

POWERLESSNESS, HELPLESSNESS, AND HOPELESSNESS OF BEING INCARCERATED MOTHER IN THAILAND

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ABSTRACT

The lived experience of being incarcerated mothers during the pregnancy of the first child until give birth to a baby is one of interest. The method of Heideggerian phenomenology was modified to explore twenty-eight women imprisoned who agreed to be interviewed in Thailand. The in-depth interviewing, observation, and personal information were collected in order to study factors that might create emotional stress of incarcerated mothers, which would lead to develop a valuable opportunity to put in place a national prisoner rehabilitation policy and a program of activities in prisons, and post-release opportunities for women with children in Thailand. The findings could be summarized into the outstanding three themes, chaotic senses of mothering, valuable things, and being a mother forever. The chaotic sense of mothering theme was consisted of three sub-themes, which were unable to control, unable to seeking help, and unable to find self-concept. The first sub-theme was an unable to control, which was focused on the feeling of powerlessness, while the second sub-theme was all about of the limitation of abilities to find the helping resources. This sub-theme was called the feeling of helplessness. The last sub-theme was described about the experiences of being hopelessness. They lived with the feeling of unable to find self-concept for how to live with better and happier quality of life.

Therefore, the lived experience of being incarcerated mothers during the pregnancy of the first child until give birth to a baby would be a valuable opportunity to set up as one of a national prisoner rehabilitation policy, which includes the program of activities in prisons and post-release opportunities for women with children in Thailand.

Keyword: Lived experiences, hermeneutics phenomenology, incarcerated mother, and mothering.

INTRODUCTION

As reported in 2005, there were 8 out of 139 institutions, which provide facilities for baby care to the children that were living with their parents in the prisons under the responsibility of the Department of Correction in Thailand (Chitsawang, 2005). As of December 2006, the female prison population was 23,576 prisoners or accounted for 17% of total inmate population, whereas the male prison population was 128,907 prisoners or accounted for 83 % of the total inmate population in Thailand (Department of Corrections of Thailand, 2007). In comparison, there were 322 children who lived with their mothers during incarceration. This figure represents only the population surveyed from four central female prison institutions of each regional part of Thailand in 2003 (Susiriwatananon et al., 2003). It was reported that some female prisoners were taken care of their children by themselves. The comparison between female prisoners in Thailand and USA, it was shown that the ratio between female prisoners to the pregnant inmates was approximately 4 to 1 of female prisoners versus pregnant inmates. Unfortunately, there are no reference statistical numbers that show the exact numbers of total incarcerated pregnant women, incarcerated mothers, and their children in Thailand.

According to Act 246 and 247 of Thai law, incarcerated mothers and their children are allowed to live inside the prison by the Department of Corrections. These laws seem to be benefit, but many reports have shown that incarceration has serious effects on women, pregnant women, mothers, and their children. Such research has indicated that incarcerated women have higher risks in physical health illnesses, diabetes mellitus, exacerbated asthma, peptic ulcers, epilepsy, and sexually transmitted diseases than the normal ones (Safyer and Richmond, 1995; Martin et al., 1997; Fogel and Belyea, 1999; Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2008). The findings also extended to mental health illnesses including high levels of anxiety and depression, lifetime psychiatric disorders, and major depressive disorders (Scott et al., 1982; Beckerman 1989; Wilson and Leasure, 1991; Jordan et al., 1996; Teplin et al., 1996; Fogel, 2001). Several studies

reported the difficulties in child rearing and child bearing during incarceration, which resulted in both physical and mental health impacted. Those difficulties were listed as poor maternal-fetal attachment, poor mother-child bonding, poor pregnancy outcome, and greater rates of postpartum blue or psychosis disorders because of maternal-child separation (Shelton and Gill, 1989; Egley et al., 1992; Feinman, 1994; Martin et al., 1997; Stanley and Byrne, 2000). The lived experiences of being a mother, which was contained of life circumstances, well being, and humanism were greatly influenced by incarceration.

It was shown that being incarcerated mother was one factor that affected the developmental process of children. A number of factors have been identified that they can influence the prenatal attachment period. A recent integrative literature review by Cannella (2005) who also indicated that many factors that correlated with maternal fetal attachment, social support/relation with others, self esteem/sense of mastery, psychological status, coping behavior, and health status. But there were two frequently explored factors, which the correlations were the stress due to life events and social connection (Norbeck and Tilden, 1983; Cranley, 1984; Mercer, 2004; Norbeck and Anderson, 1989; Cannella, 2005). More specific research findings indicated that pregnant women under stress were more likely to experience physical complications during their pregnancy, birth, and postpartum periods (Fonagy et al., 1991). All the stresses related complications might adversely affect the evolving maternal relationship with the fetus on the bonding-attachment especially.

Unfortunately, all of the afore-mentioned incarceration factors' studies provided the information in eyes viewing of a whole picture of a group of people in terms of numbers even in factors related to incarcerated population. Because of the limited evidence on body of knowledge of being pregnant women and mothers in prison, there is a need to explore the empirical data about these groups of people and all relevant issues of this population in the past. All information regarding to incarcerated pregnant women have focused on the ability and inability of prisons to provide an adequate prenatal

environments. Many researchers have suggested that the lack of prenatal care, loss of social support systems, poor nutrition, and stress of incarceration contributed to poor birth outcomes, and an increase in pregnancy and birth complications (Shelton and Gill, 1989; Bloom, 1990; Egley et al., 1992; Feinman, 1994; Martin et al., 1997; Cordero et al., 1999).

According to situations in Thailand, imprisonment places a tremendous stigma on all significant members' family even the women, their child, and family in terms of culture and believes. Their families usually excuse all communications with a woman once she has been imprisoned. This is one factor that produces serious problems for the incarcerated women because they usually lack family supports that would typically keep them care for the baby. Under the Thai governmental law, incarcerated mothers may keep their babies in prison until one year after birth (National Human Right Committee of Thailand, 2007). At the end of this period, the mothering role may be transferred to the care of a woman's family or the foster care. This event is the stigma associated with imprisonment, which many families are confronted with crossing between continuing mother-child bonding or giving up the mother-child connection. Thus, this study has focused only on the specific objective that aimed to understand the role of incarcerated mothers during their pregnancy, and the first year after birth of their child in the chaotic senses of mothering lived experiences.

According to the philosophical thought, a question regarding to the meaning of being lived experience was not simply a question about what happened, even though that question did get answered. Any question concerns the meaning of being lived experience was a question about the learning experience, one must understand how participants interpret the experience within the context to their world. Hermeneutic phenomenology is the methodology that will be used in this study to uncover this understanding (Moran, 2004).

Heidegger reported results of a study during the period of 1927-1962 that the hermeneutics phenomenology was the process of exploring lived experiences of participants in order to derive a

meaning and an understanding of the meaning of experiences in a qualitative study, which the structures or pre-understanding was the meanings or organization of a culture that were present before we understand and become part of our historical of background. A person's history or background includes what a culture gives a person from birth and is handed down, presenting ways of understanding the world. The hermeneutics phenomenology enabled access to a phenomenon that was often subconscious and provided a mean of interpreting participants' experiences of personal learning experiences (Heidegger, 1953; Moran, 2004).

Thus, the hermeneutics phenomenology was considered as a research strategy to explore learning experiences of pregnant women and mothers, who had experiences of being incarcerated in prison, were able to remember past experiences, and were able and willing to share their experiences. This will lead to the understanding of lived experiences of being incarcerated pregnant women and to explore they're perceived of experiences when they were under arrested situation as female prisoners.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was considering Hermeneutic Phenomenology as a research strategy to investigate learning experiences of female prisoners who were pregnant or being incarcerated mothers concerning child health care and its communication in health professional practice. An attention was given to criteria chosen to ensure quality in interpretive research, rigor, and credibility. It was also given to the ethical conduct of the research with research findings were presented to enable readers to contextualize the research approach and to understand the connection between research design and outcomes.

The participants

A purposeful selection method was chosen in order to select information-rich cases for detailed study. All participants were those female prisoners who could illuminate the phenomenon of learning experiences of being pregnant or being incarcerated mothers to communicate clinical reasoning in child

health care practices. Twenty-eight participants that met the following criteria, i.e., the ones who were arrested/charged, imprisoned during pregnancy, being incarcerated mothers for one year after childrearing, were able to understand, speak, write, and read the Thai language. All of them were willing to participate in the research project and be able to refuse or leave this study whenever they need.

Data collection.

In order to collect data in a phenomenological research, the researcher conducted a face-to-face interview by using a tape recorder and in some cases, a protocol form. The responses garnered from participants were usually analyzed into patterns in order to form themes or a theme. The trickiest part of analyzing a response was the ability to identify the hidden pattern that exists in each response. As the patterns form, the researcher could form a theme with the patterns analyzed. The theme that was formed subsequently gave the meaning to the study. The theme could also be called an outcome or result in a qualitative research study.

Methods of data collections were observations, written reflective exercises, and repeated semi-structured interviews. The researcher led the semi-structured questions, comprised of statements that encouraged the participants to recall and talk about an instance of incarceration that stood out in their mind. Then, one-on-one unstructured questions with tape-recorded interviews were conducted in the maternal and child building. Interviews began with opened-ended questions about what that means to live with this situation. Participants were asked, "What were the reasons that brought you to be imprisoned?" "How do you live with this struggle place?" "How do you feel about your mind and body in being pregnant and mothering before and during imprisonment?" "How do you feel and manage in your perspective of being pregnant women and mothers of incarceration lives?" The observations were mainly focused on the behavior of being incarcerated mothers during interviewing period. Moreover, their personal journal books were used as their diary, which was described their

experiences without dialectical presented.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this research was obtained from the Faculty of Graduate School Human Research Ethics Committee, Burapha University, and from relevant ethics committees at the Department of Correction of the Kingdom of Thailand and at each prison site from which data were collected. Ethical considerations raised by this research were concerned with obtaining informed consent and maintaining participant confidentiality. Informed consent was defined as the voluntary and revocable agreement of a competent individual to participate in a therapeutic or research procedure, based on an adequate understanding of its nature, purpose, and implications. An informed consent may be broken down into four constituent elements: disclosure (providing adequate information), comprehension (understanding of information), competence (ability of participants to make a rational decision), and voluntariness (no coercion).

All participants were provided with information sheets detailing the aims of the research and the research process. These information sheets were provided to the participants either directly or via the physiotherapy managers. All participants were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and were aware that they could withdraw from this research at any time without negative consequences. Written consent was obtained from each volunteer prior to commencement of data collection. There were no existing power relations between the researchers and the participants that could be perceived as coercion.

Data analysis.

An interpretive phenomenology approach described by Diekel et al. (1989) was used as method for data analysis, which was the seven steps data analysis. Results were consisted with a description of shared practices and common meanings. The seven steps of data analysis were as follows; first, an interpretation of research text made from interviewing of all incarcerated mothers concerning their experiences

prior to and during in prison. The second step, an interpretive summary of each interview in written form, an analysis of selected transcribed interview or text. The third step, any either disagreements or interpretation of any incarcerated mother's life experiences that come across was reviewed in order to resolve in comparison with the texts and reanalyzed for agreement. The fourth step, all common meanings and shared practices were identified by constantly cross-checking our interpretations with the original transcripts we sought to maintain closeness (or faithfulness) to the participants' constructs, grounding interpretations in the data. The fifth step, an analysis was subsequently analyzed into patterns in order to form themes. The sixth step, a team addressed a relationship among the themes emerged which were apparently understood what were and how the incarcerated mothers lived with in terms of the telling story beyond time and space. The final step, a draft of the themes along with life experiences from all participants' summary of interview in written form was presented to the team, and all responses or suggestions were incorporated into the drafts of presentation, which yielded more clarified and clearly pictures of the participants' experiences.

RESULTS

According to participants' living and learning process, it was shown that the participants tried to reform their mothering abilities by regaining and gathering all experiences during their imprisonments. They become to realize that there were lots of the essences of being daughter, and these seemed to be the basic requirement for growing to be the grown up motherhood. Unfortunately, they found some pieces of life's experiences still stained in their life. They reflected that there had a plenty of powerful factors that made living process to be more complicated because they were being pregnant female prisoners. These all circumstances were always interrupting their mind concept. They explained that their memories still were in memory, and they could determine which one was very meaningfulness or meaningful for them. Obviously, the partici-

pants tried to create their own life, but there were always something happened to push them away. Therefore, the purpose of this study focused on the uncommon events that had impacted on the learning process for being an incarcerated mother. The findings could be summarized that the lived experiences of being incarcerated mothers had an outstanding theme and appeared as a life-cycle of the chaotic senses of mothering which was consisted of three sub-themes, and finally shown in learning and living processes.

Theme: Chaotic senses of mothering

These findings indicated that the participants were the basically learner because they had to adjust-interpret-readjust of being incarcerated mother. This theme would be presented in the dynamic feeling of being-in-the-new-world. The participants explained all of their feeling in negative dimension. They were explained all about the lived experiences in limitation resources for their own perception, which was all resources, were supportive incarcerated woman only. Moreover, all the events occurred during the time of being incarcerated pregnant and mother seemed to be unorganized, not only the feeling of being an incarcerated women but being a mother also. The imprisonment was strongly provided the rules and regulations for all female prisoners obviously. The uncommon and unfamiliar events seemed to be the interference factors for the participants' thought. Therefore, they tried to gain their experiences and determine which the participants' thinking process was very important and this process led the being incarcerated mothers' phenomenon to the adjusting for interpreting pattern as the basis of prior their adapting for acting pattern as living experiences. They had shown the pattern of responses to represent their thought by verbal via their recognized viewing. The meaning of being incarcerated mother lived experiences was very uncertainty, anxious, stressful, and depressive manifestations. Therefore, they had to take all their abilities to live with the imprisonment lived experiences. They presented the meaning of the being incarcerated mothers' experiences in terms of power and energy regained.

Unable to control: The feeling of being unable to control was the most common of the participants' lived experiences. They lived with the sense of uncertainty, which was referred to do not maintain to social relationship with others that lived outside the prison. Some of participants explained about their roles as partners in the family. They could not tie the relationship with their beloved people. Therefore, they tried to find the method how to maintain the families' relationship. Undoubtedly, the sense of being-in-the-new-world as incarcerated female prisoner was very much more complicated for her to live well. They also explained the lived experiences of being in the world of anxious, stress, and depressive person, which were totally different experiences. The significant factor was the imprisonment context unsurprisingly. According to the laws, offenders' right should refer to the prison officers, and so they had to follow the rules and regulations of the correction department. According to these lived experiences, the findings were summarized and referred to the powerlessness concept of being incarcerated mother.

Powerlessness was the negative perception, which was the meaning of lacking of the capacity or authority to act to affect an outcome or current situation. Actually, the powerlessness was presented as psychological subtheme on the other hand physiological function was also occurred. A power resource of incarcerated mothering was concealed with the integrating experiences, which were physical strength, psychological stamina, and acknowledges, and apparently these are struggle in incarceration context. Furthermore, powerlessness was a potential problem explicitly for women who were developed their mothering in prison. On reflection, the participants indicated the most powerful lived experiences' part about being imprisoned mother, obstructed, and restrained was the taking away of all power and control for mother confrontations.

"I really got much painfulness from my experiences but it did not mean anything to me right now - - I was here. It could not help me to

live well. Actually, I did not want to be a same person. It was shamed on me. - - I ran away from home and dropped out of school. I got pregnant that I did not want to be. Finally I did a huge mistake and I became to be at there. I had to live in here - -(crying) - -"

"My grandparent, they told me that it was not necessary to think, did not think too much, and just let it goes. It was very easy. I did not have a power to do for myself. I was just a daughter, a girl - - It was very easy too, I think Tumjai, this was a word that I got used to and it meant let it goes, do not worry, do not care, and do not need to fix those things"

"I did not have a plan what should I do for my baby. - - My family always made a decision for us anyway. They would like to take my baby as soon as possible. I did not have a chance to tell my needs even hopeless. I really want to keep my baby but the Department of Correction's law did not allow prisoners to raise a baby over than one year old - -"

Unable to help: They explained the sense of being unable to control, which was in terms of their abilities to live as a prisoner compared to a normal citizen. The senses of unable to find the supportive resources when they were obstructed in the circumstances with the important one of the lived experiences meanings. An incarcerated mother always reflected their abilities were under other authorized persons, which was meant that they had to follow the prison's rules. They had to strongly consider in behaving congruently. They perhaps acted as helping seeker but they could not find any even from themselves. Therefore, the sense of being unable to help could be summarized to helplessness concept.

According to the attached subsequent help-

lessness to maintain a status as being a mother, an incarcerated mother always explained about their feeling of being incarceration in terms of there was no chance of help seeking. All of their thinking reflections were the method for determining the better way to choose. They had to recall all of their experiences and adjusted for appropriate ones for themselves. They would like to seek, gain and gather the information to add up to their thinking. Then, they acted on the thinking process and thought back if they found that the action was not in the right way. They had to recall back and forth thinking over for trying another method. Unfortunately, some of participants seemed to be lacking of social support and some of them seemed to be lost of thinking process to seek help. Therefore, this content was mainly pointed to a meaning of helplessness, learned to helplessness, and lived with helplessness experiences.

“I remembered very well about my really hurt experiences, especially on my uncertainty status after my parent divorced. I did not know where I would live, and whom I would live with. I was nothing and not even exist. I think - - What I should do? How to prepare? And what I should have to prepare. What did I do to prepare for? I meant that it might be useless and helpless because it looked like no place to meet a success. I was here if I think what should I do but I could not do either. Anyone could not help me.”

“I was a third year student at a university when I got pregnant. I had to drop out and went to stay with my husband’s family. Unluckily, his family never taught him to be a good father. He always slept with many girls. He was a teacher but he always did bad thing and sin, I could not believe it. That was shocked and scared me until I decided to commit suicide. Helpless,

no one could either. It still stained in my soul and it made me hard to move over to have a happy life with my first child. So, I was quit. I ran away.”

“Imprisonment was an act that nobody wants to have an experience. My relatives always visited me a lots but I did not realize that they could help me. I was still got struggle in here. I could not care myself even my baby. What should I do? How should I do? I felt helpless likewise I was living with my grandparent. I was young. Anyone could not help me when I got in trouble so that was why I did not want to seek the way of helping me.”

Unable to hope: Previously, the participants reflected that they got of tremendous abusively experiences. They explained their lived experiences as a roller coaster. Some of them told their stories could be called as a soap opera. They had to deal with it, but they could not find the solving method. They felt very shame on them because they could not get through it well. Therefore, their lived experiences reflected their thinking in the term of no more hope to live. All lived experiences were occurred accidentally and intentionally. At the beginning part, the participants received what happened to them and they did not want to response to it. They felt really stress and painful from other abusive behaviors. They tried to regain all of their power to protect themselves as a surviving mechanism. Finally, they got all strategies where they were tried to do but it was failed. They were tried to be patient and chosen to do different things. They chose to use the denial and ignore the unwanted and the crisis situation because they could not leave these situations at all. Hopelessness was the perfect word for telling their meaning of being incarcerated mother.

“I never did anything by myself. I did not want to be in a complicate

circumstance. Somehow, I just waited and saw. - - Actually, if I would like to do something, someone would correct my doing. This was no hope and wastes of a time.”

In a controversial manner, some participants chose to denial, surrender, and ignore. They explained about their thoughts, which were empty that meant nothing for thinking of. They just needed to create their own safe place. They would like to stay away from the unwanted situation. Moreover, they addressed that they did not have to do anything with those situation because it would be gone by someone or killing time, their parent, their grand parent, and their partner/husband. On the other hand, it would be strained in their life forever, so that there was no needed to do anything to correct it. They got these thoughts from their own experiences' learning process. Their family members always taught that the participant was a suppressive person. They described the suppressive person's behaviors as a person that was letting other persons to do it for them and kept quiet. Therefore, almost all participants considered themselves as the surrenders and losers, they made a decision to do nothing that causes of easier way of living. Finally, the participants had chosen to do all abusive behaviors, which were depended on their purposes. All participants wanted to do with many different reasons; some did it for just making their parent felt bad, some did it for showing how good they were, and some did it for protecting themselves from harmfulness.

DISCUSSION

The differences of the participants' living arrangement for childhood and youth hood reflected the differences in understandings of family's functioning as the origin. The more gave interpreted terribly behaviors by participants appears to be related to the more got involved of the chaotic. They were differentiated their resources which were the internal and external power. The internal power was the strengthen mind and consistency of thing process. They presented their behaviors for actions/reaction

to other as external power. According to before imprisonment, the participants still took both their resources benefit in between good and bad zoning. The meaning good and bad depended on their religion, but they always skipped all of the laws of being good. Therefore, all of their experiences were referred to the initiators of becoming incarcerated mother.

Incarceration presented mothers with the difficult task to maintain their identities, position, dignities, and roles as mothers in families. This discussion has provided a fruitful understanding of how connects the relationship of being mother and how maintains to be mothering and paths to prison affected their babies and the participants. It has been also explored how incarcerated mothers demonstrated fitness; negotiated for babies; balanced criminality; and balanced families relationship, motherhood while they were imprisonment.

Paths to prison were the same of all the participants. Typically, they entered criminal lifestyles by virtue of running away from home, school dropping out, physically and emotionally victimizing, and drug abuse involving. Some families appeared more likely to extend help in times of crisis unless family resources were depleted. The availability of some family resources did not necessarily mean family extension during crisis in the manner that it did for their daughters who were in jail. The quality of relationships between incarcerated mothers and caretakers who were the trajectory of mother's role outside is referred to the quality of children's life. When with the supportive and abilities of caretakers for the children were more likely to be maintained in a positions and role for incarcerated mothers because they could plan together for the children as well. Overall, the families appeared more supportive of incarcerated mothers with respect and sympathy to their offspring who were and not suppose in jail.

Demonstrating fitness of prison officers to mothering classes were accomplished through incarcerated mothers' identities. To maintain as a mother, the lesson learn classes included the body and mind changed during pregnancy, the antenatal clinic checking up, the preparation to be laboring

classes, and a breast feeding preparation classes. To maintain identities as person, inmates employed a variety of vocations training institutions. The children served many resources in a way to foster care because of lacking of families support when the time of caretaking inside prison is over.

As women faced a situation of being mothers and criminals, they attempted to perform role as mothers in a variety ways. Some participants realized their crimes as supporting and responding to the needs of their families. Some of them saw the incarceration was the safe place for being as a person, and some seemed to be happy behind bars for being on the good way motherhood. In other hand, incarcerated mothers saw a huge conflict between their behaviors and being a good mother. Obviously, mothering mean acted out there, being a good mother acted inside here prison. One key word determine of mothering was known when one was not influenced by incarceration. Incarcerated mothers were able to see the definition of being mothering clearly which meant they could act as a good mother. They were able to live with the imbalanced identities well as they could work as a mother, adapt as a prisoner, and realize as daughter.

In conclusion, the participants presented all three subtheme as a freely follow together always. They told their thinking and responding process as a fore and back path way. They tried to conclude and react to the event which was necessary to deal with underpinning powerlessness, helplessness, and hopelessness. At the beginning, they had to learn from their past history in piece by piece dimension as life's experiences jigsaws and they saved them as mind correction. They always ready and easy brought out to use, but they needed the mediator to link all the prior experiences together. The phenomena of the adjusting for interpreting pattern were contained in their mind and able to lead the behavior of being incarcerated mother.

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