context, hence the need for a struggle on the side of the mother to adjust her role in the new conditions of the prison (Makrisopoulou, 2013). The building of a strong relationship between the mother and child, during custody, plays a significant role in the social reintegration of the inmate mother (Miloni, Anitsi & Lempesi, 2018).

III. Research methodology

Data presented in this paper have been collected through a research under the title of *“Interventions on the promotion of gender equality, as well as the psychosocial, family and vocational reintegration and adjustment of imprisoned and released women”*.⁶ In terms of scope and purpose, the current study attempted to establish the profile of the women's population in prison, as well as their views concerning their

⁶For a detailed presentation of the actual research and its results, see Milioni F. (Ed) (2019). *Research titled, “Interventions on the promotion of gender equality, as well as the psychosocial, family and vocational reintegration and adjustment of imprisoned and released women”*, Athens: EPANODOS, KETHI, GGIF. On the methodology of the research see also E. Anitsi (2019). *Methodological research issues* In. F. Milioni (ed.) *Research titled: “Interventions on the promotion of gender equality, as well as the psychosocial, family and vocational reintegration and adjustment of imprisoned and released women”*. Athens: EPANODOS, KETHI, GGIF.

reintegration. The research also aimed at the submission of proposals for the inclusion of the gender equality reasoning into the penitentiary treatment and post-custodial care of the released women. For the needs of this research, the term “reintegration” was approached in a continuum starting from the actual custody until the smooth transition into the social life (UNODC, 2012).⁷ The notion of reintegration was examined via three interlinked themes: psychosocial, family, and vocational reintegration. Those three themes were considered to synthesize the very meaning of reintegration since they play a key role in the desistence from crime and the adjustment to life after prison. The three themes of reintegration were examined in two life phases of a woman who has been involved in the criminal justice system: (a) life in custody and (b) post-custodial life and in this light the research included both women inmates and ex-inmates. Each theme (psychosocial, family, and educational-vocational) was analyzed in three time periods: (a) Past, (b) Present and (c) Future.

Two interview guidebooks have been drafted, one for each target-group (women inmates and ex-inmates). Regarding the nature of questions, a combination of both close and open-type questions was included. Both guidebooks maintained the same structure, where each guidebook included six sections: (1) personal information; (2) psychosocial reintegration; (3) family reintegration; (4) criminal history; (5) educational-vocational reintegration and (6) post-custodial personal goals or expectations. While shaping the interview guidebook, we used short questions and we made sure that the phrasing is such that mitigates the comprehension difficulties likely to arise due to the heterogeneity and linguistic restrictions of the respondents. Furthermore, we devoted special attention to the actual wording of questions so that they reflect the proper respect and discretion towards the participants. In parallel to the guidebooks, the research-related consent forms were drafted.

⁷ Moreover, as evidenced by a survey recently conducted on released women, attending the social reintegration program of “EPANODOS”, it is the women who actually define reintegration as a process of personal choice and maturation. A process that is triggered while they are still in prison and continues upon discharge, consisting of changes in their way of thinking, their lifestyle and the things they claim. See E. Anitsi (2018) The relationship between penalty and punishment: a research into the attitudes of ex-inmates. *Criminology*, i.1/2018, pp.134-147, Zarafonitou, Ch., Kontopoulou, E., Panagos, K., Anitsi, E., Lempesi, M. (2018). Empirical examination of recidivism in the context of P.L.E. EPANODOS for the social reintegration of ex-inmates: Quantitative and qualitative approaches, *Criminology*, i.1/2018, p.p. 20-40, E. Anitsi (2020) The meaning of social reintegration through the experiences of ex-inmates. Paper presented in the 7th conference of the Greek Society of Sociology “Societies after crisis, societies without crisis?” in press.

The empirical part of the survey took place over the period from June through to September 2018 in the Korydallos Women's Prison facilities, the Female Prison of Eleona Thebes, the Women's sections at Thessaloniki and Neapoli Detention Centers, the EPANODOS public law entity and the "Onissimos" Association for the Support of Inmates. The research team collected the material by way of the face-to-face interview method (in 98% of the cases). Interview sessions were carried out upon the relevant permission granted by the General Secretariat for Crime Policy, falling under the Hellenic Ministry of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights. The inmates were informed of the research, both in writing and orally through prison social services. What is more, a banner invitation to take part in the research was posted in all four prisons, encouraging female inmates to participate in the survey. Women interested in participating informed the social services which in turn drafted the schedule of the interviews in each prison.

The interviews started with the finalization of the interviews schedule. On the scheduled interview dates, social service would call the inmates to participate in the interview. To facilitate the interview sessions, the detention centers had granted access to designated spaces, such as the library at Korydallos Prison, the Second Chance School (SCS) at the Female Prison of Eleona Thebes, as well as the SCS of the Detention Center of Diavata, Thessaloniki.

Interviews began by briefing the inmates about the profile of each organization, the survey framework, and its purpose. In the next phase, the researchers encouraged the participants to read and, in case of agreement, sign and accept the consent form (or they would simply read the form aloud, whenever deemed necessary) (Zarafonitou & Tsiganou, 2020). During the interview, the researchers encouraged the participants to give their reply, while highlighting the optional character of the entire procedure. The shift from one section of questions to the next was always coupled with a short description of the next batch of questions. Depending on the inmate, the time of each interview session varied between 30 and 60 minutes approximately. At the end of each meeting, the researchers offered inmates a leaflet informing them about the social reintegration services offered by EPANODOS, along with a card containing all of the organization's contact information. In general, the respondents were quite collaborative and their participation in the interview was a positive experience.

The analysis of the research material was conducted by way of statistical and thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was applied as to the open-ended questions, to explore the themes that emerged from the narrations of the participants (Kyriazi, 2011). Following this process thematic categories emerged for each open-ended question.

Regarding the group of inmates that this survey is focusing on, a total number of 134 interview sessions was conducted. During the period over which this survey was taking place, the female population in prisons, based on data of the Ministry of Justice, amounted to 551 women. Consequently, approximately 25% of the entire female inmates' population took part in the survey. A total of 55% of the respondents came from Thebes Women's Prison and 33% from Korydallos, 10% from the Detention Center of Diavata, Thessaloniki and 2% from the Detention Center of Neapolis. As far as age is concerned, most of the inmates (95%) were adults whereas only 5% were younger girls (adolescent and post-adolescent). Most respondents were Greek nationals (namely 62%), whereas merely 37% were foreigners. Regarding the country of origin of the latter, more than half came from neighboring Balkan countries. In terms of pre-custodial residence, most of the participants - accounting for the 67%, altogether - replied that they used to live in the two major urban centers of the country.

As far as the female inmates' educational background is concerned, our study indicated that such background is poor. Most women have completed elementary school (27%) and a significant percentage of female inmates reported they were illiterate (22%), with only 32% of them attending or have attended school in prison.

Regarding the women's penal profile, most respondents, 43.7%, were incarcerated because they were accused or convicted for drug-related offenses (drug possession & use, participation in the trade of illicit drugs, organized crime drug trafficking), 22.96% for crimes against property such as theft, robbery, embezzlement, 12.6% for crimes against life (such as intentional homicide etc.), and 2.22% for crimes against sexual liberty (rape, sexual harassment of a minor etc.).

IV. Research findings

i. Parenting from prison

A total of 110 of women inmates (81%) stated they have children, while 33% of them reported to be mothers of three or more. Most of the imprisoned mothers (78%) were mothers of minor children. More than 50% of the participants said that they had no life partner (divorced, widow, single or in separation).⁸ Given these statistics one can assume that there are cases where the mother was the main role model for the children (without of course excluding other persons playing a secondary role).

In the current phase, minor children mainly reside with other members of their family who assumed the responsibility of rearing. These are usually the parents of incarcerated mothers, the parents of the father, older siblings of the children in question who may be adults but not significantly older than the children, as well as other relatives from the broader family environment. In very few cases, the father assumed the responsibility of the child, either alone or with the support of other family members or some institution. A very small number - 6% of the participants - report that their children are placed in an institution or are given away for adoption.

When it comes to their pre-custodial living conditions, most of the inmates - 56 (41%) out of 135 - replied that they led a bad/ miserable life full of difficulties; An inmate mother pointedly stated: *"I used to live in a small house inside the Romá settlement. I have been taking drugs since I was 13. Drugs are the easiest thing to find inside a camp. They are everywhere. First time I went to prison I was 20 years old. I had a little boy at the time, whom I left with my mother-in-law. I got out and later I had 4 more children, all girls"*. Another woman describes *"My life was tough. It was all drugs and criminal activities, and I was constantly in and out of prison (...) my life has been a hell; he was giving me pills to make me fearless and be able to steal; these pills used to make me audacious. Before I knew it, I had four kids with this guy; he made them beg for food and money"*. In the light of such narratives, cases of children growing up in the same stress-generating environment that their mothers lived before going to prison, are detected.

Female inmates often mentioned the parallel incarceration of the father as well: *"I was having a difficult time, but I was getting by. I used to live with my partner who was already involved in some nasty business. He was beating me, blackmailing me and*

⁸Similar findings by Couraki & Milioni. Courakis N., Milioni F. And fellow researchers (1995) *"Survey on the Korydallos Womens' Prison"*

forced me to do things... now he is in prison too.”; “I had three kids and a husband in prison; my father was helping me out”.

Parenting and the contact of children with their imprisoned mothers is mainly shaped through phone calls and visitation sessions. Sixty percent (60%) - 81 women - of the inmates mentions that they have been visited by members of their families. However, there are equally remarkable percentages that suggest lack of or deficient family contact; 39% (53 women) stated that they have not had any visitation from their family. What is more, out of the 60% reported to have had visits, a significant portion (42%) describes that the visits are quite scarce, rare or that they have only been visited once by a family member, while in prison. The inmates tend to mainly attribute such fact to financial difficulties. More specifically, they underline the great distance and the fact that their families do not have the financial means to cover the expenses for the visitation trip.

For certain inmates, getting in contact with their underage children is perceived as a severely stressful situation. Children (a very sensitive subject in itself) trigger emotions and thoughts that some mothers find it particularly challenging to cope with. The emotional predicament of some imprisoned women is also coupled with the fact that some of them have not yet disclosed the whole truth about their incarceration: *“I lied to my daughter saying that my trial is adjourned. I did that while in prison when I was speaking to her on the phone. And she replied: ‘I am not a child anymore; I know that you have been convicted; I want you to be patient and to eat well’. As soon as I heard these words I fell down and started to cry. The correctional officers had to come and pick me up because I could not stand on my feet. I am a worthless mother. I might as well die, so that my child can be motherless”.*

Without proper preparation of both sides (inmate and partner or inmate and minor children), it seems that the visitation day can be a truly excruciating, if not traumatic, experience for both the woman in custody and her underage children. *“When I first laid eyes on my children, I hit myself against the glass pane of the visitation area. I was calling my kids, they were screaming back at me (a minor daughter now residing with her at the prison), my husband was crying, my kids were crying”.*

The difficulties mentioned by young, imprisoned mothers, of up to 21 years in age, do not differ from those described by the rest of the mothers. Seven respondents in our

research were of up to 21 years in age whereas 6 out of them mentioned that they are mothers of minor children. More specifically, 4 women had at least one child while 2 of them had three or more children. Regarding their nationality, 4 were Greek nationals and 3 were foreigners. Young mothers mainly focused on the emotional disturbance stemming from the separation from their children: *“I have no one to bring me my child”*; *“I cry because I miss my child”*; *“I don’t want to be in this prison (...) I cannot get in contact with my kids and I have no visitations”*; *“I cannot see my kids and I am very sad; I know that my child was in hospital and I couldn’t be there... so I hurt myself; I cut myself”*.

The plans of women in custody for life after prison are mainly centered around getting together with their children and the rest of their family and making sure that their children will have a better life: *“I want to go home, to see my little one, my husband, my mother-in-law”*; *“To see my kid. To get a job; “My dream is to ensure a better future for my child, away from monkey business and drugs”*.

ii. Raising a child in prison

Out of the 86 mothers that participated in the research, 13 reported that during the period of the research they were raising their children in prison. One of them has stated that this is the second time raising a child in prison. All these women are kept in the Female Prison of Eleona Thebes, that has a special department for the incarceration of mothers and their children. It should be noted that 9 of the 13 mothers stated that they also have other children living outside of prison. Also, 5 other women reported raising their children in prison in the past.

Most of the women in custody rearing their children in prison stated that they perceive the presence of their child as a source of support. This is made evident through their answers to the question about what helps them get over difficulties in prison. More specifically, 8 out of the 13 inmates interviewed eventually reported that the rearing of their children helps them overcome the difficulties of prison. The rest of the mothers generally referred themselves to their children, as a source of support, including the children growing outside the prison. Typical of such fact are the answers given by two of the mothers: *“The only strength that gives me a motivation is my son.*

I do everything for him.”; “I think of my children, my child I the prison and I feel stronger”.

Nevertheless, parenting in prison is often assorted with worries about the circumstances in the penitentiary and the deprivations that the child is being subjected to due to the incarceration. Furthermore, mothers in custody are concerned about the way the child is experiencing prison. More specifically, their difficulties while raising a child in prison can be categorized in the following themes, emerging from their narratives: (a) the child is being subjected to deprivations, (b) co-habitation with the rest of the mothers, (c) concerns about the child’s experience of prison, (d) interference in the parental role by the prison staff, (e) circumstances in prison are not proper for a child, (f) there is not sufficient medical and pharmaceutical support.

Regarding the deprivations that the child is being subjected to, they are usually linked to the financial situation of the mother. As stated by mothers *“I have no money to buy stuff, here. She sees other children’s things and she is jealous.”; “This is no place for a child, mine is deprived of a lot of things”; “I have no money to buy her toys and clothes”, “I cannot buy my child an orange juice, a croissant”; “Children do not have many toys and they get into fights for the toys (...) there are only two swings outside”.*

Cohabitation with other mothers is also a difficulty often mentioned by the mothers. Conflict is usually triggered by cultural differences of the inmates. Quoting an inmate: *“Cohabitation with other mothers has been extremely difficult. Every country, every ethnic group has its own habits and peculiarities that cannot be understood”.* Another mother mentioned the difference of styles of parenting as a source of conflict. More specifically, some mothers tend to set stricter boundaries to their children than others and this causes problems and fights amongst children, that mothers are called upon to handle. Pretty often the mothers end up at the social services office to have their differences resolved. Quoting one of the respondents: *“There is a lot of tension and fighting between the mothers as they tend to judge one another on how they raise their children”.*

Concerns amongst mothers about the way the child is experiencing prison is also a theme often transpiring through the descriptions of the inmates: *“I do not like the fact, that my child is discovering prison” ; “I am afraid that my child will understand we are in prison and this will hurt it” ; “My child is doing time” ; “When we got here*

she was a different child, now she screams, fights with other children and pushes and shoves them around (..) this worries me a lot (...) The worst part is that she bangs on the doors when she wants to go outside, asking me, “mom when is the door going to open?””.

Some mothers focus on the interferences of the prison framework in the parental role. As noted by Dobash, Dobash & Gutteridge (1986: 199) the prison regulates the life of the child, the same way it regulates the life of the imprisoned mother and the needs of the mother and the child are sacrificed in favor of the needs of the prison. From the descriptions of the inmates, it is evident that the parental role inside the prison is shared between the mother and the rules that dictate the function of the prison. Typical of this are the descriptions of the inmates: *“They scorned me for not taking care of my child and I was punished for that” ; “(...) the wardens are bound to tell you, you do not care for your child (...) they are getting at us” ; “I don’t like other people telling me I am not taking care of my child” ; “What hurts me the most is when I take my daughter out in the playground and then they have to lock us back in and she is screaming she doesn’t want to go”.*

Other descriptions stress the fact that prison circumstances are difficult for the child. Quoting some mothers: *“The situations are difficult, it is very cold in the winter and very hot in the summer” ; “I am concerned about the child’s health, this is an unhealthy environment” “(...) we all get sick easily, especially the babies!”* Some mothers raise the issue of the limited medical and pharmaceutical care: *“When you get sick it is difficult to go to the hospital”, “the doctor visits once each week” ; “the only problem is that the pediatrician who is not available in the prison every day”.*

A major issue emerging is the mothers’ stress about the imminent separation from the children, upon them reaching the age of three, at which time they will have to leave prison according to the Greek legislation. A respondent’s descriptions are indicative of her concerns and feelings of anxiety *“If she leaves, I do not know what will happen (..)I will be depressed without her, here”.*

V. Conclusions

Most of the imprisoned women that participated in the research, were mothers of minor children. As discussed in the literature review, their narratives indicate that

their children are among their main concerns. Regarding the children growing outside of prison, cases of such children being placed in institutions are rare, as most children are usually referred to the care of other family members. In some cases, the father is also in prison, so the children are bound to live with the grandparents or under the care of their oldest siblings. For some mothers this is comforting although others worry about their children growing up in the same “criminogenic” environment as the one they used to dwell in before ending up in prison. Most of mothers in custody report feelings of anxiety about the children’s wellbeing and fear that they will be unable to maintain a steady relationship with them. There are also some participants who have not been honest to their children about incarceration, mentioning other reasons to justify their absence, embarrassed as they are to tell the truth.

Parenting and the contact of imprisoned mothers with their children is mainly shaped through phone calls and visitation sessions. For most of the women in the prison of Eleona Thebes, visitations are usually rare, due to the financial difficulties faced by their families. The prison is located far from their homeplaces and inaccessible to their families who do not have the financial means to afford the cost of a visitation trip. Even when the visitation is taking place, for certain inmates, getting in contact with their minor children is perceived as a severely stressful condition, as children trigger emotions and thoughts that some mothers find particularly challenging to cope with. Among the participants there also young mothers – some of them having barely attained the age of 21. The concerns of young women are mainly focused upon their children – not unlike the rest of the participants which focus on the emotional disturbance stemming from the separation from their children. Most of the women express the hope that life after prison will include the reunification of the family and a better life for their children.

When it comes to children growing up in prison, over the period during which the research was conducted, a total of 13 women reported raising their children in the Female Prison of Eleona Thebes. According to their narratives, these women see their children as a source of support whilst also expressing concerns about the circumstances in prison and the deprivations that the child is being subjected to due to the incarceration. Although mothers with children are detained in a special section of the penitentiary, cohabitation with the rest of the mothers, with who they are compelled to coexist and share common-use premises is an important source of

concern and conflict between the mothers, due to cultural differences and different styles of parenting. Some participants express worries that their child is ultimately experiencing imprisonment, given that children have to also follow the prison's program and rules, something that they find difficult to explain to their offspring. Moreover, some mothers find the prison staff make attempts at interfering in the ways they are raising their children. The mothers also report that circumstances within a custodial context are not proper for a child. Central to that is the difficult situations of prison and the insufficient medical and pharmaceutical support. Finally, a central theme expressed by the mothers is stress triggered by the prospect of separation, upon the child reaching the age of three. As the child is a source of support and their daily program is centered around the raising of the child, they refer to this separation as a "loss" and express serious concerns about their lives in prison afterwards.

Although many steps have been taken towards bringing about positive changes and improvements in the Greek penitentiary system to the benefit of mothers in custody - aiming to enhancing parenting from within prison as well as ensuring a better life for mothers and children within a custodial context (including the creation of dedicated premises for visitation, the placement of mothers with children in special wards as well as the possibility for such children to attend nursery school outside the penitentiary) - still, according to such mothers, incarceration poses serious threats to children dwelling inside a prison as well as those living outside.

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