

This study aimed at investigating the influence of play and learning materials and their influence on the social development of children aged 3- 4 years living with their jailed mothers in Langata Women Prison in Nairobi Province, Kenya. The research study looked at play and learning equipment and materials and their influence played on the process of social development of children. The study also looked at the interaction between children and their agents of socialization in prison. The researcher highlighted the influence of play and learning materials in the process of social development of children. The researcher used quasi-experimental design to collect information on the play and learning materials available, and make judgements regarding the degree to which accessibility and use of play and learning materials influenced the process of social development of children living with their jailed mothers in prison.

Data on interactions was also collected. Independent and dependent variables were described respectively. The research targeted jailed mothers, female inmates with no children accompanying them, prison officers, ECD teachers and children aged 3-4 years living with their jailed mothers in prison community. Non-probability sampling technique was used to select the study area as well as the respondents involved in the study. Both simple random sampling and stratified random sampling were used to select the imprisoned mothers, their children aged 3-4 years living with them in prison, prison officers, female prisoners with no children accompanying them, while ECD teachers were selected purposively.

Three instruments were used to collect data which included an interview schedule for jailed mothers and female prisoners, two questionnaires, one for the prison officers and the other for the ECD teachers. Observation checklist was also used to check what was actually on the ground, that is, availability, adequacy and use of play and learning equipment and materials by children, and social skills exhibited during interaction. The research instruments were piloted on a small representative sample identical to, but not included in the group that was involved in the actual study. After the instruments were found valid, logical and reliable, then the actual data collection took place.

Data collected were analyzed by use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. Results showed that some play and learning materials such as swings, sand pit, climbing and sliding ladders which are important for social development of children were not available in prison. Play and learning materials which were available were not adequate such as bean bags, balls, ropes, flash cards and counters. Children of jailed mothers did not frequently use the said materials as did other children living outside the prison. Interaction between caregivers and children was not positive due to lack of affection and warmth on the side of the caregivers. Poor interaction, lack of play and learning materials, and their inadequacy, and lack of opportunity to frequently use the materials may affect social development of children.

The researcher, therefore, recommends provision of adequate and a variety of play and learning materials to children. Children should be given the opportunity to frequently use the said materials and positive interaction between children and their caregivers should be encouraged. Areas for further research are also suggested. It is hoped that the findings of this study will enable the stakeholders, Government officers, policy makers, prison administrators, ECD teachers and jailed mothers become involved in providing opportunities for children to use play and learning materials while in prison.