

## SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR GRANDPARENTS CARING FOR CHILDREN OF PRISONERS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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### ABSTRACT

While previous research has looked at grandparent caregivers in developing countries, interest in children of prisoners (CoP) is recent and there is a paucity of data on grandparent families with CoP. Furthermore, previous research has focused largely on the double vulnerability of both carers and children. Cognizant of the challenges faced by these households, this study also presents data on their support systems. The overall study objective was to deepen understanding on the experiences and support systems of grandparent-headed households with CoP. This is a phenomenological case study from Uganda whose data collection method was mainly in-depth interviews with grandparents, their incarcerated children on death row, the children of these prisoners and key informants. The main support system was the grandparents and children themselves. Their relationship is unique in a sense that it is reciprocal in nature and does not usually follow the linear, predictable pattern of relationships between majority of other children and their carers. Other support systems include community, faith, civil society organisations and the imprisoned parents of the children. The support provided by each of these varies in nature, function and frequency. Understanding these would be illuminative to interventions seeking to improve outcomes for grandparents caring for CoP. This paper proposes an adaptation of the Haddon Matrix as a framework for analysis and intervention.

**Keywords:** Children of prisoners, parental incarceration, grandparent carers, kinship care, vulnerable children.

### INTRODUCTION

Incarceration or imprisonment is a rising global phenomenon with severe effects particularly at the household and individual levels (Crain, 2008; Murray & Farrington, 2008). While justice systems serve a very important function in society and many times those incarcerated could have been in contravention of the law, in other cases innocent victims also find themselves behind bars in miscarriages of justice. Although the negative impact of parental incarceration on children had been largely ignored it began drawing attention of researchers, practitioners and policymakers in the mid-1990s (Codd, 1998; Trcie & Brewster, 2004; Jones et al, 2013). As a global issue the problem affects all countries in both developed and developing regions. Studies undertaken in the United States (see for example Clopton & East, 2008) show that in 1999 it was estimated that up to 1.5 million children had a parent in prison (Miller, 2006: 472).

The last few years has seen an increment in the number of prisoners in Uganda (Wells of Hope, 2013; Uganda Prisons, 2012). Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2014) reported at 12.5% increase in the prison population with 56% of inmates being on remand. With the increasing number of prisoners in Uganda, the number of vulnerable children has also increased. This is because the incarcerated people, whether male or female often leave behind dependants who face an uncertain future. Uganda has a total of two hundred and twenty four

(224) prisons. Twenty one (21) of which are women's prisons and two hundred and three (203) are men prisons (Asuagbor et al, 2013) ; 96.2% of these prisons are for males and 3.8% females (Uganda Prisons, 2012). There are over thirty four thousand (34,000) prisoners in Uganda's prisons and it is estimated that on average each inmate has five (5) children (Uganda Prison report, 2012) the majority of who are left in the care of grandparents. The report further indicated that over one hundred and sixty six (166) children are imprisoned with their mothers while others are born in prison. The children stay with their mothers up to the age of eighteen (18) months when they are passed on to the next of kin according to the prison policy (Wells of Hope, 2013).

The children of prisoners are an invisible group in society who are vulnerable to a whole host of challenges which arguably constrain their access to childhood opportunities (Adl et al. 2007; Adalist-Estrin, 2005; Jones & Hirschfield, 2015). Such problems include early marriages, school dropout, delinquency and drug abuse, inadequate care and potential physical abuse amongst others. When not supported, there is a high possibility for children of prisoners to adapt a negative lifestyle in their bid to manage the challenges of their situations (Edwards, 2009). There is a high possibility of becoming socially excluded adopting anti-social behavior with a continuation of a cycle of crime which their parents could have been a part of (Dallaire, 2007; Dallaire & Wilson, 2010). While this cycle might not be obvious or important to some, it is significant and needs to be addressed in a proactive way. Addressing the plight and situation of children of prisoners is in line with the government of Uganda's efforts to improve the situation of children in Uganda (see Republic of Uganda, 2011). Of paramount importance is the effort of the government of Uganda to achieve its social development indicators and meets the targets specified in the NSPPI II 2011/12 2015/16. Yet most policy documents and legislation including the National Strategic Programme Plan of Interventions (NSPPI) for Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) rarely mentions children of prisoners as a particularly vulnerable group. This could possibly be due to the invisibility of the experiences of the children of prisoners and the lack of evidence about their experiences and outcomes.

Children of prisoners constitute arguably one of the most vulnerable but most invisible categories among children in need (see also Kalibala & Elson, 2010 for categorization of other vulnerable children in Uganda). There are even fewer documented interventions targeting and addressing the unique situations of the children of prisoners. Yet left alone without any alternate support or buttressing of the alternative care system, these children are at increased risk of delinquency, vagabondism, substance abuse and limited accessibility to childhood opportunities, education inclusive (Comfort, 2007). Many times, children of prisoners are not told the truth about the circumstances surrounding their parent's incarceration or whereabouts (Adalist & Mustin, 2013:1). As a result children have unending questions and heightened vulnerability in all spheres of life. (Estrin, 2003; Murray, 2005). Many children have been retorted to blame themselves for parental incarceration and also exhibit anti-social tendencies such as withdrawal and self-imposed isolation in the wake of their parent's imprisonment (Stanton, 1980; Murray & Farrington, 2005). This puts restrictions on the extent to which they can get help from any support networks (Adalist & Bass, 1994; Murray & Farrington, 2008).

The support systems for families with an incarcerated members have been noted to be extremely few, more so the impact of incarceration or criminal justice system on children (Adalist, 2003; Wells of Hope 2013). The impact on families impact on families has been negative and characterized by a vicious cycle of increased vulnerability at all phases of the

incarceration process from arrest to imprisonment and even exit which is sometimes followed by re-entry (Adalsist, 2003; Fishman & Alissi, 1979). The impact of incarceration has far reaching implications – most of them negative - on the social and economic stability of the family (Murray & Farrington, 2008). For the children involved, issues around the absence of their parent in their developmental and schooling years will have negative effects for a lifetime. The literature suggests that interventions for children of prisoners are constrained by the limited knowledge about the situations of children of prisoners (see Arditti, et al 2003; Jones, et al, 2013; Foyd, 2015). A review of the literature at the beginning of this study also showed that little had been done both in intervention and research to establish the situation and interventions for children of prisoners in Africa and Uganda in particular. This research therefore provides an important resource base which can be used to support households with children of prisoners (CoP) in Uganda while cognizant of good practices and interventions elsewhere.

## Objectives

The overall aim of this study was “to give representation to the voices of grandparent households with children of prisoners in constructing their own experiences”.

The specific objectives were:

1. To ascertain the magnitude of grandparent households with children of prisoners.
2. To deepen understanding of their subjective experience following incarceration of a family member.
3. To identify their support systems with a view to assessing the availability and viability of these systems
4. To develop a theoretical framework for understanding the care and support of grandparent households with children of prisoners.

## METHODOLOGY

The study (which was largely a situation analysis on CoP) employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study was divided into two phases. In phase one a rapid assessment method involving a quantitative survey tool was used to elicit the necessary information on the magnitude of the situation of CoP in Uganda. The second phase combined both qualitative and quantitative tools to determine certain behavioral and coping mechanisms while trying to understand the children's experiences and those of their grandparents as alternative caregivers.

In order to get a deeper understanding of their lived experiences, the pragmatic decision was made that this study becomes heavily skewed to the qualitative approach in data collection with emphasis towards social constructionism (Schwandt, 2003). An ethnographic research design putting emphasis on the lived experiences of CoP and their grandparent carers was utilized in the current study. Moreover qualitative methods enabled the collection of data pertaining to the impact of parental imprisonment and available support systems or services. For the quantitative strand a survey method using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which has been successful used in similar studies elsewhere, was used after local validation and modification.

Data were collected in the Central region of Uganda. Within the region two districts (Kampala and Luweero) specific districts and sub counties were selected purposively.

Consideration was given to areas with the highest number of prisoners as well as their children. The latter were determined in the first phase of the study. The study sites were in the communities (with CoP, grandparent carers and other key informants) and prisons (with incarcerated parents). Although children were important study respondents at all phases of this study, data were also collected from significant adults in the children's lives and critical resource persons in the study areas. A sample of 45 households took part in this study including children whose parents were in prison, incarcerated parents, grandparent caregivers and some key informants.

Data were analyzed thematic analysis. A variant of thematic analysis known as template analysis (King, 2004) was also utilized at analysis stage for categorization and organization of data. The generated template guided the presentation of the findings based on the major themes and sub themes emerging from the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant local, national and professional institutions as well as local leaders and community gatekeepers. This study adhered to standard ethical procedures and emphasis was put on the three vital aspects of informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity. Study participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study, their right to refuse to participate in the research and that their possible decision not to participate would not be held against them.

Considering that some of the topics (around incarceration, separation or trauma) can be disturbing and might have psychosocial implications, this study put in place mechanisms to manage distress and disclosure. For example senior members of the research team (the majority of who are social workers) could readily draw from their professional resources to provide counselling and psychosocial support. In addition, the study team liaised with locally available psychosocial services beforehand and it was agreed that study participants would be signposted to these services where necessary. However no such incidents and ethical dilemmas were experienced in the actual implementation of the study. Research assistants were provided with training on effectively undertaking the research, including ethical issues like how to manage distress and disclosure.

## **RESULTS**

### **Impact of incarceration**

This study found that there was ill-preparedness for prison by the family members. This includes the prisoners but more so the children and grandparents who did not have much time to prepare for their new role as alternative and full-time caregivers for the children of prisoners. As one of the carers remarked:

*I love my grandchildren and even before this [incarceration] happened, they used to come and visit me. But it happened so quickly and one day they came here crying saying their father had been put in prison and up to now they have been staying here and have never gone back. It has not been easy because I used to live alone but now I have five children to look after*  
(Grandparent)

The children also expressed nearly similar same sentiments regarding the change in their living arrangements within a very short period of time. They were nostalgic while speaking

of the dramatic changes and disruptions to the life they hoped for in the future. This can be seen in an excerpt with one of the children below:

*For me never in my life did I ever dream that my mother would be taken away from me. Okay maybe for death I know that it can happen anytime but prison! I knew that as long as my mother is alive we would always be together... but now she is in prison waiting to die ... I still cannot believe it. So now I live with my grandmother and she is good to us but she even her she did not think this could ever happen* (CoP, Boy)

For the inmates the lack of preparation was mainly related to insufficient material and financial planning for their families before incarceration. The majority of them regretted not having been able to put in place sources of livelihood for their children and new carers:

*It was me who used to provide for them. My mother is very old now so I do not know how they are doing because I do not hear from them anymore, but at least I know they are not dead. If only I had been able to do something before being here... I feel bad about this and the burden I put on my mother, I feel like they [my children and mother] are being punished for my mistakes* (John, 43 years)

The above feeling of parental anxiety and powerlessness was further exacerbated by the behavior and actions of some relatives in the aftermath of parental incarceration. Study participants, particularly grandparents and key informants, reported that property grabbing by the other relatives had robbed them of the resources they desperately needed to care for the children of prisoners as seen in the excerpt below:

*These children's father was not rich but at least he had some few things and some land which could have helped them. He even had a job. But the moment he went to prison his relatives took all his things and even chased his children away. That is why these children are here with me now, they have nothing and nowhere else to go* (Grandparent)

This was confirmed by the inmates who said:

*I fear that my brothers could harm my children due to the property wrangles we had prior to my imprisonment. I am also afraid that the caregivers may one day get tired and give up on my children ... my only prayer is that their children should not suffer the consequences of my actions* (Abdulla, 34 years)

The negative impact of parental imprisonment can be categorized into three stages – immediate, ongoing and long term. Sometimes the way it manifests can cut across the three stages; for example the issue of property grabbing mentioned in the previous paragraph can be both immediate and long term – sometimes even ongoing as the inmate's relatives keep taking one or a few things at a time.

In addition and related to property grabbing the other issue arising from parental incarceration is the lack of resources or reasonable livelihoods in light of carer vulnerability. All the grandparents who participated in this study – and this is largely representative of the reality of other grandparent carers elsewhere – reported to struggling to have their basic needs met as well as those of the children under their care. Most of the grandparent carers do not enough the energy and skills to undertake income-generating activities but have continued doing their best to care for the children. However this weighs heavily on them as seen below:

*Because of the high stress I have of being old and having to look after all of these children I have suffered from a lot of diseases. I have to work extra hard and sacrifice*



*taking care of myself at my aging life to taking care of these five children. It has resulted into diseases like ulcers and high blood pressure ... I am sickly most of the time and when I am sick it is the children who take care of me* (Grandparent)

Some of the work done by grandparent carers to support children of prisoners includes vending goods (especially foodstuff) on the roads, cooking, cleaning, and digging in the gardens and many more. Uganda has a predominantly agricultural economy with over 86% of its population residing in rural areas and most living below the poverty line. The nature of agriculture done by most Ugandans is quasi-subsistence farming from which many also try to earn a living; however not much is left over for sale.

Children of prisoners are heavily involved in the work done at household level and provide their grandparent carers with the complementary labour needed to work and have some form of livelihood. They dig, vend foodstuff like bananas or groundnuts, cook, clean and also care for their ailing grandparents. In addition to providing complementary labour to support their households, many children have taken on formal employment where they do all sorts of work at extremely low rates of payment.

*After doing all the work at home many of us, especially the old ones, go to work so that we can also help. It is very hard because sometimes you are not even paid and when you are paid it is very little money you work hard for... but it helps somehow. But the problem is that when you are working you are very tired and sometimes you have to forget about school because you cannot work and then go to school at the same time* (CoP, Girl)

*For me at home my grandparents they cannot manage even my uncles and aunties can't because they have their own diseases so I go and work and get money* (CoP, Boy)

Children also mentioned the difficulty of realizing educational achievement in low- standard schools which would not have been the case if their parents were not in prison.

*When my father was imprisoned my performance was greatly affected because I joined a government school* (CoP, Boy)

The above two excerpts highlight some key issues for children of prisoners including the limited access to educational opportunities and the notion of child labour. Most children of prisoners, a distinct category under the famous 'Orphans and Vulnerable Children' (OVC) label, continue to be at an educational disadvantage in terms of both school enrollment and educational attainment (Boler & Carroll, 2003; Case et al, 2003, Seruwagi et al, 2012). Research has shown that schools and teachers are critical to the development of OVC, especially in the wake of their loss or separation from parents. The school system also provides an opportunity to provide psychosocial support - one of the needs of OVC that is most often neglected in favour of meeting critical material, economic, nutritional and other physical needs (2003; Smart, 2003). In spite of the advantages associated with being in school and its integral function to child development and well-being, this function has not been optimally achieved for most children of prisoners due to low enrollment levels.

Even among those already enrolled statistics show that they drop out of school at a higher rate in both primary and secondary schools (Boler & Carroll, 2003; Operario et al., 2008). Older male OVC are more likely to be at risk of being overloaded with domestic and farm work. As their workload increases, the time spent on schoolwork decreases, and dropping out of school becomes inevitable. Female OVC particularly those aged between 5 and 12 years are at a greater risk of missing out on education as they are in demand as domestic servants

for families with young children in urban centres. By contrast, older female OVC tend to drop out of school to marry early, sometimes as early as the age of 15 (Oleke et al., 2006). Researchers have warned that declines in school enrolment and completion rates resulting from parental death, illness or incapacity have the potential to reduce not only the living standards of a large number of sub-Saharan African children throughout their lives, but also slow growth and development at national and regional level (Case et al., 2004; Seruwagi, 2012:41).

Another loss brought on by incarceration is that of fractured relationships and disintegration of families. Some spouses have chosen to leave the children following incarceration; this is most common when the person incarcerated is the breadwinner or has committed a crime that some family members may want to disassociate themselves with. The excerpt below sheds further light on this:

*These children you see here have been abandoned by their mother. As soon as the husband went to prison imprisoned she [wife] abandoned them with me here. It is not just mine [grandchildren] alone; many mothers have abandoned their children to remarry or look for jobs. Out of fear for responsibility they leave the children so these children have not only lost their father but now also their mother is gone... it is very bad for them*  
(Grandparent)

It is important to understand the reported maternal ‘abandonment’ with the broader context that these families are embedded. Some of the related issues include a heavily patriarchal traditional society with its related cultural norms which largely disempower women and the prevailing property wrangles which that leave many mothers with no choice but to leave. However this does not detract from the fact that some women just leave their children in search for a better life elsewhere.

The loss of important people and networks for grandparent households with children of prisoners is closely linked to the loss of their previous identity. The loss of identity and self-worth can be seen in the way families lose respect, the elderly move from being looked after by their adult children to becoming full-time carers for their grandchildren and how children start worrying survival to take on adult roles. Imprisonment of a family member has been reported to bring about societal stigma and indifference which has a negative impact as shown in the excerpt below:

*You see because of the crime many people do not want to associate with us ... sometimes the crime has been against fellow community members so it is like a curse. The good thing is that most of us (grandparents) do not live in the same village so what actually helps the children is that they have to move away from their former homes to live with us in another place otherwise it can be very hard for them because no one wants them*  
(Grandparent)

This was confirmed from other sources:

*When someone is put in prison, a mark is put on his or her children that makes them stand out prominently making it easy for people in the community to identify and associate them with the imprisonment and consequently they become shunned, these young children are made to look like an effigy of the absent parent* (Key informant)

The negative impact of incarceration on families is perhaps not as surprising given that previous research (for example Jones et al, 2013; Murray et al, 2012; Murray, 2005) has shown this link. However there is a new twist to this for settings like sub-Saharan Africa and Uganda in particular where a number of factors such as HIV/AIDS, urbanization, migration and poverty have already brought about an aberration of the traditional family setting (Mavise, 2008; Skovdal, 2009). In Uganda there is a local saying that “*it takes the whole village to raise a child*” and traditionally all children with some form of vulnerability would be easily absorbed by the extended family system; however the above-mentioned factors have increasingly eroded the capacity of the extended family to effectively care for vulnerable children – and parental incarceration only adds to the complexity and confirmation of this.

### Support systems

In light of the above lived experiences, this study sought to understand the support systems drawn from by grandparent households with children of prisoners. Study participants pointed to both internal and external sources of support at the household, community, national and even celestial level. Support systems are largely idiosyncratic and the perspectives of study participants just present the unique way they perceive their social world. Grandparent households get various types of support from different sources; and in this study support systems were looked at using a functional and structural approach.

The first and most important source of support for the grandparents was the children and vice versa. Nearly all such households have extremely close relationships which are reciprocal in nature.

*Our grandmother loves us and she does all she can to provide for us. There are also other things she does like telling us nice stories, taking us for prayers and teaching us to become better people in society. Because of my grandmother I have hope that I will one day become someone who is useful to society like a doctor* (CoP, Girl)

These sentiments were echoed by the grandparents:

*I think if it was not for these children I would be dead by now... because when my son was taken away it broke my heart and I did not know what would happen next. But his children gave me strength, and I did not have time to start feeling sorry for myself. They [children] helped me to pull myself together and be strong so that I can look after them. I am still weak as you can see, but when I do not have energy these children do all the work and nurse me until I am well again* (Grandparent)

Previous research (see for example Mavise, 2009; Skovdal & Campbell, 2011) has highlighted the role vulnerable children play and the need for them to be seen not only as recipients of care but also givers of care. This study further found that children are not only a major support for their elderly caregivers but also for their incarcerated parents – they remain a major link and incarcerated parents mentioned being more attached to the children than the caregivers and drawing inspiration to become better people because of the children they left behind. The support grandparents and children give each other is on-going and all-encompassing covering physical, material, social and emotional needs.

Some study participants mentioned receiving some support from other members of their extended family who did not live with them. The support received from these relatives was in the form of meeting financial or materials needs such as paying school fees, buying scholastic



materials, food and clothing. Some participants mentioned that these relatives occasionally help take the children or their elderly caretakers to the hospital when in need of medical attention as seen below:

*These children live in bad shelter conditions and they get jiggers yet their grandparents cannot help them because of poor eye sight and besides they cannot afford medical treatment for themselves or the children. We appreciate some relatives who have taken responsibility by helping the elderly grandparents by taking these children to clinics for treatment when sick... only those who are willing but these are very few*  
(Key informant)

The issue of extended family members being involved in care for children and their elderly relatives is not new. Previously the traditional set up was where relatives each had a home in the same homestead and most activities undertaken communally for example eating or working in the gardens. Older relatives also helped the younger ones to learn about their culture and tradition in line with socialization. Families subscribed to the fundamental principle of joint responsibility in the care of children. However as already mentioned this traditional arrangement has been affected by many factors and evolved. Presently many extended family members so not live in the same geographical location and this, in addition to other factors like poverty, makes it difficult for them to support their relatives. The nature of their support is therefore restricted to certain forms such as sending money or material things and it becomes almost impossible to perform the day-to-day support roles like socialization or helping children with school work. Elsewhere these relatives have been referred to as “invisible carers” (Seruwagi, 2012) whose much-needed support is usually insufficient and intermittent.

Grandparent-headed households with OVC also mentioned faith as a key support system. Many of them hold on to belief in a higher power and hope for the future. As one participant mentioned:

*We look to God, what else can you do? It is God who gives us strength for every day. And only God knows what will happen to us tomorrow – whether we shall have food to eat or not, whether these children will go to school or be somebody useful in future ... it is only God who knows so we just pray and trust Him*  
(Grandparent)

Faith or religion can be better understood when one considers the message of hope it usually gives its followers and also the fact that it is open to all and does not exclude anyone. It therefore makes sense that, in light of their difficult circumstances, grandparent households with children of prisoners draw from their faith. Related to this is the fact that having the same belief system usually draws people together for fellowship so in this case it is possible that these households get common ground with other people – in the community and beyond – with whom they can share and get further support from. Faith is also an on-going support system which mainly meets spiritual and emotional needs but also spreads out to the social and even material needs occasionally.

Another support system is the community within which these households live. While the word “community” might mean different things, study participants seemed to confine it more to a geographical layout and the people therein. The leaders and members of the communities were noted to be supportive:

*People here are not bad, they know these children but it is just because most people are poor and trying to get something to eat that they cannot help us much. Sometimes a person can give you food like cassava when they have enough but this is very rare,*

*these days the gardens do not produce much food. But the people are good and understanding ever since the children came to live with me* (Grandparent)

The above excerpt sheds further light on the notion of community support which is largely social and material but is also integral to the identity of its members. We see that community support is much needed yet insufficient and this has partly been explained by the range of factors like poverty which have threatened and eroded the effective execution of the traditional community role as has always been the case in African traditional society. In fact issues like incarceration make matters more complex for the community to offer support because some children reported being stigmatized:

*Okay the people in this village are not bad but sometimes some of them call you names or you hear them whispering "that is the child of so-and-so who is in prison" so sometimes the children do not want to play with you or they laugh at you and you feel bad. It does not happen very much here, but if we had stayed at our former home some people had vowed to burn our house* (CoP, Boy)

From the above excerpt it is clear that communities give refuge to children of prisoners but this is usually a different community from which they previously lived before their parent's incarceration.

Finally civil society organisations were mentioned as being supportive, and specifically study participants mentioned two NGOs – the Red Cross Society was mentioned for previously helping families make contact with their incarcerated relatives but is now defunct. Study participants mostly mentioned a local NGO as their key support network helping them meet their physical, social, emotional and even educational needs:

*If it was not for Wells of Hope I would not be here because I thought my future had gone just like that. But they [Wells of Hope] came and started helping us and my grandmother, they put in in this school [Wells of Hope Academy] and now I have a bright future. They also take us to visit our parents in prison and take our letters when we cannot go. I am very happy now and I thank them very much* (CoP, Girl)

It is interesting to note that some expected support systems - for example other rights activists or the government - were not mentioned by the study participants. This could partly be explained by the fact that these largely operate in the background, for example on advocacy or policy issues, and because of this they do not interface much with this study's primary participants; as such they are not known or perceived to be helping because study participants mostly focus on the on the visible, tangible and material aspects of support. However the reality could also be that these other support systems are simply not giving much support to grandparent households with children of prisoners as seen in one key informant's opinion of the community's response to government's action or the lack of it:

*People in Uganda don't trust government's judicial system and the backlog in its courts, the system is lame right from police fueling violent mob justice which is rising every day. People take the law into their hands, even when the state successfully convicts someone, the people in the community still feel unsatisfied with the justice, so they extend revenge to the family members and the first victims are the children of the offender. They will burn the house, slaughter his/her animals, cut down plantations, and destroy everything* (Key informant)

## DISCUSSION

A number of issues emerge from the findings of this study. One of such issues is the shifting relational dimensions between grandparents and children following incarceration and its potential impact which is likely to be negative in because of the harsh socioeconomic environment within which they live and limited support networks. For example children move from being the occasional visitor to their grandparent's home to becoming fulltime household members. This would not be a problem if one of the other factors remained constant – that both the children and their grandparents had the support (physical, material, financial and social) of the now-incarcerated family member. In the absence of this tensions are bound to build in the relationship and it becomes fragile. Another illustration of the evolving relationship is children moving from being members of a nuclear family supported by the extended to geographically relocating to their grandparent's home; some of them move from being cared for by maternal grandparents to maternal grandparents – some of whom they might not have had a strong relationship with prior. The shifting identities of both children and grandparents from being looked after [by the now-incarcerated family members] to becoming the givers of care [for each other] raises critical issues in their well-being and the need for strong support networks.

It is important to note while grandparent households with children of prisoners have many similarities and shared experiences such as having limited resources and support systems, they also have diverse experiences. The first major distinction is closely related with the nature of crime. The community's response and the other support networks these households draw from is largely contingent on this, for example if the incarcerated family member committed a capital offence and is on death row, the family is likely to have fewer support networks at all levels. Table 1 overleaf provides a summary of existing support systems:

	Support system		Needs met	Nature
1.	Children / Grandparents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receivers &amp; givers of care</li> <li>• Link to incarcerated member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physical</li> <li>▪ Material</li> <li>▪ Social</li> <li>▪ Emotional</li> </ul>	On-going All-encompassing
2.	Extended family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School fees</li> <li>• Clothing, etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial</li> <li>▪ Physical</li> <li>▪ Material</li> </ul>	Intermittent
3.	Community	Collective responsibility in care for vulnerable members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Material</li> <li>▪ Social</li> <li>▪ Material</li> </ul>	Insufficient, Complicated *At times vindictive
4.	Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Comfort, fellowship,</li> <li>▪ Hope, assurance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Spiritual</li> <li>▪ Emotional</li> </ul>	On-going
5.	Civil society organisations (NGOs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family-like function*<sup>1</sup></li> <li>▪ Linkages to prison</li> <li>▪ Advocacy</li> <li>▪ Resource mobilisation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Physical</li> <li>▪ Social</li> <li>▪ Emotional</li> <li>▪ Educational</li> </ul>	Periodic, On-going
6.	Government* <sup>2</sup>	Policy	-	Invisible ? Detached?

**Table 1: Support Systems for Grandparent-headed homes with Children of Prisoners**

The other issue is that the majority of this study's participants had some form of support with a local NGO and are in fact considered to be relatively well taken care of – on one extreme other households do not have any support at all while some few grandparents might be wealthy and supported, able to care for children without much strain. Furthermore, irrespective of their socioeconomic status children of prisoners living with their grandparents have more loving relationships and suffer less abuse compared to those living with other much-younger relatives such as uncles, aunts or step-parents.

### **Haddon's Matrix: A Framework for Analysis and Action**

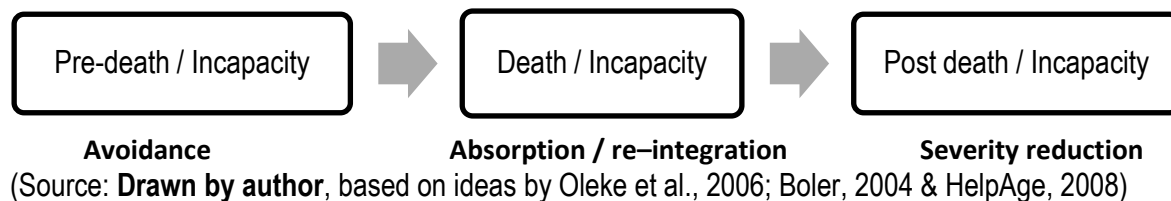
The findings of this study show that all family members – including the inmates - were not prepared for prison. Yet the impact of incarceration on the family is severe on all family members and curtails the possibility of having their multiple needs met. Some of the effects include family disintegration, societal stigma, living in extreme impoverished conditions and generally having poor outcomes in all areas of life – especially for grandparents and the children under their care. Support systems of these families were presented including their availability, efficacy and limitations and a key issue is that not only are these support systems few but some are also inconsistent and with inherent limitations.

Cognizant of this and in line with principles of protecting vulnerable people it becomes important to have a framework to mitigate the negative impact of incarceration on these households. We propose the adaptation of Haddon's matrix (1980) as a framework for analysis and action. Building on the limitations of existing support systems for grandparent households with children of prisoners, this proposed framework provides a practical approach to not only understanding but also supporting these households. It is cognizant of the strained community capacity or social rupture theory to provide support; the framework also aligns itself with, and supports, national policy and cherished cultural values that the extended family and community should be the first line of response (Seruwagi, 2012; Chirwa, 2013).

### **Background to the conceptual framework**

A number of theoretical orientations are evident in research on vulnerable populations like children and the elderly, reflecting the various interests of the researchers and disciplines concerned. No single paradigm can therefore claim to address all the possible theoretical and research interests in the study of marginalized populations; instead, a multi-faceted orientation is necessary with various researchers and disciplines contributing their perspectives to lead to a better understanding of the various dimensions on this topic. This is invaluable in the search for better understanding and more effective interventions (Seruwagi, 2012:54).

One useful theoretical framework (Haddon, 1980) provides insight into how the experience of grandparent households with children of prisoners can be looked at as a sequential event that has three phases with varying levels of vulnerability at each. The Haddon Matrix is a commonly used paradigm in the field of epidemiology, particularly in injury prevention and infection control. Developed by William Haddon in 1970, the matrix looks at factors related to personal, agent, and environmental attributes before, during and after a critical event such as incarceration or death. Utilising this framework enables one to evaluate the relative importance of different factors and design appropriate interventions at each stage as illustrated in Figure 1 below:

**Figure 1: Haddon's Matrix**

We argue that the *grandparent-with-children-of-prisoners* experience is one that is experienced – and can be appropriately responded to – at three different phases. These three phases are **i)** the pre-incarceration phase; **ii)** the incarceration phase and **iii)** the post-incarceration phase. Each of these three phases requires unique approaches and responses from a diversity of actors at different levels right from individual and household to the global level as aptly illustrated by the the ecological systems model (Bronfenbrenner, 1999; 1989) which is widely used as a key to understanding human behaviour by focusing on people, systems and nested relationships within their environment.

This perspective looks at not only the events that precede the incarceration but also what happens during and after in order to improve the resulting impacts such as land grabbing, school dropout and family breakdown (Oleke et al, 2006; Boler & Aggleton, 2001). Each of the three phases identified has specific characteristics and implications for policy and programming. The first or pre-incarceration phase is the process that precedes the incident. Underlying circumstances that may lead to the occurrence of incarceration include issues at the structural level for example poverty or unemployment and those at personal level such as engaging in criminal activities, anger and unresolved conflict, property wrangles or heavy drinking. This phase exacerbates the problem and there is a possibility that any of the preceding factors can be improved upon or managed to avoid incarceration and its effects, for example by emphasizing responsible living and some form of investment among adults with dependents or resolving conflict. The second phase moves from potentiality to actuality and may include death (for those on death row) or incarceration of the family breadwinner. A major concern at this phase will be how the severity of the incident affects the persons involved – who, in this case, are their children and elderly parents. At this stage there will be concerns around whether or not they will survive this, live or die in dignity – the study findings show them to live in extremely impoverished situations with limited support. The post – incarceration phase is the aftermath. The concern at this stage is with trying to absorb children, support elderly parents and give them some semblance of normalcy. The success of this phase largely depends on the capacity of existing support systems and resources. Haddon's sequential (phases) framework offers the possibility of looking not only at the risk factors or generative forces associated with incarceration but also to examine the preparedness and efficiency of existing structures and systems in coping with and effectively dealing with them. Such a broad-based focus will go a long way to address both underlying causes and also reduce the magnitude of the negative impact it could possibly have on the children and their grandparent carers (Seruwagi, 2012:236).

### **Implications for Policy and Programming**

Having presented the incarceration and grandparent childcare phenomenon as a sequential event with three phases and varying levels of vulnerability at each, this holistic perspective can be used in policy and programming to mitigate the potential negative impact on households. The issue of timing and response is critical here; in other words the most



appropriate interventions should be needs-based, appropriate and relevant to the timing at which households are. This represents reflective interventions that will ensure efficacy as opposed to interventions that are random or technically expedient for policymakers and implementers. Table 2 below illustrates an application of the proposed matrix:

Haddon Matrix Applied					
	Phase	Drivers	Impact	Possible Solutions	Who/Level?
1	Pre-Incarceration	<b>Structural level</b> -Poverty -Unemployment --Urbanization etc  <b>Community &amp; Household level</b> -Moral degeneration -Dysfunctional systems for law and order -Family breakdown,etc  <b>Person level</b> -Anger -Unresolved conflict, etc	Criminal behaviour	<b>Preventive &amp; Cushionary Interventions</b>  - Job creation - Advocacy - Risk awareness - Anti-violence campaigns - Protective family measures - IGA* investment - Writing wills - Forming relationships with alternative caregivers, etc	<b>Micro-Macro</b>  ✓ Individuals ✓ Household members ✓ Community leaders ✓ National level leaders ✓ Global community
2	Incarceration	Ref to Phase 1	Family disintegration Dependent impoverishment Community backlash, etc	- Psychosocial support - Transitional caregiving - Invoke wills - Reap from IGA, etc	
3	Post-Incarceration	Ref to phases 1 and 2		- Mobilise community support - Support elderly parents - Absorb children - Leverage on household resilience & competences,etc <i>*Largely dependent on existing systems &amp; resources</i>	

\*IGA – Income Generating Activities

The first or pre-incarceration phase is the process that precedes the incident. Although this phase exacerbates the problem there is the possibility that any of the preceding factors can be improved or managed to avoid household vulnerability. Interventions at the pre-incarceration stage can be both preventive and cushionary and should be undertaken by different stakeholders including the government, community leaders, members and institutions like schools, civil society organisations and media. Examples of preventive measures include increasing risk awareness for example of the dangers of unresolved anger or engaging in activities considered criminal, encouraging protective family measures such as investments for children plus other dependents and writing wills with clear indication of resource allocation and management in the case of parental death or incapacity. Other measures include encouraging children interaction with their future carers while still under the care of their parents; integrating life skills in their learning processes as well as training and

supporting the significant adults like teachers, community leaders or potential carers. The possible measures that could be undertaken demonstrate linkages between the phased approach and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model which shows various actors at different levels. It also positions children and grandparents at the centre of interventions.

The second (incarceration) phase shifts the position from potential to actual vulnerability and households usually react with shock, anxiety or denial. Interventions at this stage include providing material support, supporting children's relationships with their new grandparent carers thereby involving them in the transition process as well as providing psychosocial support which is directly linked to and builds on identified coping mechanisms.

The post-incarceration phase is the aftermath. The concern at this stage is with trying to absorb children and giving them some semblance of normalcy following the incarceration of their parents. The success of this phase largely depends on the robustness and capacity of the extended family or institutional support available and of great concern is the availability of resources (physical, material, psychosocial and other) to use in supporting households in this phase. It touches on the preparedness and efficiency of communities to deal with the effects of incarceration after it has occurred. Because children and their grandparent caregivers are most vulnerable at this stage, the interventions here should tap into their agency and/or resilience<sup>1</sup>, develop their competencies and support their aspirations. It is at the post-incarceration stage that the protective family measures undertaken at the pre-incarceration stage, such as investments and income-generating activities, can be most useful and should be enforced. In addition, the implementation of other protective systems and structures such as child protection procedures or support for the elderly becomes critical to their positive transition, survival and ultimately well-being. The efficacy of interventions targeting grandparent households (for example by providing them with income generating activities<sup>2</sup>) and communities<sup>3</sup> is largely unquestionable at this stage (Seruwagi, 2012:242).

## CONCLUSIONS

The plight of grandparent households with children of prisoners remains largely unknown inspite of its severity on all the people involved. In addition to other factors, the complex nature of crime and vulnerability of in-mate dependents has tested the capacity of the existing support systems which are few. Although the effect of incarceration has been regarded more as a personal or family matter the overt and covert reactions towards these households indicate otherwise, confirm that it is indeed a major problem with negative impact at all levels and demand for a paradigm shift to address it. This paper posits that the incarceration experience is phased and its effects can be successfully mitigated by integrating preventive and proactive measures as demonstrated by the application of one such robust framework for intervention in research, policy and practice.

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<sup>1</sup> This, however, does not eradicate the need for agency and/or resilience to be recognized and utilized at the preceding stages.

<sup>2</sup> These IGAs would supplement support or resources put in place by the incarcerated family member if any.

<sup>3</sup> To address the issue of societal stigma and indifference.

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