

Aggressive Behavior in Young Children Co-detained with Imprisoned Mothers

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To the Editor: A home is comprised by family members and is the safety umbrella of elements of basic needs essential for child growth and development. Unlike home, in prison, children are inevitably exposed to aggressive environmental influence due to the behavior of mother and other imprisoned women. Aggression is defined as any behavior intended to harm another person who does not want to be harmed. Persistent aggression in childhood is related to a variety of negative outcomes in adulthood [1]. Childhood exposure to violence is associated with a variety of aggressive and maladaptive behaviors [2]. Children are most vulnerable to be influenced by aggressive environment than adults as adults already develop their own sets of morals and values and seeing aggression does not affect them so much [3]. Justice system of India permits co-detention of children (upto 6 y) with imprisoned mothers in prison. The present article identifies the aggressive behavior in children co-detained with imprisoned mothers.

A cross-sectional study was conducted at the Central prison of Delhi. Prison staff members of the crèche were interviewed to rate co-detained child's (3 to 5 y) behavior for aggression. Out of sixteen children, aggressive behavior was observed in 13 (81%, 95% C.I: 57%–93%) co-detained children, in moderate 5 (31%, 95% C.I: 14%–55%) or severe 8 (50%, 95% C.I: 28%–72%) grades.

In the prison, more than three-fourth of co-detained children were found to have moderate to severe grades of aggressive behavior. Imprisoned mother might exercise aggressive parenting as overcrowding is reported to make parenting more punitive [4]. When imprisoned mothers try to solve problems with physical or verbal violence, children mistakenly learn that as an appropriate behavior and behave aggressively [5].

Strict prison policy is required against the use of abusive language and prevention of frequent fights among prisoners. Parenting classes needs to be organized for imprisoned mothers and training of the crèche teachers to manage aggressive behavior of children in the early stages.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest None.

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