



Exploring the Effects of Parental Incarceration on Children's Welfare in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

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Abstract. The study examines the effects of parental incarceration on the welfare of their children in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, focusing specifically on their educational continuity and health status. A descriptive survey research design was employed, collecting primary data from a purposive sample of 110 children of incarcerated parents aged 12 to 21 years residing in Benin City. Data analysis included descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (regression analysis/t-test). The study found a strong agreement among respondents regarding the negative consequences of parental incarceration. The demographic data showed that the incarcerated parent was the father for the overwhelming majority (95.5%) of the respondents. Specifically, the hypothesis testing confirmed two significant findings that Parental incarceration has a significant relationship with educational continuity of their children in Benin City and that the loss of a breadwinner due to incarceration significantly affect the health status of their children in Benin City, Edo State. The study concludes that parental incarceration and the resultant loss of a breadwinner significantly disrupt the educational continuity and health status of their children in Benin City. The findings underscore the role of financial necessity and trauma in compounding children's vulnerability. Recommendations include policy interventions like establishing emergency welfare funds to cover school fees and healthcare, integrating child support mandates into the criminal justice system, and implementing community support programmes such as expanded counselling services and microfinance loans for extended family caregivers. Ultimately, the work advocates for integrated interventions to mitigate the detrimental effects of parental incarceration in Nigeria.

1. Introduction

The significant rise in global incarceration rates in recent decades has generated urgent social anxiety regarding the collateral consequences of imprisonment, specifically the ripple effects on families. Children of incarcerated parents are particularly vulnerable, facing elevated risks of malnutrition, poor health, educational disruption, inadequate shelter, and psychological instability. These adverse outcomes, collectively known as the "spillover effect," demonstrate that parental incarceration extends far beyond the criminal justice system to significantly impact child welfare, thereby demanding rigorous research, policy focus, and intervention measures (Pettit & Western, 2004; Turney & Haskins, 2019). The magnitude of this crisis is underscored by studies suggesting that millions of children globally suffer from familial disruptions due to a parent's imprisonment (Geller et al., 2009). In this study, parental incarceration is conceptualized as the physical confinement of a parent within the criminal justice or correctional system, a separation that effectively severs the emotional bond and parental caregiving capacity (Murray & Farrington, 2005). Child welfare is viewed here as a multidimensional construct comprising education, nutrition, physical health, shelter security, and psychological well-being—elements essential for healthy child development (Gilbert et al., 2011). The interdependence of these factors implies that structural family changes, such as parental incarceration, jeopardize the child's overall welfare. Psychological stability is notably susceptible, with children frequently enduring anxiety, depression, and social stigmatization in the wake of imprisonment (Poehlmann-Tynan & Turney, 2020).

Studies both globally and within Africa highlights the intricate relationship between parental incarceration and child welfare. Evidence suggests that parental

imprisonment is associated with poorer educational outcomes, compromised nutritional and health status, unsecured housing, and heightened psychological distress (Geller et al., 2009; Poehlmann-Tynan & Turney, 2020). In the Nigerian landscape, specifically within Benin City, Edo State, these impacts are potentially intensified by systemic issues within correctional centers, such as overcrowding, poor infrastructure, and inadequate rehabilitation programs (Adefisoye & Adejumo, 2024; San, 2024). The Nigerian Correctional Service faces significant obstacles in maintaining humane conditions, which exacerbates the socio-economic fragility of families. Furthermore, the scarcity of social safety nets leaves caregivers grappling with financial hardship and insufficient support (Ogunbosi et al., 2022).

Consequently, this study aims to bridge the gap in empirical data regarding the impact of parental incarceration on child welfare in Benin City, Edo State. By examining dimensions such as education, nutrition, health, shelter, and psychological stability, the research intends to illuminate the socio-economic and psychological challenges faced by these children. The objective is to inform policymakers, child welfare agencies, and correctional bodies, facilitating holistic rehabilitation systems that prioritize child well-being. Ultimately, this work advocates for integrated interventions to mitigate the detrimental effects of parental incarceration in Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The concept of “invisible victims” draws attention to a disparity in academic and policy discourse, which predominantly focuses on offenders while overlooking the dependents of incarcerated individuals, specifically their children (Turney & Haskins, 2019). Although these children endure the unintended socio-economic and psychological burdens associated with parental imprisonment, their plight is frequently marginalized within public policy and social welfare frameworks. Consequently, this lack of visibility results in inadequate interventions that is insufficient to meet the multifaceted needs of this vulnerable demographic (Ogunbosi et al., 2022).

In the specific context of Benin City, Edo State, where fragmented family structures and urban poverty are widespread, these issues become increasingly complex. Due to pervasive economic hardships, unstable living conditions, and restricted access to quality education, children of incarcerated parents are acutely susceptible to the deprivation of critical welfare components, including health care, nutrition, shelter stability, and psychological support (Adefisoye

& Adejumo, 2024). The urban context of Benin City exacerbates the socio-economic disadvantages faced by these children, who are often forced to rely on extended family networks that may be ineffective or overburdened in their caregiving capacities (San, 2024).

While there is emerging literature on parental incarceration in major Nigerian hubs like Lagos and Abuja, a distinct gap remains in empirical research concerning Edo State, specifically regarding family support systems and cultural dynamics (Ogunbosi et al., 2022). This scarcity of localized data leads to a significant knowledge deficit regarding how children in Benin City manage the compounded stresses of imprisonment within their distinct economic milieu and socio-cultural environment (Poehlmann-Tynan & Turney, 2020). Bridging this gap is essential, as broad national studies often fail to adequately reflect the nuanced experiences and coping mechanisms specific to children in Edo State.

Consequently, this study aims to critically investigate the effects of parental incarceration on child welfare in Benin City, examining dimensions of education, nutrition, health, shelter, and psychological stability. The research seeks to expose the invisible plight of these children, offering evidence to drive localized policy reforms and contributing contextualized insights to the Nigerian literature required for the formulation of holistic social protection strategies.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To examine the extent to which parental incarceration affects the educational continuity of children in Benin City, Edo State.
- To investigate how the loss of a breadwinner due to parental incarceration influences the health status of children in Benin City, Edo State.

1.3 Research Hypotheses

- There is no significant relationship between parental incarceration and the educational continuity of children in Benin City.
- The loss of a breadwinner due to incarceration does not significantly affect the health status of children in Benin City, Edo State.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as its primary theoretical foundation, utilized here to analyze how parental incarceration reshapes the child's developmental environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) posits that human development occurs within nested environmental systems, extending from immediate settings like the family and school (microsystem and mesosystem) to broader societal structures, including community institutions and laws (exosystem and macrosystem).

Within this framework, parental incarceration acts as a severe disruption originating in the exosystem specifically the legal and correctional systems which permeates and destabilizes the mesosystem (the interconnections between immediate environments). This systemic disturbance negatively impacts caregiving arrangements and family-school relationships, which are fundamental for ensuring educational stability, emotional support, and general child welfare (Tudge et al., 2009).

In the specific context of Benin City, this theory elucidates how external institutional decisions regarding imprisonment degrade the primary environments responsible for nurturing children, thereby impairing their material and psycho-social well-being. Furthermore, the framework highlights the significance of the macrosystem, encompassing the cultural and societal context of Edo State. Here, societal attitudes toward imprisonment and family responsibilities dictate the resources available to children and shape their lived experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Acknowledging these intersecting environments provides a holistic view of how the effects of incarceration cascade through various levels to influence child welfare outcomes.

To augment this ecological perspective, Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST) is applied to provide a psychological and behavioral explanation for the reactions of children impacted by parental incarceration. GST suggests that youth experience strain when they endure the loss of positively valued

stimuli (e.g., parental presence) or confront negative stimuli (e.g., poverty, family instability, and stigmatization) (Agnew, 1992). This strain precipitates negative emotions such as anxiety, anger, and frustration, which may manifest in maladaptive behaviors including aggression, withdrawal, or academic disengagement (Agnew, 2006).

When applied to Benin City, GST helps clarify why children of incarcerated parents often display emotional and behavioral difficulties; the breakdown of social support systems and family structure creates persistent psychological stressors. Additionally, the theory accounts for social and economic disadvantages such as reduced household income and community stigmatization—which are widespread in the city's urban poor communities (Turney & Haskins, 2019). These compounded strains compromise the children's ability to cope, necessitating an analysis of both individual psychological resilience and the efficacy of social support mechanisms offered by extended family networks (Poehlmann-Tynan & Turney, 2020).

By integrating Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach with Agnew's strain theory, this study establishes a multidisciplinary framework capable of capturing both systemic environmental disruptions and internal psychological responses. This comprehensive perspective is essential for formulating child-centered policies and intervention strategies that address the specific structural and emotional dimensions of parental incarceration in Benin City, Edo State.

3. Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of children of ex-offenders aged 12 years to 21 years residing in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. Primary data were collected from a sample size of 110 respondents, who were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The data analysis involved both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

4. Result and Discussions

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are hereby presented:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Sex	Male	69	62.7
	Female	41	37.3
	TOTAL	110	100.0
Age	12 – 14 years	27	24.5
	15–17 years	34	30.9
	18 - 21 years	49	44.5
	TOTAL	110	100.0
Current Level of Education	Primary School	6	5.5
	Junior Secondary School	31	28.2
	Senior Secondary School	45	40.9
	Tertiary Education	28	25.5
	TOTAL	110	100.0
Relationship of the Incarcerated Parent to You	Father	105	95.5
	Mother	5	4.5
	TOTAL	110	100.0
How Long Has Your Parent Been Incarcerated?	Less than 6 months	7	6.4
	6 months to 1 year	18	16.4
	1 to 2 years	45	40.9
	More than 2 years	40	36.4
	TOTAL	110	100.0

Source: Researcher's Field Work (2026)

The following is a descriptive statistical explanation of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, based on the data presented in Table 1. The study involved a total sample size of 110 respondents.

In terms of sex distribution, male respondents constitute the majority, accounting for 62.7%, while female respondents make up 37.3% of the sample. The age distribution reveals that the largest category of respondents falls within the 18-21 years age bracket, representing 44.5%. The second largest group is the 15-17 years age group, with 30.9%. The youngest category, 12-14 years, accounts for 24.5%. With respect to the current level of education, the highest percentage is in Secondary Senior School, with 40.9%. The next highest is Secondary Junior School, representing 28.2%. Respondents currently in Tertiary Education account for 25.5%, while the smallest group is those in Primary School, making up 5.5%. In terms of respondents' relationship with the incarcerated parent, the overwhelming majority of respondents reported that the incarcerated parent was their father, accounting for 95.5%, while only 4.5% of the respondents reported the incarcerated parent as their mother. As regard the duration of parental incarceration, the longest duration category, 1 to 2 years, holds the highest percentage of respondents, at 40.9%. The second highest category is more than 2 years, with 36.4%. The 6 months to 1 year duration accounts for 16.4%, while the shortest duration, less than 6 months, is the smallest category, representing 6.4%

Table 2: Respondents' Perception of Parental Incarceration

S/N	Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean	SD DEV
		No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)		
Q1	The frequency with which I have missed school days has increased since my parent was incarcerated.	5	4.5	9	8.2	9	8.2	37	33.6	50	45.5	4.07	1.13
Q2	Managing the cost of my tuition/school materials has evolved into a major problem since my parent's incarceration.	4	3.6	10	9.1	9	8.2	38	34.5	49	44.5	4.07	1.11
Q3	There has been a measurable decline in my academic performance since my parent was sent to prison.	4	3.6	9	8.2	6	5.5	42	38.2	49	44.5	4.12	1.07
Q4	Following my parent's incarceration, I was forced to drop out of school or transfer to a less expensive school/program.	3	2.7	11	10.0	9	8.2	37	33.6	50	45.5	4.09	1.09
Q5	Since the incarceration, my access to necessary educational resources (e.g., internet, books) has decreased.	5	4.5	12	10.9	7	6.4	50	45.5	36	32.7	3.91	1.11
	Grand Mean											4.05	1.10

Researcher's Field Work (2026)

Table 2 reveals that with a Grand Mean of 4.05 and an SD of 1.10, there is a strong agreement among respondents regarding the negative consequences of parental incarceration on various aspects of their schooling. The most highly agreed-upon statement was the measurable decline in academic performance (Q3), which registered the highest mean in Table 2 at 4.12 (SD 1.07). This suggests that a drop in school results is the most intensely felt educational consequence. Closely following this was the agreement that the need to manage the cost of tuition and school materials has evolved into a major problem (Q2) and that the frequency of missed school days has increased (Q1), both scoring a mean of 4.07 (SD 1.11 and 1.13, respectively). Furthermore, a mean of 4.09 (SD 1.09) indicated agreement that they were forced to drop out of school or transfer to a less expensive school/programme (Q4). The statement concerning the decrease in access to necessary educational resources (Q5) showed the lowest level of agreement in Table 2, yet still registered an "Agree" rating with a mean of 3.91 (SD 1.11).

Table 3: Respondents' Perception of Educational Continuity

S/N	Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean	SD DEV
		No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)		
Q6	I feel less motivated to continue my education specifically because of my parent's absence.	4	3.6	11	10.0	8	7.3	40	36.4	47	42.7	4.05	1.11
Q7	The loss of parental support has made it increasingly difficult to complete my school assignments or studies.	6	5.5	6	5.5	9	8.2	42	38.2	47	42.7	4.07	1.11
Q8	I am required to spend time working or engaging in income-generating activities instead of studying after school.	5	4.5	12	10.9	10	9.1	18	16.4	65	59.1	4.15	1.23
	Grand Mean											4.09	1.15

Researcher's Field Work (2026)

In Table 3, focusing on educational continuity, yielded an overall Grand Mean of 4.09 (SD 1.15), confirming the sustained negative impact. The most critical finding, as indicated by the highest mean score, was the agreement that respondents are required to spend time working or engaging in income-generating activities instead of studying after school (Q8), with a mean of 4.15 (SD 1.23). This suggests that financial necessity is the dominant factor disrupting their education. Additionally, respondents agreed that the loss of parental support has made it increasingly difficult to complete school assignments or studies (Q7), scoring a mean of 4.07 (SD 1.11). Lastly, the statement concerning feeling less motivated to continue their education specifically because of the parent's absence (Q6) also reflected agreement with a mean of 4.05 (SD 1.11).

Table 4: Respondents' Perception of Loss of a Breadwinner due to Parental Incarceration

S/N	Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean	SD DEV
		No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)		
Q9	Since my breadwinner parent was incarcerated, the ability of my family to afford nutritious meals has become significantly harder.	4	3.6	10	9.1	9	8.2	56	50.9	31	28.2	3.91	1.03
Q10	We are frequently forced to delay seeing a doctor or acquiring prescribed medication due to lack of money.	4	3.6	4	3.6	11	10.0	45	40.9	46	41.8	4.14	0.99
Q11	Gaining access to necessary medical check-ups or dental care has become a serious challenge.	3	2.7	8	7.3	13	11.8	29	26.4	57	51.8	4.17	1.07
Q12	The lack of funds dictates that we often resort to traditional or informal remedies instead of professional medical help.	3	2.7	14	12.7	14	12.7	21	19.1	58	52.7	4.06	1.19
	Grand Mean											4.07	1.07

Researcher's Field work (2026)

The data, presented in Table 4, assesses the effects of parental incarceration on a child's welfare, specifically focusing on the perception of loss of a breadwinner due to parental incarceration. The Grand Mean for the perception of the loss of a breadwinner is 4.07 with a standard deviation (SD) of 1.07, indicating a high level of agreement among respondents on the negative effects.

Table 4 reveals the statements focusing on the impact of losing a breadwinner consistently show high agreement, with all individual means above 3.0. The most critical areas relate to access to medical care. Respondents strongly agree that they are frequently forced to delay seeing a doctor or acquiring prescribed medication due to lack of money (Mean: 4.14, SD: 0.99) and that gaining access to necessary medical check-ups or dental care has become a serious challenge (Mean: 4.17, SD: 1.07). Furthermore, the lack of funds often dictates that they resort to traditional or informal remedies instead of professional medical help (Mean: 4.06, SD: 1.19). The financial strain has also made the ability of the family to afford nutritious meals significantly harder (Mean: 3.91, SD: 1.03).

Table 5: Respondents' Perception of Health Status of Children

S/N	Statements	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		Mean	SD DEV
		No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)	No	(%)		
Q13	The financial strain from the loss of income has directly caused me increased stress and anxiety.	3	2.7	9	8.2	10	9.1	38	34.5	50	45.5	4.12	1.06
Q14	I report feeling physically unwell (e.g., frequent headaches, fatigue) more often since the incarceration.	2	1.8	6	5.5	9	8.2	43	39.1	50	45.5	4.21	0.94
Q15	My general physical health has noticeably worsened since the main earner was imprisoned.	4	3.6	9	8.2	13	11.8	53	48.2	31	28.2	3.89	1.03
Q16	My relationships with family members or friends have become strained due to the stress of the incarceration/financial loss.	4	3.6	8	7.3	10	9.1	50	45.5	38	34.5	4.00	1.03
	Grand Mean											4.05	1.01

Researcher's Field work (2026)

The data, presented in Table 5, assesses the effects of parental incarceration on a children's welfare, specifically focusing on the perception of health status of children. The Grand Mean for the perception of the children's health status is 4.05 with an SD of 1.01, indicating a high level of agreement among respondents on the negative effects.

In Table 5 the perception of the children's health status also reveals significant challenges, with all means above 3.0. The highest level of agreement is seen in the statement that the children report feeling physically unwell (e.g., frequent headaches, fatigue) more often since the incarceration (Mean: 4.21, SD: 0.94). The financial strain from the loss of income has directly caused increased stress and anxiety (Mean: 4.12, SD: 1.06), and 80% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. While the mean for the statement that general physical health has noticeably

worsened is the lowest in Table 5 (Mean: 3.89, SD: 1.03), a combined 76.4% of respondents still agreed or strongly agreed with it. Finally, the stress of the incarceration and financial loss has also strained relationships with family members or friends (Mean: 4.00, SD: 1.03).

Hypothesis Testing

Regression analysis (t-test) was used in this study to assess the hypotheses at the 5% significant level. The p-value determines whether or not we accept a hypothesis. If the p-value is >0.05 (more than 5%), we fail to reject the null hypothesis, meaning we accept it. If the p-value is <0.05 (less than 5%), we reject the null hypothesis.

The following are the hypotheses that were investigated in this study and are expressed in the null form:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between parental incarceration and the educational continuity of children in Benin City.

H₀₂: The loss of a breadwinner due to incarceration does not significantly affect the health status of children in Benin City, Edo State.

Model Summary 1					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.198 ^a	0.039	0.030	0.64066	1.874
a. Predictors: (Constant), Parental Incarceration					
b. Dependent Variable: Educational Continuity					

The value of R² which is 0.039 indicates that the independent variable (Parental Incarceration) explains only 3.9% of the variations in the dependent variable (Educational Continuity); 96.1% of the dependent variable's (Educational Continuity) systematic volatility goes unaccounted for. After adjustments of the R-squared, this percentage drops even lower to 3%. This indicates that Educational Continuity is determined by factors other than the independent variable (Parental Incarceration).

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.806	1	1.806	4.401	0.038 ^b
	Residual	44.328	108	0.410		
	Total	46.134	109			
a. Dependent Variable: Educational Continuity						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Parental Incarceration						

At 0.038, the F statistic of 4.401 is significant. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between Parental Incarceration and Educational Continuity in Benin City.

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.171	0.425		7.469	0.000
	Parental Incarceration	0.217	0.103	0.198	2.098	0.038
a. Dependent Variable: Educational Continuity						

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between parental incarceration and the educational continuity of children in Benin City.

Parental incarceration is significant at the 0.05 level of statistical significance, as indicated by the p-value of 0.038. Therefore, with a t-value of 2.098 and P-values of 0.038, we reject the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between parental incarceration and the educational continuity of children in Benin City. This implies that educational continuity of children in Benin City is statistically predicted by parental incarceration.

Model Summary ^b					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.216 ^a	0.047	0.038	0.49338	2.258
a. Predictors: (Constant), Loss of a Bread winner due to Parental Incarceration					
b. Dependent Variable: Health Status of Children					

The value of R^2 which is 0.047 indicates that the independent variable (Loss of a Bread winner due to Parental Incarceration) explains only 4.7% of the systematic variation in the dependent variable (Health Status of the Children); 95.3% of the dependent variable's (Health Status of Children) systematic volatility goes unaccounted for. After adjustments of the R-squared, this percentage drops even lower to 3.8%. This indicates that the health status of children in Benin City, Edo State is determined by factors other than the independent variable (Loss of a Bread winner due to Parental Incarceration).

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.289	1	1.289	5.297	0.023 ^b
	Residual	26.290	108	0.243		
	Total	27.580	109			
a. Dependent Variable: Health Status of Children						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Loss of a Bread winner due to Parental Incarceration						

At 0.023, the F statistic of 5.297 is significant. This indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between Loss of a Bread winner due to Parental Incarceration and Health Status of Children in Benin City, Edo State.

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.312	0.352		9.417	0.000
	Loss of a Bread winner due to Parental Incarceration	0.195	0.085	0.216	2.301	0.023
a. Dependent Variable: Health Status of Children						

H_{02} : The loss of a breadwinner due to incarceration does not significantly affect the health status of children in Benin City, Edo State.

The loss of a breadwinner due to incarceration is significant at the 0.05 level of statistical significance, as indicated by the p-value of 0.023. Therefore, with a t-value of 2.301 and P-values of 0.023, we reject the null hypothesis, which states that the loss of a breadwinner due to incarceration does not significantly affect the health status of children in Benin City, Edo State. This implies that the health status of children in Benin City, Edo State is statistically predicted by the loss of a breadwinner due to incarceration.

5. Discussion of Findings

Parental incarceration fundamentally disrupts children's educational continuity and health outcomes in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria, thereby confirming a significant relationship between these factors and overall child welfare. The financial impact, specifically the loss of a breadwinner, intensifies existing vulnerabilities, a pattern consistent with regional patterns of family instability and economic hardship. These research findings highlight the critical necessity for targeted interventions within low-resource Nigerian contexts (Chike & Bob-Eze, 2025; Ogunbosi et al., 2022).

Parental incarceration shows a significant relationship with interrupted educational continuity, as children in Benin City frequently encounter barriers such as

unpaid school fees, emotional trauma, and caregiving gaps. The resulting family instability from imprisonment reflects broader Nigerian trends, where insufficient parental involvement is linked to poor school adjustment and increased dropout risks. This observation aligns with international evidence documenting reduced school readiness and long-term academic setbacks among affected youth (Habecker, 2020; Haskins, 2014; Henkhaus, 2019).

The absence of the breadwinner due to incarceration significantly affects children's health status, limiting crucial access to nutrition, healthcare, and stable environments across Edo State. Caregivers, often strained by pervasive poverty, struggle to provide basic needs, which corroborates studies on Nigerian prison families reporting significant unmet health and feeding requirements. Global comparisons further indicate that incarceration elevates child adversity, leading to physical health declines caused by co-occurring stressors (Jackson et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2024).

These detrimental outcomes perpetuate cycles of disadvantage, simultaneously compounding psychosocial risks and the potential for juvenile justice involvement in Benin City. Providing economic support for caregivers and implementing school retention programs are key strategies that could mitigate these effects, drawing on existing African

child welfare models that prioritize family integration. Ultimately, policy reforms that effectively integrate mental health services within justice systems remain essential for achieving sustainable child welfare (Atilola, 2012; Akintayo, 2021; Herreros-Fraile et al., 2023).

6. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between parental incarceration and children's welfare in Benin City Edo State Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to examine the extent to which parental incarceration affects the educational continuity of children in Benin City, Edo State and to investigate how the loss of a breadwinner due to parental incarceration influences the health status of children in Benin City, Edo State.

The study concludes, based on the data that parental incarceration has a significant relationship on educational continuity of children in Benin City and that the loss of a breadwinner due to incarceration significantly affects the health status of children in Benin City, Edo State.

7. Recommendations

The study's recommendations underscore the need for targeted interventions to mitigate the adverse effects of parental incarceration on children's educational continuity and health within the specific context of Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. These strategies are categorized into economic support mechanisms, community-based programmes, and policy reforms designed to enhance family resilience and child welfare.

Policy Interventions: Governments are urged to establish emergency welfare funds for the families of incarcerated parents, specifically to cover school fees and basic healthcare, thereby preventing educational dropouts and health declines. A crucial policy reform involves integrating child support mandates into the Nigeria criminal justice system, such as mandatory family impact assessments during the sentencing process, to proactively address the loss of the breadwinner. Furthermore, collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is deemed essential for providing subsidized nutrition and medical aid in the communities surrounding Edo State prisons.

Community Support Programmes: Local NGOs and faith-based organizations in Benin City must expand counselling services for affected children, with a particular focus on addressing emotional trauma to

ensure sustained school engagement. Developing foster care training for extended family caregivers, complemented by microfinance loans, will help alleviate the economic strains that detrimentally impact children's health and education. The implementation of school-based monitoring systems is recommended to facilitate the early identification of at-risk students, thereby promoting retention and timely health screenings.

Research and Monitoring: To refine the interventions, longitudinal studies are necessary to track the children's outcomes post-incarceration, with priority given to the unique socio-economic context of Edo State. Capacity-building initiatives for social workers in juvenile welfare must specifically emphasize the effects of parental imprisonment to ensure effective service delivery. Finally, annual evaluations of implemented programmes are required to measure reductions in welfare disruptions.

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