

**Family system and deprivation of liberty: Narratives about the past, present
and future**

**Sistema familiar y privación de libertad: Narrativas del pasado, presente y
futuro**

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore and analyze the narratives about the past, present, and future of people with a family member deprived of liberty. Five women from Buenos Aires were interviewed regarding the matter, and the Thematic Analysis Method (Mieles Barrera et al., 2012) was used to categorize, analyze, describe, and interpret the speech. Those with an incarcerated family member have perceived various changes regarding their relationship with the inmate, the relationship with the justice/police, perception of family support, stigma/discrimination, dynamic family, and expectations/feelings. The departure of a family member on the grounds of incarceration requires a readjustment and rearrangement by their

relatives. Analyzing the changes perceived by the family when having a member deprived of liberty provides a greater understanding of the subjective meaning of imprisonment for family members. Furthermore, it improves the visibility of an important theme in current society.

Keywords: deprivation of liberty, family, thematic analysis method, narratives, incarceration

Resumen

Bajo la concepción de la familia como sistema, la separación de uno de sus integrantes debido a la privación de la libertad afecta a todos los miembros familiares y genera cambios en múltiples aspectos propios de la dinámica familiar, así como en las vivencias personales que se encuentran intrínsecamente relacionadas con el contexto social. Este estudio tuvo como objetivo explorar y analizar las narrativas sobre el pasado, presente y futuro de personas que tienen un familiar privado de libertad. Se entrevistó a cinco mujeres pertenecientes a la zona metropolitana de Buenos Aires sobre el tema. Como requisito, debían tener por lo menos un miembro privado de la libertad al momento de la relevación de los datos. Se utilizó el Método de Análisis Temático (Mieles Barrera et al., 2012) para categorizar, analizar, describir e interpretar el discurso de los participantes. Los resultados obtenidos a partir de las entrevistas realizadas mostraron que quienes tienen un familiar encarcelado han percibido diversos cambios en cuanto a la relación que tienen con el interno, la relación con la justicia/policía, percepción de apoyo familiar, economía familiar/trabajo, estigma/discriminación, dinámica familiar y expectativas/sentimientos y emociones relacionadas con los distintos momentos del proceso de privación de libertad. Esto evidencia que la salida de un miembro de la familia por motivos de encarcelamiento requiere un reajuste y reordenamiento por parte de sus familiares. Analizar los cambios

percibidos por la familia al tener un miembro privado de libertad permite comprender mejor el significado subjetivo del encarcelamiento para los familiares y permite visibilizar un tema de suma importancia para la sociedad, brindando un mayor entendimiento hacia un grupo poco estudiado. Además, temáticas emergentes en el estudio tales como la importancia de la educación, el trabajo y el deporte, tanto dentro como fuera del penal, resultaron sumamente importantes y fueron percibidas como factores protectores del individuo privado de la libertad, dejándolo como iniciativa de estudio para próximas investigaciones.

Palabras clave: privación de libertad, familia, análisis temático, narrativas, encarcelamiento

Introduction

This qualitative research seeks to analyze the narratives developed by families based on the deprivation of liberty of one of its members. Conceiving the family as a system implies that it cannot be seen as a sum of individuals; instead, the whole is more important than the sum of the parts (Abaunza Forero et al., 2016). Family functioning is circular, and the effects of any cause may end up being the cause of other events. Dysfunctional bonding ways cause symptoms and problems in the family dynamic. Separating a family member affects the homeostasis of the microsystem and, therefore, the interaction between the family and other social systems (Vite-Coronel & Reyes-Mero, 2016).

The National Statistical System on the Execution of the Sentence (SNEEP, 2020) indicates that, in Argentina, there are a total of 94 944 people housed in penitentiary services, with 49 569 people held in Buenos Aires and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires and 43 836 people in the rest of the country. Their judicial status can be divided between prosecuted and condemned, with numbers that approximate 45.5 % and 54.8 %, respectively.

Demographic data of all prisoners indicates that 96 % are men while 95 % are Argentine. Also, of the total number of people deprived of liberty in jail, 65 % have completed their primary studies, and 57 % are under 35 years old. The person deprived of liberty, whether prosecuted or sentenced, is subject to the last legitimate measure that the State uses to prevent and correct crime: imprisonment (Criminal Procedural Code of the Argentine Nation, 1921).

Regarding Criminal Law, countries have different theories behind the punishments imposed on inmates. In Argentina and many other Latin American countries, the view that underpins the Penal System is the utilitarian one, for which the penalty of deprivation of liberty will ultimately be destined to re-socialize the individual (Bombelli et al., 2011; Ospina-Gómez & Bedoya-Gallego, 2019).

Said goal proposed by the National Penitentiary System is not easy to achieve since studies mention the difficulties prisoners endure when they intend to return to their previous life after being released from prison (Liras Pescador, 2018; Peñaloza González, 2017; Robertson, 2007). The annual report on the human rights situation in Argentina's federal prisons states that the country has been in a "penitentiary emergency" since 2019 due to overcrowding and unhealthy conditions of the institutions; the constant violation of human rights in jail undermines the ultimate objective and purpose: resocialization for reintegration into society (National Penitentiary Procurator's Office, 2021). The person deprived of liberty is not the only one with difficulties continuing his life. Different studies show that the 'inmates' relatives suffer from discrimination and are treated as if the 'offender's actions reflected their deeds. These disruptions in family life come with financial and psychological burdens, often endured by families already experiencing social marginalization (Halsey & Deegan, 2015; Jardine, 2017; Robertson, 2007). Parental

incarceration worsens and increases disadvantage, prompting household instability and escalating the risk of childhood homelessness and dependence on public assistance (Wakerfield & Wildeman, 2018). A study conducted in Ecuador concludes that “the psychological, emotional, economic affectation of family integration, social image, physical and mental health in the families of inmates was evidenced” (Vite-Coronel & Reyes-Mero, 2016, p. 265).

In Switzerland (Robertson, 2007), the family impact of a parent’s imprisonment on children was analyzed. The study performs a sequential analysis of the prison process from childhood experience. It organized narratives in a timeline dimension: the past included the stage before incarceration, the present referred to how the child experienced life with a jailed parent, and the future related to the possible reintegration of the parent into the family environment. Another study, conducted by Solís and Vivanco Muñoz (2016), performed this type of analysis and reported a retrospective point of view on the relationship between inmates and family members. Authors conclude that there is a revalorization of family relationships once a person is incarcerated. Family members remember life before their relative’s incarceration as good, even when the narrative content did not correspond with that assessment in all cases. This type of sequential analysis evidenced the importance of studying narratives as coherent interconnected events that attribute meaning to the individual’s personal history and reflect psychic reality. Narrative research in psychology contributes to understanding the unique worlds, experiences, and relational dynamics that constitute people’s identities (Domínguez De la Ossa & Herrera González, 2013).

Narration is the ontological essence of social life and it serves to acquire knowledge. It organizes and selects vital elements, endowing them with a global meaning and configuring a communicative unit that expresses individual identities. Narrations are the structures that

people usually use to tell stories, coherently developing them and assigning order to information, attributing a past, present, and future when communicating the particular account. These structures make life easier to understand based on the meanings given to these stories, highlighting feelings, experiences, and expectations, which constitute forms of construction of reality around this phenomenon (Pava-Ripoll, 2015). As Domínguez De la Ossa and Herrera González (2013) maintain, narratives and meanings are acquired and generated about others.

In this context, it is of utmost importance to analyze the narrative from a perspective focused on interpersonal relationships since they are built from them (Rollo et al., 2017). This perspective is considered the most effective way to truly understand the meaning that the family attributes to having a member deprived of liberty.

A Colombian study (Paredes Blandón, 2019) highlighted the importance of the discourse of people deprived of liberty due to its transformative quality. Said discourse allows them to recognize their history, becoming protagonists of the changes that may occur, highlighting the family as the setting where they can make these modifications, and strengthening the values obtained from it.

Due to the previously highlighted importance regarding the functioning of the narrative process and its significance, reaching conclusions of practical value is considered the appropriate approach.

Deprivation of liberty

Throughout history, the need to maintain order and correct those who do not adjust to the changes in social dynamics has ultimately consolidated the incarceration of said individuals (Ospina-Gómez & Bedoya Gallego, 2019). Edwards (1996) states that when speaking of persons deprived of liberty, reference is made to all those housed in penitentiary units,

whether convicted or not. The term extends to detained and prosecuted persons, the ones in preventive detention, and those serving a sentence. It is the State that, through the judiciary, dictates which individuals must be deprived of liberty according to the corresponding laws of each country (Vite-Coronel & Reyes-Mero, 2016).

Bombelli et al. (2011) investigated attitudes towards people deprived of liberty in Argentina. The sample was taken from the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. The authors concluded that a lower social distance predicts a positive attitude towards people deprived of liberty. Individuals who knew someone who was incarcerated could break the stereotype. In contrast, those who didn't have any contact with a jailed individual evidenced a tendency to be prejudiced and have negative attitudes towards them.

Family system

Part of the development of the systemic theory was carried out by Bronfenbrenner (1979), who applied it to the family system, considering that it configures and defines the person from its conception (Espinal et al., 2006). The microsystem is conceived as the interrelationships that occur in the immediate environment. The family is considered the most critical microsystem because it configures a person's life for several years. System modifications are generated when one of its member's positions changes or when there has been a change of role, environment, or both simultaneously (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The systemic approach allows the cause-effect analysis to be replaced by the study of the guidelines and rules of reciprocal family interaction, which is what makes it possible to get to the center of family conflicts and, therefore, to the causes of their respective dysfunctions (Vite-Coronel & Reyes-Mero, 2016).

Abaunza Forero et al. (2016) and Quevedo (2017) studied the psychological consequences of incarceration in both the families and the inmates. The authors state that the breakdown

of the family bond can generate adverse effects such as anxiety, guilt, resentment, the feeling of helplessness, excessive emotional demand from inmates toward families, and powerlessness for not being able to solve the family group's own needs. A higher assignment of responsibilities and tasks generates stress and discomfort in the families that must accompany the person deprived of liberty (Paredes Blandón, 2019). According to Solís and Vivanco Muñoz (2016), the penitentiary system contributes to the deterioration of family ties and the distancing of friends.

Deprivation of liberty and family system

Deprivation of liberty implies that the individual separates himself from his interaction systems, and adapts to a new one: prison. It requires adaptation to a new normative, behavioral, and relational scheme (Abaunza Forero et al., 2016). The term used by various authors (Echeverri-Vera, 2010; Quevedo, 2017; Sarmiento et al., 2015) to define the psychological changes suffered by inmates by the extended stay in jail is "prisonalization". As a closed environment, prison requires incarcerated people to make an adaptive effort due to its code of conduct, which is accompanied by affective, cognitive, emotional, and perceptual distortions. Some of the effects found in the literature are increased anxiety, depersonalization, getting used to the loss of intimacy, loss of self-esteem, the feeling of lack of control over one's life, and the absence of expectations (Echeverri-Vera, 2010; Ospina-Gómez & Bedoya-Gallego, 2019).

The prison system alters the reality of family members, suffering adverse effects regarding emotions and family finances, and may even generate family disintegration (Paredes Blandón, 2019). Relatives must meet the inmate's needs and the costs of legal processes and lawyers. Also, since prison is an unknown world for most people, their ideas about it are taken from audiovisual productions or literary narrations without being able to reflect

reality reliably. The lack of information on the criminal process, the bureaucratic paperwork, and the difficulties in understanding the language of the prison system are factors of incidence in the relatives of a person who is deprived of his liberty (García-Borés et al., 2006; Harper et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, it is interesting to point out that although some families cannot tolerate imprisonment and dissolve, it does not happen in all cases. Solís and Vivanco Muñoz (2016) highlight that families can adapt to the new situation, leaning on their resources and coping with incarceration, taking on new roles, and strengthening themselves financially. Also, a Colombian qualitative investigation has found that staying in contact with a close support group is a crucial resource for individuals deprived of liberty, promoting the development of prosocial skills and functioning as a compromise for re-socialization (Ospina-Gómez & Bedoya-Gallego, 2019).

Concerning inmate couples, literature refers to a feeling of “secondary imprisonment” as a process that often affects them. Partners demonstrate symbolic changes, adhering to a new system of representations, manifested in behavioral modification such as the acquisition of prison slang, alternate routine schedules, and alterations in how they dress. The authors mention that these behaviors usually involve deconstructing the stigma around their incarcerated relative. They also found that men’s family visits are more frequent (Abaunza Forero et al., 2010; Condry & Minson, 2021). A study on women revealed that inmate couples and mothers have reportedly enmeshed in unresolved cycles of blame, blaming themselves, other family members, or even the system for the incarceration of their family members. This study emphasized that mothers tended to take personal responsibility for their children’s imprisonment, even those extra-personal factors primarily related to structural problems (Halsey & Deegan, 2015).

Regarding the children of incarcerated parents, qualitative research (Nesmith & Ruhland, 2008; Paredes Blandón, 2019) found that most of them wanted to maintain an active relationship with the jailed parent, despite the feelings of anger and pain they feel towards them. Most interesting were the high levels of resilience manifested by some interviewees, directly proportional to their perception of a supportive environment. This is consistent with the explanation of Abaunza Forero et al. (2016), who maintain that children's behavior problems escalate when different caregivers disagree on parenting guidelines, which generates cognitive dissonances.

Another aspect to highlight is the importance that studies give to communal entities working with prisoners' family members. These centers operate worldwide, providing support and help to family members who have trouble managing stress, loneliness, and guilt, and giving information on judicial terminology and procedures (Ibañez Roig & Pedrosa Bou, 2018).

It has become evident that research over the last 20 years has focused on the relatives of people deprived of their liberty. It is known that modifications in the microsystem destabilize its homeostasis and functioning, even more so when the entire family must adapt to the prison context, as stated in the research by Espinal et al. (2006), and Vite-Coronel and Reyes-Mero (2016). Reviewed studies conclude that there are modifications in the socio-psychological processes of families, such as changes in family dynamics and the roles exercised by the members. Financial hardships related to the loss of shared income and the expense of having an incarcerated relative represent an excessive demand on family members. The presence of negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, guilt, and anguish has been observed, which could ultimately lead to the dissolution of the family.

However, protective factors for family members and prisoners help overcome difficulties and redefine their experiences to emerge stronger from adverse situations. One of these resources is accompaniment carried out by institutions. They offer legal advice and psychological support from professionals, as well as sharing experiences with peers in the same situation. Although these studies have been carried out in the United States, Europe, and some Latin American countries, no study has been conducted in Argentina that focuses on the socio-emotional and psychological effects of family members of incarcerated prisoners. In addition, framing it from a narrative point of view allows family members to give a sense of continuity to their history, allowing them to re-signify the past, present, and future, to be able to compare it with the few other investigations carried out on the subject. With all this considered, this research sought to explore the narratives of the relatives of the people deprived of liberty to delve into the meanings of that experience of having one of its members in such a condition. By using a systemic approach, the content of the narrative was analyzed in sequential order:

- Past: describing family life before the member deprived of liberty was separated from the group.
- Present: explore, if any, the modifications that family members experience due to having a member deprived of liberty.
- Future: investigate the future expectations that family members have regarding the family functioning.

This study seeks to better understand the subjective meanings that people give to the experience of deprivation of liberty, as well as provide information about family dynamics.

Method

Design

Given that there is little information on the subject proposed for research, the study had an exploratory-descriptive empirical qualitative format.

Sample

A total of five women belonging to the metropolitan area of Buenos Aires, who have at least one family member deprived of liberty at the time of data collection, were interviewed. These women participate in weekly meetings of the Association of Relatives of Detainees in Federal Prisons (ACiFaD). This association provides a space for orientation, listening, and accompaniment for the relatives of people deprived of liberty. The sample considered for the investigation is a non-probabilistic, intentional sample involving an informal and arbitrary selection procedure. Participant selection sought the most significant possible heterogeneity about the characteristics of the convicted person based on the type of crime, length of sentence, and type of family bond, considering that only a few regular attendees were willing to tell their stories. Recurrences were found in the topics addressed and in many of the narratives regarding the experience of having a family member deprived of liberty. At the end of the fifth interview, a saturation of categories (Hernández Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018) was contemplated, and the data collection phase was considered complete. A description of each participant is provided in the Appendix.

Instrument

The information was compiled through an ad hoc instrument: an in-depth interview conducted with the relatives to know the narratives referring to the past, present, and future of the deprivation of liberty event. The guide to the topics included:

- (1) Past: What are the antecedents to the deprivation of liberty and description of the situation before said question (family dynamics, habits, work, bonding modality, roles, authority).

(2) Present: Definition of the current situation (How do you define deprivation of liberty? And how does the family work from the separation of the member in question?).

(3) Future: What are the future expectations (what do they expect to happen).

Procedure

The Association was contacted via email and agreed to facilitate contact with the participants since they manifested interest in this research. The sample was comprised of subjects who voluntarily decided to participate in the interview, giving their oral consent. It was explained to them that the information collected would be used only for academic purposes, giving them the possibility to withdraw at any time they wished.

A total of five interviews were conducted, one per family. The meetings were held at ACiFaD, with an estimated duration of 40 or 50 minutes per interview. Interviews were recorded on audio to provide a pleasant space and promote a fluid dialogue.

Data analysis

The thematic analysis method was used (Mieles Barrera et al., 2012). It is a qualitative analysis method to systematize the registration of the information obtained in the interviews. It consists of identifying, analyzing, and finding patterns in the discourses to classify the data and establish the themes that families report as essential. Those themes are then categorized into thematic codes of predominant topics to organize the information gathered in the interviews.

Results

Several categories presented in Table 1 are a predefined set of codes, a product of the deductive coding established before the interviews were conducted. As they correspond

with the investigation’s objectives, they were divided into past, present, and future. The predefined codes are:

(1) Past (Before): Previous relationship with the relative, emotions when the family member was incarcerated, perception of family support during the process, and family economy before the incarceration of the family member.

(2) Present (Now): Emotions related to the situation, present relationship with the family member, family economy, stigma/discrimination, and a definition of deprivation of liberty for them.

(3) Future (After): Expectations and emotions related to that moment.

Table 1.

Definition and naming of topics related to deprivation of liberty

Past (Before)	Present (Now)	Future (After)	Other important aspects
Previous relationship with the relative	Sustaining innocence	Emotions	Education/work/sport
Emotions	Emotions	Expectations	Term “deprivation of liberty”
Perception of family support	Relationship with the family member		
Relationship with justice/police	Family economy		
	Structural violence Stigma/discrimination		
Family economy/work	Evidence presented		
	ACIFAD as accompaniment		

Some codes were the product of inductive coding based on qualitative data. These codes were mainly found when interviewees were referring to the Present situation. Still, given

that some of them were not explicitly related to a moment in time, they were categorized as Other vital aspects. These codes were:

(1) Present: Sustaining the innocence of the incarcerated family member, the different levels of structural violence they reported suffering, and the evidence they presented to several agencies to prove the innocence of their family member.

(2) Other vital aspects: Education, work, and sports as protective factors.

Past: before deprivation of liberty

Regarding the causes of incarceration, robbery and homicide predominated, in that order, accompanied in some cases by substance possession. As for their previous relationship with their relatives, interviewees highlighted qualities such as companionship, unity, and love.

This was not consistent with some of the content they expressed in their narratives, manifesting everyday differences and relationship problems, evidencing unhealthy coexistence: “He came home every night at dawn, smelling like alcohol. I had to cook.

Sometimes I even showered him. But I preferred that because sometimes he didn’t even come back. That’s when I got worried” (Vanessa).

Most interviewees commented on how they felt during the initial incarceration process, with a predominance of anguish and guilt highly relevant in their discourse. Cindy manifested that she was to blame for her son’s murder little after he was incarcerated: “I am to blame. I should have been there... I followed my husband to Argentina and brought my children, but I shouldn’t have because he would be alive if I hadn’t done that”.

When discussing the perception of family support, feelings of loneliness and sadness were predominant. Cindy and Karen, both foreigners, associated these feelings with the fact that they were away from their families. “My other children do not stop calling me, [...]. They want me to go to Peru” (Cindy). “I feel lonely because it is not the same... having my mom

or my sister next to me and being able to talk to them... it is not the same” (Karen). Cora and Vanesa stated that they felt rejected by their families and that their lives were “highly affected” by their relative’s imprisonment. “My partner did not want to accompany me anymore... I visit my son alone” (Vanesa). “I had a lot of rejection from my family; they isolated me...” (Cora). They both felt that the lack of family support makes their situation even more complex. Cora also commented that, due to the condition of her current partner, her mother decided to take custody of her daughters from her.

Regarding the relationship with the justice/police, it was found that interviewees used to trust the judicial system and even reached out to it when needed before their family member was deprived of liberty. They pointed out that, in recent years, the system is less reliable than before, having witnessed an increase in corrupted officials and feeling more insecure in their neighborhoods. Foreign interviewees recall the penal system in their respective countries as stricter and less corrupt than in Argentina. “In Peru, my brother-in-law is a police officer. You don’t see this there... [...] The inmates themselves handle it here” (Carmen).

Interviewees highlighted their insufficient knowledge regarding the necessary bureaucratic paperwork and legal terms. This was severely aggravated by their low-income level, which made the possibility of accessing information or assistance from a professional more remote.

Regarding family finances and work, the interviewees stated that before the incarceration of their relative, they had a better-quality lifestyle and had to work fewer hours to maintain it. They mentioned that they used to work from 3 to 5 times a week when their deprived of liberty relatives still lived with them.

Present: during the deprivation of liberty

All interviewees upheld the innocence of their family members. The predominant emotions manifested and shared in the interviews were anguish, pain, and fear related to their relative's incarceration. Although all emotions were expressed as felt in the present tense, fear and anxiety were associated with both the present and future. Interviewees emphasized the feeling of uncertainty that life in prison entails: "You don't know what's going to happen tomorrow... you don't know what's going to happen to him... and you're scared" (Karen).

Regarding the relationship with the family member, they highlighted the importance of daily telephone communication. Karen, from Bolivia, commented: "We talk, but he has been in prison for eight months... The bond changed a lot. As a couple, it is complicated... Now he has doubts and insecurities all the time". She mentioned the appearance of insecurities, anxiety, and mistrust that she said did not exist previously. Karen manifested an intense fear regarding the personality changes that her partner could undergo within the prison, stating that if she couldn't handle it, she would end the relationship: "And I am terrified... I am afraid of getting used to the idea that he is not here and then when he returns, it will be more difficult...". Insecurities hamper Karen and her partner's relationship on both sides, generate excessive tension and fear, and anticipate situations that could be years away, attributing these emotions to her past, her present, and her future. This psychological process is different for every interviewee. Cora, for example, comments: "When he calls me, it is as if he were my God, he is the one who makes me happy, making me go up and down as he wants." Possibly, this has to do with the fact that Cora's relationship began two years ago when her partner was already incarcerated, so she has no previous past with which to compare her present situation. Both interviewees commented that they visit their partners monthly due to the need for physical contact.

Regarding parenting, Karen drastically changed her son's behavior after his father's incarceration. "...He is also increasingly rebellious with me, at least before he obeyed, he paid attention to what I said [...], but the change in attitude is evident". In addition to the behavioral changes presented by her son, she manifested changes in her relationship with their husband. She displayed that they are presently having discrepancies related to the parenting guidelines of their son and having difficulties reaching an agreement: "There was always a shock in that sense, he wanted one thing, and I wanted another, and we collided on that, but in the end, we always agreed or reached a midpoint. Now we never agree". While crying, she commented that, in the beginning, his son did not answer his father's calls and did not want to interact with him the first time he visited him in prison. Over time, they began re-binding by text messages. Karen highlighted her son's sadness, recounting some of the nightmares he shared with his mother, emphasizing how complicated this process was and is for both of them.

It was found that visit frequency might vary. Interviewees stated that having a family member deprived of liberty comes with high demands of emotional and financial resources. Having more than one incarcerated family member, which was the case of some interviewees, requires prioritizing visits: "I can't handle everything... because they're in prison, and that's where you have to put the money" (Paulina). Since Vanesa's oldest son has been in prison longer and "gained enough experience to survive", she prioritizes visiting her youngest son, Alexis. The latter is serving a sentence for the first time.

It is interesting to note that all the people interviewed were women and commented that it's their mothers who visit their incarcerated relatives while their fathers don't. They mentioned that men in their families believe their relatives "deserve" the punishment of being in prison for their crimes, refusing to visit them.

Interviewees experienced changes in the family economy after their relatives' incarceration. They stated they have to work "Monday through Monday" (Karen), every day, including weekends, due to the economic demands they experience. Karen said she even had to move from her house and drop certain recreational activities carried out by her and her son. She receives financial aid from her father-in-law.

The interviewees reported a high level of structural violence. They described overcrowding, mistreatment, torture, and abuse of power by prison system officials. Their narratives were accompanied by feelings of fear, anguish, sadness, discomfort, and uncertainty regarding the possible death of their relative.

A predominant theme brought by interviewees was stigma/discrimination. Situations such as dismissals, rejection from family and friends, taunts, mockery, and negative comments were reported: "Not only stigma and rejection, but people started laughing at me..." (Cora). In one of the interviews, Karen manifested that she felt "double discrimination" for having an incarcerated family member and being a foreigner. She states that being Bolivian was one of the main reasons her husband was sentenced for a crime she claims he did not commit: "I was fired from one of my jobs... I felt discriminated against... because they kept telling me, 'What are you doing here that is not your country?' [...] The judge said that, because of his face, he could be the one who did it" (Karen). Therefore, it was found that discrimination is present when having a deprived of liberty family member, and that factors such as being a foreigner can aggravate mistreatment felt by immigrants.

Mothers with incarcerated sons emphasized their attempts to prove their son's innocence. They manifested that they presented evidence in their favor through the years to various lawyers and agencies but were ultimately unsuccessful.

Regarding ACiFaD, interviewees stated that they felt accompanied by other participants going through similar processes. Feeling part of a group and talking regularly about their experiences facilitated their psychological cope and helped them overcome fears and concerns. Interviewees also felt thankful to the association, given that they receive free legal advice.

Future: after deprivation of liberty

Regarding future expectations, interviewees expressed different feelings and presumptions intimately related to the type of sentence their relative had. Karen and Cindy intend to return to their native countries, Bolivia and Peru. They described their experience as “a migratory failure” because residing in Argentina is seen as the leading cause of their relative’s incarceration.

Believing in the innocence of their relatives made interviewees credit them with a good prognosis, with a firm belief that they would be able to resume their life outside the prison environment once they get out.

An interviewee manifested that her imprisoned son’s recent parenthood could be an incentive to leave criminal behavior behind and focus on being a father. “I think he’ll do it for his daughter. He assumed his role as a father, and he’s pretty firm about it. I don’t think Adrián will have a hard time getting out of prison; I see him with another perspective ever since his daughter came along” (Paulina).

Other important aspects to mention

Interviewees highlighted some activities inside the prison, such as working, studying, and playing sports. They described them as essential, given that they are carried out to make the most of their time in prison and demonstrate good conduct so that they can appeal for a

reduction in their sentence. “Now he is calmer, he is doing Rugby and working... Luckily he is fine”. (Vanessa).

When asked about the meaning of the term “deprivation of liberty”, they emphasized the negative aspects, such as mistreatment and the poor conditions in which their relatives live: “No person deserves to live as they live, without food, without medications, dying of cold, or without having a comfortable place to sleep... This affects them psychologically”

(Karen). “The prison has been made to help, not to kill or create more violence. But that’s what’s happening” (Cindy). One interviewee stated she felt as if she was also incarcerated.

Families are affected by their relative’s incarceration, identifying with them and manifesting they wish they could take their place, so the family member does not have to go through that particular situation. “I am somewhat similar, imprisoned in freedom. Truth be told, it hurts more. I was never locked up, but I think it hurts more to be on the outside. You want to trade places with that person” (Cora).

Discussion

The present study with a qualitative approach had the general objective of analyzing the narratives about the past, present, and future of families with at least one of their members deprived of liberty. The results obtained from the interviews showed the relevance of interpersonal relationships in the construction of personal narratives, given the importance that interviewees gave to the past, present, and future relationships with their deprived of liberty family members and the abundant life changes they report having experienced since their confinement.

The first specific objective of this study was to describe family life before their deprived of liberty member was separated from the group and during the initial incarceration process.

Regarding the predominant emotions, the interviewees referred to the initial moments of

the judicial process, highlighting the presence of anguish and guilt. This coincides with what was stated by Abaunza Forero et al. (2016) and Quevedo (2017), who found that the breakdown of the family bond from the incarceration of a relative can generate negative consequences, finding guilt as one of them. Results also correspond with the findings of Halsey and Deegan (2015), concluding that all women interviewed in the present study were immersed in cycles of blame, often taking personal responsibility for their relative's incarceration. Mothers tended to feel greater responsibility for the imprisonment of their children and expressed behaviors that directly sought to prove their son's innocence to the authorities.

Most interviewees described their family relationship before incarceration as good, highlighting aspects such as cohesion, flexibility, and communication. Although they emphasize the positive aspects of their previous relationship, the content of their narratives did not always express the same since they provided information that evidenced serious coexistence problems. This is consistent with the findings of Solís and Vivanco Muñoz (2016). They found that, retrospectively, inmates and their family members tend to describe their prior relationship as good, even when that assessment did not correspond with other statements addressed in the interview.

It was also found that before the family member's incarceration, they maintained a better quality of life than the current one, having to work fewer days/hours to cover their basic needs and those of the rest of their family. Paredes Blandón (2019) remarked that families where incarcerated men previously had the role of providers suffer from emotional destabilization and financial trouble. The present study shows that the family members must not only fulfill the role of providers within the families but must also meet the needs of the inmate within the prison, attending to new expenses that become part of what must

be considered in daily life, consistent with the results reported by Robertson, (2007), Jardine (2017), and Halsey and Deegan (2015).

As was stated by García-Borés et al. (2006) and Harper et al. (2021), insufficient knowledge regarding bureaucratic formalities and legal terminology complexifies the situation for the family members. This was aggravated by their low-income level, hindering the possibility of accessing information or advice.

Following the investigations of Solís and Vivanco Muñoz (2016), and Agudelo Hernández et al. (2016), family ties deteriorated, and interviewees felt socially isolated by their communities. The present study, as well as the one carried out by Vite-Coronel & Reyes-Mero (2016), evidences the psychological affectation of family integration and social image on family members of inmates by their social circle. Results also show that being a foreigner can aggravate feelings of rejection and discrimination due to the little legal knowledge of immigrants regarding the Argentine laws and the mistreatment they suffer from the judicial system. Current investigations have not yet addressed the subject of incarceration from a foreigner's point of view.

The second objective proposed to explore, if any, the modifications that family members experience due to having a member deprived of liberty. An incarcerated relative generates structural changes in the family dynamic, as stated by Vite-Coronel and Reyes-Mero (2016). The interviewees became the providers in their respective households and, in some cases, began to depend economically on other family members. There was a change in daily activities, and some children had to abandon their recreational activities. As stated by Paredes Blandón (2019) and Abaunza Forero et al. (2016), the sum of responsibilities generated stress to the point where interviewees noted that the family might dissolve.

Unsanitary conditions in Argentine prisons cause uncertainty and fear in the prisoner's families, similar to what was found in the investigation by Stratta Albérico (2015).

Interviewees manifested that their relative experiences daily torture and violence, highlighting the high levels of structural violence experienced in Argentine jails. It is important to note that the annual report about human rights in federal prisons in Argentina (National Penitentiary Procurator's Office, 2021) confirms the state of emergency in penitentiary matters in which the country is found regarding unsanitary conditions.

Although the vision that sustains the law in Argentina states resocialization as the ultimate goal, the question remains whether said goal is more theoretical than practical, given that prisons aren't well equipped for the proposed objective to be reached.

While daily communication was reported as a bonding factor, as stated by Ospina-Gómez and Bedoya Gallego (2019), interviewees manifested feelings of insecurity in the relationship between them and their incarcerated relatives. They also expressed concerns about behavioral and personality changes that their family members had experienced inside the prison. This description relates to the concept of prisionalization (Echeverri-Vera, 2010; Quevedo, 2017; Sarmiento et al., 2015). Similar to what Abaunza Forero et al. (2016) stated in their research, interviewees felt overburdened by the inmate's emotional and financial demands and legal process costs. They had difficulties taking on new roles, such as becoming the leading provider and caring for the entire family.

Secondary imprisonment feelings were found in narrations, alongside behavioral changes experienced by families. As Abaunza Forero et al. (2010), and Condry and Minson (2021) described, interviewees went through personal changes ever since their relative was incarcerated. These modifications include symbolic, linguistic, and behavioral changes such as the use of prison slang, changes in their personality and social group, and changes in the

way of dressing. It is interesting to note that the aforementioned authors indicated that family members carried out this process to disarm the stigma surrounding the situation of deprivation of liberty. The interviewees reported feeling stigmatized, discriminated against, and rejected by their families and social group due to their family member's imprisonment. It is evident that, in this sample, discrimination and stigma were transferred rather than eliminated.

The results of the behavioral changes experienced by children with an incarcerated parent are consistent with the investigations carried out by Abaunza Forero et al. (2016), and Wakerfield and Wilderman (2018). They argue that children's behavior problems escalate when different caregivers cannot agree on parenting guidelines, causing children cognitive dissonances that make them feel unsupported by their parents. Behavioral disorders, rebellious attitudes, and a significant decrease in school performance were found in the present study. It should be noted that the authors Paredes Blandón (2019), and Nesmith and Ruhland (2008) highlight high levels of resilience proportional to the perception of a supportive environment in children of people deprived of liberty. However, given that this was not the case for any of the interviewees, it was impossible to delve deeper into this issue.

Lastly, ACiFaD, the association interviewees attend, has not only made them feel accompanied on their experience but it has also given them assistance and information on judicial procedures and terminology. This organization plays a fundamental role in providing support and help to family members and resources to facilitate the inmates' re-socialization once they serve their sentence. Ibañez Roig and Pedrosa Bou (2018) mentioned that feeling part of a community with people going through similar situations

provides consolation for present negative emotions and improves their expectations about the future, which interviewees maintained when talking about the association.

The third objective sought to investigate family members' future expectations regarding family functioning. The ability to redefine their life experience and the deprivation of liberty event helped them hold a firm sense of hope for the future. One of the interviewees highlighted that her son's imprisonment and subsequent death made her find the strength to get ahead and study the university career her son wanted to pursue, indirectly fulfilling his dream. The results are consistent with the ones stated in the research papers by Agudelo Hernández et al. (2016), and Solís and Vivanco Muñoz (2016). They found that the changes within the family dynamics may be conflictive during the beginning of the process of incarceration. However, family members could manage to re-signify their experience, transforming it into a positive experience that strengthens them and gives them hope for the future. Interviewees mentioned the importance of prison activities, such as practicing sports, working, and getting an education, given that they represented essential aspects that helped with prison resignification and creating a sense of meaning inside the jail. They linked these aspects to future re-socialization, stating that starting healthy habits in the present could be maintained once they got out of prison.

The foreign interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction with the Argentine Penal System. They've decided to return to their respective countries once their partners are released from prison. They have described the deprivation of liberty of their relatives as a "migratory failure", and residing in Argentina is experienced as a factor causing the imprisonment of their relatives. No research has been found that deepens the aspects and effects of incarceration in immigrant families. It is one of the topics that remain open to exploration in future investigations.

Limitations

Given the nature of a qualitative study, it is impossible to generalize or draw exact conclusions regarding the experiences of people with a family member deprived of liberty. The sample used in the present study was taken from the Civil Association of Relatives of Detainees in Federal Prisons. This means that the results obtained from the interviews reflect the narratives of five families whose members are in prison run by the Federal Penitentiary Service. It should be noted that the sample does not have people with relatives deprived of liberty in the Buenos Aires Penitentiary Service. Hence, the experiences with prisons are limited. Also, interviewees in the present study were five women emotionally contained and legally instructed by the Association. The lack of male meeting attendees made it impossible for this research to collect data from their perspective. Adding to this, incarcerated relatives were, in all cases, male. The lack of data on male family members and female prisoners is a limitation of this research.

Although qualitative research allows the exhaustive analysis of multiple realities, it is not possible to make an exact replication of the study due to the breadth of the questions posed in the interviews and the unique subjectivity of the participants who were part of the sample. It is important to note that the stories were affected not only by personal and subjective variables but also by sociocultural variables from the context in which they live, limiting the study's results to the particularity of each of the interviewees.

This study continues a developing line of research that seeks to know the narratives of people who have a member deprived of liberty. The study of the subject began several years ago in the United States and Europe; however, it is recent in the countries of Latin America. Analyzing the changes perceived by the family when having a member deprived of liberty

provides a greater understanding of a poorly studied group, especially in Argentina, and allows the visibility of an issue of utmost importance for society.

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Appendix

Sample Description

The participant description below allows a better understanding of the results.

Vanesa: 53-year-old woman. Divorced. She has six children. Two of them, Ariel (31) and Alexis (30), are deprived of liberty. Her two brothers were also deprived of freedom several years ago. Ariel has been deprived of liberty for the cause of homicide for ten years, while Alexis has been deprived of liberty for five years due to drug possession and abuse. Ariel had already served a sentence in a juvenile prison for robbery, the first cause of the elderly for which he is incarcerated.

Karen: 29-year-old woman. Married. Her husband has been deprived of liberty for five years for the cause of armed robbery. The couple has an 8-year-old son who lives with her. They're both Bolivian and have lived in Buenos Aires for five and a half years. It is the first time that he has been deprived of liberty.

Cindy: 63-year-old woman. Married. She has five children, one deceased. Daniel (23) died inside the prison after two years of serving a sentence for homicide. She is Peruvian, and although she lives with her partner and two of her children, the rest of her children live in Peru.

Cora: 28-year-old woman. She has two young daughters. Her current partner has been deprived of liberty for two years due to aggravated homicide since he was convicted of murdering his former partner. He had already served a previous sentence.

Paulina: 43-year-old woman. Married. She has four children, one of whom died at the age of one. Her second son, Adrián (25), and two of her brothers, César (42) and Nicolás (35), are deprived of their liberty. Adrián has been deprived of freedom for eight

years for the cause of homicide, while her brothers are jailed for robbery. It is the first time Adrián has been deprived of his liberty, but not the first time her brothers have been convicted.