

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Health Problems of Children in Women Jail (Karachi)

Muhammad Irfanullah Siddiqui, Syed Muhammad Maqsood, Abdul Muqtadir, Abbas Hussain

Abstract**Objective:** The purpose of this study was to assess the health status & problems of children in women jail Karachi.**Methods:** A cross sectional study was carried out in Women Jail which is part of Central Jail, Karachi. Convenient sampling technique was adopted and the data was collected through interview of mothers and anthropometric measurements of the children.**Results:** There were 22 children in jail and male to female ratio was same. Analysis of the data indicated that 54.5% children were exclusively on breast feeding up to 4-6 month and were given homemade food at weaning. Eighty two percent of children were born by normal delivery, 68.2% children suffered from different illnesses and most of them had frequent attacks of diarrhea. Children faced a lot of problems Moreover they had no recreational facility and separate area, to avoid mixing with criminals. Hence the living conditions of the children were not acceptable. Most of the mothers (66.7%) were uneducated, 57.1% mother had 3-4 children, 54.5% mothers had received tetanus toxoid vaccination during pregnancy. Sixty eight percent (68.2%) mothers received antenatal care in jail.**Conclusion:** It was concluded that the living conditions were not suitable for the physical and the social growth of the children in women jail. Immediate measures should be taken to handle these problems.**Keywords:** Women, children, jail**Introduction**

The women in jail have important role on the health of their children as according to various studies the proportions of mothers is 57 to 80% out of all women in jail.¹⁻³

The health status of mothers affect the physical, mental, social and spiritual health of the children who are living in jail along with their mothers. The mothers and pregnant women with their children in jail pose serious ethical, social, and legal issues which society finds difficult to manage. The children are more prone to infectious diseases, psychological problems and other health hazards. The prison populations have poor hygienic condition and poor health care,⁴⁻⁷ A study conducted in Italy, demonstrated that the children in jail had a mean low weight at the time of admission while they caught up their growth because of better medical and nutritional facilities in jail.⁴ That could be because most of the mothers in jail were from poor socioeconomic and demographic background and the provision of good care resulted in improvement of health status of children. If the health care services of mothers in jail of Italy are replicated in developing countries, one may expect improved health indices of the children of them.

Another study carried out in Srilanka, observed that most of the children living in the jail had skin problems such as, scabies, pediculosis and impetigo. Their educational needs also suffered. The child-friendly dormitory was inadequate to accommodate all children.⁸ A study conducted by Messina et al observed that mental health problems increased by 40% for these children in their later life.⁹ A study was conducted at juvenile prison in Karachi to find out the social and psychological problems of children.¹⁰ However limited studies are available to highlight the problems of children living with their mothers in women jail of Pakistan.

As the environmental and sanitation condition in Pakistani jail are much poorer than the other countries, it is expected that children of Pakistani jail may be having more physical, social and health problems as compared to other countries. The upper age limit for the children in Italy was 3 years and in Pakistan 13 year thus enslaving children to jail condition for longer time, affecting the children personality traits.⁴ More-over the adolescent age group is more vulnerable to psychological and social problems. Hence keeping these age group children in jail with their mother may adversely affect their development as a responsible citizen.

The objectives of this study were to find out the nutritional status, illnesses and the problems faced by the children living with their mothers in jail.

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Subjects and Methods

Setting: This cross-sectional study was conducted in the "Central Jail Karachi" located in the downtown of Karachi in the month of July 2006. Karachi is the economical hub and the largest city of Pakistan with an estimated population of more than 15 million. Necessary permission from the jail authorities were obtained along with the informed consent from the

respondents. A questionnaire was filled from the children and their mothers.

Sampling technique: During the study period there were 22 children in jail who were all included. It was non-probability, convenience sampling.

Data analysis: The data was analyzed by SPSS ver. 14. The qualitative statistics marital status, antenatal care, and place of delivery were tested by Fisher Exact test and quantitative measurements like anthropometry, education, parity were subjected to t test. The power of the cut off value was set at 80%. The p value in all condition was fixed at 0.05 or less.

Data collection procedure: Permission was sought from home department of Sindh, followed by I.G Sindh, and finally from Superintendent Jail and data was collected through interview of mothers and anthropometric measurement of the children after taking their verbal consent.

Results

A group of 22 children were found (during the month of July 2006) with 21 mothers in the Central Jail

Table- 1 Frequency distributions of demographic feature of the mothers

Education of mother	n=21	%
• No education	14	66.7
• Less than Matric	4	19.5
• Matric	3	13.8
Marital status	n=21	
• Married	20	95.2
• Unmarried	1	4.8
No. of Children	n=22	
• 1-2	8	38.1
• 3-4	12	57.1
• >4	2	5
Nationality	n=21	
• Pakistani	19	90.5
• Foreigner	2	9.5
Vaccination of mothers in total 22 pregnancies (tetanus toxoid)	n=22	
• Received	12	54.5
• Not received	10	45.5
Antenatal care	n=22	
• Received	15	68.2
• Not received	7	31.8
Place of Delivery	n=22	
• Hospital	20	91
• Jail	2	9

Karachi. Only 33.3% of mother had some form of education, one mother was unmarried (4.8%). One mother had more than 4 children (5%) and two had

Table-2 Frequency distributions of demographic variables of the study population (Children)

Age	n=22
<5 year	17 (77.3%)
>5 year	5 (22.7%)
Sex	n=22
Male	11 (50%)
Female	11 (50%)
Frequency of illness	n=22
No illness	3 (13.6%)
1-3 times	15 (68.2%)
4-6 times	1 (04.6%)
>6 times	3 (13.6%)
Immunization	n=22
Not given	3 (13.6%)
Incomplete	10 (45.5%)
Complete	9 (40.9%)
Nutritional status	n=22
Normal	11 (50.0%)
Over nourished	1 (04.5%)
Undernourished	10 (45.5%)

foreign nationality (9.5%), 54.5% received tetanus toxoid vaccination, 32% did not receive any antenatal care, and two delivered in-side the Jail (9.0%) (Table 1). The proportion of <5 year children was 77.3%, with equal sex ratio and 13.6% children had been attacked by illnesses for more than six times during previous year. Only 41% had completed immunization, while 45.5% were undernourished. There was no case of severe malnutrition (Table 2). Children complained about lack of recreational facility and separate area for them, to avoid mixing with criminals. The only good thing was availability of clinic with a qualified physician (Table 3). Mean mid arm circumference was 16.4 cm with 3.03 standard deviation (Table 4).

Table -3 Problem faced by the children

Problems/facility	Provided
TV	No
Play ground	No
Facility to take children outside the jail	No
Exposure to abusive language	Yes
Children were learning abusive language(Gali-Galoch)	Yes
Provision of Toys	No
Pediatrician/consulting facilities	No
Hygienic care	No
Ordinary Clinic	Yes
Separate living	No

At the time of study the most common illness was diarrhea and skin rashes (Figure-1). for sex and age and there was no significant difference by Fisher Exact value of 1.09 ($p < 0.58$) (Figure-2).

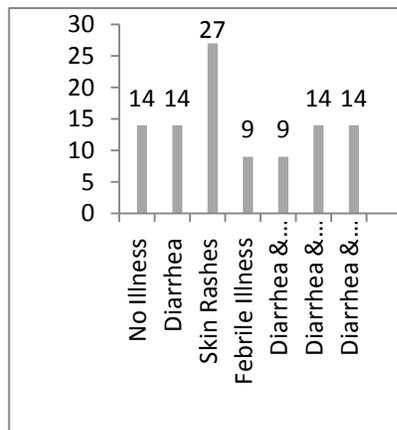


Figure-1 Distribution of type of illnesses

The nutritional status was cross matched. The pattern of illness was also compared by sex, without any significance ($p < 0.19$). However febrile illness was reported only for female children (Figure-3).

Discussion

This study recorded the finding of 22 children living with their mothers in jail while study conducted in Ireland by Enright had 14 children¹³. Ferrara in Italy studied 64 children⁴ while Senanayake in Sri Lanka

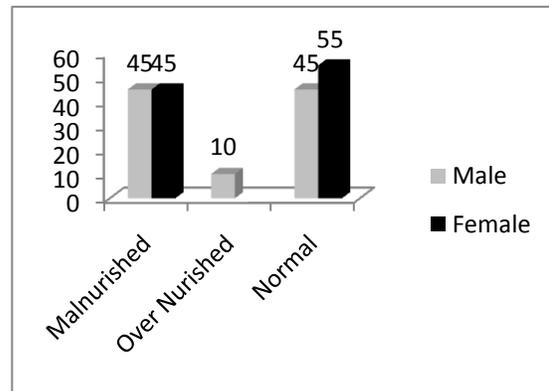


Figure-2 Frequency distribution of nutritional status by sex

studied 70 children⁸ and Jesus in Spain reported study on 127 children⁵. The mothers have a similar background as found in other studies i.e. low socioeconomic and demographic profile. We found 9.5% of the inmates as foreigner while Jesus found 22.3% as foreigner, mostly from South American countries. We found no special arrangement to keep the children away from the stressing factors inherent in jail environment while in Spain the mothers are provided with two types of options to keep the children completely secluded from other inmates in jail. First option is “non open prisons” called “mother units”. These units have complete pediatric medical and nursery facilities but it is in the jail premises and the prison rules prohibit any of the toys from outside, so playing materials are provided by NGO. The second option is “dependent unit which are shared by 4-5 women with their children. These units are open, like houses and apartment, but supervised by jail staff and, are integrated into community⁵. This study found mean number of children as 1.9 with mode 2. Minimum numbers of children were 1 with maximum 9. The standard deviation was 1.66 while Jesus found the mean number of children as 3.2⁵. In our study 95.2% women were married, while study conducted in United States by Diana, only 3% were married¹⁴. Another study conducted in Spain observed that 22% mothers were married. According to this study 33.3% mothers had some education, while study conducted by Diana indicates that all mothers had at least some education. Jonhston found 38% mother with complete undergraduate education² while Jesus found the literacy level as low as 28%⁵. In our study only one mother had two children with them inside the Jail while in Jesus study 6 mothers had 2 children with them⁵. Hundred percent of mothers had breast fed to their child in our study, while in Srilanka Jail 70% mother breast fed their child⁸. Jesus found 63% children

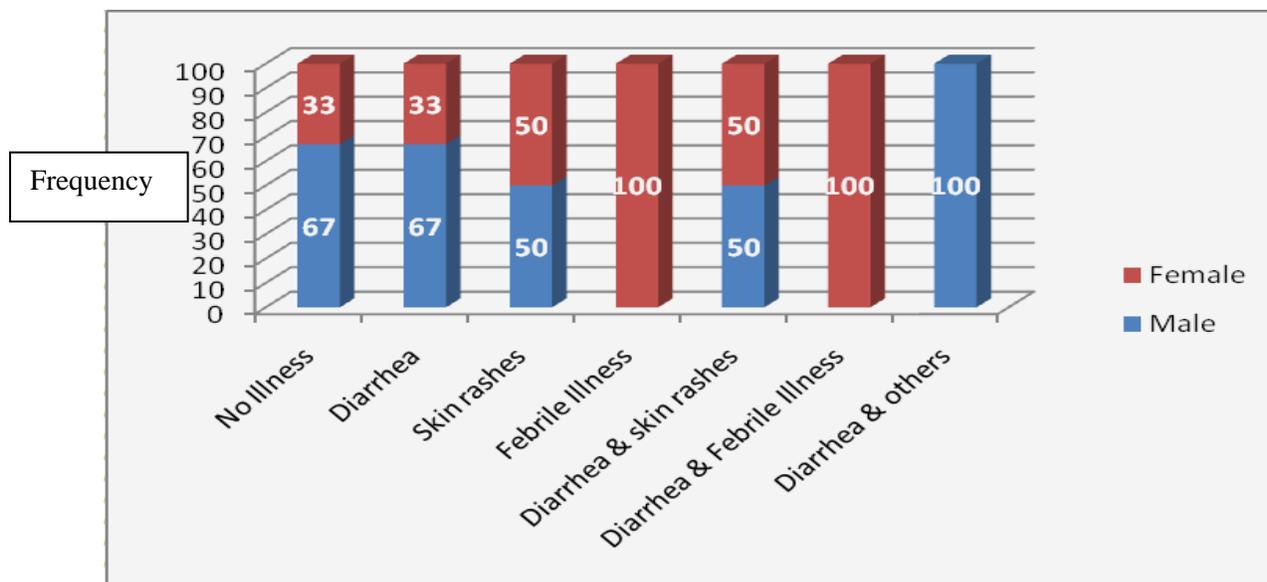


Figure-3 Pattern of illness by sex

Table-4 Anthropometric measurements

Character	Mid arm circumference (cm)	Weight (kg)	Height (cm)	Head circumference (cm)	Chest circumference (cm)
Mean	16.3841	12.3991	88.491	46.8455	49.8182
Std error	.6466	1.63	5.3	1.7	2.3
Median	15.75	10.77	87	47	49.75
Mode	15	7.5	70	47	47
Standard Deviation	3.0330	7.6502	25.132	7.9859	11.0965

Body mass index = weight (kg)/height (m²), Mean BMI=12.80
 Mean BMI=14.18 (female), Mean BMI=11.43 (male)

born in Jail⁵. Up to the age of 3 year children can live with their mother in jail in Italy,⁴ while in Pakistan the age limit is 13 year. Jesus found that in most of the country the age limit is 3 years.⁵

This study found almost the same proportion of malnourished children in jail as in the general community¹⁵. A lower frequency was found by Jesus who shows only 10.2% children had nutritional problems.⁵ While Casado in Spain found 17% malnutrition in children¹⁶. The mean ages of children were 43.8 months with median as 36 and mode 60. The data was skewed with a standard deviation of 31.16 months for age. The frequent attack of diarrhea was the most common illness in this study, which affected most of the children followed by skin rashes,

while study conducted in Srilanka showed 40% children had skin problems like impetigo, scabies⁸. Jesus found less number of children with Gastric problems; however he found more cases of infectious diseases.⁵

The frequency of illnesses in our study was 68%, Casado in Spain founded a higher percentage¹⁶. There was insignificant difference in the nutritional status of children by sex. There was no case of severe malnutrition observed in ours and other studies. In this study male, female ratio was same while study conducted in Spain 54.3% were girls.⁵ Quilty et al found a ratio of 1:3 between male and female.⁷ In our research just 41% of children have complete immunization.

Conclusion

It was observed that most of the children were suffering from illness of one kind or another, which had bad impact on their physical health. They had no recreational facility and were learning abusive language. Special program should be designed to meet the health needs of the children in women jail. Steps should be taken to separate the children from the jail environment as done by other countries in the west.

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