

Full Length Research Paper

The sociological analysis of prison: Costs and consequences

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Prison as one of society institutes and organizations contains a group of people and a chain of incidents necessarily happens inside it. To become familiar with the incidents happening all the time in this small social unit and with its related consequences, the identification of its culture, economical, social, and behavioral, pathology dimensions is necessary. Studies show that before the management of jails begins its operations including behavioral control of newcomer prisoners tries to lead them to the desired social circuit, the prison itself and its prisoners, the inveterate prisoners come along teaching the prison alphabets to the newcomer prisoners. From the sociological point of view, prison's tendency towards prison policy with its present conditions, management has lost its remedial and renovation functions and motives considerably. According to the existing statistics, between 30 to 50% of the prisoners who are released from jails, recommit crime out of jail. Although imprisoning the criminals and completing their punishment stages is to be regarded as a responding approach towards declining the rate of crimes, in most of the cases this leave behind many economical, social, and cultural expenses in prisons and consequently it does not play a meaningful role in the reduction of crimes. This paper is a study of the sociology of prison and a study of tendency of prison policy from pathological point of view (considering its consequences and related expenses). Harms related to the aforementioned matter have been described under three different titles: "Harms Addressing Prisoner", "Harms Addressing Family" and "Harms Addressing Society".

Key words: Prison, jail, sociology, pathology, costs, consequences.

INTRODUCTION

For many sociologists, crime is a direct result of culture. Sellin (1938) has argued on that social differentiation. The division of people into separate groups is a product of the development of modern (as opposed to postmodern) societies and this leads to cultural conflict, which is seen as the main cause of crime.

Prison punishment is the most comprehensive social control, regulation, and crime prevention tool. All aspects of the prisoner is considered when one is jailed, which includes physical training, workability, day to day behavior, moral quality, interest and talents. Prison is more disciplinary than school, workshop or military academy that always guarantees a kind of expertise and is all disciplinary with incessant action.

Increased number of prisoners have economical as well as evil social effects on government, and not only need high costs to hold them at jail, but it is also a blow to

the main convicted concerned, prisoners, who are the main elements of prison, since the authorities fail to classify and select them according to crime, age, the conviction time and so on.

An important aspect of actuarial justice is the development of 'incapacitation theory' in dealing with criminal offenders (Moore et al., 1984). This suggests that crime will not be reduced by changing individual criminals into law-abiding citizens, or by eliminating poverty or whatever, but by ensuring that those who offend cannot reoffend for a given amount of time. This implies that there should be greater use of imprisonment, not as a means of retribution or rehabilitation, but because putting criminals away postpones or reduces the number of subsequent crimes, thus changing the actuarial chance of crime in society. Imprisonment reduces the danger to the rest of the society. This

reduction of danger is maximized by 'selective incapacitation' where criminals with high-risk profiles are given longer sentences and those who constitute a low risk are given non-custodial sentences.

Goufredson and Hirschi (1990) do not believe that longer prison sentences can reduce crime significantly, because the poor self-control of criminals means that they are focused on short-term satisfaction and tend to disregard the prison as a consequence of their actions.

We must acknowledge that the prison does not reduce the rate of criminality. The infrastructure of the prison houses could be developed, their numbers could be increased or they may be altered but the quantity of crimes and criminals remain constant. It is seen that those who abandon prison are more likely to return to prison.

The sociologists believe that prison has not been a successful tool to return the criminal to the society or that it has not rehabilitated the criminal's reputation. In compilation of juridical regulations, especially in financial crimes, the prison penalty should be cosigned and the approaches like cash surcharges, enforcement for provision of public services or confiscation of a part of income for the government should be applied in order to collect the cash surcharges. In this way, not only the number of prisoners will be reduced, but also it would have effective individual and social benefits. Under such circumstances, the guilty person is not opposing the community or juridical justice administration and would be made to realize that the society is not his enemy. Besides, the proper exploitation of the convict would have social benefits because the social – occupational and family situation of the guilty person is less endangered and in fact it is an effort for socialization.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prison is not an appropriate training place for prisoner. Although all training facilities can be accommodated there, it is a place for dysfunction and anti-social learning, perhaps it would train the prisoner in more anti-social behaviors and the criminals are more empowered in the prison for their dysfunction behaviors, they can become more specialized in their criminal behaviors.

Data collected from the Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed that among 300,000 prisoners released in 1993, 67.5% were rearrested within three years (Langan and Levin, 2002). Among those rearrested, 46.9% were reconvicted for a new crime, and 51.8% were back to prison with a new sentence or for a technical violation of their release (failing a drug test, missing an appointment with their parole officer). Men, non-Hispanics, and prisoners with longer prior records were more likely to be rearrested. Younger prisoners are also more likely to reoffend than older prisoners (Langan and Levin, 2002).

Sutherland has a differential association theory and he

believes that:

- 1) Misbehaviors are learned
- 2) Misbehaviors are resulted from communication process
- 3) The main part of misbehaviors is an imitation of intimates, and all criminal act techniques are learned in this process (Sutherland, 1974).

Bundora believes that the behavior is the interaction consequence of recognition and environmental factors. Tarde has an imitation theory respective to criminal misbehavior imitation process, which is based on learning through observation. He emphasizes on such kind of learning (Reid, 2000) Tarde emphasizes on triple rules as follows:

- 1) People's imitation depends on their friendliness and imitation of each other.
- 2) Inferiors imitate superiors
- 3) The law of insertion

Merton believes in a conflict among the goals and means. He said that there is a special and intimate relation among the jailed criminals who are jailed in the same prison. They also learn how to be and how to approach their objectives. If a criminal can not approach his/her objective through normal behavior, he/she recourses to abnormal behaviors (Crothers, 1987).

Labeling theory says that social deviance is a social definition regarding humanity behaviors. (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Erikson, 1966). Perhaps the most well-known of the theories of crime and deviance is the labeling theory, associated with the work of (Becker, 1963; Lemert, 1951; Erikson, 1966) among others (Lawson and Heaton, 1999).

The basic elements of labeling theory were presented by sociologist Lemert (1967), who believed that everyone is involved in behavior that could be labeled delinquent or criminal, yet only a few are actually labeled. He explained that deviance is a process, beginning with primary divination, which arises out of a variety of social, cultural, psychological and physiological factors. Although most primary acts of deviance go unnoticed, they may lead to a social response in the form of an arrest, punishment, or stigmatization. Secondary divination includes more serious deviant acts, which follow the social response to the primary deviance. Once a criminal label is attached to a person, a criminal carrier is set in motion. According to the labeling theory assumptions:

- 1) The basic cause of deviance is the reactions of social control units such as police.
- 2) Any behavioral factor is deviant when it would experience the first social reprimand
- 3) Sociologists of deviance must study the deviants to recognize that how many times they have committed a

criminal act.

Some people are assumed to be criminals when they are labeled as criminals. Goffman believes that when someone is stocked with a deviant label his/her fate is changed (Bilton, 1988).

Based on labeling theory we could conclude that, a punishment that is provisioned to prevent deviant, may result in more deviants.

Based on classic criminology school, the rules for crime and punishment must be straightforward, and punishment must be in accordance to the crime. So, prison and punishment are for deterrence and they must be in agreement to the crime and its consequences should be considered. Christie (1993) argues that prison is the main way in which industrialized societies attempt to deal with the dangerous underclass. But the increased use of prison means increased costs and therefore demarcation, (the use of non-custodial punishment) is also used to control this population.

With regard to the United States, Zedlewski (1987) argues that the increased use of imprisonment is cost effective in the long run, in that putting offenders behind bars saves money in terms of policing and the expenditure on victims, and that such savings outweigh the cost of keeping them in prison. However Greenberg (1990) is critical of this position, arguing that it expenditure on the individual prisoner, or the benefits that would be is highly ideological and it ignores important cost factors, such as the gained if the money spent on prisons was spent on other welfare programs, for example education.

Economy costs of jail

Imprisonment wastes human force. When the manpower of a society changes to cost forces, the society losses its resources. The active prisoners are usually 20 to 50 years old and they will spend their best effective time in jail.

The costs of prison are irrevocable. Although they could be directly and indirectly provisioned to increase the security level and it consequently would result in social and economical productivity and prosperity. But round-the-clock maintenance costs of each system are very high all around the world; most of it is not regenerated, so the resources are wasted.

Along with the increase in the number of prisons comes an increase in prison budgets (Stephan, 1999).

The construction costs of prisons are especially very high in megalopolises, and there are too many problems. The prisoners' family expends a huge amount of money to visit him/her. For instance, if there are 150,000 prisoners in a country and the average household is of four people, and only two people of a family go to visit their prisoner, then, 300,000 people go to prisons to visit

the prisoners every week. The annual figure of expenditure is very alarming. Furthermore, their traffic results in energy loss, environment pollution, and some problems concerning the compulsory interurban traffic. Consequently, economy costs of jail and prison are:

- 1) Human resources loss
- 2) Susceptible active population
- 3) Maintenance and support costs
- 4) Prison construction
- 5) Family financial poverty
- 6) Reduction of per capita income
- 7) Job discontinuity
- 8) Unemployment Increase
- 9) Traffic costs to visit the prisoner

METHODOLOGY

This research is rather descriptive, based on survey. The statistical population of the research is inclusive of the prisoners in Golestan province. The sample community of the research is inclusive of 200 newly entered prisoners in the prisons and their families (100 prisoners and 100 family members).

The data for the research has been collected by interviews. (Interviews with the prisoners and their families). The collected data has later been duly analyzed by revision and content analysis.

Punishment and its functions

Punishment refers to any act that will prevent unlawful act, and the punishment is used for the following functions:

- 1) Punishment for unlawful acts
- 2) Social protection
- 3) Re-cultivation
- 4) Deterrence

Punishment prevents criminals by gradual institutionalization of punishment fear among people.

Sociologists have discussed on the issue and their question is that, could the jail be an effective punishment preventive, based on the obtained information that 30 to 50% of the prisoners again tend to commit criminal act (Kendall, 2000).

Dysfunction of prison punishment

One of criminal's harsh behavior, when they are temporarily or permanently imprisoned, is self-injury, or attempt to injure others. Suicide and self-injury is an expression of personal objection. When the prisoners have objection against their long term stay in prison, objections for individual cell, inhuman behaviors of the prison staff, and objection to other prisoner's abusive behaviors against them. One of the most important dysfunction in the jail is the abusive behavior of other prisoners.

The main negative functions of prison are:

- 1) Intensive violent behaviors
- 2) Suicide
- 3) Homicide and murder
- 4) Spiritual washout and depression
- 5) Despair and isolationism
- 6) Criminals' unity and empowerment

7) Growth of criminal bonds.

PRISONERS' PARENTS AND CONSEQUENCES

1) Occurrence of abnormal social behaviors: The absence of family's main factors (father and mother) would result in negative effect on the children's capability and they may not be able to adapt with the society, since children's behavior process cannot be observed by their parents and they cannot train them optimally. So, those children whose parents have a prison background are more abnormal.

2) Non optimal social adaptability

3) Disorder in the children modeling process

4) Children imitate their father's deviated behaviors

5) Weakness in learning and acceptance of social values

6) Non intercommunication among the children and family members (they do not have respectable behaviors)

7) Children do not continue to be educated, or their education is lapsed.

Those families where the father is jailed, his economy role and his authority are upset and his job is encumbered. Father may become indebted. Addicted fathers sell their house and property. The family comes to realize that the addicted father is the seller of the house and property.

Effect of imprisonment of parents on children

When parents are imprisoned it has very harmful influences on the children. The most important of them are:

1) Children's life is disorganized.

2) The children lose relationship with their parents.

3) The children have to live in poverty.

4) The children experience difficult emotions.

5) The children are ashamed of their parent's being imprisoned: They are humiliated and they might be excommunicated as member of disrepute families. On the other hand, the children feel shy for their parent's imprisonment. They would like to defend their parents. They get nervous and are anxious. They do not want to be excommunicated.

6) Children are endangered: The children whose parents are in prison are endangered for weak educational functions, laziness, are fired from school; they are prone to membership in deviated groups, hasty pregnancy, abuse, drugs and crime.

Woman and prison

Women are jailed for various criminal acts such as drug abuse, addiction, financial crimes, theft and non-ethical

behaviors. Most women who are jailed have husband and children, and their absence in the family would result in various social and emotional problems for their children. The absence of mother in a family could result in the weakness, deviance and family system breakup.

Overpopulation and prison

Prisoners' multiplicity and confluence provokes the authorities to schedule for more security, more intensive health and nourishment program. But it is found that the prison houses neither desire nor has enough motivation to correct the prisoner's behaviors.

The correction space of the prisons evoke the prisoners to train each other, they pass their experiences of criminal act to each other thus the amateurs turn into professional criminals. The crowded prisons, which are not classified, are the locations of criminals' unity for various reasons. An individual who has committed a crime and is imprisoned sometimes becomes a member of a coherent group when he/she comes out of prison and is free. In such cases the presence of a criminal as a prisoner in jail, especially when he is convicted for a short time is not fruitful but rather it is harmful. Despite the relative reduction of crime, the number of prisoners is increasing in some parts of the world.

Despite the decline in crime rates prison population is increasing (Anderson, 2003). Drug offenders now make up more than half of all federal prisoners. (Ibid) The nature of prison life makes rehabilitation unlikely. Longer time spent in prison can increase the likelihood of recidivism. Jails and prisons are seriously overcrowded (Gilliard, 1999; Lauer and Lauer, 2002). As a result there are too many prisoners for the amount of available space. Nearly two-thirds of prison inmates are confined to units with less than 60 square feet of space, and a third spend 10 or more h a day in that space. Such conditions are stressful and make many efforts at rehabilitation difficult. (Lauer and Lauer, 2002). The main reason while jailed population increase is enforcement of rules. Nearly 52% of Iranian prisoners are jailed for simple offenses.

Prisons full of prisoners, abusive behaviors toward prisoners, and corruption outbreak in them result in unfruitful prisoner punishment and rehabilitation and decriminalization. They even result in criminal nurture.

In 1999 conference, the international center for prison study (ICPS) concluded that not only the prison is unfruitful for crime-damaged society, but also it destroys family life.

Normal behavior and feeling are impossible in prisons. The prison is a total institution, a place where the totality of the individual's existence is controlled by various external forces. Those who enter a maximum-security prison are immediately deprived of various things we value: liberty, goods and services, heterosexually, autonomy, and security (from attacks of other prisoners). Moreover, they share a place with a high proportion of

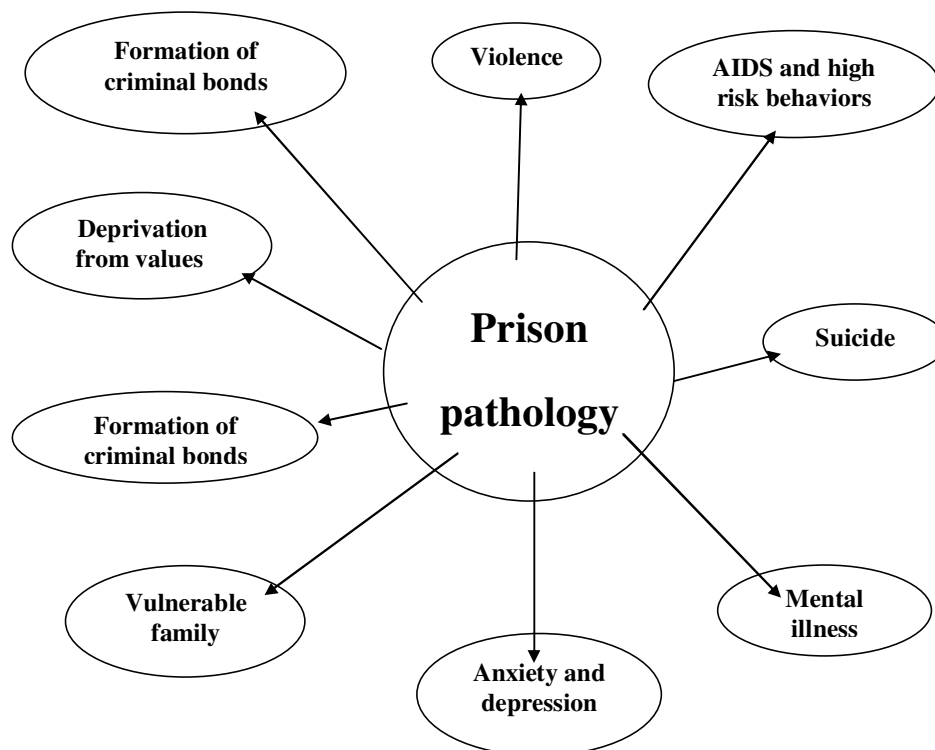


Figure 1. Prison pathology and problems.

disturbed individuals: 10 to 15% of jail and prison inmates have severe mental illness (Lamb and Weinberger, 1998). As many as half of prison inmates may engage in self-destructive behavior, and 10% carry serious risks of suicide (Haycock, 1991).

On the other hand, the jailed parents damage the social status of family, which negate moral bondage to rule and order that justify delinquency and abnormal behavior when their behavior becomes abnormal (Matza, 1964).

Porporino (1988) found that the prisoners are the most depressed and stressed when they are jailed for the first time. Suicide rate among them is more than the normal population of the society. The findings show that the prison is destructive for people's spiritual health. At the beginning of punishment the destructive rate is the highest but when the prisoner adapts with the prison environment, the destruction rate is reduced.

The family vulnerability and formation of criminal bonds are consequences of criminal crowds' organization and outbreak of hazardous diseases in prisons. There are other aspects of prison pathology (Figure 1).

IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES OF PRISON

Learning and education of crimes

As a result of communication with other prisoners, the professional criminals teach their methods to the

inexperienced and new comer convicts.

- 1) The separation and classification of crimes is increased with the increase in imprisonment duration, as a result the rate of learning these techniques is reduced.
- 2) The ones spending more duration in prison necessarily learn more techniques.
- 3) Increase in the rate of density of prisoners increases the rate of learning.
- 4) As the possibility of visiting their families' increases, the rate of learning crimes and deviations reduces.

Committing crimes inside prison

Provision and satisfaction of the innate needs of human beings is critical. If they are not properly provided, they procure them illegally. As the need exists, the case of meeting them remains, and prevention of crime commitment and other deviational actions can only be provided for by change in the needs and finding different ways for satisfaction in them.

Among the needs existing in human beings is the satisfaction of sexual urge. Because of limitations in prison that prevent this instinct to be satisfied naturally and legally, it results in sexual deviations among prisoners.

Due to long duration of imprisonment for the murderers and exclusion of remission, such prisoners become

perverted, because in this deviation both entertainment and satisfaction of the instinct are included. What makes it more difficult is lacking the possibility of private appointment.

Acceptance of anti-social values

The inexperienced convicts being in bad spiritual situation in the prison inevitably adapts themselves with the situation in the prison. Such people are forced to get close to experienced and professional criminals and little by little they are attracted to them. As a result, they learn anti-social values distributed by these professional convicts.

Separation of family relations

One of the palpable and objective effects of prison is ruin of family relations. Then instead of affection and kindness, the prison provides the bed for deep dispute, argument and disgust. In its utmost extent, it occurs as divorce and in its lowest forms it is considered as family excommunication.

Unemployment and social rejection

Among other negative and harmful aftermaths of prison we can mention are the loss of job and being socially excommunicated and rejected.

The prison impacts could be classified in two groups, the objective impacts and the subjective impacts.

The objective impacts; include:

Family separation and breakdown divorce for:

- a) Spiritual and emotional pressure regarding man's imprisonment
- b) Prolong jail duration
- c) Material and intellectual issues

Imprisonment can influence divorce for two reasons:

- 1) Psychological, spiritual and emotional pressures caused by the imprisonment of the man for his wife. As a result of this event, the wife is considered as the convict most of the time.
- 2) Prolonging of imprisonment duration resulting in appearance of material and moral problems for the family leads the wife to ask for divorce in order to find a new supporter for her and her children.

Learning criminal acts techniques

- a) Imitating crime behavior

- b) Quality enhancement of crime
- c) Learning crime techniques and legal tricks

Employment

- 1) Job deprivation
- 2) Unemployment future risk
- 3) Social rejection (friends, family, neighbors, organization and so on)

The subjective impacts; include:

- 1) Alteration of social values
- 2) Attitude toward judicial system
- 3) Attitude toward law
- 4) Reduction of prison preventive effect

Out of jail

After an individual enters or comes out of jail he/she faces psychological effects.

In interview with the prisoners they described their feelings when entering the prison as:

1- Psychological effects

- 1) Feeling humiliated
- 2) Stressed and worried
- 3) Suffering spiritual tribulation
- 4) Scared
- 5) Perplexed
- 6) Indifferent
- 7) Melancholic
- 8) Secluded
- 9) Jewish

The criminal being more professional Intensification of delinquency

REHABILITATION

Based on the view of social pathology, effectiveness and efficacy of prisoners, rehabilitation has a close relation with labeling the arrested criminals as criminal and felon. Its formal and informal reactions could affect their attitudes and behaviors. For the prisons effectiveness in criminal rehabilitation we must not label prisoners as felons since their identity is transformed by it.

The prisoners' rehabilitation in prison must take place in two stages:

- 1) Removing the label on the prisoner's character
- 2) Welcoming them anew based on the accepted norms of the society with modest alterations in their behavioral

patterns and personal values.

Conclusion

New guidelines and replaced techniques

The criminal enters the prison when he/she has committed a criminal act, but when he is freed from prison he has known many crimes, he also knows the lawful behavior against crime. Then, if he /she is prone to commit crime again he/she can find some ways to escape legal punishment, In such conditions it is not only that the prisoner has not been rehabilitated but also that he/she has been motivated to do criminal things when he is imprisoned. The enforcement of compulsory and harsh obligations makes the prisoner destructive and ungovernable; there is a possibility of making him angry and abusive. In these conditions the prisoner does not assume himself as a criminal, but he accuses the justice. Some new solutions and guidelines to the prison can be:

- 1) Punishment suspension: unless the criminal does not commit a new crime within the specified time as prescribed by judge, he/she is not punished.
- 2) Punishment suspension without the issuance of verdict.
- 3) The felon is not forbidden to settle.
- 4) He/ she is not prohibited to work in the organization.
- 5) Cash punishment.
- 6) Accomplishment of public benefit services.

Based on the verdict a felon can be given an opportunity to compensate the losses enforced on the society, without his punishment in prison.

Also, the main replaceable techniques are:

- 1) Community work service
- 2) Halfway houses
- 3) Freedom by guarantee
- 4) Day reporting centers
- 5) House arrest

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