

# Dysfunctional Families: The Foundation and Upshot of Female Criminality in India

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**Abstract:** *Roots of criminality lie in the dysfunctional families especially in case of women all over the world. In Indian context the break-up of the age-old institution of joint family, long lost family values, unhappy interpersonal relationships, exploitation, abusive relationships and sometimes forced involvement are the major reasons of women's engagement in crime. Though female prisoner represents only 5-6 % of total prison population but consistent increase in the crime rate among women in past few decades become alarmingly conspicuous. Women involved in criminal activities usually have history of abuse and in most of the cases they are the real victim of situational crime. Generally, women are less inclined towards crime than man and tend to commit minor crime like forgery, prostitution, drug trafficking, and burglary etc. But the consequences they face are way more terrible, not in terms of duration of sentence but the psychological and social issues they confront behind the bars and social rejection after their release. Sometimes their own families refuse to accept them and children of female prisoners become the additional victim of their mother's act. Due to absence of female specially a mother from the family because of incarceration, the family itself become dysfunctional again. At this juncture of time there is a great need to attract researchers' and social workers' attention towards outcomes of dysfunctional families and tackle this problem before it takes some major form. Besides there is a great need to change community's attitude towards imprisonment so that reintegration of prisoners after completing their sentence in the family and society will be easier.*

**Keywords:** Vicious Cycle, Dysfunctional Family, Female, Criminality, Social Reintegration.

## 1. Family: The Institution of Orientation

Family of orientation is the only worldly possession of an individual at the time of birth, it is the family which gives identity to the individual in the times when he/she barely knows the meaning of his/her existence, it protects them from every peril and plays significant role in the transformation of individual from fully dependent creature to an independent being. Family is a primary institute where an individual learns most important lessons of its life and lay foundation for bright future. In a family child experience the value of trust, faith, belongingness, love, empathy, responsibility etc. The very attitude of individual towards himself/herself and society is shaped by the early experiences of individual with its family. As family is a major component of immediate environment of individual, it plays very crucial role in formation of individual's persona.

## 2. The Dysfunctional Family

Families with strained and poor interpersonal relationships are called dysfunctional families. Alcoholic, psychologically disturbed, broken families, abusive, rigid dogmatic families and families unable to cope crisis comes under the category of dysfunctional families. Due to strained relationship members of dysfunctional family are always entrapped in the web of their own problems and lack the perspective of trust and faith i.e. the very foundation of interpersonal relationship. Such families are unable to provide healthy environment for emotional, social and moral development of its members. Due to prolonged exposure of stressful, impoverished, fearful and uncertain environment most of the members of dysfunctional families are turn out to be either highly oppressed, submissive and dependent far beyond the

limits of a normal person, or violent and dominating to such extent that they cannot fit into normal social environment.

## 3. The Vicious Cycle of Dysfunctional Family and Female Criminality

The roots of criminality lie deep down in the dysfunctional families as unpleasant family experiences are the major reason for women's involvement in crime. Though women are known as the non-violent creature since the dawn of civilization, but around the globe involvement of females in crime in last few decades shed light upon the fact that crime is not only male bastion anymore. The empirical evidences proposed by previous studies unveiled that female criminals have histories of exploitation and in most of the cases their crime is directed towards the person responsible for their exploitation. Victimization during childhood or adolescence is a risk factor for both male and female. Immediate family environment and poor interpersonal relationship with spouse, in-laws and in some cases bitter relationships in family of origin are also the reasons behind females' anti-social behavior. Family disorganization, marital discord, high aspiration level and frustration due to unfulfilled needs, stress and failure in coping process and alteration in women roles are the reasons of women's involvement in criminal activities more in number in the present day's Indian society (Patanik, 2002).

Crime is essentially a social problem which disrupts the harmony and peace of a society and motto behind committing crime can be situational or intentional. Situational crime is unplanned and occurs as reaction to a particular event like harming someone for self-defense on the other hand intentional crime are pre-planned and reaction to prolonged oppression, exploitation or hatred in

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case of female offenders. Most of females behind the bars themselves are the victims of situational crime. Women are less inclined towards crime as compared to men and tend to commit petty or non-violent crimes like prostitution, forgery, reselling drugs, and robbery and the reason behind committing such crime ranges from fulfilling basic needs and forced involvement to lack of moral values. The causal factors of female criminality are the major outcomes of poor interpersonal relationship among family members and dysfunctional family. Due to inability of dysfunctional families to provide good care, quality of education and values the poorly educated, poorly skilled women are highly prone to fall in the trap of crime.

A common trend observed all over the world is that majority of the females held in the prisons are charged for minor crimes. In Indian Scenario **Das (2013)** found that at the time of their arrest most of the women prisoners were unemployed, hailed from poor family background, married, from joint family and do not possess any land particular, basically the poor condition of their families has compelled them to commit crime. Generally, when the uneducated and unskilled women have to take responsibility of their families, they are easily attracted by unfair means. Sometimes the poor, psychologically deprived and abusive family environment or excessive burden of responsibilities affects the judgmental abilities of females and ultimately as a product of dysfunctional families and disempowerment they ended up behind the bars.

#### 4. Crime and Consequences

In this era, Indian women got numerous opportunities to prove themselves in various arenas of life but on the dark side it also exposes women to various form of crime directed towards them or directed by them. A growing area of research reveals that incarceration is the most painful event of female prisoner's life. Irrespective of type of crime and motive behind committing crime they are labeled as criminals. The taboo of being in jail marks negative impact in their psyche. They lose their families, social status and the right to live a respectful life in the society even after completing their sentence. The families of imprisoned females face a wide array of challenges which can have serious effects on lives of family members especially children. Once entered in the prison most of women lose all links with the family and have no control over their children's life.

In India female prisoners represent a very small percentage of total prison population, but because of traditional nature of our society, incarceration affects the life of prisoners as well as their families, way more adversely than any major crises. Humiliation, social rejection and lost status in society as well as in family is too much to handle for Indian females, whose very existence is linked with their family. The strained, unnatural and abusive relationships of dysfunctional families are the source of origin for criminal tendencies among females on the other hand due to their absence from home because of incarceration their families become dysfunctional again. The worst case scenario is that the taboo of criminal or imprisoned turns their whole world upside down; their family and social life get finished. Strong

rejection from the family and society even after completing sentence determined for the crime, creates major hurdles for females to live a normal life which is their fundamental right.

#### 5. Conclusion

*"If every saint has a past, every sinner has a future"*

Women delinquency is increasing rampantly and negative family experiences are the major causal factors behind it. There is a great need to attract social workers' and researchers' attention towards such dysfunctional families so that the issues of maladjustment can be resolved before becoming far more dangerous and taking the shape of crime. The change in the society's attitude towards the criminals can also be helpful in social reintegration of prisoners after completing the sentences. Community's mindset about prisoners also needed to be changed, rather than considering prisoners corrupt, ill-mannered and sinners, people must admit the fact that after completion of their sentence prisoners also have the right to live a normal life because they got punished for their wrong deeds. Family therapy and counseling can be very helpful in improving family environment which will reduce the chances of further exploitation and help the smooth reintegration of prisoners in the society and saving the family system from further breakdown.

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