



**Challenges and Experiences of Women Prisoners in Assela Correction Center**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Prisoner is individual who has been legally deprived of liberty and kept under involuntary confinement or custody as a punishment for a crime. The situation in prisons and other places of detention is characterized by recurrent challenges such as high levels of overcrowding, disease, malnutrition, torture, ill-treatment of inmates and long-pre trials detention periods. This study explored the experiences of women prisoners; examine the cases of imprisonment, challenges, and how they are treated in Assela correctional center. A purposive sampling technique and a qualitative research design with a phenomenological study approach were used. As study tools, Interview, observation and focus group discussion were used. The primary and secondary data were collected from the women prisoners and documents obtained from the correction center. The study revealed that women prisoners in Assela correction center are facing many psycho-social, health and economic challenges. Thus, disrespect, depression, and low self-esteem are common among women prisoners of the study area. Major cases revealed in this study includes political cases, murder/homicide, corruption, conflict/ quarrel, human trafficking, drug trafficking, theft, and infanticide. To solve Challenges observed in the center concerning service provision and treatments of women prisoners, the correctional administration should act and treat prisoners as per the regulation No 138/2007 endorsed by council of ministers (Ethiopia) to respect the rights of prisoners. Latrine house, sleeping condition, accommodating those sick with healthy once and the condition of the incarcerated children, opportunity of education for children, and issue of vocational training should get due attention by prison officials.*

## Introduction

### Back ground of study

Prison is a place used for confinement of convicted criminals. Prisoners is defined as individual who has been legally deprived of liberty and kept under involuntary confinement or custody as a punishment for a crime (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2016)

Crime is a Social problem which threatens the wellbeing of individuals, Families and communities as a whole. Unlike men, Women prisoner are often single parents like with dependent children. Therefore, many children are incarcerated with their mother to get the care of mother. Imprisonment has been shown to be counterproductive in the rehabilitation and re integration of those charged with minor crimes. According to (Mintewab G 2016) imprisonment of a mother will affect the whole family negatively. Currently the situation in prisons and other places of detention is characterized by recurrent challenges such as high levels of overcrowding, disease, malnutrition, torture, ill-treatment of inmates and long-pre trials detention periods.

According to J. sarkin cited in Addisu(2012), most prison and law enforcement authorities are still ignorant about prevision of human rights instruments on the treatment of people deprived of their liberty and the materials and financial resources available to them are in most cases inadequate. In Ethiopia there are 70, 000-80,000 prisoners out of which 2500 were women and about 600 were children incarcerated with their mother (Human right report, 2013). Ethiopia had six Federal and 120 regional prison centers. There are also an official detention centers, such as Diddessa, Bir shelleko, Tolay, Hormat, Blate, Tetak, Jijiga, Holeta, and Senkele these were located at military camps (Human right report, 2013). There were 78 prisoners imprisoned with 35 children in the correction center.

### Statement of the problems

Prison is a place used for confinement of convicted criminals. Given the poor state of prison infrastructure in various African countries, women have little or no access to adequate facilities that can meet their accommodation or health needs.

The way most prisoners are being treated in Ethiopia is clearly contrary to what the constitution and international agreements demand. Although there are some researches available in relation to imprisoned women, there are gaps with the studies that focused on the delay of decision giving /sentence for women suspected for different criminal cases and health related problem that faces women prisoners in the correctional centers. The study by Samrawit G (2015) showed the challenges political prisoners' faces in Ethiopian prison centers. Other researches done by Ogomo U, on women prisoners also showed that service provision for women prisoners are inadequate. This article differs from studies done by different researchers in that it assessed the experiences of women prisoners ranging from examining reason for imprisonment among women, the service provision, and human treatment condition to pre-trial detention condition. Unlike studies focused on single aspect of women prisoners, this study attempted to explore all kinds of challenge faced by women prisoners in Assela correction center.

Therefore, the study was conducted to assess what women prisoners are facing in correctional center.

## **Objective**

### **General objective**

The general objective of this study is assessing over all experiences of women prisoners in Asella correction center.

### **Specific objective**

- Identifying cases for their imprisonment
- Identifying health related problems of women prisoners
- Describing how of the services provision and human treatment condition of prisoners
- Analyzing how pregnant women and mother incarcerated with their children are treated.
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### **Significance of study**

This study helps to explore the overall experience of women prisoners; identify cases for imprisonment, service provision, treatment condition of women detainees and prisoners in the Asella correction center. It gives information for the correction Administrators to reform the system of administration, human treatment and service provision conditions.

It has also significant contribution in improving Health, Economic and living conditions of prisoners by identifying the main challenges to them in the center. Besides serving as an input in areas of administering correction centers in making these centers the true correctional centers, it is also helpful in indicating the issue for concerned body and researchers for further investigation.

### **Scope of study**

This research is restricted to Asella correction center so as to assess what women prisoners are experiencing in the center. Male prisoners and the juvenile delinquents were not part of this study. Out of many aspects to be considered in assessment; condition of women in correction center particularly the experience, reason for imprisonment, service provision conditions and challenges of women in prison were the main concern of the study.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research design**

Research design implies the methods and procedures for collecting, processing and analyzing the required data. In this study, qualitative research approaches were used in order to explore what women prisoners' experiences in the correction center. From qualitative sampling techniques the purposive sampling method was employed to select the study area. To determine sample size of study population; convenience sampling techniques was employed and the data were analyzed and interpreted by phenomenological analysis method.

### **Sampling strategies and sample size**

The study employed the qualitative sampling which is non-probability sampling, specifically; convenience sampling aiming to get access to the detail data on the issue. So, among the total population of 78 women prisoners in Asella correction center, the researcher has purposively selected 17 samples to conduct the study. With regard to the selection of the samples women prisoners with mental problems were excluded from the sample; and women prisoners with child, pregnant, old aged or whose age are ranging from 16-78 were included in sampling believing they could provide detail information if involved in the study. Prisoners with mental problem were excluded from the sample on the assumption that they were not in a position to provide genuine information because of their illness. The study has also proceeded with two (2) focused group discussion/FGD (six members in each group) and employed unstructured interview with five (5) individuals. Through the use of interview and FGD data on challenges, treatment condition of prisoners in the centers, service provision and reason for their imprisonment were collected. while data concerning the condition of dormitory, clinic, toilet, kitchen, prisoners praying place and the overall structure of the compounds were collected through observation (*refer the observation check list and interview guide line on the annexes part*)

### **Data collection instrument and Procedures**

The data inputs for the study were dominantly primary sources. The primary data for this study was generated by employing interviews, discussion with women prisoners. Thus to collect detail data on the experiences of women prisoner's, tools such as:-

- Unstructured interview
- Non participant observation and
- Focus group Discussion (FGD) were employed

### **Data Analysis Method**

The qualitative data collected through interview, observation and Focus Group Discussion were analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis to analyze the experiences of women prisoners in Asella correction center.

### **Ethical consideration**

Ethical permission was obtained from Asella correction center officials, so as to collect data from respondents only for educational purpose. The confidentiality and privacy of information were assured and the formal letter was written from Arsi University, department of sociology and social work. Above all, the study ensures information provided by each and every respondent was kept confidential.

## **Results and discussion**

As noted in the methodology part of this research, qualitative research study approaches were employed to explore what women prisoners' experiences and examine challenges they are facing in Assela correction center. Data were collected from 17 samples through the use of tools mentioned under method of data collections. This means 5 for interview, 12(two FGD) each group consisting of six members. Maximum care was taken in collecting data according to the pre-formulated eligibility criterion and the need to get a diversified response.

The cases are presented below in an orderly manner. The responses of the participants were translated, transcribed and coded. Finally, the responses were categorized in to themes and presented according to the interview guidelines (see on annex part).

Women Prisoner is denoted by 'P' followed by numbers. The symbol signifies the first letters of the word Prisoner and the number indicate the order of respondents.

Meaning, the 1<sup>st</sup> respondent will be denoted by P1.

### **Analysis of Responses on Cases for Imprisonment**

To identify different cases for imprisonment of women in the selected center; interview, observation and focus group discussions were employed. Hence, a total of eight cases were identified. These includes political cases, murder/homicide, corruption, conflict/ quarrel, human trafficking, drug trafficking, theft, and infanticide (avoiding their child after giving birth).

#### **Reason 1: Political related causes**

**P (1)** Is an 18 years old girl come from one of the woreda in Arsi zone, arrested and brought to the center. She said "I was attending grade 5 in my home kebele but the police arrested me and I was brought here and nine months gone since then"

**P (2)** Is a women with her two children suspected for motivating and participating in anti-government movement. She said "I was brought here 11 months before being said participated in opposing government. She continued saying" I know nothing about the politics, I was arrested and accused for the issue that I don't have even understanding about". The half of FGD participants also reflected what they say 'disturbance' as reason for their imprisonment.

#### **Reason 2 : Homicides/ Murder**

**P (3)** a 32 years old women looking good, was lying on the bed and crouching what is named 'Dantel', after we exchanged greeting, She told me that she killed her own kid and brought to the center. 'I was sentenced life imprisonment initially but, I asked appeal and it was changed to me to 18 years" she said. She continued saying "I spent seven years here".

**P (4)** Standing on the right side of her bed was a 53-year-old women. She used to make 'tella' and support her life. She said "I came here being accused for killing one of my costumers whose dead body founded near to my residing home. Due to this my three children whom I used to grow solely left helpless" she said.

### **Reason 3: Corruption**

**P (5)** a 61 years an old woman was watching TV in the prisoners sleeping room. She told that she was brought to the correctional center being suspected for giving money for the woreda administrator and judges in here woreda. She said “it was land property cases decided by court but the second party accused me saying you gave money for the judge and made decision to be biased in favor of me”.

### **Reason 4: Conflict/ Quarrel**

The data reflected from the FGD shows that conflict between family members and neighbors on land property and social relationships were other cases for imprisonment in the two centers as reflected from interview and FGD.

- **Analysis of Responses on Conditions of Service provision in the center.**

Findings from Observation and FGD have shown that food; ‘Injera’ with ‘shiro’ and ‘misir’ is given on lunch and dinner. Bread with tea on breakfast is provided to them. The content (quantity, quality and taste) of the food is moderate. Participants of the discussion said “others such as ‘wot’ and ‘Injera’ is good. But the bread is not clean and too much roasted”.

According to the FGD, The service provision given to them is inadequate. For instance, the condition of latrine house is not save, there is no shower house, vocational training is not facilitated to them (they learn nothing as the center is correctional). They are given similar medicine/tablet for various health problems. It is also reflected that there is no equal treatment of prisoners having long stay in the center and these stayed below 1-2 years.

*“When we are getting sick and need them bring us to clinic, they do not give us ear. This is especially common in the night time”.* Continued saying... *“we are not taken to clinic soon, unless our representative act (report). If she is not willing to report, no body helps us”.* It was observed that there is challenge in sleeping dorm as it is crowded; they share a single room with 30-60 and 1metre bed with two. The crowdedness of their living quarter, bad condition of the latrine and the difficulty of physical gangway to walk on, mixing up of those sick people with healthy once, poor handling of incarcerated children, there is kindergarten but children stay in the same class every year (no promotion to the next class) are major problems observed in the center.

What is worse among other thing is that sick people stayed with normal once including those who have mental illness and transmitted diseases which endangers the health of prisoners sharing a single room and the whole center.

**P (1)** *“I am young; I want to learn new skills.* Continued saying; *“but the chance is not available to us in the center”.* Finding from observation also shows that Muslim women prisoners do not have place to pray unlike other prisoners.

- **Analysis of Responses on the treatment of pregnant women and women with incarcerated children.**

According to Ogomoh U (ND.) women treatment practice in several African countries has resulted in the neglect of the human rights of the inmates without much consideration for the various international standards and recommendations advocating for humane and equitable treatment for all. In this correction center, pregnant women and women imprisoned with their child were not separately treated and got the chance of enjoying the care they deserve which is given to them by constitution and other international conventions. According to Hand book for prison Managers and Policy Makers on Women and Imprisonment, (2010) prison do not provide an appropriate environment for children to grow up in, health services, which are usually not geared towards children's health care needs, are inadequate to cope with needs of babies and small children in a large majority of countries.

Data obtained through interview, FGD and observation also confirmed this fact.

P (1) Is a 39 years old women who came from one of the woredas in Arsi zone and spent one year in the center. She was with her two kids while the researcher met her standing on the corridor of the room she used to reside. She holds a two year son at her back and the other standing behind her. She said *"I was brought here last year putting my two sons with relatives. But, they unable to care for them and brought them two here and now I am facing all kinds of problems with them"*. Data collected from FGD also explains as the center were not considering pregnant and women with child being separated from ordinary prisoners in health care, food provision and even in sleeping room or bed.

Various researches have been conducted on the issue of women prisoners. For instance; Study conducted by Mintwab(2014) revealed the negative consequence that women imprisonment imposes on the society at large. The study emphasized on condition of children incarcerated with their mother. The study by Samrawit (2015) showed the challenges political prisoners' faces in Ethiopian prison centers. Other researches done by Ogomoh U, on women prisoners also showed that service provision for women prisoners are inadequate. This study on one hand confirms the findings of study conducted before and also come up with other overlooked problems that women problems are facing such as pre-trial detention and problem of accommodating the mentally ill and with transmitted diseases.

## **Conclusion and recommendation**

### **Conclusion**

Women prisoners face various problems in Assela correction center. These problems are psychological, social, health and economical. Although the study respondents are from various walks of life;- age, economic status, education background and varying cases of imprisonment, they have one thing in common. The lack of income joined by social isolation and psychological pressure is further worsening their living condition in the center. Accordingly, depression, inferiority complex and low self-esteem are common among women prisoners. The major cases as revealed in this study includes political cases, murder/homicide, corruption, conflict/ quarrel, human trafficking, drug trafficking, theft, and infanticide (voiding their child after giving birth). Among cases as respondents reflected, political cases followed by murder were dominant cases of imprisonment.

Sharing of the same room and bed among prisoners with mental problem and transmitted diseases with the normal ones, physical punishment and frustration of prisoners by the officials and guardian were other challenge faced by women in the correction center.

It is true that the primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needy and, oppressed, and living in poverty (NASW, 2005). Women prisoners living in Assela are particularly vulnerable and are experiencing various challenges. Hence, policies and programs existed with this regard should be revisited and implemented by concerned organizations (correction center administration) including the government who bears the legal and moral responsibility of safeguarding its people particularly in improving service provision and human treatments in correctional centers.

### **Recommendation**

The experiences of the above cases are clear indicator on the challenges and experiences of women prisoners in Assela correction center. Hence, the following way forwarded and policy issues are recommended.

1. To solve Challenges observed in the center concerning service provision and treatments of women prisoners, The correctional administration should act and treat prisoners as per the regulation No 138/2007 endorsed by council of ministers of Ethiopia to respect the rights of prisoners.
2. Scaling up the women prisoners' skill and training by the correctional administration through opening vocational training programs for prisoners as it gives moral make up and hope.
3. The study calls for ensuring fair treatment among women prisoners so as to build prisoners' moral, respect their right, and to put hope in their mind.
4. Latrine house, sleeping condition, accommodating those sick with healthy once and the condition of the incarcerated children, opportunity of education for children, and issue of vocational training \should get due attention by prison officials.
5. Long pre-trial detention of women should get focus by courts and correctional administrators.



6. The correctional administration of the center, in collaboration with the woreda and zonal women and child Affairs being with Education office of woreda, zone and city administration should provide education for children imprisoned with their mother.

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## APPENDIX

### Observation checklist.

Things that the researcher observed in studied area, in particular at the compound of prisoned women are elaborated as follow;

- The overview of prisoned women compound
- The dormitory or resting area of the prisoned females
- The overview of sanitation in compound.
- The kitchen of small micro finance of prisoned women.
- The availability and cleanliness of toilet and shower.
- The religious places.
- Pregnant women and children with women in prison

### Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide line

1. Period of stay in prison (participant should have to stay in prison at least 5 months within the center)
2. The participant's /respondents/ should be normal mentally to take part in the discussion.
3. The age of the respondents should be in the range of 16-78 (excluded children under 16 and old age beyond 78)
4. The willingness of participant to take part in discussion on the selected issue.
5. The participant should have stay on discussion until the end.

### Interview guiding questions for women prisoners

#### Background Information

Age.....Sex.....Place of Birth.....Educational Status.....

#### Probing questions

1. From where did you came from?
2. Duration of imprisonment: How long have you stayed here?
3. Reason of Imprisonment: What is the reason you detained for
4. Experience: What problems /challenges/ you faced in prison?
5. What are the services provided to you by this center?
6. What did you trained in the center?
7. Did you get conviction/decision/? If yes, how many years?
8. What the center should have to improve?

9. Challenges you faced in your stay in the center

Tell me difficulties you faced  
Effects of imprisonment

10. Living condition:

Tell me about your living condition  
How do you describe your living condition?  
Living arrangement/ Accommodation: whom do you live with?  
How is your health condition?  
Do you have health problems?