

## Children of Incarcerated parents: An experimental study of life-skills intervention on self-esteem, emotional problems and resilience

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### Abstract

Increases in the incarceration rate during the past several decades have makes to consider its effects on families, communities, and in particular, children of incarcerated parents. Parental incarceration creates a significant risk of childhood mental health, educational prospects, social stigma, and behavioral problems. So, imparting life-skills to them to develop self-awareness make informed decisions, cognitive, social, and self-management skills for life adjustment. The intention of the current study was to identify the life-skills-based intervention on self-esteem among children of incarcerated parents. The pre-post experimental design without a control group was used with a sample comprised of 22 children in the age group 10-15 whose parent has been incarcerated were selected with the purposive sampling method. Pope et al Self-esteem inventory (1988) tool used for this study. The intervention was conducted in 11 sessions and the duration of each session was one and half an hour. Results indicated that after the life-skills intervention, children of incarcerated parents experienced a significant increase in self-esteem ( $p = 0.035^*$ ). Further, the study concluded that life-skills intervention established to be effective in enhancing self-esteem in children of incarcerated parents.

**Keywords:** Parental Incarceration, self-esteem, emotional problems, life-skills intervention, children of incarcerated parents

### Introduction

Family plays an essential role in supporting the children, both in emotional and social needs. The absence of either father or mother can affect the child's psychological as well as emotional well-being. According to National Crime records bureau statistics India (2019), there are 4,78,600 inmates who were confined in various jails across the country. In this incarceration population, there is a family to face the effects of the consequences from society. Especially the children of incarcerated parents may undergo severe psychological, behavioral and emotional trauma. These children are commonly divided into two categories- an individual who lives alongside their mom in the prison (up to the time of 6 years) and those are given up when their parent(s) is/are detained (Sukhramani and Gupta, 2020). These children experience unique difficulties during their developmental period.

Parental incarceration makes a child undergo isolation, separation, anxiety, disorganized feelings, shame, anger, insecurity, embarrassment, and a sense of loss. Losing a parent due to incarceration may lead to the children have low self-esteem, emotional disturbances, and inability to bounce back from the traumatic event. When a primary caregiver of the parent drives incarceration makes a child loses their attachment figure. Focusing on Bowlby's attachment theory, the quality of parent-child interactions contribute to a close relationship between the parent-child wellbeing throughout their lifespan (Bowlby, 1973). So the sudden detachment from the parent may lead to the child feel embarrassment, social stigma, low academic performance, loss of economic support, increased risk of abuse or neglect, and delinquency (Travis, Mcbride, and Solomon, 2003).

Generally, self-esteem plays a vital role in the psychological and socio-educational functioning of the individual. It reveals one's own evaluation of his or her worth. Self-esteem is characterized as the assessment which the individual makes and generally keeps up with respect to himself: It communicates a demeanor of approval or dissatisfaction and demonstrates the degree to which the person accepts himself to be capable, critical, effective, and worthy (Coopersmith, 1967). The propensity to recognize with their parental incarceration makes the child feel stigmatized and leads to withdrawal from society which may be one of the contributing variables to decreasing their self-esteem. So the low self-esteem is one of the social issues that influences the children of incarcerated parents.

Parental imprisonment makes a child suffer a variety of emotional and physical issues in their developmental period. Furthermore, previous studies found that parental incarceration affects the child in a more emotional way. Boswell. et. al. describe, anxiety, anger, sense of loss, and aggression problems are connected to parental incarceration. Research indicates that the reaction of children to parental incarceration differed by gender. Moreover compared to girls, boys who experienced incarceration in their childhood showed significant antisocial behavior at the age of 32 (Murray & Farrington 2005).

Ramesh and Farshad (2006) proved that life-skill intervention increases physical and mental health and decreases psychosocial problems and self-destructive behavior. So the life-skill intervention can be given to children of incarcerated parents to create self-awareness, make informed decisions, maintain healthy interpersonal relationships and develop appropriate actions to shield themselves from negative peer pressure, emotional disturbance, and other high-risk behavior. So, the present research is aimed to identify the influence of life-skill intervention among children of incarcerated parents by assessing self-esteem, emotional problems, and resilience.

## METHOD

### Aim

The aim of the study is to know the effect of Life-skill intervention on Self-esteem, Emotional problems and Resilience of children of incarcerated parents.

### Hypotheses

Based on the findings of previous research studies, the following directional hypotheses were formulated.

1. Life-skill Intervention would enhance the self-esteem of children of incarcerated parents
2. Life-skill Intervention would reduce the emotional problems of children of incarcerated parents.
3. Life-skill Intervention would improve the resilience of children of incarcerated parents.

### Sampling technique

After defining the population-based on inclusion criteria, a sample of 22 boys was selected, based on their availability, through the purposive sampling method. In purposive sampling, the selection of unit entirely depends on the choice of the investigator. This type of sampling is adopted when it is not possible to adopt any random procedure for selection of sampling units

(Agarwal, 2007).

### Inclusion criteria

1. Had either one parent imprisoned.
2. The participant's age should be between 11-17 years.
3. Able to understand read and write Tamil.

### Sample description

The population for this study was sixth to ninth-grade boys who have parents in prison. The respondents were in the age group of 11-18 years. Children of incarcerated parents sample were taken from Society for Education and Economic Development (SEED), Utkottai in Chennai which provides free education run by Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO).

### Materials Used

#### Demographic data

The questionnaire was designed as a booklet with the first page containing the need for the survey and details about the research along with informed consent form (See Appendix-1). The booklet further included three psychological questionnaires, which had 114 items on the whole. All the items were objective in nature. Since the educational status of children of incarcerated parents was sixth to tenth standard and they do not comprehend English language, all the items were furnished in Tamil language. The demographic data was devised to obtain personal information about the respondent's age, grade level and, type of family etc,

#### Self-esteem inventory (Pope et al, 1988)

The translated Tamil version of Pope et al self-esteem questionnaire (Priscilla, 1999) was used because it is easily comprehensible and is short enough to be computed quickly. In this questionnaire had modified from the original questionnaire to suit the Indian population and items in the lie scale were modified and items 12, 18, and 16 were deleted. A Tamil version of this questionnaire was translated so that the children would easily comprehend as they were predominantly Tamil speaking children. This scale is multi-dimensional having global, academic, body, family and social domains. The reliability coefficient was 0.76 for the self-esteem questionnaire.

#### Emotional Problems

The Tamil version of Screening Test for Emotional Problems- Self Report (ERFOLD, SHORT & FREEMAN, 2011) can be individually or group administered to students and scored in less than 15 minutes. The STEPS consists of 40 items, with 8 items rationally assigned to each of five subscales designed for identification of emotional problems: (a) Academic problems, (b) Social problems, (c) Behavioural problems, (d) Depression, and (e) Anxiety. Raw scores for each subscale are determined by a simple sum of all the items in the category. The 14 days test-retest reliability (Pearson) coefficients of rationally derived subscales of the STEP-S responses were (a) Academic Problems,  $r=.79$ ; (b) Social Problems,  $r = .65$ ; (c) Problem Behaviour,  $r=.77$ ; (d) Depression,  $r = .75$ ; and (e) Anxiety,  $r= .69$ .

#### Conner-Davidson Resilience Scale

The scale distinguishes between those with greater and lesser resilience. The Conner Davidson Resilience Scale (2003) was chosen because it includes items that represent not only challenges, commitment and control but also a variety of other resiliency characteristics, such as goal setting, patience, faith, tolerance of negative effect and humor. The Tamil version of Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) is a self-report measure comprised of 25 items, each rated on a five point scale (0-4), which higher scores reflecting greater resilience. A pilot study conducted to establish reliability. Based on the difficulty faced by the students in answering the five point scale was modified into three point scale. The modified scale was tested for reliability. The split-half reliability coefficient was 0.78.

#### Pre-test

22 children of incarcerated parents were assessed on Self-esteem, Emotional problems and Resilience. All the questionnaires were in Tamil. The sample consisted of boys only. Many of the boys had difficulties in reading, sitting in one place for a long period of time, and tended to distract each other. Self-esteem was assessed in the first session, followed by an assessment of emotional problems and resilience in the next session.

**Implementation of Life-skill Intervention**

Life-skill Intervention was given to all the 22 children of incarcerated parents after the pre-assessment. The intervention was conducted in 11 sessions and the duration of each session was one and half hours. The module for the life-skill intervention program was developed in order to enhance self-esteem and confidence; to reduce the emotional problems: to build the level of resilience and to develop the ability among respondents in assessing personal strengths and weaknesses. Techniques like free-associating, role play and group conversation methods were employed to train them on life-skill.

**Post-test**

Subsequently the completion of the Life-skill Intervention, the questionnaires that were used for the pre-test were re-administered.

**Analysis of Results**

**Table 1**

Comparison of Self-esteem of Children of incarcerated parents between Pre and Post-test (N=22)

Variable		Mean	SD	t	ρ
Self-esteem	Pre-test	59.63	8.26	2.26	0.002**
	Post-test	61.68	8.38		

\*Significant at 0.05 level

Table 1 shows the difference in the mean scores of self-esteem of children of incarcerated parents before and after the Life-skill Intervention. The ‘t’ value indicates that there was a significant difference in self-esteem between pre-test and post-test. The mean value indicates that self-esteem had increased in the post-test. It can be understood Life-skill Intervention program had increased the self-esteem among children of incarcerated parents. Hence, the hypothesis stating that “Life-skill Intervention would enhance the self-esteem of children of the prisoner” was accepted.

**Table 2**

Comparison of means of Emotional Problems of Children of incarcerated parents between Pre and Post-test (N=22)

Variable		Mean	SD	t	ρ
Emotional Problem	Pre-test	33.09	12.16	0.79	0.43(NS)
	Post-test	34.5	9.84		

NS- Not Significant

Table 2 shows the difference in the mean scores of emotional problems of children of incarcerated parents in before and after the Life-skill Intervention given. The ‘t’ value indicates that there was no significant difference between the pre and post-test on emotional problems. It can be understood that both before and after were having similar scores of emotional problems before participating in the Life-skill Intervention program. Hence the hypothesis stating that “Life-skill Intervention would reduce emotional problems of children of incarcerated parents” was not accepted.

**Table 3**

Comparison of Means of Resilience of Children of incarcerated parents between Pre and Post-test (N=22)

Variable		Mean	SD	t	ρ
Resilience	Pre-test	37.68	7.88	1.304	0.206(NS)
	Post-test	38.81	6.82		

NS-Not Significant

Table 3 shows the difference in the mean scores of the resilience of children of incarcerated parents in before and after the Life-skill Intervention is given. The ‘t’ value indicates that there was no significant difference between before and after the Life-skill Intervention program. It can be understood that both before and after the test was having similar scores of resilience before participating in the Life-skill Intervention programme. Hence the hypothesis stating that “Life-skill Intervention would improve the resilience of children of incarcerated parents” was not accepted.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The present study found that there is a significant difference in self-esteem before and after the intervention. It can be clearly understood that the given Life-skill intervention is effective in enhancing self-esteem among the children

of incarcerated parents. Self-esteem generally refers to understanding their strength, weaknesses, introspecting their abilities, accepting themselves and also relating themselves with others. Life-skill intervention given to the children has improved overall appraisal of their cognitive ability and also improved their self-esteem. Paired t-test results showed that there is Improvement in the various dimensions of self-esteem such as global, academic, body, family and social domains. The result of the present study has been supported by various research findings. Yadav and Iqbal (2009) found that Life-skill intervention was effective in increasing the self-esteem of adolescents. The results of the study clearly illustrated the positive effect of Life-skill Intervention on adolescents and the importance of self-esteem as an important personality variable. It was conspicuous to note that Vernofaderani (2014) also obtained similar results. However, there was no significant difference in emotional problems and resilience after the Life-skill intervention.

Though Life-skill intervention was effective in increasing the self-esteem, there was no significant difference in the emotional problem such as academic problems, behavioral problems, social problems, depression, and anxiety after the intervention. This could be due to lack of social support, family support and unhealthy environment. More number of sessions in the life-skill intervention can bring a change in emotional problems and improving resilience further to an extent. However, the immediate effect could not be seen, due to inadequate time given for the post-assessment and to practice the skills that were trained. Individual counseling can be given to improve their resilience.

### Conclusion

According to the results, life-skills intervention had a considerable effect on enhancing the self-esteem. Considering the significance of self-esteem in their circumstances and particularly in children of incarcerated parents, it is important to incorporate these skills in regular will make the child will improve their ability.

### Limitations of the study

1. The sample size of the present study was small (22) hence, the results cannot be generalized.
2. Due to lack of time, follow-up could not be done for the Children of prisoner's in order to study the sustainability of the intervention module.

### Implications

Taking into consideration the experience and findings of the present research, the following suggestions can be offered for future research in this area. In the present study, all the samples were boys. Future research should assess girls. Similar study can be conducted with a large sample.

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