# Unheard Voices: The Lived Experience of Motherhood After Prison

## Research Fellow in Collaborative Practice in the Criminal Justice System

by

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# Summary

Incarcerated mothers, often the primary caregivers for their children, face a unique set of challenges. Their incarceration not only affects the immediate family structure but also poses significant challenges upon reintegration into society. Many of these mothers grapple with long-standing issues like poverty, abuse, and mental health and substance abuse problems, all of which can impede their successful reintegration. Prior research has delved into their apprehension of re-entry, including fears of discrimination and lack of adequate support systems. However, a significant gap exists in understanding their lived experiences, particularly in resuming their role as mothers post-incarceration.

For professionals in the field of social work, truly understanding and addressing the needs of these mothers requires a close knowledge of their stories and lived experiences. This study seeks to bridge this gap by centring the experiences of motherhood post-incarceration, shedding light on challenges and successes in a culturally sensitive context. By doing so, this research not only contributes to the broader literature on women's re-entry but also underscores the importance of viewing incarcerated mothers beyond the lens of their criminal past, highlighting our shared humanity.

The study's objectives were threefold:

- Understand motherhood post-prison in a global context and identify knowledge gaps.
- Delve into the lived experiences of post-incarceration motherhood in Ethiopia, a context often overlooked in mainstream research.
- Assess the trustworthiness of the empirical study in Ethiopia, focusing on issues related to data collection. Reflections focused on how researchers elicit and engage with the stories of formerly incarcerated women (a marginalised group) to understand their experience of motherhood after prison in culturally diverse contexts such as Ethiopia, where the cultural and religious context is different from the Global North.

Utilising both secondary and primary data, this research provides a comprehensive overview of the topic. From the secondary data, 14 articles were analysed and synthesised, offering insights into mothers' experiences post-incarceration globally. The primary study, set in Ethiopia, employed a descriptive phenomenological approach, gathering data from nine released mothers through in-depth interviews. Finally, reflective practices were also incorporated, with the researcher's fieldwork diary offering valuable insights.

The study underscores that formerly incarcerated mothers deeply value their maternal identity. They often make personal sacrifices to shield and nurture their children, mirroring the protective characters of most mothers universally. This finding highlights the shared human experience and the necessity to view these mothers beyond the lens of their criminal histories.

However, a major revelation from the study was the perception of these mothers post-release. The shadow of incarceration often cast them in the role of "bad mothers," subjecting them to societal stigma. This external judgement not only tarnished their societal role but also deeply affected their self-worth. Their keen desire to care for and reconnect with their children post-release was followed by guilt over their children's hardships during their absence. Their journey to reclaim their maternal role post-release was accompanied by challenges. Factors such as strained mother-child relationships, discrimination, unemployment, housing issues, poverty, mental health concerns, and substance abuse further complicated their reintegration. As a result, while these mothers may physically return to society, they often find themselves alienated from their children, families, and the broader societal frameworks, leading to feelings of neglect.

It is crucial to approach the experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers from a holistic, intersectional viewpoint. They navigate an intricately linked marginalisation necessitating structural adjustments. Historically, these mothers have faced marginalisation due to poverty, trauma, and abuse. Their incarceration and subsequent release amplify these challenges, with issues like childcare, rebuilding parent-child bonds, unemployment, and lack of supportive networks coming to the forefront.

The study also points out the nuanced complexities of intersectionality, especially concerning women in regions like Ethiopia. These women, besides being formerly incarcerated, also belong to the Global South, a region often researched through a predominantly Western lens. Attempts to understand the perspectives of these mothers in the Global South can sometimes be flawed by cultural insensitivity. This double-edged shortcoming – of not listening to their experiences and failing to gather data in a culturally attuned manner – further deepens their marginalisation. While some steps have been taken in social work education towards inclusivity, academic research training might sometimes appear disconnected from local contexts. This potential oversight could suggest that mothers, like those in Ethiopia or perhaps the broader Global South, might be put for further marginalisation.

In conclusion, it is pivotal to grasp the multifaceted experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers, encompassing social, economic, racial, and cultural dimensions. By doing so, professionals in social work and the criminal justice system can design tailored services and research methodologies. This ensures that the experiences of these mothers are understood and addressed holistically, catering to their unique socio-cultural contexts.

# Preface

Over the years, many individuals have enquired about my interest in the issue of incarcerated women. Such curiosity often arises from a societal preconception that views these women as mere offenders, thus relegating them to the fringes of our concern. Admittedly, I too was once distant from this issue until my academic journey led me to an eye-opening experience. During my undergraduate studies, I had the privilege of visiting a prison in Ethiopia. What I witnessed there was profoundly unsettling: the heart-breaking sight of young children, innocent yet confined within the walls of incarceration. These children, who are deeply affected by their mothers being in prison, suffer the most because the system does not offer them any other place to be cared for. The stark reality of their living conditions — the visible despair and the detrimental impact on the children's emotional and developmental well-being — stirred something deep within me. It was clear that these children were victims of circumstances, trapped due to a lack of childcare options for their incarcerated mothers. This poignant encounter prompted a pressing question: What could I do to give voice to their silent struggles? This search for answers culminated in my bachelor's thesis, where I explored the emotional challenges faced by children living in prison with their incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia. This initial research only deepened my commitment. I realised that to genuinely address the issue, one must understand the experiences of the mothers themselves. Thus, my Master's research shifted to focus on incarcerated mothers living in prison with their children, centring on their maternal experiences inside Ethiopian prison walls. The results were concerning. Both mothers and children faced a host of biological, psychological, and social challenges. Yet, prison services failed to cater to the unique needs of these mothers, proving insufficient. Furthermore, many of these mothers harboured fears about societal judgement and the potential obstacles they might encounter upon their release from prison.

However, amidst these findings, I spotted a clear gap in academic literature, particularly regarding the experiences of these

mothers after their release, both on a global scale and specifically within the Ethiopian context. This realisation spurred my PhD pursuit, aiming to shed light on and delve into the complexities of motherhood following imprisonment.

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# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This doctoral study delves deep into the complex and often unspoken challenges faced by mothers post-incarceration, offering crucial insights for social work professionals and other stakeholders. The journey from prison back to society is multifaceted. For mothers, it is compounded by societal expectations and norms surrounding motherhood. These women are not only battling societal stigmas attached to their past, but they are also striving to reconnect with their maternal identity in a society that frequently views them through the lens of their criminal history (James, 2013). The rising female prison population worldwide (World Prison Brief, 2017) emphasises the need for a more comprehensive understanding of this issue, especially from a social work perspective.

With the majority of incarcerated women being mothers (Mumola, 2000), their motherhood concerns are usually paramount to them and represent a crucial subjective aspect of their life after prison as shown in Brown & Bloom (2009). Furthermore, the influence of cultural, religious, and societal frameworks on the concept of motherhood cannot be overstated (Frizelle & Kell, 2010). This is especially pronounced in patriarchal societies, like Ethiopia, where research suggests that motherhood is often seen as a crucial element of a woman's fulfilment (Crivello et al., 2019; Tefera et al., 2017; Gurmu & Dejene, 2012). In these societies, societal norms tend to dictate what is considered "appropriate mothering," leading to a categorisation of women as either good mothers" or "bad mothers," as noted by Holmes (2006) and Lewis (2002). Those adhering are deemed "good mothers," while deviations label women as "bad mothers". These stringent norms, however, have significant repercussions, particularly for those who have been incarcerated. As highlighted by Gobena and Hean (2019), adherence to these strict norms often leads to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of formerly incarcerated mothers. This stigmatisation, in turn, can add layers of complexity to their reintegration process, making it more

challenging for them to return to society and fulfil their roles as mothers within the confines of societal expectations.

Social workers, who play a crucial role in supporting individuals through their transition from prison back into the community, need a nuanced understanding of these challenges. The disparities in educational, economic, and social opportunities that these women face make their re-entry process particularly precarious (Visher & Travis, 2003). Understanding these pathways and the reasons for and dimensions of an individual's success or failure is the focus of recent scholarly engagement with the problem of "prisoner re-entry". However, most of the existing research on prisoners' lives after release focuses primarily on recidivism (Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Harm & Phillips, 2001) and ignores the fact that recidivism is directly influenced by post-prison reintegration and adjustment, which in turn depend on several factors: personal and situational characteristics, including the individual's social environment, consisting of peers, family, community and state-level policies. For women in particular, incarceration poses unique challenges, especially when it comes to motherhood and maternal responsibilities. The act of imprisonment disrupts the mother-child relationship, often leading to less empathy or tolerance in these women compared to those whose motherhood is disrupted by other means, such as illness (Lockwood, 2018). In addition, Baldwin (2017) posits that a mother's incarceration can be more detrimental to both mother and child than a father's. This may often be the case since a substantial number of incarcerated mothers tend to serve as the primary caregivers (Artz & Rottman, 2015).

The challenges do not end with the incarceration period. As these mothers reintegrate into society, they face significant obstacles, including poverty, trauma, abuse, and mental health issues (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Laub & Sampson, 2003). Studies, such as the one by Gobena and Hean (2019), highlight that incarcerated mothers, for example, in Ethiopia, express apprehension about their re-entry into society, fearing discrimination and inadequate support post-

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incarceration. Yet, there is a noticeable gap in understanding the lived experiences of these mothers post-prison, a topic explored in Chapter 3.

In the Ethiopian penal system, social workers are instrumental in offering inmate support through orientation, counselling, and psychosocial assessments (Wako & Gebru, 2020). They bridge the gap between inmates and mental health services, facilitating both rehabilitation and reintegration (ibid). Yet, they grapple with challenges ranging from manpower shortages to budgetary constraints (Dadi et al., 2019). Despite their importance, the exact scope of social work in Ethiopian prisons is not clearly defined due to the absence of comprehensive national statistics. The Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers, and Anthropologists (ESSSWA) reports over 900 active members working in diverse fields, including academia, civil society, government agencies, and international organisations. However, the proportion of these members specifically dedicated to social work within the prison system is unknown. This ambiguity highlights the need for more detailed data to enhance our understanding and support the crucial work of social workers in these challenging environments.

Furthermore, while some research touches upon child and mother welfare in Ethiopian prisons (Gobena & Hean, 2019; Yilma, 2018; Geday, 2016; Ayalew, 2016; Abebe, 2006), there is an evident lack of studies on the role of social workers, especially concerning post-incarceration services. This lack of understanding is particularly concerning in Ethiopia, where social workers play an essential role in correctional settings. Without a deep understanding of these mothers' lived experiences, crafting culturally sensitive and effective interventions becomes a challenging task.

This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this knowledge gap by delving into the lived experiences of incarcerated mothers, particularly their post-release journey. This adds to the literature on women's re-entry by placing their identity as mothers at the centre of the process.

Further enriching this discourse, the research takes an international lens and places emphasis on the unique experiences of motherhood in the Ethiopian context. Recognising the significance of contextual and cultural nuances, a decolonisation framework is also adopted to reflect on the conduct of the study itself (see Chapter 5). The study reflects on how researchers understand and elicit formerly incarcerated women's experience of motherhood post-prison in a diverse cultural context by drawing on the researcher's fieldwork experience in Ethiopia. It emphasises the need for culturally relevant research practices to ensure the findings resonate with the intended community or group. For Ethiopian social workers and professionals in the criminal justice system, the findings of this study are invaluable. It emphasises the need to understand the multifaceted challenges this demographic faces and provides direction for crafting interventions that resonate culturally. As Ethiopia's social work practice evolves, emphasising global perspectives and cultural sensitivity, this research stands as a reference, supporting a more all-inclusive approach to aiding formerly incarcerated mothers.

## 1.1. Aims and research questions of the study

The main aim of the study is to explore and understand the lived experience of motherhood from the perspective of formerly incarcerated mothers. The overarching research question is: ***What is it like to be a mother after prison, and how do researchers understand their experience with cultural sensitivity?*** To provide a comprehensive answer to this overarching question, the study is divided into three distinct yet interconnected sub-questions:

- How do women globally describe and navigate the complexities of motherhood after their release from prison? (Paper 1)
- Specifically, what is the lived experience of motherhood after prison in Ethiopia? (Paper 2)
- In culturally diverse and non-Western settings like Ethiopia,

how can researchers effectively elicit and understand the narratives of formerly incarcerated mothers, ensuring their stories are understood with cultural nuance and respect? (Paper 3)

To answer the central questions of the thesis, the sub-questions were examined independently in separate articles.

**Paper 1** address the first sub-question, serving as a research review with the objective of synthesise existing evidence concerning the narratives and experiences of mothers post-incarceration on a global scale. This review not only facilitates a deeper understanding of the prevailing literature but also identifies knowledge gaps, situates the current study within this body of work, and underscores its unique contributions.

**Paper 2** is an empirical investigation centred on the second sub-question. It delves into the lived experiences of motherhood from the perspective of previously incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia. The decision to focus on Ethiopia was informed by the literature review, which highlighted a visible absence of research from regions outside the Global North, highlighting the need for such a study.

**Paper 3**, addressing the third sub-question, is a reflexive piece that explores the trustworthiness of the empirical research conducted in Ethiopia. It offers insights into the challenges and nuances associated with data collection, especially when engaging with the narratives of formerly incarcerated women—a marginalised group. The paper emphasises the importance of understanding motherhood post-prison in diverse cultural landscapes like Ethiopia, which significantly differs from the Global North in terms of cultural and religious contexts. A significant feature of this paper is its discussion on the impact of Western-centric paradigms of knowledge and social work research training on studies conducted in culturally distinct regions, such as the Global South. This reflection is grounded in the researcher's firsthand fieldwork experiences in Ethiopia.

**Table 1.** Overview of the research articles

| | *Paper 1* | *Paper 2* | *Paper 3* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Title* | The Lived Experience of Motherhood After Prison: A Qualitative Systematic Review | Beyond the Prison Wall: Experience of Motherhood after Incarceration in Ethiopia; a Descriptive Phenomenological Study | The Challenge of Western-Influenced Notions of Knowledge and Research Training: Lessons for Decolonising the Research Process and Researcher Education |
| *Methodology* | Systematic literature review and qualitative evidence synthesis | Descriptive phenomenology | Reflexive |
| *Authors* | Eden Begna Gobena, Sarah Hean, Vanessa Heaslip, Ingunn Studsrød | Eden Begna Gobena, Sarah Hean, Vanessa Heaslip, Ingunn Studsrød | Eden Begna Gobena, Sarah Hean, Vanessa Heaslip, Ingunn Studsrød |
| *Status* | Published 2022 | Ready for submission | Published 2023 |
| *Journal* | Women & Criminal Justice | Women & Criminal Justice | Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work |

## 1.2.    *Clarification of concepts*

*Motherhood or mothering:* The terms *motherhood* and *mothering* are usually used interchangeably, although theoretically, there is a difference (Jiao, 2019). The term *motherhood* refers to the state or condition of being a mother. It is usually distinguished from the term *mothering*, which refers to the activities or practices involved in raising and caring for children (ibid). While *mothering* focuses on the everyday practices associated with being a mother and caring for children, *motherhood* is a social institution. However, the two terms are inextricably linked, as the practices of mothering in any society are performed and experienced in the context of the meanings and ideologies of motherhood. Throughout this dissertation, the terms motherhood and mothering are used based on the above definition. In the broadest sense, "mothering" can be performed by non-mothers. However, in this dissertation, the term refers to mothering activities performed by mothers rather than non-mothers.

*Re-entry* or *reintegration*: these terms are interrelated and are mostly used synonymously. However, *re-entry* denotes an incarcerated person's return to the community after prison, an inevitable consequence of incarceration. *Reintegration*, on the other hand, is the individual's reconnection with the institutions of society, which is both a process and a goal. It consists of programmes that help incarcerated individuals adjust to life back in society (Visher, 2015). This dissertation uses the terms re-entry and reintegration based on the above definitions.

*Lived experience and voice:* "Lived experience" pertains to a direct, first-hand account, encapsulating how an individual perceives, feels, and makes sense of their world, moulding their understanding into a tangible and meaningful construct. James (2012) illuminates it as a reflection of an individual's unique experiences and choices, alongside the knowledge derived therefrom, offering a pivotal lens through which individual and collective realities are held. It is important to recognise the inherently subjective and potentially non-generalisable nature of such experiences (Smith-Merry, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to engage rigorously in discerning biases

and selective narratives within personal accounts. Additionally, one must consider the influence of intersecting identity facets, including but not limited to race, gender, and class.

In socio-political and cultural dialogues, the concept of "voice" is multifaceted, often deployed to convey the experiences, viewpoints, and perspectives of typically marginalised or underrepresented groups (Baker, 1999), whilst also embodying a spectrum of sonic, material, and literary practices shaped by specific cultural and historical contexts (Weidman, 2014). Simultaneously, it functions as a category within discourses concerning personal agency, communication, representation, and political power, illustrating its intertwined nature with aspects of both individual expression and broader socio-political dynamics (Manyozo, 2016; Weidman, 2014). Navigating both the "lived experience" and "voice" concepts requires an insightful and reflective approach to understanding its potential to express such views and experiences while mitigating the risks of inadvertently homogenising or essentialising diverse perspectives and confronting challenges related to tokenism (i.e., reducing the inclusion of these voices to a symbolic gesture devoid of substantive impact on decision-making processes) (Sürgevil Dalkiliç & Kurt Yilmaz, 2019) and authenticity in representation. On the journey towards achieving robust theorisation in these domains, an unwavering commitment to depth, ethical and collaborative engagement, and continuous reflexivity prove pivotal (Manyozo, 2016). Integrating theoretical frameworks such as feminist theory and intersectionality, a cautious approach to applying "voice" and "lived experiences" can be taken. This aligns with an ethically transparent methodology, fostering collaborative knowledge creation. By maintaining ongoing self-reflection on personal biases, this approach aims to promote a discourse that is comprehensive, inclusive, and critically engaged. The dissertation adopts these terms based on the provided definitions and concepts.

## *1.3.  Structure of the dissertation*

Chapter 2, Theoretical Underpinnings, explains the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that have been crucial to this research and that have influenced my position as a researcher. Chapter 3, Literature Review, situates the study within the broader literature and current evidence on the challenges of incarceration. Following the presentation of the broader literature on the challenges of incarceration, this chapter presents the existing literature on the lived experience of mothers after incarceration in an international context. Chapter 4 presents the methodology and research design of the thesis. It explains the ontological and epistemological position of the thesis and then provides an overview of the methodological and philosophical stance of several research methods (qualitative systematic review, descriptive phenomenology and reflexivity) used to address the different research questions with different research samples and analysis methods. Ethical issues are also addressed in this chapter. Chapter 5 summarises the research findings presented in the three articles. Finally, Chapter 6 discusses the three papers' main findings and highlights the study's contribution, implications for social work, and possible recommendations.

# CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

This chapter elucidates the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are pivotal to this research, and which have shaped my stance as a researcher. The initial section introduces the concept of motherhood, followed by a brief discussion on reintegration, a theme pertinent to this study. Concluding the chapter, the concept of intersectionality and multiple jeopardy is introduced, aiming to understand that the marginalisation and vulnerability experienced by formerly incarcerated mothers should not be perceived as a singular process. Rather, it is more appropriately understood when viewed through the lens of multiple, interlinking, or converging systems and identities. Collectively, these concepts have not only influenced the study and interaction with participants but have also provided a supportive framework (e.g., intersectionality) for discussing the overarching findings. While intersectionality is not the theoretical underpinning that informed the research question and methodology, it has been pivotal in enriching the discussion of the findings.

## 2.1. Motherhood

What is motherhood? Is it a woman's individual experience of facing the birth of her child? Or is it a social role to be played by following the norms set by one's culture or social group? Various ideologies of motherhood attempt to answer the above questions. The most prominent are the essentialist and the social constructivist. Essentialists view motherhood as innate or biologically determined and believe that "good mothers" possess qualities that supposedly stem from instinctive love for their children (Douglas & Michaels, 2004). To challenge the essentialist view, feminists interpret motherhood as socially constructed rather than "natural" (Korolczuk, 2010; O'Reilly, 2010; Tobin, 1990). The feminist scholar Andrea O'Reilly, in her book *From Motherhood to Mothering*, argues that:

*"Motherhood is fundamentally a cultural practice continuously redesigned in response to changing economic and societal factors. As a cultural construction, its meaning varies with time and place"* (2004, p.5)

In many cultures, women traditionally take on the role of mother, with the protective function often being a consistent element of the gender division of labour (O'Reilly, 2010; Douglas & Michaels, 2004). However, feminists, through the lens of the feminist movement, have critically re-evaluated the treatment and roles of women in various societies, challenging the presumption of their equal political standing with men (Neyer & Bernardi, 2011; O'Reilly, 2010; Cavallaro, 2003). Through feminist perspectives, the deeply rooted ideologies surrounding motherhood are analysed, looking at how they play out in practice. These perspectives also shed light on how power structures within diverse social contexts shape and are shaped by motherhood, considering factors such as race, social status, gender constructs, and historical time and place (Fierheller, 2022; Stadtman, 2008; Gross, 1998). By amplifying the voices of mothers, the feminist movement showcases how women challenge and negotiate with the dominant societal narratives surrounding motherhood.

Proponents of feminism such as Adrienne Rich have illuminated how personal, cultural, material and historical conditions have affected women's experience of motherhood and have argued that all these conditions are influenced by patriarchy. In her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Adrienne Rich (1986) refers to motherhood as a patriarchal institution defined and controlled by men and deeply oppressive to women. Because the patriarchy suppresses maternal needs and denies the creative role of mothers, motherhood may be unfavourable for women in constructing their subjectivity (O'Reilly, 2010). Despite women potentially finding satisfaction and meaning in various ways, even beyond maternal roles and across different sociocultural contexts (Suppes, 2020), in patriarchal societies, motherhood is often seen as the pinnacle of physical and emotional fulfilment for women (Holmes, 2006).

For instance, in both general African and specific Ethiopian

contexts, motherhood is a revered institution, embodying a rich cultural, spiritual, and social significance, despite the immense diversity of cultures, languages, and traditions across the continent. Mothers, in most African societies viewed as indispensable nurturers and primary caregivers, are pivotal in safeguarding the continuity of lineage and transmitting cultural heritage, providing not only for the physical and emotional well-being of their children but also acting as the channel through which moral and societal values are imparted (Egbekpalu, 2022; Clemence, 2022; Nourse, 2021; Mochache et al., 2020; Semley, 2020; Devi, 2017; Stephens, 2013; Akujobi, 2011).

Particularly in Ethiopia, while the available literature predominantly explores Ethiopian motherhood through the lens of maternal health (Kebede & Seifu, 2021; Asefa et al., 2020; Kebede & Mihrete, 2020; Tesfaye et al., 2017; Tewabe et al., 2016; Gurmu & Dejene, 2012), it frequently overlooks the nuanced and multifaceted role of motherhood, which is deeply intertwined with societal expectations and individual worth in the country, establishing fertility and childbearing as not only pivotal but also intricately connected to social status and personal value (Crivello et al., 2019; Tefera et al., 2017). In this complex situation, Ethiopian women face social pressure related to motherhood while also serving as pillars of cultural and spiritual strength (Crivello et al., 2019). Their journey unfolds amidst myriad challenges, such as poverty, lack of opportunity, healthcare issues, and literacy, all deeply rooted in the nation's diverse socio-cultural, religious, and economic context (Briones & Porter, 2019). Not only do Ethiopian mothers provide comprehensive emotional and physical support to their families, but they also occasionally become crucial economic pillars (Yimam, 2013). However, this essential role comes with its own set of challenges, as they simultaneously navigate through socio-cultural expectations and responsibilities, which, at times, pose significant barriers to their own personal and professional aspirations (Briones & Porter, 2019). Often, they have to grapple with balancing professional roles alongside culturally defined familial responsibilities (Kebede & Seifu, 2021). The integration of religion, particularly Christianity and Islam, further shapes a distinct narrative, potentially influencing motherhood in Ethiopia by possibly impacting perspectives and experiences

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related to family planning, childbirth, and child-rearing (Smith et al., 2022; Tigabu et al., 2018).

Similarly, in the Western world, the idea of intensive mothering, a philosophy that influences how women understand what it means to be a good mother, requires mothers to invest a lot of energy, time and money in raising their children. The ideology of intensive mothering is understood as a maternal ideal that is "child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labour-intensive and financially expensive" (Hays, 1996, p. 54). Hays argues that intensive mothering continues to put all women in the subject position of the all-providing, self-sacrificing ideal "mother", with a limited and constrained agency in the public and professional spheres (Hays, 1996). Deviation from these expectations and norms of motherhood leads to social stigmatisation and categorisation as a "bad" mother in society (Akujobi, 2011). This idealised image of motherhood is unattainable and leads to women feeling guilty, ashamed and anxious about their daily practice and role as mothers.

Both the African particularly the Ethiopian and the Western contexts highlight certain expected social and emotional roles and commitments attributed to motherhood, albeit one that should be navigated with cautious reflection and contextual sensitivity considering their applicability and resonance across diverse societal and cultural contexts. For example, while "intensive mothering" might be embedded in certain societal narratives (Stirrup, Duncombe & Sandford, 2015), its normative influence may be challenged, altered, or contradicted in societies that emphasise equality, like Norway and other Scandinavian countries. In these relatively egalitarian societies, where there is strong policy support for parents and a cultural focus on co-parenting (Ellingsæter & Kitterød, 2023; CORE, 2019), the ideology and related pressures of intensive mothering may manifest differently or may even be somewhat mitigated. Moreover, in a recent study led by Lanke (2022) in the USA, it was unveiled that none of the mother groups in the study universally adhered to an intensive motherhood experience across all metrics, starkly challenging established narratives from previous research and theory. By shedding light on the nuanced intensity of mothers' involvement, the study enriches

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our understanding of the complex manners in which mothers simultaneously conform to and challenge gender norms within their parenting practices.

Given the evolution and increased complexity of women's motherhood experiences across numerous societies (Fierheller, 2022; O'Reilly, 2010; Chandler, 2007), recognising the broad spectrum of these experiences becomes paramount to authentically understanding and respecting their unique journeys within varied sociocultural environments. Motherhood is ultimately an identity that is actively negotiated in a web of social interactions against a backdrop of broader cultural expectations (Rich, 1986). Current demographic shifts within numerous communities suggest that women are now more likely than in the past to be single parents, or to reside in blended or stepparent families, sometimes with children living across multiple households (Pew Research Centre, 2018). Particularly in Europe and North America, and among affluent mothers in various societies, there tends to be a trend toward older ages at first childbirth and reduced childbearing (Eurostat, 2021). An uptick in the number of women having only one child, or no children, utilising assisted reproduction techniques, or acting as surrogate mothers (Kuhnt & Passet-Wittig, 2022; Billari et al., 2006), signals an exploration into how motherhood, far from a static or unilateral concept, evolves and shapes itself across diverse individual and societal contexts.

Despite the evolving experiences of motherhood, ideologies of motherhood still suggest implicit disapproval of many categories and experiences of mothers, notably those involving incarceration, single parenthood, teen mothers, or drug addiction to name a few (Kim et al., 2022; Lee & Boeri, 2017; Couvrette et al., 2016; Wilson & Huntington, 2006). It is vital to approach the subject of mothers with the above experience with a balanced perspective, acknowledging the numerous challenges and potential risks for children, despite instances of competent and loving parenting (Enos, 2001; Jensen & DuDeck-Biondo, 2005).

As such, conditions such as incarceration, which markedly change the motherhood experience in diverse ways, point towards a crucial, under-explored position. Delving into and

eluciding the narratives of mothers with histories of incarceration can significantly broaden and enrich our understanding of motherhood, revealing numerous stories that often remain unvoiced and overshadowed. Motherhood, in all its different forms and contexts, invites continual exploration, empathy, and critical analysis, forging a path towards a more inclusive, comprehensive, and nuanced understanding.

## 2.2. Reintegration

The nature of prisons has witnessed significant evolution, especially when considered through the lens of rehabilitation. Historically, prisons in many nations worldwide were largely punitive, designed to exact retribution and isolate offenders from society (Rubin, 2018; Phelps, 2011; Dikötter & Brown, 2007; Morris & Rothman, 1995). However, the rehabilitative model, which gained prominence in the 20th century, underscores the belief that individuals possess the capacity for change and that prisons should cultivate such transformation (Phelps, 2011; Hesselink-Louw et al., 2003). Although the rehabilitation concept remains vague and is being interpreted differently by different countries (Meijer, 2017), within this framework, criminal conduct is frequently interpreted as an outcome of deep-seated personal, societal, or economic challenges (Robinson & Crow, 2009). Rehabilitation, thus, pivots on addressing these foundational issues, endeavouring to shape inmates into constructive contributors to society. This change is facilitated through psychological therapy, academic pursuits, vocational programs, and therapeutic measures (Lorraine, 2021; Robinson & Crow, 2009; Hesselink-Louw et al., 2003). The primary objective is to arm inmates with the requisite knowledge and skills to break the cycle of crime. By focusing on rehabilitation, the prison system not only serves to protect society in the short term by confining offenders but also seeks to ensure that upon release, these individuals are less likely to re-offend, leading to long-term societal benefits (Robinson & Crow, 2009). In this context, rehabilitation and reintegration are inextricably linked. While the former concentrates on personal transformation within a prison, the latter emphasises the transition back into society.

The conceptual matrix of reintegration unfolds into a series of

processes and experiences that interplay from the moment of an offender's arrest to their eventual re-entry into society (UNODC, 2018). Encompassing more than merely the provision of resources and support post-release, reintegration, as emphasised by Laub and Sampson (2001), and Menkel-Meadow (2007), combines initial post-arrest diversions from the conventional criminal justice system into alternative trajectories, such as restorative justice or specific treatments tailored to address the root causes of offending, including mental health interventions and drug treatments.

A subtle yet crucial delineation also exists within Farrall and Calverley's (2006) categorisation of 'reintegration' alongside other "re" terms, such as "resettled", "rehabilitated", and "reformed", all implying a return to a former state within society. However, as Rotman (1990) and Raynor (2004a) noted, it's pivotal to avoid limiting this concept to mere restoration or "returning to a former state". Raynor argues that we cannot always presuppose offenders were in a prior desirable state, and Rotman asserts that merely reverting to a prior condition overlooks the potential for new personal or societal advancements. For both scholars, rehabilitation might necessitate surpassing a mere "return", evolving the individual beyond their initial state. Consequently, as Robinson & Crow (2009) put it, this would suggest a definition of offender rehabilitation as "change for the better".

Maruna (2006) enhances the dialogue on reintegration by introducing an element of "moral inclusion", which spans forgiveness, acceptance, redemption, and reconciliation—principles that suffuse the reintegration process with qualitative depth. This is synergistically echoed by Johnson (2002), who elucidates that while released prisoners may physically inhabit society, they are not morally or emotionally integral to it. They reside amidst "presumptions of moral contamination", thereby necessitating a reintegration that is inherently mutual—a bidirectional journey where both offender and society collaboratively engage to amend past misgivings and pave a path towards a more restorative future (Johnson, 2002).

Synthesising these scholarly perspectives unearths a richer,

multidimensional insight into reintegration. It implies that the subject transcends being a procedural post-release initiative, evolving into an intricate web, encompassing moral, social, and emotional threads that weave through the entire experience of an offender within the judicial and social rehabilitation system. The inquisitive lens must, therefore, not merely focus on "what works" and "how it works" from a mechanistic standpoint but should delve into unravelling the multifaceted threads constituting successful reintegration. This mandates a meticulous examination of the causal roots of reintegration failures, and a thoughtful exploration into devising pathways that illuminate a more holistic, morally inclusive, and socially consistent reintegration process (Brand, 2016). Therefore, the landscape of inquiry and implementation should, arguably, be as diverse and nuanced as the concept of reintegration itself, threading through legal, societal, emotional, and moral territories.

## 2.3. Intersectionality and multiple jeopardy

Over the past few decades, feminist theory has robustly embedded the concept that women are subjugated by multiple, intersecting systems of oppression, underlining that marginalisation extends beyond a singular, binary political process to encompass a web of overlapping, interwoven systems (Carastathis, 2014). Historically, intersectionality, pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, emerges as a pivotal theoretical approach, originating from "multiple jeopardy", a concept conceived by Deborah King to articulate the structural disadvantages and interpersonal mistreatment encountered by African American women due to their membership in multiple minority groups (King, 1988). Both King and Crenshaw underscored the imperative of understanding and addressing the dynamic and complex interaction between systems like racism, sexism, and classism in shaping lived experiences and institutional practices, thereby revealing the rich, nuanced interactions and impacts of various forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality, defined by Crenshaw as a framework to critically examine the myriad and mutually reinforcing forms of

inequality, stresses the necessity to acknowledge the meeting of an individual's multiple social identities, which amplify experiences of discrimination. This theoretical framework illuminates a notable gap in discourse by challenging the tendency to compartmentalise inequalities based on race, gender, class, and other categories, concealing the genuine experiential reality of those subjected to these intersecting disparities (Crenshaw, 1991). It is important to note that the concept of intersectionality is often used as a response to this theoretical demand to read several categories at once. There are two variations of the claim that intersectionality meets that theoretical demand. The first is the phenomenological claim that intersectionality captures how marginalisation is experienced simultaneously. The second is the ontological claim that intersectionality can theorise the convergence, co-constitution, overlapping or interwovenness of systems of oppression and marginalisation (Carastathis, 2014). Another supposed theoretical advantage of intersectionality is its ability to capture and account for the complexity of a phenomenon's experiential and structural aspects, as opposed to monistic approaches. Intersectional approaches agree that monistic/single-axis (non-intersectional) approaches fail to consider the complexity of social structures and subjective experiences (Carastathis, 2014). The claim is that monistic approaches to marginalisation are reductive: they reduce the "complex" experiences of "simultaneous" marginalisation to simplistic unitary categories.

Despite its wide application across numerous disciplines, intersectionality has not been immune to criticism. Scholars have pinpointed its alleged lack of definitional clarity and methodological precision, alongside its potential to inadvertently perpetuate essentialist thinking and overemphasise narratives of oppression, neglecting explorations of resistance and empowerment (Tomlinson, 2013; Nash, 2008; Bilge, 2013; Carastathis, 2014). Concerns have also been raised about its universal application, which could inadvertently universalise Western feminist paradigms, risking the misrepresentation of non-Western experiences of marginalisation (Salskov, 2020; Nash, 2019; Mohanty, 1988).

In an article on *The theory, applications and praxis of*

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*intersectionality*, Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) argue and suggest that intersectionality is an analytic disposition, signifying it as a guiding perspective or approach to analysing social and political issues. It is crucial to note that employing an intersectional lens in the analysis is not strictly bound to using the term "intersectionality" or adhering to specific scholarly citations in the literature (Cho et al., 2013). The framework compels a critical exploration into the complexity of how various social and political identities, such as race, gender, and class, interconnect and contribute to creating unique, multifaceted experiences of discrimination or privilege, especially in relation to power dynamics within society (Cho et al., 2013; Anthias, 2013; Levine-Rasky, 2011; Dhamoon, 2011). Intersectionality, in its theory and praxis, intertwines with the power structures it scrutinizes, deeply embedding within and being influenced by the very fields of race and gender power dynamics that it seeks to understand and dismantle (Cho et al., 2013). Thus, it offers a rich, nuanced approach to understanding and navigating the complexities of sameness and difference in societal structures and power dynamics, without extricating itself from the contexts it investigates.

Through intersectional analyses and knowledge gathered from and about marginalised groups, such as incarcerated mothers, intersectionality provides vital insights into the structural, disciplinary, and interpersonal dimensions of power. It illustrates how marginalisation and vulnerability are co-constructed through various identity aspects. For instance, in the context of formerly incarcerated mothers, intersectionality provides a lens to understand how intersecting gender inequalities with racial and economic discrimination significantly mould people's behavioural patterns (Agboola & Rabe, 2018). To advance an understanding of gender, crime, and motherhood that transcends the limitations of previous perspectives, it is imperative to understand the intersections of such stratifications, thereby necessitating social workers and researchers to employ an intersectional theoretical framework in examining the experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers. Intersectionality's broader claim does not assert equal cruciality of multiple inequality systems for all groups in all contexts but underscores the essentiality of always contemplating the potential

intersection of multiple inequality systems (Harnois, 2015).

# CHAPTER 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter, with an emphasis on the Ethiopian context, delves into the prison experiences of incarcerated mothers, referencing prior studies to enrich the understanding of their reintegration challenges. It also offers preliminary insights into the difficulties these mothers encounter upon their re-entry into society post-incarceration. The discussion further encompasses the policy framework, shedding light on international laws and standards specifically concerning female offenders. The overarching aim of this chapter is to furnish an overview of the documented challenges faced during reintegration, especially by women, thereby addressing the central research question of this dissertation by consolidating existing knowledge.

## *3.1. The prison experience of incarcerated mothers*

Women make up a smaller part of the total prison population, yet their numbers in the criminal justice system have been growing steadily on all continents (World Prison Brief, 2017). Since 2000, the global count of female offenders has increased, with women and girls now forming 6.9 per cent of the overall prison population (World Prison Brief, 2017). The growth rate of female prisoners has been faster than that of male prisoners, noting a 50.2 per cent increase for women as compared to an 18.1 per cent rise for men since 2000 (World Prison Brief, 2017). However, there are considerable variations between countries, for example, the latest Australian figures show that around 8% of the prison population is women (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018) and in the United Kingdom this figure was 4% (Prison Reform Trust, 2021). The United States has the highest total number of women in prison (8.7%) in any one country, as well as the highest prison population rate for women (about 65.7 per 100,000 of the national population) (World Prison Brief, 2018). Within the United States, as per a report by The Sentencing Project (2022), the female prison population has increased by over 475 per cent from 1980 to 2020, inflating from 26,326 to 152,854. By comparison, the rise in the female prison population in Africa is less pronounced (World Prison Brief,

2017), however, an upward trend in female incarceration is discernible (Agomoh, 2015). For example, according to the World Prison Report (2022), women constitute 5 per cent, 5.1 per cent, 3.7 per cent and 4.2 per cent of the overall prison population in Uganda, Kenya, Egypt and Ethiopia respectively.

Examining the specific context of women's imprisonment in Ethiopia, historical data and written records are scarce, making it challenging to piece together a comprehensive picture of their prison experience. Despite difficulties locating primary evidence, traditionally, prisons in Ethiopia were not designed for women but rather for incarcerating men. Before being converted into prisons, many prisons initially served as warehouses for military and administrative purposes (United States Department of State, 2012). The separate incarceration of women from men also began after the adoption of the 1957 Penal Code, although before this, women prisoners were often housed with men, and prisons lacked female staff (The African Union Human Rights Memorial, 2012).

Following the rise to power of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991, the country's penal rules underwent revision, with a focus on implementing progressive prison principles that included prisoner rehabilitation (Zerihun et al., 2021). Since then, the rehabilitation of prisoners has become a central objective of Ethiopian prisons, aiming to control and prevent crime. Numerous reforms have been introduced in the administration of prisons in Ethiopia following the promulgation of the 2007 Treatment of Federal Prisoners (Regulation No. 138/2007). This enactment, by the Council of Ministers, underscores the significance of providing educative and rehabilitative treatment for prisoners. It covers various aspects, including accommodation, clothing, bedding, sanitation, food, and medical services. The regulation also recognises the importance of professional counselling services for inmates and advocates for fair compensation for their work in correctional centres (Treatment of Federal Prisoners Enactment of the Council of Ministers, 2007).

Despite these efforts, the prison conditions in Ethiopia continue to demonstrate a gender-insensitive approach, resulting in serious human rights violations against women prisoners (Weldeyohannes, 2017). Reports indicate persistent inadequacies in health and sanitary care for women, including issues such as overcrowding, lack of hygiene, and insufficient nutrition (Meseret, 2018). Pregnant and nursing women often do not receive the specialised food and care they require (African Child Policy Forum, 2007). Moreover, once a child surpasses 18 months of age, all monthly allowances and special support provided by the prison for children living with their mothers are discontinued, placing the sole responsibility of meeting the children's needs on the mothers (Gobena & Hean, 2019). The overall quality of medical care in federal and regional prisons remains poor (ibid). Budget constraints contribute to the limited resources allocated to improving prison conditions (Meseret, 2018), resulting in prisoners often relying on external sources such as family or local vendors to supplement their meals (US Department of State, 2015).

The management of incarcerated mothers in Ethiopian prisons also encounters significant challenges in providing adequate support for their participation in prison activities and programmes. While the prison administration has introduced services such as education, vocational training, and small businesses to support inmates financially and aid in their rehabilitation, accessing these services remains challenging for mothers with young children (Gobena & Hean, 2019). Many programmes are not designed to be convenient or readily accessible to mothers, despite the entitlements specified in the Regulation on the Treatment of Prisoners (2007).

In addition to practical difficulties, mothers in Ethiopian prisons face emotional challenges as they strive to fulfil their maternal responsibilities while coping with the separation from their left-behind children (Alemineh et al., 2022). The restrictions they experience within the prison environment directly impact their perception of being good mothers, leading to feelings of shame, guilt, and self-blame for the hardships their children endure (Gobena & Hean, 2019). The inability to provide for their children's needs, both inside and outside the prison, adds further

emotional burden to these mothers (ibid). Furthermore, the lack of support from family and society exacerbates these emotional issues, as for most women relationships become strained due to incarceration (Alemineh et al., 2022). According to a study by Gobena and Hean (2019), many incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia lose contact with their neighbours, and only a few receive regular visits from their family members, including their children. This lack of support among other things could be attributed to the prevailing societal perception that labels these women as "bad" mothers due to their criminal activities, tarnishing their image as responsible caregivers. They are frequently perceived as having failed their basic maternal responsibilities due to their criminal activities (Gobena & Hean, 2019). The issue of imprisonment carries a social stigma (Almund & Myers, 2003), leading to discrimination and social exclusion from both their families and the broader community, making the process of reintegrating into society after release more challenging (Zerihun et al., 2021). More discussion about women and reintegration post-prison will follow in section 3.3.

## 3.2. Challenges of reintegration

A report from the World Prison Brief (2017) indicates that more than 10.35 million individuals are confined within penal institutions, the majority of whom will eventually be released and face the challenge of reintegration (Petersilia, 2005).

The process of reintegration is complex. While the initial release may be marked by relief and joy, these emotions often give way to the harsh reality of freedom without personal resources or social support (Davis et al., 2013). As such, the rehabilitation of offenders and their successful social reintegration into society should therefore be among the basic objectives of criminal justice systems. This viewpoint is explicitly acknowledged in legally binding international human rights conventions, as well as the United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice (2006), which emphasise the importance of interventions aimed at supporting the social reintegration of offenders. Such interventions are recognised as effective measures for reducing repeat offences and ensuring the safety of society.

In line with the United Nations' ambition, correctional programmes on a global scale have implemented education and skills training to facilitate post-incarceration employment (UNODC, 2018; Berghuis, 2018). In Ethiopia, for instance, inmates commonly receive vocational training and engage in small businesses while incarcerated (Zerihun et al., 2021; Gobena & Hean, 2019). Some even have opportunities to pursue further academic studies, enhancing their employment prospects upon release (Gobena & Hean, 2019). The implementation of such rehabilitative initiatives, when coupled with appropriate care and guidance, assumes a pivotal role in fostering positive transformation, diminishing the likelihood of reoffending, and fostering a more inclusive societal fabric (Aiello, 2013).

However, despite these efforts, recidivism rates remain high in various regions, signifying a persistent challenge within criminal justice systems. In Ethiopia, research has identified a concerning trend in recidivism, even in the absence of specific statistics or official reports (Zerihun et al., 2021; Tegeng & Abadi, 2018; Kahsay, 2017). This pattern extends beyond Ethiopia, with similar trends observed in South Africa, where recidivism rates range between 55% and 95% (Schoeman, 2013), and even within developed nations like the UK an aggregate proven reoffending rate of 24.3% in 2021 is documented in the Ministry of Justice's Authoritative Publication (2023). Similarly, countries such as Australia, Chile, and Denmark experience varying rates, ranging from 45% to 63% (Fazel & Wolf, 2015).

The effectiveness of rehabilitation and deterrence is complicated because skills and attitudes cultivated during incarceration often do not translate to successful reintegration (Redpath & Brandner, 2010; Davis et al., 2013). The post-incarceration world can be vastly different, leading to challenges in finding employment despite acquiring skills. Studies in Ethiopia have revealed that economic hardship, family issues, psychological problems, and systemic issues such as overcrowding and inadequate rehabilitation services contribute to recidivism (Zerihun et al., 2021; Tegeng & Abadi, 2018; Kahsay, 2017). The situation is further exacerbated by Ethiopia's lack of a coordinated post-prison support system, including the absence of parole supervision and formal transition programmes (Zerihun et al.,

2021). Although the Ethiopian Criminal Code (2004) recognises conditional release under parole, the implementation has been hindered by the absence of an established institutional system of parole supervision (Kahsay, 2017). Similarly, community-based rehabilitation, intended to reduce overcrowding and enhance reintegration, has not been realised.

The findings from Ethiopia are also reflected by studies in other countries. A study by Seymour and Costello (2005) in Ireland found that of the 241 prisoners surveyed, the most common problems they expected to face after release were employment (42 per cent) and housing (40 per cent). This was followed by problems related to drugs (29 per cent), alcohol (22 per cent), education (18 per cent), family difficulties (17 per cent), problems within the community (17 per cent) and mental health (13 per cent) (ibid:59). Similarly, in their study of reintegration in the UK, Jacobson et al. (2010) found that employment and housing were the most critical factors for successful reintegration. Another study in Norway also suggests that the interaction between the psychosocial needs of the prisoners and the organisation of the welfare services is complex and does not harmonise during reintegration (Larsen et al., 2019). The study also stated that the rehabilitation process for released offenders is accompanied by multiple challenges, such as drug abuse, lack of housing, mental health issues, the perceived inevitability of falling back into hostile social networks, vicious cycles of substance misuse and repeated crime (Larsen et al., 2019).

Furthermore, most people with experience of imprisonment are burdened by a history of social exclusion, discrimination, high levels of family and community disadvantage, and abuse (Davis et al., 2013). This shows that reintegration is a process that goes beyond the physical act of leaving prison and arriving in the community, but is also a social issue, and not just a personal one. This argument is further highlighted by Maruna (2009), who describes it as a "two-way street", encompassing not only the changes and adjustments a person makes after being released from prison, but also how the community responds to that person (ibid:60). These indicate that not only is the concept of reintegration a complex process, but its intervention and programmes should also be multifaceted and holistic. After all,

the overarching goal of reintegration, according to Travis (2000: 2), is "to have returned to our midst an individual who has discharged his legal obligation to society by serving his sentence and has demonstrated an ability to live by society's rules".

In conclusion, the complexities of reintegration and the persistence of high recidivism rates underscore the need for a multifaceted approach that addresses not only the immediate needs of the incarcerated population but also the broader systemic challenges.

## 3.3. Women and reintegration post-incarceration

Incarcerated women constitute a particularly vulnerable group within society, often grappling with a complicated web of interconnected health and social concerns upon their entry into prisons (Edwards et al., 2022). Despite their proportion being smaller than that of incarcerated men on a global scale, the number of incarcerated women is progressively on the rise globally, as detailed in section 3.1 of this literature review. Much of this rise is associated with increases in the arrest, prosecution, and incarceration for substance-related offences (alcohol and other drugs), particularly in countries like the United States (Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2018; Gunn et al., 2018; Ray et al., 2017). Notably, in countries such as Ethiopia, the primary reasons for female imprisonment are non-violent, predominantly economic-related offences (Alemineh et al., 2022; Gobena & Hean, 2019).

The trajectory of women's involvement in criminal activities is usually different from that of men, primarily due to the unique challenges they face in their lives. Research indicates that many women resort to illicit activities as a coping mechanism, driven by histories of abuse, poverty, substance misuse, and economic challenges (Agboola et al., 2022; Alemineh et al., 2022; Wesely & Dewey, 2018; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016; Bloom, 2003). A report by the United Nations Human Rights Office (2014) underscores that incarcerated women often consist of minor offenders with limited education, property ownership, and a history of gender-based maltreatment. This trend is also evident in Ethiopia, where many incarcerated women have faced abuse,

violence, and the overwhelming impacts of poverty and illness, exacerbated by economic disparities, limited political representation, and low literacy rates (Alemineh et al., 2022; WHO, 2021; Gobena & Hean, 2019). This finding echoes a study conducted in the United States that identified gender-based violence as a significant risk factor for female incarceration (DeHart, 2008). Research across five Latin American countries further accentuates gender disparities in criminal behaviour and the extent of social exclusion experienced by women prior to imprisonment (Safranoff & Tiravassi, 2018). The Prison Reform Trust (2021) also notes that many incarcerated women in England and Wales have experienced more severe offences than those leading to their imprisonment.

Research indicates that women, due to the comparatively less severe nature of their offences relative to men, often receive shorter sentences, leading to their earlier reintegration into society (Prison Reform Trust, 2021; Gobena & Hean, 2019; Agomoh, 2015; Ackermann, 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2006). However, upon their return to the community, these women face a multitude of disadvantages including inadequate post-release care, limited social support, parenting stress, homelessness, poverty, constrained employment prospects, substance-related issues, unresolved trauma and mental health issues (Baldwin, 2018; Doherty et al., 2014; Zurhold et al., 2011; Cobbina, 2010). Many have endured systemic discrimination and abuse throughout their lives, fundamentally shaping their recuperation and reintegration prospects (James & Glaze, 2006; Young & Reviere, 2006). This struggle is particularly intensified for mothers, given their roles as primary caregivers to dependent children prior to incarceration (Breuer et al., 2021; Glaze & Maruschak, 2008).

For these mothers, reintegration is intricately tied to their maternal responsibilities. The intersection of motherhood and a history of incarceration presents profound challenges. While incarceration can provide some women an opportunity for personal growth and familial reconciliation (Lockwood, 2017), for many, it strains familial ties, especially with their children (Lockwood, 2018). The emotional repercussions of separation can manifest as guilt, shame, and fear of rejection, making it

challenging to rebuild trust and re-establish healthy relationships post-release (Gobena et al., 2022). Rebuilding trust and nurturing a healthy emotional bond with their children amidst their own emotional turmoil becomes difficult post-release. Studies underscore that while children serve as motivators for women navigating the criminal justice system, the stressors women face (psychological problems, employment, housing, poverty, etc.) can hinder their efforts to fully embrace motherhood again (Breuer et al., 2021; Brown & Bloom, 2009).

Furthermore, the dual stigmas associated with incarceration and motherhood can exacerbate feelings of isolation and diminish self-esteem (Raikes & Lockwood, 2011). Societal perceptions of what constitutes a "good" mother are often reshaped or affected by imprisonment (Lockwood, 2018). Consequently, women with incarceration histories face heightened societal scrutiny and stigma, as evidenced by multiple studies (Breuer et al., 2021; Mitchell & Davis, 2019; Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Enos, 2001). Such perceptions can create enduring barriers to their reintegration efforts. For instance, Baldwin (2018) found that in England, post-release mothers felt their societal status as "good mothers" remained tarnished, even after reuniting with their children. Although the focus of this study is on the prison experience, it emphasises the reintegration challenges these mothers face, especially as they reconcile their maternal identity with societal expectations. Similarly, despite the scant existing studies on post-prison experience of motherhood, research from Ethiopia indicates that incarcerated mothers harbour apprehensions about potential societal discrimination post-release, primarily due to the prevailing norms surrounding the role of a "good" mother (Gobena & Hean, 2019). Such stigma and discrimination can obstruct their access to essential resources like employment, housing, and social networks, thereby perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage that jeopardizes their ability to ensure stability for their children.

Although the challenges faced by incarcerated mothers have been recognised by scholars and policymakers, there is a noticeable gap in literature focusing on their post-prison experiences, especially their lived experiences. While numerous

studies have examined women, incarceration, and gender dynamics (Gross, 2015; Shanna & William, 2013; Christian & Thomas, 2009; Bloom et al., 2004; McIvor, 2004; Carlen, 2002), the emphasis has largely been on the differential treatment and experiences of men and women within the criminal justice system (Zerihun et al., 2021; Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004). Additionally, several studies have explored motherhood across various contexts such as poverty, mental health, substance abuse, teenage motherhood, and maternal imprisonment (Gobena & Hean, 2019; Crivello et al., 2019; Longman et al., 2013; McKay, 2004; Coyer, 2003). However, research specifically addressing the lived experiences of motherhood post-imprisonment is scant, especially in the Global South as identified in the literature review paper (Gobena et al., 2022). Given the unique challenges incarcerated mothers may face in different socio-economic and cultural contexts, it is crucial to explore their experiences post-release in the Global South.

## 3.4. Policy framework

The rehabilitation of offenders and their successful social reintegration into society should be among the primary objectives of a nation's criminal justice system. For example, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966) (Art 10, 3) states that the essential principle of the treatment of prisoners shall be their reformation and social rehabilitation. The legally binding international human rights conventions and the United Nations Standards and Norms on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice recognise this point and emphasise the importance of measures to support the social reintegration of offenders to prevent further crime and protect society (UNODC, 2018).

The special considerations made for women prisoners are recognised in the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules). Significantly, the Rules recognise that many women offenders do not threaten society and that imprisonment may impede their social reintegration. In addition, the Bangkok Rules require prison authorities, in cooperation with probation and social services, local community

groups and non-governmental organisations, to design and implement comprehensive pre-release and post-release reintegration programmes that address the gender-specific needs of women prisoners. This will not only help the female prisoners, but also ensure the healthy development of their dependent children, as recommended by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Article 3 (1) states as follows:

> *In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. (p.2)*

The other international standard is the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) (2015). It is the most critical and recent set of international standards for the treatment of prisoners and management of prisons. The standard clearly states that the provision of meaningful rehabilitation programmes in prisons is critical to achieving the ultimate goals of a custodial sentence, namely reducing recidivism and improving public safety. The Nelson Mandela Rules also emphasise that prison administrations and other relevant authorities should provide education, vocational training, employment, treatment and other forms of support, in line with offenders' individual treatment needs, to promote the social reintegration of prisoners into society (UNODC, 2018). The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules): Rule 4, paragraph 1, states:

> *The purposes of a sentence of imprisonment or similar measures derivative of a person's liberty are primarily to protect society against crime and to reduce recidivism. Those purposes can be achieved if the period of imprisonment is used to ensure, so far as possible, the reintegration of such persons into society upon release so that they can lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life. (p.3)*

The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial

Measures (Tokyo Rules) also encourage the Member States to develop non-custodial measures as alternative options to detention. The Tokyo Rules give emphasis to public awareness and constructive attitudes to the value of non-custodial efforts and the importance of the social reintegration of offenders. They call for public participation and the implementation of alternatives to deprivation of liberty "to be seen as an opportunity for members of the community to contribute to the protection of their society".

These international standards and norms emphasise the need for post-release services, including providing aftercare services to former prisoners, early release from prison and community supervision of offenders, and the crucial role of the community in the social reintegration of former prisoners. The Nelson Mandela Rules, in particular, are a potent reminder that "society's obligations do not end with the release of a prisoner" (Rule 90); they emphasise the need for effective aftercare to be provided by both state and non-state agencies. The Tokyo Rules call for the availability and early consideration of a wide range of post-sentencing alternatives, including various forms of parole, remission and pardon. Finally, both the Nelson Mandela Rules and the Tokyo Rules strongly encourage public participation in the social reintegration of offenders and appropriate community-based interventions (including using appropriately trained volunteers). Given the desired involvement of various public and non-governmental agencies, effective coordination mechanisms and linkages are rightly presented as critical to adequate post-release services.

Many African countries have ratified the aforementioned international laws and integrated them into their national laws (Agomoh, 2015). Ethiopia has also signed and ratified international human rights instruments to ensure that all women have access to adequate physical, social and mental health care standards (Weldeyohannes, 2017). The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which came into force in 1995, recognises international human rights standards, including the rights of the child and of women. Through Article 9 (4), all international instruments recognised by Ethiopia become an integral part of the law of the land. This recognition

is further extended by the international human rights instruments in Article 13 (2), making them standards for interpreting the third chapter of the Constitution, which deals with fundamental rights and freedoms. Article 35 (9) establishes the right of women to the prevention of harm from pregnancy and childbirth.

The Federal Prison Proclamation No.1174/2019 is the central prison policy in Ethiopia. The objectives of the Proclamation are to enforce sentences and court orders, respect the rights of prisoners under its care, meet their needs and uphold their human dignity; provide psychological, academic and vocational training for prisoners so that they are rehabilitated both ethically and attitudinally, which in turn helps them to be law-abiding, peaceful and productive members of the community into which they reintegrate. In addition, the Proclamation obliges the government to provide the prisoners with essentials such as food, water, shelter, clothing and medical care. This shows that Ethiopia has made progress in recognising rights relevant to incarcerated women by adopting international human rights instruments and developing its own instruments.

These international and regional instruments are essential in providing a legal basis for the specific rights of incarcerated women in Ethiopia (Weldeyohannes, 2017). However, Ethiopia still lacks specific policies and regulations to support the release of incarcerated individuals, particularly women and mothers. Existing statutes have mainly focused on treating women in prison, and relevant prison laws and regulations do not recognise the rights of women prisoners after release. For example, Federal Prison Proclamation No. 1174/2019 states the following in Article 67 on parole and release:

> *1/ Where conditions are fulfilled, the prison administration shall request parole for prisoners in accordance with the Criminal Code and directive to be issued by the Commission.* (p.12139)

> *2/ The prison is responsible for returning prisoners' money and other belongings in accordance with Article 31 of this Proclamation.* (p.12139)

Article 67 inadequately addresses reintegration issues and provides limited guidance on the type of measures and responsibilities the government has in order to address the reintegration of offenders and their experiences after imprisonment. Therefore, Ethiopia needs a holistic prison policy reform that can include released persons and address their challenges post-prison.

# CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGY

This thesis consists of three papers. The aim was, first, to understand the experience of motherhood post-prison in an international context. Secondly, to explore the lived motherhood experience after incarceration in the Ethiopian context. Finally, to reflect on and explore how researchers elicit and engage with the stories of formerly incarcerated women, to understand their experiences of motherhood after prison in culturally diverse and non-Western contexts such as Ethiopia.

This chapter sets out the thesis's philosophical approach and describes the methods chosen to achieve the research objectives of the three studies presented. The chapter begins with an introduction to the ontological and epistemological position of the thesis. This is followed by an overview of the methodological and philosophical stance of different research methods (qualitative systematic review, descriptive phenomenology, and reflexivity) that were used to answer the different research questions, with different research samples and methods of analysis, as shown in Table 2 below. Ethical issues are also addressed in this chapter.

**Table 2**.Overview of the methodological specifications in the papers

| Research question | Methods | Samples | Analysis | Papers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *How do women globally describe and navigate the complexities of motherhood after their release from prison?* | Qualitative Systematic Review | 14 research studies on the lived experience of motherhood in an international context | Thematic analysis | Paper 1 |
| *What is the lived experience of motherhood after prison in Ethiopia* | Descriptive phenomenology | Nine mothers who have been released from prison in Ethiopia | Descriptive phenomenological analysis (Giorgi, 2009) | Paper 2 |
| *In culturally diverse and non-Western settings like Ethiopia, how can researchers effectively elicit and understand the narratives of formerly incarcerated mothers, ensuring their stories are understood with cultural nuance and respect?* | Reflexive | Researcher's journal from the fieldwork in Ethiopia | Reflexive analysis | Paper 3 |

## *4.1. The ontological and epistemological position*

The ontological (nature of being) and epistemological (nature of knowledge) distinction involves the critical aspect of the research process, as it affects the research approach and methodology selected to uncover social truths (David & Sutton, 2004). This PhD research approach is based on the assumption that formerly incarcerated mothers are meaning-making beings and experts in their own lives, who have the right to express their views and be heard. Since the thesis was interested in exploring the lived experience of motherhood after prison, it is positioned within constructivist ontology, which views individuals as social actors contributing to the construction of social realities, and assumes that reality is subjective (Bryman, 2016; Scotland, 2012). The thesis is interested in understanding the subjective experience of motherhood of formerly incarcerated mothers. Individual mothers experience motherhood differently after incarceration, and this study explores these different experiences.

This research is based on the ontological assumption that social reality is subjective and co-constructed by individuals who interact and make their own meaning of the events in their lives in an active way (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). This aligns with the epistemological assumption that knowledge is maximised through interaction between the researcher and participants. Such knowledge can be generated through an inductive approach by observation or participation in real settings, grounded in experience and the natural world (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009). As a phenomenological researcher, I recognised my role in data collection and analysis concerning the participants. Thus, my position as a researcher is not impartial, meaning that data collection and analysis are influenced by factors such as my values, biases, and cultural and professional background. Throughout the thesis, however, I have attempted to make my positionality explicit. Furthermore, in Paper 3, I have made use of reflexivity, i.e., an attitude and conscious effort to

become aware of one's own presence in relation to the research participants, by noting down my reflections during and after the fieldwork.

## 4.2. A qualitative systematic review

While Papers 2 and 3 of this thesis are empirical and reflexive works based on data obtained through interviews with formerly incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia and from the researcher's fieldwork notes, Paper 1 is a qualitative synthesis of previous research. This study aimed to consolidate previous research on formerly incarcerated mothers, in order to gain a more comprehensive and holistic overview of their experiences of motherhood after prison in an international context and to identify where the gap in the literature lies. A systematic review not only highlights existing gaps, deficiencies, and patterns in current evidence but also lays a solid foundation for guiding subsequent research in the domain. Such reviews adhere to a meticulous and pre-established methodology, ensuring results that are both dependable and pertinent to the intended audience (Munn et al., 2018).

The review followed the qualitative synthesis review procedure employed by Thomas & Harden (2008), a verified method of synthesising qualitative research to accomplish higher-order thematic categories in a transparent way, to explore and synthesise the current research evidence of the nature of the lived experience of motherhood after prison in an international context. A qualitative synthesis was employed in this review. Compared to a meta-synthesis, a qualitative synthesis allows for an exploratory and inductive analysis of people's experiences and focuses on increasing the understanding of a phenomenon (Noyes et al., 2019; Ring et al., 2011).

The Population, Phenomena of Interest and Context (PICo) model was adopted to develop the review question, search strategy and inclusion criteria (Riesenberg & Justice, 2014). Qualitative synthesis

reviews of English-language articles published before January 2020 that provided insight into the motherhood experience of formerly incarcerated mothers were included. Of the 418 studies identified, 14 peer-reviewed qualitative studies were included using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. With the assistance of a librarian, seven databases (Criminology Database, PsychINFO, MEDLINE, CINAHL, ProQuest, Scopus, Academic Search Premier) were selected for searching. To identify additional papers not covered by this search, a hand search was conducted in Research Gate, Academia and the reference lists of articles already selected for inclusion (for more detail, see the full Paper 1 in Appendix 7).

The importance of prospective registration has been increasingly underscored in recent years, with the objective of minimising bias in both the execution and dissemination of research, enhancing transparency, and minimising inadvertent replication of reviews (Pieper & Rombey, 2022). Notwithstanding this, the qualitative systematic review presented in this thesis was not pre-registered, which constitutes a limitation.

## 4.3. Descriptive phenomenology

Utilising a qualitative approach, the empirical study in Ethiopia delves into mothers' experiences post-incarceration, seeking to understand their individual perspectives on motherhood. Dahlberg et al. (2008) highlight the importance of capturing subjective experiences for a genuine understanding of human narratives. Qualitative research, inherently, unravels the multifaceted realities we inhabit (Bryman, 2016). Despite its importance, the intricate dimensions of motherhood following incarceration have been largely overlooked in existing literature, as discussed in Chapter 3 and subsequently in Paper 1. By focusing on these lived experiences, this study not only bridges this scholarly gap but also, as Vasilachis de Gialdino (2009) articulates, emphasises the inherent value of qualitative methods in illuminating the depth and nuance of human phenomena.

Phenomenology is a unique approach to qualitative research that delves into the essence and significance of human experiences. It stands apart from other qualitative methods due to its philosophical underpinnings, research focus, and data analysis techniques. Grounded in the tradition established by philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology emphasises studying subjective experiences, conscious awareness, and the lived world of individuals (Giorgi, 2009). It places great importance on exploring and understanding the lived experiences of individuals, aiming to uncover their meaning and essence from their perspective (Giorgi, 2009). Furthermore, it draws upon existential philosophy, delving into questions about meaning, consciousness, perception, embodiment, and the nature of reality, thereby setting it apart from other qualitative methods. Although phenomenology has a philosophical origin, it has recently been recognised as a research method (Giorgi et al., 2017).

Key concepts in phenomenology include epoché, reduction and essence. Epoché, a central concept of phenomenology, means setting aside one's preconceived beliefs, assumptions and judgements about the world to approach phenomena with a fresh and open perspective (Morley, 2010; Giorgi, 2009). Epoché aims to observe and describe phenomena directly, as they are, without imposing external interpretations or theories on them. Closely related to epoché is reduction, another fundamental concept of phenomenology. It aims to eliminate external influences such as cultural, historical and psychological factors in order to reveal the essential and universal aspects of human experience (Giorgi, 2009; Husserl, 2004). This process involves a shift from the concrete and specific to the abstract and general and enables the identification of the underlying structures and meanings that shape our subjective encounters (ibid).

As a crucial notion within phenomenology, essence refers to the fundamental characteristics that define a specific phenomenon (Husserl, 2004). Essence is distinguished from the contingent and accidental aspects of phenomena, which makes the phenomenon to

be that very phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2006). It represents the necessary and universal properties that are essential to a phenomenon's identity (Giorgi, 2009). By grasping the essence of a phenomenon, researchers seek to gain deeper insights into its nature and meaning. These concepts are crucial in phenomenology as they provide a methodological framework for the rigorous analysis of human experience and the exploration of the fundamental nature of phenomena. While there may be overlapping elements with other qualitative methods, phenomenology's unique emphasis on lived experiences, bracketing of preconceptions, reduction, and focus on the essence and holistic understanding distinguish it from other approaches.

Whilst there are different interpretations and variations within phenomenology, this study adopts a descriptive phenomenological approach to explore the lived (emic) (Heaslip et al., 2018) experience of motherhood after incarceration. The phenomenon is motherhood after incarceration. The descriptive phenomenological approach describes a phenomenon rather than explaining or interpreting it and starts from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Giorgi, 2009). It also provides a detailed description of individuals' experiences so that their experiences can be understood and illuminated in a different and novel way (Langdridge, 2007). This approach helps the researcher avoid adding their interpretation or creating meanings that are not present through bracketing (Giorgi, 2009). Unlike phenomenological methods such as Interpretive Phenomenology (IPA), which seeks to understand the lived experience rather than simply describing it, the descriptive phenomenological approach privileges and honours the voices of the participants and their stories. Ultimately, both approaches (descriptive phenomenology and IPA) focus on the lived experience of a phenomenon, and both could have been used in the context of this study, which was primarily concerned with the experience of motherhood post-prison. However, as highlighted in the literature review (Chapter 3 and Paper 1), the perspectives of these mothers remain limited in academic literature and their voices were usually undermined by their status as convicts (James, 2013).

These societal attitudes make it difficult for researchers to access these individuals and groups, as they are hidden, hindered and sometimes considered non-existent. Considering these challenges, it was imperative to prioritise and amplify their voices, presenting an alternative, yet equally valid, narrative to the dominant academic and professional discourses. The application of descriptive phenomenology was deemed the most suitable approach to capture the depth and nuance of their lived experiences. Insights gathered from these narratives not only enrich academic discourse but also have the potential to inform and enhance practices within the broader field of social work and the criminal justice system.

This methodological choice, which emphasises the voices of the mothers, also aligns with intersectional feminism, which fundamentally challenges the complex interplay among various forms of oppression, encompassing racism, sexism, classism, and other identity-based discriminations (Crenshaw,1991). It highlights the nuanced challenges faced by individuals with overlapping marginalised identities (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw,1991), such as incarcerated mothers as discussed in the theoretical framework section. For instance, incarcerated women grapple with multi-layered marginalisation; they face gender discrimination, economic hardships especially in low-income regions (e.g., in countries like Ethiopia), and societal stigmas intertwining motherhood with criminality. This latter point is particularly poignant, as society's conventional standards often conflict with the realities of incarcerated mothers, challenging the prevailing notions of a "good mother". As such, intersectional feminism advocates for a research approach that applies a corrective lens, ensuring that these marginalised narratives are acknowledged and authentically represented in scholarly discourse. Such representation is crucial to uphold the integrity and validity of research findings.

In the current study, a descriptive phenomenological approach was chosen over a feminist methodology as it emphasises on capturing the rich, nuanced details of individual experiences. It also facilitates a deep exploration of personal narratives, by brackting preconceived

notions and theoretical biases often associated with feminist frameworks.

Further, this research is grounded in Giorgi's method of descriptive phenomenology, which evolved from Husserl's original concept. Giorgi's adaptation bridges phenomenological philosophy with empirical research, enhancing its accessibility and applicability across diverse social science disciplines. Although his method was initially designed for psychological research, its application has since expanded to various disciplines within the social sciences, allowing researchers to apply phenomenological principles rigorously and systematically. As Giorgi (2009) points out, a key advantage of this approach is that it provides a clear structure and systematic framework for analysing phenomenological data. This feature makes it particularly attractive to researchers new to phenomenology who are looking for a clearly defined method to guide their investigations.

Thus, the use of Giorgi's method of descriptive phenomenology in this research firstly provides a rigorous approach to analysing the data, ensuring systematic and detailed exploration of the mothers' experiences. Secondly, the method emphasises capturing detailed descriptions, allowing for a nuanced understanding of participants' lived experiences of motherhood post-prison. Additionally, incorporating phenomenological reduction enables unbiased interpretation, enhancing the validity of findings. Furthermore, the method facilitates clarity and coherence in presenting research outcomes. Overall, Giorgi's method of descriptive phenomenology offers a structured framework to investigate the specific phenomenon under study, enhancing the quality and depth of the research. As a novice researcher, the structured guidance provided by Giorgi's approach was invaluable and intuitively resonant.

### 4.3.1.     *Study site*

The phenomenological study focused on formerly incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is the second most populous country

in Africa and the twelfth most populous in the world, with about 127 million inhabitants, half of whom are female (World Population Review, 2023). The female prison population is increasing in Ethiopia; in 2001/02, for example, it was 3 per cent and had increased to 5.3 per cent in 2014, and most of these prisoners are mothers of dependent children (Zelelew, 2001). This figure places Ethiopia among the African countries with a relatively high female prison population (World Prison Brief, 2017).

### *4.3.2.    Recruitment and sampling*

In a phenomenological study, the selection of participants depends on whether the participants have had the experiences the researcher seeks (Englander, 2012). In a descriptive phenomenological study, purposive maximum variation sampling is a key technique (Langdridge, 2007). It focuses on participants with a common experience of the phenomenon (experiencing motherhood after prison), but who differ in terms of as many demographic characteristics as possible (age, marital status, education level and geographical location) (Langdridge, 2007). In life-world research, variation is more important than participant number (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Ensuring maximum variation helps to discover those features of the experience that differ across perceptions, and those that are unaffected or invariant across perceptions (Langdridge, 2007). In this study, the goal was to understand the lived experience of formerly incarcerated mothers with the common experience of motherhood after prison, but with a wide variety of demographic differences, as far as possible.

The Federal Correctional Administration, a lecturer from Addis Ababa University, and an NGO called Prison Fellowship served as gatekeepers to identify the participants. This was essential given the challenges in locating former prisoners in Ethiopia. Most prisoners are dispersed after release and tend to change their living arrangements offen due to discrimination and marginalisation in society (Gobena & Hean, 2019). Ethiopia lacks a robust system to monitor post-incarceration life of these individuals. Primarily,

NGOs undertake this task, but even within these organisations, programmes addressing the post-prison life of offenders remain limited and often insufficient.

The Federal Correctional Administration served as the initial gatekeeper for obtaining permission to access contact addresses, specifically phone numbers, of released mothers from its records. Upon evaluating the provided request letter, the Administration granted access to these details. They then communicated with a maximum-security federal prison in Addis Ababa, one of the nation's most extensive detention facilities for individuals prosecuted under federal laws, seeking their full cooperation. The approval letter was directed to the women's sector of the prison administration, which subsequently provided the contact details for nine previously incarcerated mothers. These details primarily consisted of the phone numbers of a family member registered during the mothers' initial arrests. Communication with all but one of these mothers proved challenging due to severed ties with both the prison and their families. As an alternative, I communicated with the Prison Fellowship (an NGO) and a local Pastor. Connecting with these "trusted" gatekeepers, who had longstanding relationships with former prisoners, was pivotal—their years of engagement and trust-building with offenders enabled them to assist in identifying additional participants.

Another avenue for participant recruitment was an opposition political party with a substantial membership base across Ethiopia. Given the political climate, differing opinions, or affiliations with opposition parties in Ethiopia could lead to imprisonment. Two mothers, previously detained as political prisoners, were introduced through this party's networks. The snowballing method was then employed, prompting participants to recommend peers in similar circumstances. This strategy, commonly utilised amongst marginalised demographics (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015), facilitated the identification of five more participants.

However, the political turbulence in Ethiopia during the concluding month of data collection impeded the process. Consequently, I was unable to engage with a prospective participant, a former political detainee, due to the unrest. Accessing a politically volatile environment requires flexibility and consideration of a broader spectrum, something that did not occur to me at the beginning of the data collection. Overall, the familiarity with my native country's culture and administrative structures was instrumental in understanding the environment and concluding the research.

Using the above strategies, the study incorporated nine participants from different demographic backgrounds. Geographically, two participants were residents of Addis Ababa, six originated from the Oromia region, and one from the Amhara region. While one participant was based in a rural setting, the remainder were from both major and minor urban centres. In terms of educational level: two participants held either diplomas or degrees, two had finished high school, another two had primary education, and the remaining three had not undergone formal education. Relationship-wise, four of these participants were in marital unions, while the remaining five were single parents. Their ages spanned from the late 20s up to 60 years. While the inclusion criteria encompassed various categories of mothers (e.g., biological, stepmothers, and those without primary childcare responsibilities), all participants who identified and expressed willingness to participate in the study were mothers of biological children. The number of children per participant ranged from one to eight, with their ages spanning from infancy to adulthood. The mothers had varying sentence lengths, ranging from as short as two months to as long as nineteen years.

Regarding the specifics of their offences, only a few participants, particularly those identifying as political prisoners, disclosed the nature of their crimes. However, many refrained from discussing this aspect. As a result, detailed information about the nature of their offences was neither sought nor recorded. It is crucial to highlight that the study's primary focus was not on the reasons behind their incarceration but rather on their experiences of motherhood post-

release. While the length of their sentences, which indicates the duration of separation from their children, is relevant, delving into the reasons for their incarceration risked undermining rapport. Focusing on these details could have hindered participants' willingness to openly discuss their current challenges, given the potential shame associated with being in prison. This omission of background information on their offences might be seen as a limitation of the data, presenting an area for further exploration in future research.

Among the participants, two mothers were able to continue caring for their children while in prison, although the majority entrusted their children to the care of their husbands or relatives. Throughout their incarceration, most mothers reported making efforts to stay in touch with their children, even though the frequency of contact varied. A few mothers mentioned receiving regular visits from their children, while others experienced irregular visitation patterns. For mothers incarcerated as political prisoners, although Regulation No. 138/2007, concerning the Treatment of Federal Prisoners, apparently guarantees visitation rights for all inmates, reports from them indicate a systematic denial of these rights. These mothers have specifically highlighted the negative impact of such restrictions on their relationships with their children and families.

See Table 1 for brief biographical details of the mothers. Pseudonyms were assigned to each mother for protection and confidentiality.

**Table 3.** Biographical details of the mothers

|   | Pseudonym | Age | Education level | Children | Marital status | Geographical location | Time of release |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Selam | 35 | Higher education | 3 | Married | Addis Ababa | 2 months ago |
| 2 | Askale | 50 | High school | 3 | Divorced | Addis Ababa | 1 year ago |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *3* | Demitu | 52 | Higher education | 4 | Married | Amhara region | 2 years ago |
| *4* | Nardos | 35 | High school | 1 | Divorced | Oromia region | 4 years ago |
| *5* | Rahel | 35 | No formal education | 5 | Divorced | Oromia region | 7 months ago |
| *6* | Hana | 38 | Primary school | 2 | Widowed | Oromia region | 4 years ago |
| *7* | Azeb | 25 | Primary school | 2 | Married | Oromia region | 6 months ago |
| *8* | Bayush | 45 | No formal education | 2 | Divorced | Oromia region | 7 years ago, |
| *9* | Alem | 60 | No formal education | 8 | Married | Oromia region | 3 years ago |

### *4.3.3.     The interviews*

There are two general ways to collect data about a phenomenon from another person: the traditional face-to-face interview, and a written or recorded account of the experience (Giorgi, 2009). Although there is no prescriptive quality for a good interview, according to Giorgi (2009, p. 122), there is one main criterion: "What one seeks from a research interview in phenomenological research is as complete a description as possible of the experience a participant has lived through." The interview aims to have participants recount their experiences about the phenomenon (motherhood), usually through an experience-near question (Giorgi, 2009; Heaslip et al., 2018). Additionally, most incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia have low literacy levels (Gobena & Hean, 2019), and as such, face-to-face interviews were chosen. Face-to-face interviews are usually longer, richer, deeper and more nuanced than written or recorded accounts (Englander, 2012).

This data collection method also reflects the study's epistemological orientation, which is interpretivism. It aims to understand phenomena from the perspective of the individual and explore the interaction between individuals, as well as the cultural and historical

settings in which people live (Scotland, 2012). This helped me to understand the mothers' perspective through direct participation in their motherhood experience after prison. For the above reasons, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine mothers in three regions in Ethiopia. The choice of these specific locales for the interviews was influenced by the fact that the participants, who were identified utilising the snowball sampling method and through the facilitation of gatekeepers, were residents of these areas. The interviews were unstructured in order to capture the participants' meanings of a phenomenon on their own terms. During the interview, the interviewer presented herself as a learner with a genuine interest in the participants' lives. This helped to build rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee and allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' lives (Moyle, 2002). As the study was interested in participants' experience of motherhood after incarceration, it was clear to them that there were no right or wrong answers. Visual prompts such as smiles, nods and encouraging words, such as "please continue", "interesting", and "yes" were also used.

The interview schedule used the following question, and follow-up prompts were also used:

*"I am interested in hearing about your life as a mother after prison. Please, can you tell me what it is like being a mother now that you have left prison?"*

The in-depth interviews were a mixture of face-to-face (n=7) and telephone interviews (n=2). Conducting telephone interviews differed from face-to-face interviews. This is commonly used in quantitative data collection, but less in qualitative data collection (Novick, 2008). It has its advantages and disadvantages; the advantages were that it reduced costs and travel and allowed for geographically dispersed participants to be captured (Novick, 2008). Therefore, participants in three additional cities were included in the study, which would not otherwise have been possible, due to the distance and Covid 19 situation in the country. The telephone

interviews also helped the researcher to take notes unobtrusively and freely (McCoyd & Kerson, 2006). The disadvantages were the lack of visual cues, distractions during the interviews, network connectivity problems, and the fact that the interview was kept short compared to face-to-face interviews (Garbett & McCormack, 2001), making it difficult to have an in-depth conversation with these two participants. The network connectivity problem also interrupted one of the interviews and forced it to be rescheduled for another time. To address the drawbacks, an attempt was made to communicate with the two participants a second time, to ask further and overlooked questions, and this was successful with one of them. Except for the two interviews, the majority (n=7) of the interviews were conducted face-to-face at various locations, mainly in churches and other public places, such as a school. One interview was conducted in the participant's home.

Depending on the research area and location, researchers and participants may be placed in dangerous and vulnerable situations (Liamputtong, 2007). During data collection, the physical danger was challenging, as most ex-offenders live in poor and unsafe neighbourhoods because they are usually economically disadvantaged, especially after release (Nyamathi et al. 2017). It was therefore a challenge to choose an interview location that was safe and secure, while feeling comfortable for both the researcher and the participants. All interview locations were chosen with safety in mind, to protect the participants and the researcher. Most interviews were conducted in a public place, such as a church, as they are public, yet quiet. The locations were chosen mainly on the basis of the participants' wishes. The interviews were supportive, and participants were encouraged to share their experiences in an environment and at a time that suited them. This helped the participants to feel comfortable and safe while telling their stories. It also addressed the power imbalance between the researcher and the participants, giving them some control over the interview process. To avoid researcher vulnerability and potential danger, I informed close family members of the location and time of the interview, so they could check on me. Because the study occurred

during the Covid 19 pandemic, safety measures were also taken during the interviews, including familiarisation with Ethiopian infection control guidelines, use of masks, sterilisation of hands and equipment, and application of a two-meter distance rule during the course of the interview.

The interviews were conducted in Amharic, the official language in Ethiopia, and I am a native speaker of the language. Qualitative research, especially phenomenological studies, focuses on subjective meanings, which are highly intertwined with the language used to express them. Language also influences how meaning is constructed; for example, metaphors are different and language-specific in different cultures (Polkinghorne, 2005). In a phenomenological study, the meanings experienced by the participants, and the researcher's interpretation of those meanings, should be as close as possible to ensure credibility. However, translation of an interview from one language to another may involve interpretation, which may result in lost meanings and further affect the credibility of the study in general (Nes et al., 2010). Some concepts used by the participants were culture-specific (bound) and were difficult to translate into English. Therefore, all analysis steps were conducted in the original language and then translated into English. The interviews were recorded, as this allowed the researcher to listen to the interviews several times during the analysis and in case of doubt (Stockdale, 2002).

### 4.3.4.    *Analysis*

The data from the interviews was analysed according to Giorgi's three-stage descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2009). First, the data was transcribed verbatim, and each transcript was read to get a feel of the full description of the individual's account. Once a sense of the whole had developed, the transcripts were divided into smaller meaning units to enable a more thorough analysis. This involved re-reading the entire transcript from the beginning, and whenever a shift in meaning occurred, a mark was noted in the written transcript. From a psychological perspective and mindful of

the phenomenon being researched, a meaning unit was determined whenever the researcher experienced a transition in meaning (Giorgi, 2009). This continued until all the raw data had been broken down into meaning units. In this process, a phenomenological attitude is crucial; it refers to a willingness to put one's perspective aside, referred to as bracketing, to view the phenomenon with fresh eyes, or to be open to what had not been seen before (Giorgi, 2009). Bracketing concerns not letting previous knowledge about the phenomenon influence the current analysis of the experience (Giorgi, 2009). This bracketing process was challenging because the researcher had to be consciously aware of not being influenced by previous knowledge about the experience and the findings from the literature review. The researcher had to deliberately put aside the knowledge and bias, to create space for new insights and a new perspective on the phenomenon of motherhood after imprisonment, throughout the data analysis.

Finally, the participants' accounts of their experiences were transformed into phenomenologically sensitive expressions that revealed the essence of their motherhood experiences. This step is at the core of the phenomenological attitude (Giorgi, 2009). This stage involved returning to the beginning of the description, which had been divided into meaning units. Each meaning unit was then examined to identify psychologically sensitive expressions and to see how motherhood's life-world description could be more appropriately expressed. Participants' life-world expressions were then transformed into expressions that highlighted the psychological meanings they experienced. This requires free imaginative variation, i.e. dwelling on the transformed meaning unit to identify the participant's psychological meanings and make implicit factors explicit.

At the end of the above process, there is a renewed shift from each interview analysed (the parts) to the whole, in which there is a process of identifying the constituent structures of the phenomenon of motherhood after prison. Again, the process of free imaginative variation was used to identify the aspects that form the core of the

lifeworld descriptions of the participants' accounts of motherhood experiences after prison. The purpose of this movement between the parts and the whole is to bring together the essence of the experience of motherhood. This process required me to engage fully with the data and was very time-consuming. At times I became too absorbed in the details and had to force myself to take a step back to dwell on the data. I had to learn to be patient and take the time to dwell on the data. Finlay (2013) refers to this as the dance between the depth of individual accounts and the whole.

## *4.3.5.    Ethical issues*

This project was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) under reference number 542552 (see Appendices 3 and 4).

### *Consent*

Intersectionality, as a theoretical framework, underscores the imperative need for heightened ethical sensitivity, especially when working with marginalised communities that have been historically either underrepresented or misinterpreted in academic research (Christoffersen, 2018). Central to these ethical considerations is the principle of informed consent—a foundational tenet of ethical research. Within an intersectional paradigm, informed consent transcends its conventional interpretation and assumes intricate dimensions. It becomes essential that researchers ensure participants are thoroughly briefed on the research's aim, methodology, and the potential consequences of their involvement (Liamputtong, 2007). Clear communication, free from academic jargon, and tailored to the specific cultural and linguistic context of the participants, becomes paramount. Furthermore, at the heart of informed consent lies the agency or the participant's unfettered right to withdraw from the study without any negative consequences (Christoffersen, 2018; Liamputtong, 2007).

In studying formerly incarcerated mothers—a group that is subject

to marginalisation—this informed consent takes on profound significance. Delving into their histories may inadvertently trigger emotional and psychological distress from recalling traumas and revisiting one's past, particularly one tarnished by incarceration, which can unearth traumatic memories. Participants might recall moments of shame, guilt, separation from children, or other distressing events, among other challenges. Anticipating these potential issues, the current study's informed consent process was aimed to address them. As outlined in the Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) (2019), protocols were established for data storage, archival, sharing, and eventual disposal post-project. Before obtaining consent, participants were explicitly informed about the nature of data handling, formats, and affiliated institutions. Essential details about the research and participants' rights were conveyed in Amharic, respecting the local cultural environment, and acknowledging that the mothers as experts in their own lives and lived experiences as outlined in section 4.3.3 of this Methodology Chapter. Both written and verbal consent processes were implemented to cater to face-to-face and telephone interactions, a crucial adaptation given the documented literacy challenges among incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia (Gobena & Hean, 2019). Each information sheet was verbally communicated to ensure comprehensive understanding and to reaffirm that the decision of disclosure rested solely with the participants. This approach not only enhanced the integrity of the research but also strengthened the trustworthiness between the researcher and the participants (see the detailed discussion of trustworthiness in section 4.3.6).

*Confidentiality*

Confidentiality, as a cardinal principle, intersects deeply with the ethical imperatives of informed consent. The Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) (2019) in Norway, articulate that confidentiality extends beyond the simplistic notion of limiting information access. It mandates researchers to actively uphold an environment where information

remains accessible solely to those explicitly authorised. However, the facet of restricted access is but one dimension of this intricate principle. The responsibility of assuring participants about the preservation of this confidentiality, reinforced by rigorous measures to preserve data privacy and, when necessary, guarantee anonymity, is equally important. Engaging with populations marked by heightened vulnerability, such as those susceptible to social marginalisation or exploitation, highlights the gravity of this commitment (Liamputtong, 2007). These groups are usually easily identifiable, due to their unique experiences and small numbers, which present nuanced challenges in upholding confidentiality. In alignment with these ethical considerations, participants in the study were accordingly informed about the recording and transcription of their interviews. Transcriptions underwent rigorous anonymisation processes, with audio recordings securely stored on a password-protected laptop, intended for retention only until the study's conclusion. Furthermore, participants clearly permitted the inclusion of their anonymised direct quotations within the final academic discourse.

### *Financial compensation*

Lastly, participants were compensated with NOK 100 or $10 upon completing each interview, as a gesture of appreciation for their valuable time and insights in the research project (Liamputtong, 2007). However, it became evident that this financial incentive might have been a key motivation for some, particularly since many of these participants, who were introduced through snowball sampling, faced dire financial situations post-incarceration. While the monetary incentive inadvertently boosted recruitment, its ethical implications remain a matter of debate. Nonetheless, many agree that a financial token of appreciation is appropriate, as long as the potential harm to the individual is minimal (Zutlevics, 2016). Moreover, compensating individuals for their time respects them as capable adults, able to make informed choices about financial transactions (Resnik, 2019).

## *4.3.6.     Trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness in research incorporates four pivotal domains: credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability (Morrow, 2005). *Credibility* entails ensuring that the data gathered authentically represents the participants' views and experiences. The relationship between the researcher and the participants is central to producing high-quality and credible research findings (Thummapol, et al., 2019). Conducting research with vulnerable populations, like incarcerated mothers, poses inherent challenges, particularly in fostering trust and rapport. Nevertheless, when researchers establish a strong rapport, participants feel empowered to trust more openly, leading to richer and more exhaustive data collection (Duncombe & Jessop, 2012).

Being a cultural insider with the research participants and sharing the same linguistic background, substantially enhanced my ability to connect with them. Researchers who resonate culturally with their subjects tend to uncover deeper insights, narratives, and experiences (Liamputtong, 2007). This is largely attributed to their perceived legitimacy within the community, granting them a more nuanced understanding of its social and cultural complexities (Liamputtong, 2007). Moreover, gender similarity between the researcher and participants can offer multiple advantages, such as diminishing social distance, enhancing communication, and ensuring a more enriching research experience (Liamputtong, 2007). By selecting Ethiopia as my research site and being familiar with its culture, language, and system, not to mention my shared ethnicity and gender with participants, I was better positioned for accessible engagement. This not only bolstered the study's credibility but also minimised potential language discrepancies, safeguarding the integrity of the conveyed meanings.

While conducting the research, there were also times when I was an outsider due to age disparities with some participants, not having motherhood experience, and never having faced incarceration. As much as a shared identity (insider view) between the researcher and

participants has advantages in terms of data collection and credibility, it is argued that "insiders have been accused of being inherently biased and too close to the culture to be curious enough to raise provocative questions" (Merriam et al. 2001, p. 411). For them, "the strengths of the insider become the weaknesses of the outsider and vice versa" (Merriam et al. 2001, p. 411; Duncombe & Jessop, 2012). Thus, this outsider perspective prompted my curiosity, prompting me to probe deeper, thereby enriching the dataset.

Acknowledging the inherent power dynamics in research is crucial. As Merriam et al. (2001) emphasise, power is not just an element to be acknowledged but is actively negotiated throughout the research journey. This understanding aligns with the principles of intersectional feminism, which is keenly attuned to power imbalances, particularly in research contexts. It necessitates researchers to engage in deep introspection about their positionality, encompassing their personal background, identities, and biases, and to understand how these elements might shape the research process (Misra et al., 2020). I tried to address this issue by offering participants autonomy over interview locations and the flexibility to determine the extent of their disclosure during unstructured interviews. While the power difference and the aforementioned limitations could not be eliminated, I was honest with the participants about the research project and focused on the phenomenological attitude throughout the interview and analysis process. Staying true to the phenomenological attitude or being open to new experiences empowered participants to share their private and personal stories more freely. To mitigate power imbalances, I prioritised participants' choices concerning interview settings and timings, fostering trust and enhancing the data's authenticity. Although my insider and outsider status changed during the research project, I acknowledged the importance of positionality in relation to broad placement issues such as gender, age, ethnicity, social class and shared experiences throughout the data collection process. I did not think carefully about my status before the beginning of the research process, but I continued to reflect on it throughout the data

collection process.

The *dependability* and *conformability* of this research were ensured by providing a thorough and transparent description of the methodology, coupled with an acknowledgement of the study's potential limitations, as cited by Shenton (2004) and outlined in this chapter. Moreover, it was further reinforced by engaging in collaborative dialogues about the data collection, analysis, and methodological approaches with both supervisors and peers during internal and international presentations. These discussions, particularly with supervisors, were invaluable; their critical insights, questions, recommendations, and challenges to my choices and reasoning throughout the data collection and analysis phases greatly enriched the research process.

Lastly, *transferability* addresses how the research findings apply to other contexts (Shenton, 2004). Nevertheless, in the phenomenological study, generalisation is not the aim. It rather focuses on the expression of the human dimension from one person to another, and readers are those who can decide on the applicability of the findings to their area or situation (Giorgi, 2009). The detailed description of the context and research process in this thesis will also facilitate and enable readers to transfer the findings to their own context. For additional discussion on the topic of generalisability in phenomenological research, please refer to the limitations section presented in Chapter 6.

## *4.4. Reflexivity*

As argued by Finlay (2009; 2003), reflexivity, closely related with the concept of epoché (the suspension of preconceptions), is a central aspect of phenomenological research. Phenomenological researchers strive to set aside their preconceived notions and approach the research subject with openness and empathy through the practice of epoché. Simultaneously, they employ reflexivity to become aware of any lingering biases, expectations, or pre-understandings and manage their influence on the research process

(Finlay, 2003). However, scholars within phenomenology have different perspectives on the researcher's subjectivity and reflexivity.

Husserl, a prominent figure in phenomenology, advocated for the exclusion or "bracketing" of pre-understandings and subjectivity in studying subjective experience (Husserl, 2004). His intention was to achieve a state of pure objectivity, allowing for the investigation of the essential structures of consciousness and phenomena. However, other phenomenologists like Heidegger, Gadamer, and Merleau-Ponty recognised human existence's inherent subjectivity and historicity (Finlay, 2009). They acknowledged that subjective perspectives and pre-understandings offer valuable resources for understanding the world (ibid).

However, within the tradition of descriptive phenomenology, represented by scholars like Giorgi (1985), there is a tendency to restrain researcher subjectivity and prioritise participants' concrete descriptions of lived experiences. Giorgi cautiously acknowledges reflexivity, as excessive reflexivity can overshadow the pure description of the phenomenon by focusing too much on the researcher's perspective (Finlay, 2002). According to Giorgi, phenomenology should aim to capture the essence of the phenomenon being studied, and introducing the researcher's subjectivity can lead to biases and distortions (Giorgi, 2009). In Giorgi's method of descriptive phenomenology, the researcher's role is to engage in rigorous qualitative data analysis to identify the essential structures and meanings inherent in participants' lived experiences. The emphasis lies on extracting the fundamental features of the phenomenon while avoiding personal interpretations and assumptions (Giorgi, 2009).

In contrast to Giorgi's approach, scholars like Colaizzi (1973) argue for the importance of reflexivity in the research process. Colaizzi suggests that researchers should engage in individual psychological reflection to recognise their biases and preconceptions. This self-reflective process helps researchers understand their own influences and biases, enabling them to set aside these pre-understandings while analysing participants' descriptions (ibid). By doing so,

researchers not only gain a deeper understanding of others but also reveal their own pre-understandings, benefiting the readers of the research. Contemporary phenomenologists, such as Langdridge (2007) and Finlay (2008), further advocate for reflexive engagement with researcher subjectivity. They argue that our preconceptions and evolving understandings simultaneously limit and enable insight. They emphasise the importance of researchers reflecting on how their subjectivity impacts and shapes their research.

Other scholars like Scott (2008) and Dahlberg et al. (2008) also emphasise the reciprocal relationship between researchers and the research process, revealing that researchers are not detached observers but active participants who are influenced by their own research. This is particularly relevant for qualitative researchers who acknowledge subjectivity as an integral part of their work (McNarry et al., 2019; Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Laverty, 2003). Dahlberg et al. (2008) highlight the significance of recognising and leveraging subjective horizons of experience and understanding in qualitative research. They argue that subjective perspectives provide valuable insights and contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied.

Further, navigating through the discourse of reflexivity and bracketing via a feminist lens necessitates a nuanced appreciation of power, positionality, and embodiment within research. Feminist methodologies underscore the importance of critically interrogating researcher positionality and continuously embedding reflexivity throughout all research stages, influencing data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Soedirgo & Glas, 2020; Hesse-Biber, 2012). Ethical engagement, acknowledging and navigating through power dynamics within researcher-participant interactions, is vital (Sprague, 2016; Ackerly & True, 2008). Feminist critiques express scepticism towards the positivist pursuit of objectivity through bracketing, instead advocating for an explicit acknowledgement and transparent communication of the inevitable infusion of researchers' perspectives and biases (Hesse-Biber, 2012). This stance mandates a reflexive engagement with intersecting identities, such as gender, race, and class, acknowledging their impact on research processes

and outcomes (Sprague, 2016). In essence, feminist approaches advocate for an ethical, perpetual, and critical engagement with reflexivity and bracketing, promoting a transparent and critically engaged research approach, conscious of its own positionalities and power dynamics.

As discussed above, although there are varying opinions regarding the researcher's subjectivity, there is a recognition of the researcher's impact on the research process, and the importance of reflexivity is widely acknowledged in phenomenological research and feminist perspectives. Accepting the importance of reflexivity, it is crucial to illuminate my reflections during the research process to enable readers to assess the credibility of this work.

Phenomenologists understand that the research journey is fraught with inherent tensions. They constantly tread a fine line: on one side is detachment and on the other is self-awareness; they must set aside biases yet draw insights from them; and they must remain open-minded but still critically evaluate their findings, as noted by Finlay (2009). There's also the challenge, as Finlay (2008) points out, of preventing against self-indulgence, ensuring that the research remains focused on the phenomenon rather than shifting the spotlight onto the researcher. In line with these considerations, my approach in the current study and more specifically in Paper 3 was rooted in rigorous reflexivity. I made a deliberate effort to recognise and put aside any preconceptions and biases I held. In distancing myself from preconceived notions regarding post-incarceration motherhood, I aimed to reduce the impact of my biases on the research.

In Paper 3, I reflected upon and delved into how researchers elicit and engage with the stories of formerly incarcerated women to understand their experience of motherhood after prison in culturally distinct and non-Western settings like Ethiopia. Undertaking the phenomenological study in Ethiopia posed challenges in dealing with professional identity and cultural context during the fieldwork, prompting me to reflect on my positionality and background as a social work researcher. These challenges necessitated a deep

introspection on my positionality as a social work researcher. My identity as a young Ethiopian woman of ethnic origin further underscored the nuances. I critically examined how Western-centric paradigms of social work knowledge and research training sometimes fall short of resonating with the context of the Global South, particularly in the Ethiopian setting. This discourse is anchored in the phenomenological exploration of post-incarceration motherhood in Ethiopia. A more comprehensive reflection can be found in the attached article in Appendix 9 and in the discussion chapter.

Formerly incarcerated mothers represent a disadvantaged group facing discrimination. However, they also experience intersectionality and double vulnerability as women with incarceration experience in the Global South, where most research is approached from a Westernized perspective. Methodologically conducting research in a culturally sensitive manner is not always guaranteed, further disadvantaging these women. Reflexivity becomes essential in investigating and reflecting upon these issues, as its primary aim is to be aware of the researcher's positionality and biases and their impact on the study's outcomes (Day, 2012). When researchers clearly describe the contextual relationships between themselves and the participants (reflexivity), it enhances the credibility of the findings and deepens our understanding of the work (Dodgson, 2019).

The reflexive process encompasses various interrelated dimensions: personal, interpersonal, and contextual (Walsh, 2003). Personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon and clarifying expectations, assumptions, and conscious and unconscious reactions to contexts, participants, and data (Walsh, 2003). Interpersonal reflexivity explores how relationships within the research process influence the context, the individuals involved, and the outcomes (Walsh, 2003). Of utmost importance are the relationships between researchers and participants. Thus, this process acknowledges and values the unique knowledge and perspectives of the participants while considering the influence of the researcher's professional and cultural background on the research process. The final aspect, contextual

reflexivity (Walsh, 2003), situates the project (the experience of motherhood after prison in Ethiopia) within its cultural and historical context.

To achieve these dimensions of reflexivity, written forms of documentation such as researcher memos and field notes are utilised throughout the research process. These notes capture the researcher's comments and thoughts immediately following an interview, as note-taking during the interview would detract from fully engaging with the participants as they share their stories. Keeping a reflexive diary is recognised in qualitative research as a good practice for recording the researcher's thoughts, reflections, and decisions (Day, 2012). The diary or journal serves as input and data in the paper-writing process.

# CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This chapter provides a summary of the findings from the papers that constitute this thesis. Paper 1 was a research review with the aim of synthesising the existing evidence regarding mothers' voices and experiences post-release from prison on an international scale. Through this, we became acquainted with the prevailing literature and pinpointed the existing knowledge gap. Paper 2 was an empirical study set out to explore the experience of motherhood from the viewpoint of previously imprisoned mothers in the specific context of Ethiopia. Paper 3, being methodological and reflexive, discusses the influence of Western notions of knowledge and research training in social work on research endeavours in culturally diverse settings like Ethiopia.

## 5.1. Paper 1: The Lived Experience of Motherhood After Prison

This review explored the lived experience of motherhood after prison in an international context. It aimed to synthesise the existing evidence that captures the voices of released mothers in a broader context, to highlight what is currently known and where the gaps in our knowledge lie. The data for the paper was compiled from 14 peer-reviewed articles. Although the review focused on international perspectives on motherhood after prison, all of the published literature identified or available was from the Global North, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom.

This review of the lived experience of motherhood after prison found three main dimensions of formerly incarcerated mothers' experience of motherhood after release. These are the challenge of re-claiming motherhood, the impact of their previous incarceration on their current parenting and relationship with their children, and finally, their experience of support systems and their effects on their mothering role post-release.

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Most formerly incarcerated mothers in the studies included in the review had high expectations of caring for and reuniting with their children after release; however, many mentioned that they found reclaiming motherhood after release to be stressful. They also stated that incarceration affected their identity as a "good mother" and exposed them to stigma and discrimination. This negative view was detrimental to their self-esteem and identity as a mother in their own eyes, and in those of their families and the broader communities. The mothers also reflected on their time in prison and described how the emotional bond with their children was broken when they were incarcerated for an extended period. However, prison programmes provided incarcerated mothers with little connection to their children and did not prepare them for what to expect when they returned home. Their post-prison experience was also accompanied by a lack of adequate and appropriate formal and informal support systems. Although the review shows that many formerly incarcerated mothers found it far more challenging to fulfil their mothering role after incarceration, most studies focused on the general re-entry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers, and specific accounts of motherhood experiences were shallow or vague. They talked a lot about the past in terms of bad experiences in prison and their poor childhood and informal support systems, but what seemed to be missing was a thorough examination of their experiences as mothers after incarceration. An international perspective was also missing, and especially the perspective of the Global South, as mothers in these countries may have a different perspective.

The review suggested a need for quality research and that attention should be given to exploring the social, economic, racial and cultural disparities and complexities of mothers' experiences after release from prison. This would provide a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers under different socioeconomic and cultural conditions (see the full article in Appendix 7).

## 5.2. Paper 2: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study of the Experience of Motherhood after Incarceration in Ethiopia

This paper investigated the lived experience of motherhood through the lens of mothers previously imprisoned, within the specific context of Ethiopia. Utilising a descriptive phenomenological approach, the study employed in-depth interviews to illuminate the essence of motherhood following incarceration, drawing on the detailed accounts of each mother. Data for this empirical research was sourced from interviews with nine mothers who had undergone incarceration across various cities in Ethiopia.

The essence of *motherhood after incarceration in Ethiopia* meant wanting the best for their children and seeing them as a source of happiness and courage. It meant embracing the self-sacrifice that the role requires, but also worrying about their ability to support their children, given their poverty and their experience of discrimination by Ethiopian society, including in the labour market. This is a complicated experience that interweaves their feelings of inadequacy with the fear and frustration of not being able to care for their children.

In addition, the mothers constantly felt guilty and ashamed of the time they were separated from their children and wished they could have done things differently. Now that they were out of prison, they wanted to rebuild their fractured relationships and compensate for their previous absence and lost time, even though the process was complicated. As a result, the mothers strove to positively impact their children's lives, despite not feeling they were adequate role models, but hoping to prevent their children from following the same path. Ultimately, this was about giving their children a better life and meeting their needs, to help them forget the misery and the period of separation (see the full article in Appendix 8).

## *5.3. Paper 3: The Challenge of Western-Influenced Notions of Knowledge and Research Training: Lessons for Decolonising the Research Process and Researcher Education*

The cultural reflexive paper discusses in detail the dilemmas and challenges faced by the researcher during fieldwork in a culturally diverse context in Ethiopia. The paper examines the trustworthiness of the empirical study in Ethiopia by reflecting on the challenges related to data collection. Unlike Paper 1 (systematic review) and Paper 2 (empirical study in Ethiopia), this paper focuses more on the researcher's positionality and background as a social work researcher in dealing with professional identity and cultural context, when working with a marginalised group such as incarcerated mothers. The paper reflects on how researchers elicit and engage with the stories of formerly incarcerated women to understand their experiences of motherhood after incarceration in culturally diverse contexts such as Ethiopia, where the cultural and religious context is different from the Global North. In particular, this paper discusses the influence of Western notions of knowledge and research training in social work on research studies in culturally diverse contexts in the Global South like Ethiopia.

Drawing from the empirical study of post-incarceration motherhood in Ethiopia (Paper 2), this paper critically reflects on the challenges posed by Western-centric knowledge paradigms and research training. These paradigms often fall short of resonating with local nuances and overlook the cultural and religious intricacies of Ethiopia, as well as broader contexts within the Global South. The discussion is anchored in the coloniality of knowledge and advocates for a decolonising perspective. Emphasis is placed on the professional boundaries and ethical responsibilities of researchers. The paper highlights that whilst social work education has evolved towards a more inclusive approach recently, academic research training still struggles to align with local realities. Consequently, it often inadequately equips scholars and students to navigate diverse cultural

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landscapes.

In recent years, there have been significant changes in the restructuring and reorientation of the social work profession. However, gaps remain in the preparation of researchers and students in the way that the global definition envisions. Although the researcher has yet to conduct a large-scale study of social work education, in her personal experience and based on her reflection as a social work researcher and student, the higher education system still needs meaningful connections to the context, culture and traditions of diverse communities worldwide. Such disconnection of a system from the experiences and context of societies limits the ability of researchers, policymakers and practitioners to develop and deliver solutions that can address the problems of target communities and groups. Therefore, the paper highlights the need to understand the powerful forces shaping research and to support a conscious and ongoing engagement between the currently dominant and other views. By paying attention to Indigenous knowledge and methodologies, we can perhaps take the first step towards redistributing and realigning power, so that culturally appropriate methodologies and views can be incorporated into research training. This can be achieved firstly by making curricula more inclusive at our universities; secondly by reassessing funding flows, meaning that more funding should be allocated to studies focusing on Indigenous or alternative methods; and finally through supervisors' active engagement in enhancing students' awareness and skills by encouraging students' critical reflexivity through methods such as time mapping that can be used during supervision sessions to remind students that cultural histories and geographies are central to the research process and not merely a background. This will help to produce progressive and inclusive studies that can directly impact local communities and our research participants. This will also inform policy, deepen understanding and provide evidence for future best practices (see the full article in Appendix 9).

# CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION

This thesis sheds light on what it is like to be a mother after serving a prison term and how researchers can understand these mothers' experiences in a culturally sensitive way. Initially, the research took a wider view, exploring the experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers on an international scale (Paper 1). However, a subsequent focus was directed towards understanding motherhood within the Ethiopian context (Paper 2). One of the papers (Paper 3) also reflected on and discussed the dilemmas and challenges the researcher faced during fieldwork in a culturally diverse context such as Ethiopia and raised issues related to trustworthiness in the thesis; this paper is about offering an insight into the researcher's own journey. This chapter will discuss the central themes or findings from the three papers. In addition, the study's contributions to social work research and practice more broadly, as well as to policy, are also highlighted.

## 6.1. "I am a struggling, poor, albeit devoted mother, not just a criminal"

The intersectional lens illuminates the intricate experiences of mothers with incarceration backgrounds. It emphasises how their layered identities, shaped by their criminal records and intertwined with aspects such as gender, motherhood, class, race, and other socio-economic factors, might subject them to multiple overlapping marginalisation. In many countries, society holds motherhood in high regard, setting an expectation for women to embody this role impeccably as discussed in Chapter 3. Mothers who do not meet these standards, particularly due to incarceration, face heightened stigmatisation (Ferraro & Moe, 2003). It seems that often they are defined by their crimes, with some suggesting that society side-lines their maternal identities and diminishes their value (Zerihun et al., 2021; Gobena & Hean, 2019). This societal framework usually places an uneven burden of social and moral expectations on mothers as opposed to fathers (Harman et al., 2016). The societal

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emphasis on "ideal motherhood," along with the consequences of incarceration, further marginalises these mothers.

This gendered perspective, entrenched in patriarchal beliefs, perceives motherhood as a distinctive aspect of female identity and an expected social role (essentialisation) and assumes that maternal ability and maternal love are innate to all mothers (naturalisation) (O'Reilly, 2016; Christler, 2013; Akujobi, 2011; Holmes, 2006). Adopting an intersectional viewpoint suggests a potentially more intricate narrative for formerly incarcerated mothers. Those from marginalised communities or backgrounds might grapple with heightened stigmatisation and prejudice. Insights from the literature review (Paper 1) and a research study in Ethiopia (Paper 2) hint at this layered understanding. These mothers have expressed feelings that their incarceration overshadows their identity as "good mothers." The dual stigmas from both their gender and criminal record usually led to intensified societal scrutiny, ultimately undermining their familial and communal roles. Offen, such stigmatisation was not merely external; it deeply infiltrated their self-perception and self-worth. Adding to this complexity, some women seen as "inadequate" may face increased risks of social and legal interventions. For instance, they are more susceptible to legal challenges over their maternal rights, such as custody battles as shown in the literature review (Paper 1). As Ferraro and Moe (2003) noted, this situation potentially emphasises the idea that motherhood, instead of being a universal right, becomes a privilege accessible only to certain women, depending upon societal judgments.

Motherhood, as an institution, can be seen as encompassing a set of rules and regulations (O'Reilly, 2010; Rich, 1986). These are possibly imposed upon and perhaps internalised by mothers and others (Green, 2015). From such an ideological construct of motherhood, there might emerge "discourses of deviance" which seem to target women who do not conform to the traditional narrative of full-time biological motherhood (Christler, 2013). For instance, mothers who are incarcerated, immigrant, single, disabled,

or reliant on welfare or social assistance, who might often belong to overlapping yet distinct categories, could frequently find themselves at the centre of these discourses about motherhood and its supposed negative impacts (Arendell, 2000, p. 9).

Furthermore, the commonly held ideal of motherhood is frequently perceived as an unattainable standard. This relentless pursuit of a seemingly unachievable ideal, combined with the frequent sense of falling short, can have profound psychological impacts. Research consistently demonstrates that numerous mothers experience intense feelings of inadequacy, maternal guilt, and doubt regarding their child-rearing abilities (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018; Borelli et al., 2017; Henderson et al., 2016; Enos, 2001). Such emotional turmoil can, at times, escalate into more severe mental health issues. These feelings are further mirrored in the current research from Ethiopia and in the findings from a literature review, which reveal that a majority of released mothers feel stigmatised in their role, often grappling with guilt, shame, and a sense of insufficiency. This situation highlights the disconnection between societal expectations and the actual experiences of mothers, underlining that although motherhood is a personal journey, it is heavily influenced by societal norms. These societal norms, which are often restrictive, have been challenged by those who advocate for a more inclusive and varied understanding of motherhood. Feminist scholars and mothers alike call for a recognition of motherhood that embraces all experiences, as discussed in Chapter 2. This approach seeks to broaden the narrative around motherhood, moving away from narrow definitions and towards a more holistic view that respects the diversity of maternal experiences.

As intersectionality emphasises, recognising the distinct differences between mothers in various contexts is crucial. Socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and culture intersect to position women differently (Caiola et al., 2014; Hankivsky, et al., 2010; Chandler, 2007; Crenshaw, 1991). Applying this lens to the experiences of mothers across regions and socioeconomic statuses allows for a richer, multifaceted understanding. For example, participants in Ethiopia,

located in a low-GDP country, frequently cited challenges stemming from economic hardships and poverty. Such struggles may encompass limited access to essential services, healthcare, and education, profoundly affecting their roles and experiences as caregivers. In contrast, findings from the research review (Paper 1) suggest that mothers in the Global North, particularly in the USA and UK, face a distinct set of challenges. While they might not grapple with economic constraints to the same degree, they are more prominently faced with issues related to mental health and substance abuse.

In conclusion, Arendell (2000) argues that the idealised image of motherhood has helped shift collective social and personal expectations from the "good mother" to the "exceptional mother", which is often unattainable. Donald Winnicott's (1953) "good enough mother" theory serves as a poignant reminder that perfection is unattainable in parenthood. He asserted that striving to be a "good enough mother", whilst challenging, is more beneficial than chasing the illusions of perfection or idealisation. Despite their criminal backgrounds, incarcerated mothers, as evidenced in both Paper 1 and Paper 2, resonate deeply with the essence of motherhood. They value their maternal identities, expressing their desires to protect, guide, and find joy in their children, similar to mothers everywhere (Crivello et al., 2019; McQuillan et al., 2008). This commonality underscores the shared experiences of motherhood, transcending diverse life stories, cultural backgrounds, socio-economic conditions and geographical locations. This is also one of the most important contributions and messages of this PhD study, highlighting our common humanity and emphasising that formerly incarcerated mothers are viewed beyond their criminal past. It becomes imperative, then, to avoid the constraints of institutionalised patriarchal ideals of motherhood. Instead, society should lean into a more inclusive and understanding view of motherhood, one that recognises mothers with incarceration experiences for more than their past deeds and beyond the confines of "idealised mothering" (Green, 2015). As eloquently stated by Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*, it's crucial " to try new ways of

living, to make room for serious experimentation, and to respect the effort even where it fails" (Rich, 1995, p. 282).

## *6.2. Re-claiming motherhood, an experience accompanied by a lack of opportunity and exclusion*

It appears that in both the literature review (Paper 1) and the empirical study conducted in Ethiopia (Paper 2), a common feeling among formerly incarcerated mothers is a sense of guilt regarding the impact of their absence on their children. This guilt often translates into a strong desire and high expectations to care for and reunite with their children post-release. However, many described reclaiming motherhood on release as stressful and full of challenges because they had lost their children's trust, as their children were left insecure, neglected and without adequate care, which negatively affected the mother-child relationship. Moreover, although the aspiration to change and improve their lives for their children's sake can be a motivating factor for these mothers, they often face numerous stressors. These include discrimination, unemployment, inadequate housing, poverty, mental health issues, and substance abuse. Such challenges can significantly hinder their efforts to reintegrate into society and "reclaim" their motherhood. This situation suggests that while children can be a powerful motivator for change, the reality of the obstacles these women encounter often makes the journey towards reintegration and motherhood difficult.

Both Paper 1 and Paper 2 show that while mothers return to society, they do not seem to reintegrate properly with their children, family and the wider socioeconomic system, which makes them feel excluded. This is because reintegration is not just a matter of re-entering society, but also involves reconnecting the individual with the institutions of society, which is both a process and a goal. It consists of programmes that help incarcerated individuals to adjust to life in society (Visher, 2015), which can strain their relationships with their children and their community re-entry.

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The ability to mother one's children according to societal expectations and personal desires ultimately depends on having access to the resources of time, money, health, and social support (Ferraro & Moe, 2003). However, mothers with experience of incarceration are usually unfairly expected to fulfil the role of "good mother", discussed in the previous theme, whilst being systematically deprived of the essential resources to embody that role. This challenge is magnified when considering that the majority of individuals with incarceration backgrounds have been subjected to compounded layers of social exclusion, discrimination, and systemic disadvantage (Edwards et al., 2022; Davis et al., 2013).

Female offenders, and particularly mothers, are not just impacted by their economic status or education level but also by their intersections of identity. Many are trapped in a web of systemic oppression, being disproportionately poor, undereducated, and survivors of physical, emotional, or sexual trauma (Agboola et al., 2022; Alemineh et al., 2022; Wesely & Dewey, 2018; Nuytiens & Christiaens, 2016; Bloom, 2003). Their life narratives often reveal repeated instances of discrimination and abuse, influenced by their gender, race, socioeconomic status, and other intersecting identities, which in turn shape their post-incarceration reintegration journeys (James & Glaze, 2006; Young & Reviere, 2006). They often seem to utilise drugs as a means of self-medication for issues linked with poverty, such as depression, anxiety, stress, trauma, and abuse, as indicated in Alleyne (2006). Many possibly have chronic physical, emotional, and social problems stemming from prolonged drug use potentially deepening their societal disadvantage. In this context, we can discern what might be a significant impact of structural and societal shortcomings that categorise these women as "bad mothers", potentially leading them towards criminal activities, and then apparently subjecting them to negative judgment for these actions.

While previous studies above have highlighted the impact of pre-prison life on reintegration, this evidence was also echoed in the findings of the current study. In both Paper 1 (literature review) and

Paper 2 (empirical study in Ethiopia) participants commonly grapple with challenges such as low literacy levels, high unemployment rates, strained or broken marriages and intimate relationships, mental health issues, and poverty.

Poverty is particularly evident in the context of Ethiopia, which, like many countries in the Global South, has a substantial portion of its population living below the poverty line. This scenario is characterised by high unemployment and limited opportunities, as outlined in the World Bank's (2022) report. Incarcerated mothers, being part of this affected community, are likely to be influenced by the widespread marginalisation and poverty in Ethiopia. This assumption is supported by the theme identified in Paper 2, which discusses the concerns of incarcerated mothers about their inability to support their children - a struggle that likely predated their imprisonment. These insights offer a more profound and complex understanding of the disadvantages and adversities that formerly incarcerated mothers face when they resume their role as caregivers post-incarceration. Furthermore, the findings underscore the complexity of the reintegration process for individuals whose pre-incarceration life was marked by a series of intricate challenges and social deficits. These individuals often have scarce opportunities to mitigate the adverse effects of their personal and social disadvantages after their release.

Additionally, life in the community after release from prison was characterised by a constellation of social and psychological needs for many released individuals, as identified in previous studies (Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020; Brand, 2016; Liem & Kunst, 2013). Besides the need for suitable housing, employment, and help or support with other problems such as alcohol or drug abuse, psychosocial adjustment problems predominated (ibid). Similarly, the psychological difficulties identified in the findings of Paper 1 (literature review) and Paper 2 (empirical study in Ethiopia) include a sense of detachment and alienation from community life, fear and insecurity, confusion and uncertainty, loss of confidence and feelings of inadequacy. In both papers, these issues were further

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compounded by a lack of structural support in the community or perceived opportunities to overcome the experience of incarceration. This suggests that the punishment of imprisonment has far-reaching social, psychological, emotional and structural consequences that persist long after a prison sentence has ended. This was evident from the findings that released mothers struggled with the realities of life as they tried to readjust and cope after incarceration, with minimal personal resources and an absence of adequate structural support in the community to assist them in tackling the challenges.

Another significant issue highlighted by participants was the inadequate preparation of prisoners for reintegration through rehabilitation programmes. This includes support for mothers, which, as the mothers indicated, has a direct link to the challenges they encounter post-incarceration. For instance, findings from Paper 2 (the empirical study in Ethiopia) reveal that despite participants feeling confident in their vocational skills and having received essential training through the Ethiopian prisoner rehabilitation programme, they face frustration due to their inability to secure employment or establish businesses. Factors such as the country's unemployment rate, individual characteristics, and stigma or discrimination may contribute to this. However, a key reason could be the insufficient assistance and support provided to prisoners transitioning back into the community, coupled with a lack of comprehensive preparation for release by the government. While the early days after release have been described as critical to a former prisoner's chances of success in reintegration (Morenoff & Harding, 2014), unplanned and inadequate preparation for release puts prisoners' reintegration potential in immediate jeopardy. It leaves them vulnerable to homelessness, further offending and re-imprisonment (Morenoff & Harding, 2014). This practice of unplanned release, combined with the inadequate services available to prisoners, also seems to call into question the legitimacy of the purpose of imprisonment insofar as it relates to reintegration. Given the findings of this thesis concerning the structural and systemic barriers to reintegration, a strong argument can be made that greater

importance and priority should be given to pre-release planning, to facilitate the transition from prison to a free life in the community.

The findings from Paper 1 (literature review) and Paper 2 (empirical study in Ethiopia) also point to the need for alternatives to prison for these mothers. Solutions to the challenges the mothers face require not only gender-sensitive prison reforms, but also more emphasis on preventing women from entering prison in the first place. It is, therefore, imperative that non-custodial measures be considered at every stage of the criminal justice system. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures (Tokyo Rules) (1990) and The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) (2010) were also adopted to shift the focus to non-custodial measures and to incorporate the gender dimension into the criminal justice system. Determining alternatives to pre-trial detention should take gender into account. For example, bail conditions or house arrest conditions should consider a woman's childcare responsibilities. Using non-custodial measures can also reduce the social and economic costs of imprisonment, the size of the prison population, and the rate of recidivism.

Restorative justice programmes present a promising approach to tackling the discrimination and stigma that mothers face after imprisonment. Maruna (2006) highlights the importance of "moral inclusion" in reintegration, encompassing forgiveness, acceptance, redemption, and reconciliation. Johnson (2002:328) echoes this, emphasising the need for a collaborative effort in reconciliation, where both offender and society work towards amends. Menkel-Meadow (2007) describes how restorative justice involves direct communication between victim and offender, often mediated, to establish a framework for acknowledging guilt and compensating the victim. These programmes, centred on mending the harm caused by criminal acts, can significantly aid mothers in reconnecting with their communities, a crucial aspect since many mothers face discrimination upon their release as shown in the findings. By facilitating meetings where mothers can express remorse, share their

experiences, and demonstrate a commitment to change, restorative justice helps in lessening the stigma associated with their past. Furthermore, these programmes empower the mothers, giving them a voice and agency in their journey towards societal reintegration, an empowerment that is crucial in overcoming post-incarceration challenges. Additionally, restorative justice can play a pivotal role in family dynamics, particularly in aiding the reunification process with their children. It addresses the concerns and fears of family members, fostering a supportive environment for this reunification. Beyond community and family aspects, restorative justice also promotes personal growth. Participating mothers gain insights into the impact of their actions, which is essential for their personal development and successful reintegration into society. In essence, restorative justice potentially offers a comprehensive approach to addressing the problems faced by incarcerated mothers, paving the way for their reintegration and acceptance in society, as encouraged by the UN Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programmes in Criminal Matters (2002).

Finally, it is imperative that the criminal justice system, on a collaborative, system-wide basis, examines and evaluates the implementation of non-custodial interventions and alternative programmes, such as the restorative justice process, and successes and failures and the reasons for them, as well as recidivism rates among released prisoners. The reasons for failure should be investigated and the problems addressed. Successes need to be documented in order to gain public support for the policies/programmes and to leverage community support in the reintegration of offenders, particularly women. Policies should be reviewed and revised in the light of new research.

## 6.3. Navigating Motherhood After Political Incarceration

Understanding the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia requires a thorough exploration of the specific circumstances surrounding their imprisonment. Among the

participants, two mothers were particularly notable due to their incarcerations resulting from affiliations with opposition parties during the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) era. Despite the relatively small number of these participants compared to others, their stories and experiences of incarceration are distinct, making them intriguing subjects for further discussion.

In the latter years of the EPRDF's rule, Ethiopia's political landscape was marked by escalating tensions between the government and opposition groups, leading to significant unrest and the imprisonment of opposition members (Amnesty International, 2016; Jima & Meissner, 2021; Selassie, 1992). Women incarcerated for political dissent during this period endured immense emotional hardship, primarily due to severe human rights violations such as torture, rape and prolonged separation from their families and children, as reported by Amnesty International (2016) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2012). These women also faced harsh prison conditions and a notable lack of due process, highlighting the severe human rights challenges under this regime (Amnesty International, 2016; OCHA, 2012). These reports also resonate with the experiences of the participants in the current study:

*"I did not even know what I was accused of until I was in court. I was shocked and trying to figure out what I was accused of. After they sent me to jail, I wasn't allowed to contact my family, have something to eat or drink, or have a change of clothes for three days. I stayed in that jail not knowing what exactly was going on."* (Askale)

*"We don't get the chances other prisoners get; we don't take training or be a part of other rehabilitative activities. We're not allowed to have contact with the outside world."* (Demitu)

Both women interviewed in the study believe that their sacrifices in the political arena were in pursuit of democracy, liberty, and the

betterment of their nation for the sake of their children. As presented in Paper 2, they view sacrificing their freedom and battling for justice as integral aspects of their maternal duties so that their children can thrive in a more equitable and democratic society, free from fear or coercion. The findings indicate that their stories resonate with themes of dissent, sacrifice, and a yearning for democracy, justice, and freedom. This political dimension might empower them to share their stories with confidence, yet it also introduces an underlying vulnerability. The mothers reportedly stated that their affiliations place them under constant government surveillance, making it difficult to access services and rendering their post-incarceration lives a delicate balance between political activism and personal and familial safety. This restricted access to services could potentially impact their maternal role, changing the way they support their children compared to other prisoners.

*"I can't simply visit a government office and request a service like others; I'm either denied or treated poorly and often they surveil my activities, merely because I'm not a member of the ruling party but belong to an opposition party" (Askale)*

In contrast, mothers incarcerated for non-political reasons, such as economic offences or personal disputes, face different challenges. As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, their reintegration into society is often hindered by societal mistrust and economic hardships. These mothers, typically with less education as shown in the participants' demographics in paper 2, find their economic situations more strained than their politically-affiliated counterparts, complicating their reintegration. Unlike the two mothers imprisoned for political reasons, who often take pride in their struggle for democracy, those incarcerated for non-political reasons are usually burdened by the stigma of their past crimes as the findings indicated. This not only affects their interactions within society but also negatively impacts their relationships with their children.

Amid these challenges, the findings indicate that both groups grapple with the nuances of motherhood post-incarceration. Despite the different contexts of their incarcerations, both groups of mothers share the challenge of re-establishing their roles post-incarceration. The emotional impact of separation, the pain of missed milestones, and the effort to rebuild bonds with their children are common themes. The narratives of incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia, whether related to political affiliations or other causes, might offer a glimpse into the nation's complex societal, political, and economic fabric. Each story, with its unique burdens and challenges, echoes the resilience of motherhood in adversity.

These findings also hint that the distinct experiences of these Ethiopian mothers are shaped by their residence in a low-GDP and non-democratic country (Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI), 2022).) where women can be incarcerated for their political beliefs. This context specifically sets apart the challenges Ethiopian mothers encounter after release from those faced by mothers in the USA and the UK (Paper 1). The convergence of these experiences underscores how socio-economic, political, and geographical contexts affect the realities of mothers post-incarceration. Recognising these intersectional influences is vital for a comprehensive understanding and for devising interventions tailored to the distinct challenges these mothers face in varied settings.

Finally, the particular nature of the participants' political imprisonments, though based on a small sample of just two, could potentially illuminate the broader challenges and stigmas associated with motherhood following incarceration. This viewpoint indicates a necessity for additional research and examination to fully grasp these multifaceted issues.

## 6.4. Understanding the intersectionality of post-prison mothers' experiences and the impact this has on research

While many mothers might have their own unique stories, it seems that a commonality among incarcerated women could be their perceived invisibility. They are often labelled as convicted criminals and viewed as outcasts by society. Their multiple marginality (Quinn et al., 2019), which could be influenced by historical, economic and socio-cultural factors (e.g. abuse, poverty and lack of opportunity), combined with the possible stigma and shame of incarceration, might make them seem expendable in the eyes of some in society, as suggested in the second theme.

Understanding the experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers from an intersectionality perspective is crucial, as they live in an interlocking system of marginalisation and discrimination that requires structural change to promote social justice and equality (Lorenz & Hayes, 2020). Crenshaw (1991) and Collins (2015) elucidate the concept of intersectionality: the interwoven nature of race, class, gender, and other identity facets that collectively forge intricate social inequalities. Similarly, the concept of "multiple jeopardy", which describes the interpersonal mistreatment and structural disadvantage caused by multiple minority statuses, such as racism, classism and sexism, explains how systems of inequality function and are experienced (King, 1988).

In the case of formerly incarcerated women, they are a disadvantaged group to begin with because, compared to men, incarcerated women are more disadvantaged and face multiple deficits in social capital, such as inadequate vocational training, low educational status, low employment opportunities, lack of a family network or support, and economic marginalisation before and after incarceration as discussed in Chapter 3. In addition, as offenders, they carry a stigma in society. Living under these constraints affects their identities, influencing their interactions with the criminal justice system and post-incarceration trajectories. Societal

structures, influenced by patriarchy, sexism, and racial dynamics, exacerbate these challenges. This holds significant relevance as women, on average, face higher rates of unemployment and underemployment compared to men (International Labour Organisation, 2022). Such economic challenges often lead to their incarceration, with a sizeable portion of women's imprisonments attributed to economic offences (Gobena & Hean, 2019; Gelsthorpe & Morris, 2002). These offences frequently stem from systemic constraints, including limited employment and income prospects (UNODC, 2014). Similarly, the literature review (Paper 1) and the demographic status of the participants in the empirical study in Ethiopia (Paper 2) indicate that pathways to economic offences reflect specific historical circumstances, such as limited economic opportunities, low levels of education and limited access to viable forms of income. There is also evidence that intersecting gender inequalities and economic discrimination significantly influence people's criminal or anti-social behaviour (Agboola & Rabe, 2018; Silvestri & Crowther-Dowey, 2008).

Beyond economic disparities, previously incarcerated mothers face additional marginalisation stemming from unique entwined factors. Particularly, their roles as mothers and the associated childcare responsibilities increase the complexities and challenges of their post-incarceration experiences compared to other formerly incarcerated women, as discussed in the second theme. O'Reilly (2016) argues in her book *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism and Practice* that motherhood should be analysed intersectionally since maternal roles carry distinct challenges beyond those faced by women in general. Mothers' struggles, whether socio-economic or psychological, are intricately tied to their maternal identities. In other words, mothers do not live simply as women, but as mother-women. Therefore, mothers need a feminism of their own - a feminism that makes mothers' concerns the starting point for a theory and politics of empowerment (O'Reilly, 2016).

Furthermore, the intersectional experiences of previously incarcerated mothers are not solely about economic and gendered

challenges. This is because the concepts of intersectionality and multiple jeopardy take on added layers of complexity when considering women from nations like Ethiopia. These women not only grapple with their identities in the Global South but also with prison experiences that are often studied through a Western lens, as highlighted in both the literature review (Paper 1) and the reflexive article (Paper 3). Despite the literature's focus on global perspectives of post-incarceration motherhood, the majority of available research originates from the Global North, specifically the US and UK. This Western-centric approach tends to overshadow the experiences and voices of non-Western and Indigenous communities. This bias is evident in both the culturally reflexive article (Paper 3) and the literature review (Paper 1), with the latter's reliance on English articles possibly exacerbating the perceived knowledge gap.

Adopting a decolonial approach demands a commitment to embracing diverse perspectives, particularly those often marginalised or deemed insignificant (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Despite its rich history and diverse cultures, one might argue that Africa potentially contributes a smaller portion to global knowledge, which some suggest could be linked to perceptions of its underdevelopment (Olufadewa et al., 2020). It is possible that the US and UK play a significant role in academic publishing, perhaps accounting for a large proportion of the world's indexed journals (Christián et al., 2022). This situation highlights the potential need to explore and give voice to alternative viewpoints, particularly from those of marginalised groups. Embracing an intersectional approach can provide a richer understanding and support for these marginalised communities, such as the incarcerated women beyond the Global North. This approach ensures a more equitable comparison and care for those most in need (Lorenz & Hayes, 2020). The experiences of previously incarcerated mothers from the Global South, shaped by their unique socio-cultural contexts, can offer valuable insights. For instance, the narrative and experience of mothers imprisoned for political reasons in Ethiopia, as shown in the empirical study (Paper 2) and previously discussed in this chapter,

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provide a perspective that differs from more commonly discussed narratives. By examining the challenges these women face in various aspects of life—social, economic, racial, and cultural—as outlined in a culturally reflective article (Paper 3), a more thorough and holistic understanding of their experiences can be achieved. The empirical study from Ethiopia, which focuses on motherhood after incarceration, demonstrates the commitment of this research to widen the discourse by including viewpoints from the Global South.

Lastly, it is relevant to consider the relationship between participants and researchers within culturally diverse contexts as an important element of inclusive research. The investigation into personal identity and its interplay is arguably fundamental in the academic sphere, particularly within qualitative research that navigates the intricate sociocultural landscapes. My academic journey, which began in Ethiopia and extended through higher studies in Europe, serves as a practical illustration of these dynamics. My early years in Ethiopia's vibrant cultural environment laid the foundational lens through which I viewed the world. Subsequent academic endeavours in Europe (Masters and PhD) broadened my epistemological horizons, introducing me to diverse frameworks and cultural narratives. This exposure has not only enhanced my academic knowledge and skills but has also subtly influenced my perspectives and understanding.

An important moment during my doctoral research highlighted the challenges I faced in balancing these different cultural identities. During the data collection phase of my research in Ethiopia, as detailed in Chapter 4, the Orthodox church emerged as a preferred interview location among participants. However, during these interviews, I inadvertently neglected the local church dress codes, a mistake that affected the data collection process (denied interring the church). This oversight suggests the complex negotiation between my Ethiopian heritage and the adopted Western cultural norms. My time abroad had subtly influenced my perceptions and behaviours, leading to an unconscious adoption of a "Western culture". This refers to the gradual and perhaps unintentional

assimilation of Western attitudes and practices, encompassing lifestyle choices, dressing style, and a shift towards a more individualistic worldview (Humphrey & Bliuc, 2021), in contrast to the community-oriented approach often prevalent in Ethiopian culture.

This contrast was evident when comparing the informal attire common in European Christian congregations, particularly in Norway, to the traditional dress of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In many European Christian congregations, particularly in Norway, the dress code is relatively informal and does not adhere to strict traditional guidelines. This stands in contrast to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (the largest in the country) (Britannica, 2023), which maintains a distinctive and prescriptive attire for its congregants. Women traditionally wear the Netela (ነጠላ), a white, lightweight shawl that is often embellished with intricate patterns and worn over the shoulders. Men, on the other hand, wear the Gabi (ጋቢ), a thicker, blanket-like cloth that serves a similar purpose. It is typically made from cotton and is designed to cover the upper body, providing warmth and signifying a form of reverence when attending church services. This garment is not merely a piece of clothing but a symbol of modesty and respect within the religious setting. They are woven into the fabric of Ethiopian cultural and religious identity. They represent a continuity of heritage and a visible expression of faith and values.

My mistake was more than just a slip-up in what to wear; it was a mistake that showed how tricky it can be to juggle different cultural identities. For someone who has lived in Europe but originates from Ethiopia, this contrast can lead to a certain disconnection from Ethiopian norms. While residing in Ethiopia, these cultural aspects would be a part of everyday life, but living in Europe might result in a detachment or even forgetfulness regarding these important cultural practices. Such an oversight is not just a simple error in dress; it highlights the intricate and often challenging process of juggling multiple cultural identities, where one may not be as closely connected to the customs of their heritage as one would be

in an immersive environment. It was a poignant reminder of the ongoing negotiation between the heritage that shaped me and the global influences that have come to inform my worldview. This personal experience brought to light the importance of cultural sensitivity in research. It demonstrated that researchers cannot solely depend on their native familiarity to guarantee the authenticity of their data collection. Therefore, both local and international researchers should examine their potential cultural preconceptions, including those acquired later in life. Irrespective of their origins, it is important to critically assess their cultural integrations and how these impact their research practices.

It is vital to recognise that cultural competence is dynamic, necessitating continuous reflection and adaptation to ensure that the services rendered are truly responsive to the community's needs. My educational transition from Ethiopia to Norway exemplifies the necessity for a culturally sensitive approach within qualitative research and it resonates with wider academic debates on the negotiation of identity in cross-cultural research settings (Sajarwa et al., 2023; Manohar et al., 2019; Janík, 2017; Hill, Lee & Jennaway, 2010).

Inclusive research demands an in-depth understanding of the dynamics between participants and researchers, especially in culturally varied settings. In my research, particularly in Paper 2 discussing the experiences of women with histories of incarceration in Ethiopia, the complexities of intersecting cultural identities, individual experiences, and societal norms were evident. These complexities demand a careful and considerate approach in research methodology to capture the depth and breadth of the participants' experiences and perspectives, particularly from underrepresented regions like the Global South. To effectively address these challenges, it is imperative to re-examine and recalibrate the frameworks guiding our research. This may involve embracing new ways of thinking, as suggested by Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) concept of "rethinking thinking," and incorporating alternative epistemologies, such as "epistemologies of the South" proposed by

Santos (2007). Such approaches encourage researchers to step beyond traditional paradigms and consider a broader spectrum of perspectives and methodologies. Ultimately, this enhances the potential for research to be more culturally sensitive, inclusive, representative, and beneficial to the communities it aims to serve, ensuring that it captures the intersecting and complex realities of diverse cultural settings.

## 6.5. Limitations of the study

The qualitative approach, acknowledged for its flexibility and capacity to yield in-depth, detailed information through diverse data collection methods, is not without methodological limitations, notably including susceptibility to researcher subjectivity or bias, complexity in data analysis, and constraints in generalisability due to relatively smaller sample sizes. Additionally, challenges exist in replicating findings and mitigating researcher bias (Mwita, 2022). Within the context of the present PhD project—specifically, the phenomenological research encapsulated in Paper 2, the empirical study conducted in Ethiopia—generalisability in the quantitative sense was not an objective. Rather, the aim was to elucidate the universal essences of common experiences in individuals' lifeworld (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

Understanding the concept of 'essence' in Giorgi's phenomenology is crucial, especially when distinguishing it from quantitative generalisability. In phenomenological research, particularly in the tradition of Giorgi, "essence" refers to the core, invariant nature of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals (Giorgi, 1985). This essence is uncovered through deep analysis of subjective experiences, aiming to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience it (Giorgi, 2009). Giorgi's approach is fundamentally different from quantitative generalisability. Quantitative research often seeks to generalise findings across populations through statistical means, aiming for objectivity and measurement of observable variables (Creswell, 2014). It relies on numerical data to make predictions or test

hypotheses about groups or categories of people (Creswell, 2014). In contrast, Giorgi's phenomenological method does not seek to generalise in the statistical sense. Instead, it involves identifying the essential structure of a phenomenon through the detailed examination of lived experiences (Giorgi, 2009). The goal is not to predict or measure, but to understand and describe the essence of a phenomenon as it is lived by individuals. Giorgi's phenomenology suggests that the essence identified is fundamentally representative of the phenomenon, transcending individual variations (Giorgi, 1985). It implies a deeper, more intrinsic understanding of the phenomenon that is not bound by numbers or statistical representation, but by the shared human experience of it. This essence is considered universal in the sense that it holds across different individual experiences, providing a foundational understanding of the phenomenon that can be recognised and related to by others.

The study also acknowledges the possibility of researcher bias, which could potentially limit its findings. In an effort to address this, the research adopted a phenomenological stance. This approach is characterised by an attempt to temporarily suspend one's own preconceptions, a process often referred to as "bracketing", as highlighted by Giorgi (2009). Bracketing aims to approach the subject matter with a degree of openness, potentially revealing new insights that might otherwise be obscured by existing knowledge or expectations. In this study, it meant that the researcher endeavoured to consciously set aside her own knowledge and biases, thereby creating room for new perspectives on the experience of motherhood after incarceration to surface. Furthermore, reflexivity was utilised throughout the research process, particularly during fieldwork and data analysis. This involved a mindful awareness of the researcher's own biases and assumptions, with the intention of engaging in the research in a manner that was as free as possible from pre-existing notions about post-prison motherhood in Ethiopia. The delicate balance and possible tension between the concepts of reflexivity and bracketing are further discussed in the Methodology section, specifically in subsection 4.4.

## **6.5.** **Concluding remarks**

### *6.5.1.* *Implications for social work practice*

Qualitative research usually delves deeply into the subjective realm of human experience, particularly within specific contexts, aiming to uncover new insights. This approach holds significant relevance for social workers, as it facilitates a profound understanding of phenomena through the perspectives of others' experiences. These insights are crucial in understanding the complexities in the lives of those they serve, making this method of inquiry essential in addressing critical issues and improving practices in fields like social work, criminal justice, and other helping professions. The current study makes an important contribution by uncovering the underlying realities of mothers' experiences post-incarceration, a topic that has been largely neglected in both academic research and social work practice, as highlighted by Patterson (2019). By giving voice to these experiences, the study not only enriches academic discourse but also has practical implications for social work. It highlights the challenges faced by mothers after their release from prison and identifies potential areas for intervention and programme development. Vakharia (2014), emphasised the importance of multi-level intervention – micro, mezzo, and macro – in addressing the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated mothers. This holistic approach is crucial for effectively supporting these women as they reintegrate into society post-incarceration. By focusing on these various levels, social workers can develop more comprehensive and effective strategies to assist these mothers, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of social work practice in this area.

The findings presented in Paper 1 (review paper) highlight the prevalence of mental health and drug-related issues among incarcerated mothers. Similarly, Paper 2, focusing on an empirical study in Ethiopia, reveals the negative effects on mother-child

relationships, with children exhibiting behavioural changes such as withdrawal, clinging, and a lack of trust due to their mothers' absence. These findings underscore the critical role social workers must play in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by these mothers and their families. Social workers are uniquely positioned to provide tailored support at a micro level, assisting individual mothers and their families in identifying and tackling a range of issues. These include mental, emotional, social, behavioural, and financial challenges (Vakharia, 2014). Such challenges not only impede the mothers' ability to fulfil their parenting roles effectively but also adversely affect their quality of life post-incarceration. Furthermore, social workers should strive to prevent these mothers from becoming entangled in the criminal justice system, both prior to and following their release from prison. To this end, a variety of programmes could be implemented. These might include mentoring programmes, parent training, and both individual and family counselling. Such interventions are particularly crucial for mothers who struggle to reconnect with their children and have experienced trauma. Additionally, services that assist in resource linkage and navigation are essential. Many of these mothers face severe financial difficulties and struggle to locate necessary services, such as mental health and drug treatment, as well as employment opportunities. Ensuring that these mothers have access to appropriate health care and treatment is a vital component of the support that social workers can provide, facilitating a smoother transition back into society and a more positive future for both the mothers and their children.

The other issue the participants described in Paper 1 (review paper) and Paper 2 (empirical study in Ethiopia) was a lack of employment and financial problems, often exacerbated by societal discrimination. These findings indicate the necessity for social work practice to operate at a mezzo level, focusing on the development and implementation of social service initiatives within local and small community levels (Mattocks, 2018) in addressing the specific needs of formerly incarcerated mothers. In this context, social workers could play a pivotal role at the community level, engaging in programmes that support neighbourhood initiatives tailored to

these mothers. Such programmes might encompass local workshops aimed at assisting unemployed mothers with job applications and providing training in skills pertinent to gaining employment. Additionally, social workers could lead substance abuse treatment groups, offering a supportive environment for recovery and rehabilitation. A particularly innovative approach involves integrating these mothers into small business ventures. This not only provides a means of financial support for themselves and their children but also aligns with a strengths-based perspective. Such an approach recognises and values the central role of motherhood in their lives, focusing on leveraging their inherent capabilities and resources. This is in contrast to a sole focus on their needs, such as mental health support, poverty alleviation, and employment assistance. By emphasising what these mothers can contribute, rather than just their needs, social work interventions can foster a more empowering and holistic form of support.

At the macro level, social workers should help formerly incarcerated mothers indirectly and on a much larger scale (Edwards & Mika, 2017). They could examine the origins and persistence, and the impact of incarceration on women as a social problem. As the current study has shown, the voice of incarcerated women regarding their experience as mothers after incarceration is underrepresented in the literature. Therefore, social workers, who often work at universities and other social research institutions, should study the different life trajectories of incarcerated women. Considering education and research, as mentioned in Paper 3 (cultural reflexive article), social workers' education and research reform are vital in general. Indigenous knowledge and methods should be incorporated into research training to prepare students and researchers to work with diverse groups of people. Facilitating fieldwork activities/placement (common in social workers' education) for students to work directly with incarcerated individuals, and inviting former inmates to classes to share their experiences with students, will be useful. This will help produce progressive and inclusive studies that directly impact local communities and our research

participants. This will also inform policy, deepen understanding and provide evidence for future best practice.

The other essential intervention at this level should be that social workers working in government agencies, non-profit organisations, and other organisations with the resources and infrastructure to develop, implement and evaluate the effectiveness of human services programmes (Mattocks, 2018), should include women with incarceration experience in their programmes. In addition, they should advocate at the policy level for state and federal governments to change their policies to better serve vulnerable populations such as incarcerated and released mothers. For example, as described in Paper 2, Ethiopia has no reintegration policy. Therefore, it is essential to advocate for developing a new policy that addresses the problems of imprisoned women. The new policy could specifically provide for non-custodial measures, as recommended in The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules) (2010) and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-custodial Measures (the Tokyo Rules) (1990) (see Chapter 3). Since most women offenders do not commit violent crimes and most of them do not pose a threat to society (Gobena & Hean, 2019), their incarceration tends to negatively affect their social reintegration and interfere with their role as mothers, which in turn affects the healthy development of their children. To address this problem, more emphasis needs to be placed on preventing women from going to prison in the first place. It is, therefore, essential that non-custodial measures are considered at every stage of the criminal justice system, as recommended in Paper 2.

Furthermore, international policy frameworks targeting incarcerated individuals, including women, such as the Tokyo Rules, the Nelson Mandela Rules and the Bangkok Rules (see Chapter 3), are recognised by Ethiopia through Article 9 (4) of the Ethiopian Constitution as an integral part of the law of the land. However, from the testimonies of the mothers in this study, it is clear that they live in a harsh environment that contradicts the above guidelines and

laws. The findings from the study give an insight into their lived experience of being a mother within a society governed by the above policies. Society is more than policies and rules; as social norms determine behaviour and influence experiences. Although Ethiopia has all these policies, the question is whether this is enough to counteract social norms that work against the effective reintegration of mothers into society. Therefore, social workers working for the government, human rights groups and non-profit organisations should engage in policy advocacy and focus on structural changes so as to meaningfully impact the lives of mothers and their children post-prison life.

As the current thesis shows, released mothers are less educated and are victims of social exclusion before and after incarceration. Social work practice should therefore explore what brought them to prison by examining their multiple exclusions, family histories and experiences of abuse, to better understand the cycles and patterns that led them to crime in the first place. At the macro level, the intervention should educate women, increase their participation in the labour market, and address cultural and structural issues that prevent them from reaching their full potential. This process and intervention could be very complex for social workers, as the intervention involves multiple organisational structures and institutions. Complexity theory could contribute at this level as it explains how systems such as the economy and global businesses grow, adapt and evolve. It explains how the relationships between members of these systems lead to collective behaviour and illuminates how a system interacts with its environment (Sammut-Bonnici, 2015). The value of complexity theory for macro-level social work interventions lies in its ability to explain the evolution of new structures within an organisation, and the development of new models that fit the situation of service users. Social workers can therefore use this theory to navigate and understand the complex macro system in order to help incarcerated women participate in education and the labour market, empowering them to fight the structural and cultural barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential. Given the complexity, unpredictability and dynamics

of these systems, it is worth exploring in future studies how complexity theory might help social workers navigate these systems.

Last but not least, for mothers incarcerated due to political reasons, the role of social workers takes on additional layers of complexity and sensitivity. These mothers frequently encounter distinct challenges arising from the political aspects of their incarceration. Such challenges encompass issues like surveillance, the possibility of facing discrimination from government entities, and a pervasive fear of being reincarcerated due to their political engagements or the specific circumstances of their imprisonment. This is particularly evident in the experiences shared by two participants in the second paper and elaborated upon in section 6.2 of the discussion chapter. In this context, it is important for social workers in Ethiopia supporting imprisoned mothers to adopt a nuanced approach, one that recognises the distinct context of political imprisonment. This approach could involve understanding the broader socio-political dynamics that may have led to their incarceration and considering the specific impacts this has on their social, economic, and emotional well-being. The challenges experienced by these mothers could be different from those of other incarcerated individuals as discussed in section 6.2 of Chapter 6. As such, in addition to providing standard support services such as mental health counselling, family reunification assistance, and financial guidance, it might be beneficial for social workers to also be equipped to address issues related to human rights, social justice, and political advocacy. This could involve:

- *Advocacy and Legal Support*: It may be helpful for social workers to assist these mothers in navigating the legal complexities that could arise from their political activities. This might include liaising with human rights organisations, providing access to legal advice, and advocating for their rights within the justice system.
- *Empowerment and Resilience Building*: Empowering these mothers by providing them with skills and resources

to rebuild their lives could be important. This might encompass vocational training, education, and resilience-building activities. The need for this approach is highlighted by the participants' experiences, who reportedly did not have access to rehabilitation training or other vocational skills during their imprisonment, unlike non-political prisoners.

- *Policy Advocacy:* Engaging in or supporting policy advocacy to address systemic issues that lead to the political imprisonment of mothers, and working towards reform in this area, could be a significant aspect of their role.

## 6.5.2.    *Recommendations for future research*

This study suggests that future studies should focus on exploring the following:

- Focusing on mothers, the current study has contributed to an under-researched area in social work and the criminal justice system. However, it is also essential to understand the perspective of children. Future research can further explore how children experience the post-prison period and how they understand their relationship with their released mothers. Children's accounts are equally important, since their lives are intertwined with their mothers' experiences before and after prison.
- The current study explores mothers' experiences after imprisonment and the challenges they face in fulfilling this responsibility. However, the responsibility of parenthood also involves and affects the father. Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine the experiences of fatherhood after release, to determine whether parenting after prison is the problem, or whether the patriarchy is, in fact, a key issue for mothers' unique experiences and challenges after prison.

- Another possible area for further investigation is the sentencing of women, especially mothers. Given mothers' childcare responsibilities and their tendency to commit less violent, serious or organised crimes (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1996), is it necessary to punish mothers like other offenders? Future studies should examine how non-custodial interventions could be implemented to identify the barriers and potential solutions to the effective implementation of non-custodial interventions as recommended by the UN and the current study.

- The current study has indicated the potentially varied experiences of motherhood following incarceration, particularly for mothers who were imprisoned for political reasons. This highlights the need for future research to delve deeper into this aspect, exploring how the broader political environment can influence the experience of motherhood after release from prison. Such studies could provide valuable insights into the complex interplay between political contexts and personal experiences, especially in relation to the role of motherhood. By examining these experiences in more depth, researchers could uncover the nuanced ways in which political incarceration impacts not just the individual mothers, but also their families and communities. This approach would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of political imprisonment on family dynamics and the maternal role, offering a critical perspective on post-incarceration experiences in different political environments.

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# APPENDICES

## *Appendix 1 Participant information sheet and consent form (English)*

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Lived Experience of Motherhood After Prison: A Ethiopia Case Study

Background and purpose

This is a question for you to participate in a research project and in this post, we provide you with information about the goals of the project and what participation will mean for you. The aim of the PhD study is to explore incarcerated mothers' lived experience of motherhood when re-integrating back into society and with their families in the first two years in Ethiopia. The period immediately after release is a time of risk and opportunity for inmates to start a new life. The study specifically focuses on how incarcerated mothers perceive and experience their mothering role through post-incarceration obstacles, and their experience of mother-child relationship after incarceration. The study will explore mothers' relationship with their children after they are released, to see the effect of incarceration on the mother-child relationship.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of Stavanger is responsible for the project.

What does participation in the project imply?

In the study, in-depth interviews will be used as data collection tools with 10-12 mothers. Interviews will be in the native language of the participants and will last approximately one hour. The interviews are mainly with the mothers and a voice recorder will be used to gather the information. An interview guide that will help the researcher to focus on the research question and aim will also be used. Interview will be scheduled according to the availability and

willingness of the participants. Participants will share their experience of the mothering role through post incarceration obstacles and their mother-child relationship after prison.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this project is completely voluntarily and you are free to stop participating at any time without giving any reason and or suffering any negative consequences. All information about you will then be anonymised. Your name and personal data will not appear on the research paper and will be removed from interview transcript.

What will happen to the information about you?

We will only use the information about you for the purposes we have stated in this letter. We treat the information confidentially and in accordance with the privacy policy. All personal information and data the participant provides will be transcribed and stored in a password protected laptop. The only people with access to the raw data are the researcher, transcriber and supervisors. All the names will be changed to pseudonyms; therefore, participants will not be recognised in publications or presentations.

What happens to your information when we finish the research project?

The research project is planned to end on 12 March 2022 and recordings and transcripts will be kept until this time and then deleted.

Your rights

As long as you can be identified in the data material, you are entitled to:

- Insight into what personal data is registered about you
- To have your personal information corrected

- To have personal information about you deleted
- To get a copy of your personal data
- To submit a complaint to the Norwegian Privacy Ombudsman or the Norwegian Data Inspectorate regarding the processing of your personal data.

What gives us the right to process personal information about you?

We process information about you based on your consent. On behalf of University of Stavanger, NSD - Norwegian Center for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with the privacy regulations.

The study has been notified to Data Protection Officials for Research, NSD (Norwegian Center for Research Data). The information letter will be translated to Amharic (local language) before presentation to the participants.

If you give your consent to participate in this study or have any questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact:

Researcher

- Eden Begna Gobena, eden.b.gobena@uis.no, University of Stavanger

Supervisors

- Sarah Hean, sarah.c.hean@uis.no, University of Stavanger
- Vanessa Heaslip, VHeaslip@bournemouth.ac.uk, Bournemouth University
- Ingunn Studsrød, ingunn.studsrod@uis.no, University of Stavanger

NSD - Norwegian Center for Research Data AS, by email (personvernt services@nsd.no) or by phone: (+47) 55 58 21 17.

With best regards

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Consent Statement

I have received and understood information about the project 'The Lived Experience of Motherhood After Prison: An Ethiopian Case Study' and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I agree:

- To participate in the study
- To be interviewed
- To the use of a voice recorder
- That my personal data is stored until the end of the project

I agree that my information will be processed until the project is completed, on around 12 March 2022.

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(Signed by project participant, date)

# Appendix 2 Participant information sheet and consent form (Amharic)

## የመረጃ ደብዳቤ

### የጥናትና ምርምር ፕሮጀክት ተሳትፎ መጠየቂያ

**የፕሮጀክቱ ርዕስ :** የእናትነት የሕይወት ተሞክሮ ከእርምት በኋላ: የኢትዮጵያ ንጥል ጥናት

### ዳራ እና ዓላማ

ይህ እርሳዎ በአንድ የጥናትና ምርምር ፕሮጀክት ውስጥ እንዲሳተፉ የሚጠይቅ ሲሆን፣ በዚህ ጽሑፍ ውስጥ ስለፕሮጀክቱ ግቦች እና ተሳትፎ ሲባል ለእርሳዎ ምን ማለት እንደሆነ መረጃ እናቀርብልዎታለን። የፒኤችዲ ጥናቱ ዓላማ በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ በማረሚያ ቤት የነበሩ እናቶች፣ እንደገና ወደ ኅብረተሰቡ እና ወደ ቤተሰቦቻቸው ሲቀላቀሉ የሚኖራቸውን የእናትነት የሕይወት ተሞክሮ መመርመር ነው። ከማረሚያ ቤቶች እንደወጡ የሚኖሩ ጊዜ ለታራሚዎች አዲስ ሕይወት የመጀመሪያ የስጋት እንዲሁም የዕድል ጊዜ ነው። ጥናቱ በተለይ የሚያተኩረው በማረሚያ ቤት የነበሩ እናቶች በቤሃ እርምት መስናሎች ውስጥ የእናትነታቸውን ሚና እንዴት እንደለፉበት እና እንደሚመለከቱት እንዲሁም ከእርምት በኋላ በሚኖራቸው የእናት እና ልጅ ግንኙነት ልምምዳቸው ላይ ነው። ጥናቱ እስር በእናትና ልጅ ግንኙነት ላይ የሚያስከትለውን ውጤት ለመመልከት ይረዳ ዘንድ፣ እናቶች ከእስር ከተፈቱ በኋላ ከልጆቻቸው ጋር የሚኖራቸውን ግንኙነት ይመረምራል።

### የምርምር ፕሮጀክቱን ኃላፊነት የሚወስደው ማን ነው?

የስታቫንገር ዩኒቨርሲቲ ለፕሮጀክቱ ኃላፊነቱን ይወስዳል።

### በፕሮጀክቱ ውስጥ መሳተፍ ምን ይመስላል?

በጥናቱ ውስጥ ከ 10-12 እናቶች ጋር የሚደረገው ጥልቅ ቃለ-መጠይቅ እንደ መረጃ ማሰባሰቢያ ዘዴዎች ሆኖ ያገለግላል። ቃለመጠይቁ በተሳታፊቹ የዕፍ መፍቻ ቋንቋ የሚካሄድ ሲሆን በግምት የአንድ ሰዓት ያህል ርዝማኔ ይኖረዋል። ቃለመጠይቁ በእናትነት ከእናቶች ጋር የሚደረገ ሲሆን መረጃውን ለመሰብሰብ መቅረጽ ድምጽ ጥቁም ላይ ይውላል። ተመራማሪዋ በምርምር ጥያቄው እና ዓላማ ላይ እንድታተኩር የሚረዳት የቃለ መጠይቁ መመሪያም ጥቅም ላይ ይውላል። ቃለመጠይቁ ተሳታፊዎች በሚመቻቸው ጊዜ እና በፈቃደኝነታቸው መሠረት የጊዜ ቀጠሮ ይያዝለታል። ተሳታፊዎች በድህረ እርምት ተግዳሮቶች ውስጥ የሚኖራቸውን የእናትነት ሚና ተሞክሮ እና ከእርምት በኋላ የሚኖራቸውን የእናትና ልጅ ግንኙነት ልምዳቸውን ያካፍላሉ።

### በፈቃደኝነት ላይ የተመሰረተ ተሳትፎ

የዚህ ፕሮጀክት ተሳትፎ ሙሉ በሙሉ በፈቃደኝነት ላይ የተመሰረተ ሲሆን በማንኛውም ጊዜ ምንም ምክንያት ሳይሰጡ ተሳትፎዎን ለማቋረጥ ነጻ ነዎት። አለታዊ ተጽዕኖዎች አይኖርብዎትም። ቀጥሎም ስለእርሳዎ ያለው መረጃ ሙሉ ስም-አልባ ይሆናል። የእርስዎ ስም እና የግል መረጃ በምርምር ወረቀቱ ላይ የማይታይ ሲሆን ከቃለ-መጠይቁ ቅጂ ጽሑፍ ላይም ይወገዳል።

### ስለ እርስዎ ያለው መረጃ ምን ይሆናል?

እኛ ስለ እርስዎ ያለውን መረጃ የምንጠቀመው በዚህ ደብዳቤ ለጠቀስነው ዓላማ ብቻ ነው። መረጃውን የምንስተናግደው በምስጢር እና በግላዊነት ፖሊሲው መሠረት ነው። ተሳታፊዎች የሚቀርቧቸው ሁሉም የግል መረጃዎች እና ማስረጃዎች ወደ ጽሑፍ ተገልብጠው በይፋዊ ቃል በተጠበቀ ላንቶፕ ውስጥ ይቀመጣሉ። ጥሬ መረጃውን የሚያገኙት ብቸኛ ሰዎች ተመራማሪዋ: ወደ ጽሑፍ ቀያሪው (ትራንስክራይበር) እና ሱፐርባይዘሮች ናቸው። ሁሉም ስሞች ወደ ሐሳዊ ስሞች ይቀየራሉ ፤ ስለሆነም ተሳታፊዎች በሕትመቶች ወይም በገለጻዎች ላይ እንዲታወቁ አይደረግም።

**የምርምር ፕሮጀክቱን ስንጨርስ መረጃዎ ምን ይሆናል?**

የምርምር ፕሮጀክቱን እ.ኤ.አ. መጋቢት 12 ቀን 2022 ለማጠናቀቅ የታቀደ ሲሆን ቀረጻዎች እና ቅጂዎች እስከዚህ ጊዜ ድረስ ከተቀመጡ በኋላ ይሰረዛሉ ፡፡

**የእርስዎ መብቶች**

በመረጃ ይዞቱ ውስጥ እርስዎ እስከተመለከቱ ድረስ የሚከተሉት መብቶች አለዎት:

- ስለእርስዎ ምን አይነት የግል መረጃ እንደተመዘገበ በሚገባ የማወቅ
- የግል መረጃዎ እንዲታረም የማድረግ
- ስለእርስዎ የተሰረዘ የግል መረጃን የማግኘት
- የግል መረጃዎን ቅጂ የማግኘት
- የግል መረጃዎን የሚያልፍበትን ሂደት በተመለከተ ለግላዊነት እንባ ጠባቂ ወይም ለመረጃ ምርመራ  ቅሬታ የማቅረብ

**የእርስዎን የግል መረጃን የመተንተን መብት የሚሰጠን ምንድን ነው?**

የእርስዎን መረጃ ሥራ ላይ የምናውለው በእርስዎ ፈቃድ ላይ በመመርኮዝ ነው፡፡ በስታቫንገር ዩኒቨርሲቲ ስም ፣ ኤንኤስዲ - የኖርዌይ የምርምር መረጃ ማዕከል( Norwegian Center for Research Data AS) በዚህ ፕሮጀክት ውስጥ የግል መረጃን የማካሄድ ሂደቱ በግላዊነት ደንቦች መሠረት መሆኑን ገምግሟል።

ጥናቱ የምርምር መረጃ ጥበቃ ባለሥልጣናት ፣ ኤንኤስዲ (የኖርዌይ የምርምር መረጃ ማዕከል) እንዲያውቁት ተደርጓል። የመረጃ ደብዳቤው ለተሳታፊዎች ከመቅረቡ በፊት ወደ አማርኛ (የአካባቢው ቋንቋ) ይተረጎማል።

በዚህ ጥናት ውስጥ ለመሳተፍ ፈቃድዎን ከሰጡ ወይም በዚህ ጥናት ላይ ማንኛውም ጥያቄ ካለዎት አባክዎ የሚከተሉትን ለማነጋገር አያመንቱ :

**ተመራማሪ**

- ኤደን ቤኛ ጎበና ፣ eden.b.gobena@uis.no ፣ ስታቫንገር ዩኒቨርሲቲ

**ሱፐርቫይዘሮች**

- ሳራ ሄን ፣ sarah.c.hean@uis.no ፣ ስታቫንገር ዩኒቨርሲቲ
- ቫኔሳ ሄስሊፕ ፣ VHeaslip@bournemouth.ac.uk ፣ ቦርንማውዝ ዩኒቨርሲቲ
- ኢንጉን ስቱድስሮድ፣ ingunn.studsrod@uis.no ፣ ስታቫንገር ዩኒቨርሲቲ
- NSD - Norwegian Center for Research Data AS ፣ ኢሜል (personvernt services@nsd.no) ወይም በስልክ 55 58 21 17 ፡፡

ከአክብሮት ሰላምታ ጋር

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**የፈቃድ መግለጫ**

የእናትነት የሕይወት ተሞክሮ ከእርምት በኋላ: የኢትዮጵያ ንጥል ጥናት ስለተሰኘው ፕሮጀክት መረጃዎችን ተቀብያለሁ ተረድቻለሁም፣ እንዲሁም ጥያቄዎችን የመጠየቅ እድል አግኝቻለሁ፡፡ በሚከተሉት እስማማለሁ፣

- በጥናቱ ውስጥ ለመሳተፍ
- ቃለ መጠይቅ ለመደረግ
- የድምጽ መቅጃ ጥቅም ላይ እንዲውል
- የግል መረጃዬ እስከፕሮጀክቱ ፍጻሜ ድረስ እንዲከማች

ፕሮጀክቱ እስኪጠናቀቅ እስከ መጋቢት 3፣ 2014 ዓ.ም (በግምት) ድረስ መረጃዬ ሥራ ላይ እንዲውል እስማማለሁ፡፡

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(በፕሮጀክቱ ተሳታፊ የተፈረመ፣ ቀን)

## *Appendix 3 NSD approval letter (original)*

NSD                                                          Personvern

18.09.2019 15:01

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 542552 er nå vurdert av NSD. Følgende vurdering er gitt:

Our assessment is that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, so long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the Notification Form and attachments, dated 19.9.2019, as well as in correspondence with NSD. Everything is in place for the processing to begin. NOTIFY CHANGES If you intend to make changes to the processing of personal data in this project it may be necessary to notify NSD. This is done by updating the Notification Form. On our website we explain which changes must be notified. Wait until you receive an answer from us before you carry out the changes. TYPE OF DATA AND DURATION The project will be processing personal data relating to criminal convictions and offences and general categories of personal data until 12.3.2022. LEGAL BASIS The project will gain consent from data subjects to process their personal data. We find that consent will meet the necessary requirements under art. 4 (11) and 7, in that it will be a freely given, specific, informed and unambiguous statement or action, which will be documented and can be withdrawn. The legal basis for processing personal data relating to criminal convictions and offences will therefore be explicit consent given by the data subject, cf. the General Data Protection Regulation art. 6 nr.1 a), cf. art. 10, cf. the Personal Data Act Section 11(2) a), cf. Section 9 (2). PRINCIPLES RELATING TO PROCESSING PERSONAL DATA NSD finds that the planned processing of personal data will be in accordance with the principles under the General Data Protection Regulation regarding: - lawfulness, fairness and transparency (art. 5.1 a), in that data subjects will receive sufficient information about the processing and

will give their consent - purpose limitation (art. 5.1 b), in that personal data will be collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes, and will not be processed for new, incompatible purposes - data minimisation (art. 5.1 c), in that only personal data which is adequate, relevant and necessary for the purpose of the project will be processed - storage limitation (art. 5.1 e), in that personal data will not be stored for longer than is necessary to fulfil the project's purpose THE RIGHTS OF DATA SUBJECTS Data subjects will have the following rights in this project: transparency (art. 12), information (art. 13), access (art. 15), rectification (art. 16), erasure (art. 17), restriction of processing (art. 18), notification (art. 19) and data portability (art. 20). These rights apply for as long as the data subject can be identified in the collected data. NSD finds that the information that will be given to data subjects about the processing of their personal data will meet the legal requirements for form and content, cf. art. 12.1 and art. 13. We remind you that if a data subject contacts you about their rights, the data controller has a duty to reply within a month. FOLLOW YOUR INSTITUTION'S GUIDELINES NSD presupposes that the project will meet the requirements of accuracy (art. 5.1 d), integrity and confidentiality (art. 5.1 f) and security (art. 32) when processing personal data. To ensure that these requirements are met you must follow your institution's internal guidelines and/or consult with your institution (i.e. the institution responsible for the project). FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT NSD will follow up the progress of the project underway (every other year) and at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded/is being carried out in accordance with what is documented.

Good luck with the project!

Contact person at NSD: Håkon J. Tranvåg Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)

## *Appendix 4 NSD approval letter (revised)*

NSD                                              Personvern
24.02.2020 09:01

Det innsendte meldeskjemaet med referansekode 542552 er nå vurdert av NSD. Følgende vurdering er gitt: NSD has assessed the change registered on 21.2.2020. We find that the processing of personal data in this project will comply with data protection legislation, so long as it is carried out in accordance with what is documented in the Notification Form and attachments, dated 24.2.2020, as well as in correspondence with NSD. Everything is in place for the processing to continue. The change consists of adding a data transcriber to the project, who will have access the personal data. NSD presupposes that the processing of personal data by a data transcriber meets the requirements under the General Data Protection Regulation arts. 28 and 29. FOLLOW-UP OF THE PROJECT NSD will follow-up the project at the planned end date in order to determine whether the processing of personal data has been concluded. Good luck with the project! Contact person at NSD: Håkon J. Tranvåg Data Protection Services for Research: +47 55 58 21 17 (press 1)

## *Appendix 5 Meaning units*

| NO | Column A, The raw data (Direct from the transcript) | Column B, Meaning unit (Changed from first person to third person) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | It is very hard, isn't it? Being a mother is paying so much sacrifice, going through so much for your children. | P said being a mother is very hard and it is about paying so much sacrifice and going through so much for her children. |
| 2 | I have and I still am paying so much sacrifice for my kids, being called names at work, but it is ok. I have done what I have done for these kids, a person being called a thief for something they have done is deserved but they call me a thief for something I have not done. They suspect me when something gets lost. | P is still paying so much sacrifice for her kids, and she is being called names at work and in her neighbourhood though she thinks that is ok. All the things she has done are for her kids. If a person is called a thief for something he/she has done is deserved but they call P a thief for something she hasn't done. When something gets lost people do tend to suspect her first. |
| 3 | If you have given life for that child, you would want to make sure they get somewhere in life, with everything in you. You try as much as you can, go as far as you can, might not be far but you give everything you have. I don't know…I don't have words for it. I have paid so much sacrifice for them. | P believes if she has given life to her children, she wants to make sure they get somewhere in life with everything in her. She tries as much as she can and goes as far as she can. It might not be far, but P gives everything she has to her children. P doesn't have words to describe the sacrifice she paid for her kids. |

### Appendix 6 Transformation of the participants' natural attitude expressions into phenomenological psychologically sensitive expressions

| NO | **Column A,** The raw data (Direct from the transcript) | **Column B**, Meaning Unit (Changed from first person to third person) | **Column C**, Elucidation of psychological meaning (within the phenomenological attitude) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | It is very hard, isn't it? Being a mother is paying so much sacrifice, going through so much for your children. | P said being a mother is very hard and it is about paying so much sacrifice and going through so much for her children. | **(1, 3).** As she gave birth to her children, P feels a sense of responsibility for them. As such, she wants to provide for them to ensure they achieve in life. In order to do this, she sacrifices things for them. Yet she feels she wishes she could do more. |
| 2 | I have and I still am paying so much sacrifice for my kids. I am not disgusted at what I do. There are other things I do; I don't want to tell you that. | P is still paying so much sacrifice for her kids, and she is not disgusted at what she does for a living. There are other things she did but didn't want to tell. | To provide for her children, P has done something she is not proud of and finds difficult to talk about. |
| 3 | If you have given life for that child, you would want to make sure they get somewhere in life, with everything in | P believes if she has given life for her children, she wants to make sure they get somewhere in life with everything in her. She | |

| | you. You try as much as you can, go as far as you can, might not be far but you give everything you have. I don't know…I don't have words for it. I have paid so much sacrifice for them. | tries as much as she can and goes as far as she can. It might not be far, but P gives everything she has for her children. P doesn't have words to describe the sacrifice she paid for her kids. | |
|---|---|---|---|

# *Appendix 7 Systematic Review (Paper 1)*

**Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

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# The Lived Experience of Motherhood after Prison: A Qualitative Systematic Review

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**ABSTRACT**

Despite the increasing number of women experiencing incarceration internationally, their experiences of motherhood after prison rarely studied. This review aims to explore and synthesize current research on the nature of the lived experience of motherhood after imprisonment. A qualitative synthesis review of English language-based articles published before January 2020 was used. 14 peer-reviewed qualitative studies were identified. The findings indicate that the post-release was a time when mothers re-claim their mothering role but faced significant challenges without sufficient support systems. It was also a time of reflection on the impact that the context of incarceration had on parenting roles and relationships with their children. The review found that we have limited understanding of the mothers' current experiences of motherhood post-release. The reports are also insufficient to capture the mothers' voice in different contexts. Further research is therefore required to explore the motherhood experience after release in greater depth and richness.

## INTRODUCTION

Motherhood is a group identity in which the shared action of mothering is performed (Kawash, 2011). From a psychoanalytic perspective, motherhood is defined in terms of the innate behavior of being a mother and attachment to the child (Holmes, 2006), whereas sociologists explore mothers' actual experiences of child rearing and the effect that culture and society have on this (Lareau, 2003). Motherhood is hereby explained and experienced within different contexts, and these contexts/perspectives construct and restrain the mothering experience (Lareau, 2003). In patriarchal societies, motherhood is considered the ultimate way for women to find physical and emotional fulfillment (Holmes, 2006; Skott, 2016). Deviating from these norms of motherhood results in social stigmatization and the categorization of the women as "bad" mothers (Akujobi, 2011). Such women are condemned for prioritizing other things at the expense of maternal responsibilities.

Incarceration increases the likelihood of the aforementioned stigma (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016; Garcia, 2016). Incarceration is among the many adversities and conditions in life that can

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negatively impact motherhood and maternal responsibilities (Kawash, 2011). The effect of incarceration is strongly felt within the family, especially since most incarcerated mothers are the primary care givers (Artz & Rotmann, 2015). This impact extends to the reentry process as the mother makes the transition from incarceration back into society and adjusts to life outside of prison and a crime free lifestyle (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Reentry is a complex process with multiple challenges for incarcerated individuals. Many of them do not have the opportunity for professional development and therefore have limited educational and job skills. They also have difficulty finding employment and often lack proper housing (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009). Some have unresolved substance misuse, mental health and trauma issues, have little outside family and community support (ibid.) and are stigmatized because of their criminal record (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016; Pager, 2003).

Although all individuals with incarceration experiences encounter challenges during the reentry process (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009), the experience of formerly incarcerated mothers is unique due to the additional demand of reuniting with their children and fulfilling their maternal role (Gadsden, 2003). Incarceration means that the mother is often separated from her children, which can create a barrier in reestablishing relationships with the children, the wider family unit and society when she is released (Cnaan et al., 2008, Kawash, 2011). The quality of these relationships can impact the success of the transition process and the likelihood of remaining crime-free (Mignon & Ransford, 2012). The effective transition of formerly incarcerated mothers into the community also promotes healthy child development and wellbeing. When parents go through a stressful reentry process, children become highly vulnerable, and their parents' situation is a key factor in children's resilience and wellbeing (Philbrick et al., 2014). In other words, the rights of the child may be at risk if the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents as caregivers are compromised during this time (UNCRC, 1989).

The voice of mothers who have experienced incarceration is often unacknowledged and absent from discourses around what motherhood in general means and should be (Holmes, 2006). This is concerning given the rise in incarceration rate of mothers in many countries (World Prison Brief Report, 2017) and the importance of service user voice in achieving best practice and support for mothers leaving prison. When mothers who are incarcerated are consulted, they express concern about the transition/reentry phase of their lives and fear discrimination and inadequate support systems after release (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016; Gobena & Hean, 2019). There is no clear overview of their experiences, particularly the experience of motherhood when reentry has actually taken place, as current reviews of the empirical evidence focus on the experience of mothering while incarcerated (Murray et al., 2009; Shaw et al., 2015; Stanton et al., 2016). To our knowledge, there is no synthesis of formerly incarcerated mothers' experiences of motherhood after release. This review therefore aims to synthesize and reflect on the existing evidence or literature that captures the lived experience of motherhood after incarcerated mothers leave prison in an international context, to highlight what is currently known and where the gaps in knowledge are.

## METHODS

The review was conducted by staff with expertise in social work and the experiences of women in prison (EB), prison research and review methods (SH), vulnerability and review methods (VH), and social work and child protection (IS). The review follows the qualitative synthesis review procedure employed by Thomas and Harden (2008), a verified method of synthesizing qualitative research to accomplish higher order thematic categories in a transparent way. The Population, Phenomena of Interest and Context (PICo) model was adopted to develop the review question, search strategy and inclusion criteria (Riesenberg & Justice, 2014). The review question was

*Appendices*

**Table 1.** Search strategy.

| |
|---|
| (Formerly incarcerated OR ex-convict OR post-incarceration OR post imprisonment OR "release* from prison" OR "release* from jail" OR incarcerate* OR imprison* OR prison* OR jail* OR "correctional facility*" OR "correctional institution* OR parole OR desistance) |
| AND |
| ("Mother child relationship" OR mother child relationship OR mothers OR mother OR motherhood OR maternal OR motherhood experience*) |
| AND |
| (Qualitative OR "lived experience*" OR perceptions OR interview). |

**Table 2.** Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria
- Population: Formerly Incarcerated mothers
- Phenomenon of Interest: Motherhood
- Context: Motherhood experience after prison in all international contexts
- Peer-reviewed and published articles
- Paper published in the English language
- Published before January 2020
- Studies with a qualitative approach or (mixed methods with a qualitative component that met the above-mentioned inclusion criteria)

Exclusion criteria
- Quantitative designs
- Participants: incarcerated women who are not mothers, incarcerated mothers who are still in prison, the experiences of incarcerated men and the experiences of children of incarcerated individuals.
- Articles not peer reviewed, letters, personal narratives, editorials, book chapters, and theses
- Mixed method without clear qualitative description.
- Articles not in the English language

therefore: What are formerly incarcerated mothers lived experience of motherhood after leaving prison? This review question informed the search of online databases below.

### Search Strategy

With help from a librarian, seven databases (Criminology database, PsychINFO, MEDLINE, CINAHL, ProQuest, Scopus, Academic Search Premier) were selected for the search. These databases were searched from their first publication to January 2020. To identify further papers not picked up in this search, a hand search of Research Gate, Academia and reference lists of articles already selected for inclusion was conducted. To connect the key words Boolean terms were used (see Table 1).

### Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria and Inter-Rater Reliability Checks

The search resulted in 410 papers, 397 papers remaining after the removal of duplicates. The titles and abstracts of the 397 papers retrieved were reviewed by the first author (EB) based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria summarized in Table 2. All excluded papers were shared between the other members of the research team [SH, VH, IS] who evaluated these on the Table 2 criteria as an inter-rater reliability check. Disagreements were resolved through discussion among reviewers.

Original qualitative studies that provide insight about the motherhood experience of formerly incarcerated mothers were included. Only qualitative studies were included (or those mixed methods studies with a significant qualitative component). This was because these types of studies present a thick description of the formerly incarcerated mothers' lived experiences. These types of studies offer better depth of understanding of the motherhood phenomenon and are representative of the voice of formerly incarcerated mothers themselves (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Here

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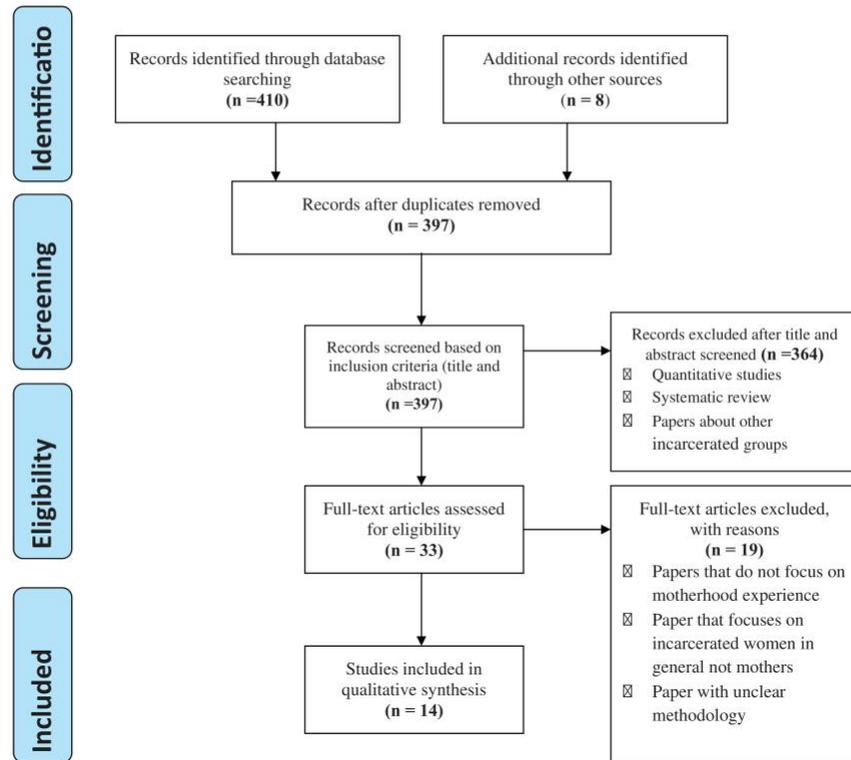


**Figure 1.** Flow diagram following PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009).

the lived experience is defined as the direct, first hand, positioned and immediate activities and encounters of the mother in everyday experiences (Pascal et al., 2011). This subjective reality or experience of motherhood after prison can only be captured inductively through a qualitative approach.

Based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 364 studies were excluded. The full text of the remaining 33 full text papers were read and checked based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria again. A total of 14 studies remained after this process. Of the 14 papers selected for review, 12 were qualitative research papers and 2 mixed-method studies. All studies used interviews as the main data collection method ($n = 14$). Two of the included articles reported findings from the same study, therefore limiting the review to 12 separate studies. The process of identification and inclusion of relevant studies in the review is summarized in a PRISMA Flow Diagram (Moher et al., 2009) (Figure 1).

## Quality Assessment of Papers

A quality appraisal of the remaining papers was conducted. This was conducted in order to critique the standard of the available literature rather than exclude any papers within the sample. To assess the quality of the identified studies, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme tool for qualitative research (CASP, 2018) was used. This tool has 10 key questions that include multiple areas, like participant selection strategy, ethical issues, relevance, and suitability of qualitative

method and rigor of data analysis. A numerical scale (0–10) to rank the papers based the CASP criteria were developed and this was applied to rate each paper as "very good" (8–10), "satisfactory" (5–7) and "weak" (0–4). A first reviewer [EB] critically appraised all studies. Then a second reviewer [VH] blind assessed 20% of the papers. The results of this critical appraisal are summarized in Table 3. Among reviewers [EB] and [VH] there were no significant differences in overall quality appraisal or CASP rating of the included studies. No studies were found to be of weak methodological quality. Seven studies were found to be of high methodological quality and seven with satisfactory methodological quality (see Table 3).

## Data Extraction

Following suggestions by Thomas and Harden (2008) all text from a paper that is labeled as "findings" or "results" were extracted. This included direct quotations. From this material, text related to motherhood and mothering activities within the results sections of each selected paper were extracted specifically. NVivo 12 was used to manage this data during the coding process and facilitate data organization and transparency of analysis.

## Synthesis Process

A qualitative synthesis was employed in this review. Compared to a quantitative meta-synthesis, a qualitative synthesis allows an exploratory and inductive analysis of people's experiences and focuses on increasing understanding of a phenomena (Ring et al., 2011). The first author [EB] engaged in a process of familiarization through reading and rereading the material extracted from the sample papers, followed by a line-by-line coding (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Similar codes were subsequently clustered together, and overlapping codes were merged. In total, 81 codes were developed. These codes were compared and contrasted for similarities and differences, and similar codes were grouped together into twelve descriptive themes. Up until this point, we had produced a synthesis, which kept very close to the original findings of the included studies. The final and third stage was the development of analytical themes (Thomas & Harden, 2008). Examining the descriptive themes in relation to the original review question and abstraction attained this. The step of "going beyond" the content of the original studies was achieved by using the descriptive themes that emerged from our inductive analysis of study findings to answer the review questions we had temporarily put to one side. Since the selected studies often had a different focus than this review, we identified commonalities, differences and themes to synthesize existing findings into a new conceptual context of motherhood experience after prison (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

This resulted in three main analytical themes. The main body of the analysis was conducted by the first reviewer [EB], but the coding and development of themes were discussed by all review team members to check the trustworthiness of the analytical process. All disagreements or inconsistencies were resolved through discussion, and all reviewers agreed the final account. A summary of the extraction, quality appraisal, general characteristics of the studies included and the synthesis process are provided in Table 3.

## FINDINGS

From the 14 papers the vast majority were from the USA ($n = 12$) with merely two studies from Europe (UK). There is a lack of published research from other countries and continents. The inclusion of only English-language articles may contribute to this. Most of the included studies focused on the psychological, socio-economic and relational challenges to motherhood as experienced by formerly incarcerated mothers upon their release. The review findings are organized

**Table 3.** Study characteristics and CASP quality rating.

| No | Authors, year and country | Aim/objective | Methods (Sample, Data collection, analysis) | Key findings/themes in the paper | Limitations and CASP |
|----|---------------------------|---------------|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Arditti and Few (2008), USA | To conceptualize maternal distress following incarceration and during reentry | Grounded theory study with 10 mothers either on parole or finished parole. Including African American ($n=2$) & Caucasian ($n=8$). Semi-structured interviewGround theory analysis | The study found three forms of distress: Psychological distress, Relational distress and Maternal distress | Insufficient information about ethical issues and researcher relationship with participants CASP = 8/10, Very good |
| 2 | Baldwin, (2017), UK | To explore how maternal emotions and the maternal role are assembled and challenged through prison space, and more specifically, how mothers themselves assimilate this experience whilst navigating motherhood post incarceration. | Qualitative study with 20 released mothers that included diverse backgrounds. Interview Thematic analysis | Mothers' reflection of situated maternal feeling: prison space and the challenge to maternal feelings and emotions after prison. Emotion and the organization of prison time and space: reflection of post prison mothers | No consideration and discussion about the researcher's relationship with the participants. No clear description of the specific research design. CASP = 7/10, satisfactory |
| 3 | Brown and Bloom (2009), USA | To explore the emotional content and the meaning of maternal role for ex-incarcerated mother. | Mixed-method researcher with 25 mothers on parole. Semi-structured interview. No clear information of how the qualitative data analyzed | Reclaiming motherhood Parental capital Preparation for reentry and community support | Insufficient information about participants' selection, interview process and ethical issues. No clear description of the analysis. CASP = 5/10, satisfactory |
| 4 | Beichner and Rabe-hemp (2014), USA | To explore the vulnerability of incarcerated and reentering rural mothers. | Mixed method approach with 17 rural mothers. Interview Analysis process unreported. | Relational Vulnerabilities: Interpersonal Factors Relational Vulnerabilities: Intra-Psychic Factors Situational Vulnerability | Insufficient information about participants' selection, interview process and ethical issues. No rigorous description of the analysis process. Inadequate justification and description of the research design CASP = 5/10, satisfactory |
| 5 | Cooper-Sadlo et al. (2019), USA | To explore motherhood experiences before, during and after their incarceration. | Transcendental phenomenological approach with 12 ex-incarcerated mothers including African American ($n=9$) & Caucasian ($n=3$). In-depth interview. Moustakas's (1994), Transcendental phenomenological analysis | Experiencing motherhood Struggles of motherhood during incarceration and Motherhood after incarceration and reunification | No clear statement of the problem CASP = 9/10, very good |

(continued)

Table 3. Continued.

| No | Authors, year and country | Aim/objective | Methods (Sample, Data collection, analysis) | Key findings/themes in the paper | Limitations and CASP |
|----|---------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 6 | Few-Demo and Arditti (2014), USA | To explore the influence that mothers' close relationships have on their reentry experience with their families. | Descriptive qualitative study with 10 incarcerated and reentry mothers including Caucasian ($n = 7$) and African American ($n = 3$). Interview. Ground theory analysis | Disempowerment due to family and intimate relationships characterized by violence, trauma, and substance abuse. The presence of ambiguous and ambivalent relationships. Unresolved loss and grief due to relationship dissolution or the death of a parent, sibling, child, or intimate partner. | Insufficient information about ethical issues in the project. CASP = 8/10, very good |
| 7 | Gunn et al. (2018), USA | To explore how formerly incarcerated mothers with histories of substance use experience stigmas from their intimate relationships with family and romantic partners. | Grounded theory study with 30 mothers including Black ($n = 19$), White ($n = 7$) and Latina ($n = 4$) Semi-structured interview Ground theory analysis | Stigmatization within familial relationships. Romantic relationships and womanhood norm violations. Racialised stereotypes and norm violations. Strategies for managing stigma in familial and romantic relationships. | CASP = 10/10, very good |
| 8 | Gurusami, (2019), USA | To examine how state surveillance under post-release supervision and child welfare services shapes and constrains formerly incarcerated Black women's mothering practices. | Ethnographic study with 35 women including, Black ($n = 24$), Hispanic (2), White ($n = 3$) and Unknown ($n = 6$) Participant observation and interview. Abductive analysis | The identified three types of mother work: Collective mother work Hyper-vigilant mother work Crisis mother work | Insufficient information about the research design and ethical issues. Limited description and discussion about the researcher's relationship with the participants given an ethnographic study. CASP = 7/10, satisfactory |
| 9 | Hayes, (2009), USA | To explore the experience of mothering after prison. | Interpretive phenomenological study with 6 mothers including African American ($n = 1$), Hispanic ($n = 2$), Caucasian ($n = 2$) and Unidentified ($n = 1$). Interview. Thematic analysis using Max van Manen's (1990) approach to hermeneutics phenomenological reflection | Doing mothering right Family: a double-edged sword The honeymoon is over Mothering beyond the honeymoon | Inconsistent and limited information of participants. Limited information of ethical issues CASP = 8/10, very good |
| 10 | Michalsen, (2019), USA | To explore formerly incarcerated mothers' descriptions of transition moments and the effect of these moments on their criminal behavior. | Exploratory qualitative study with 100 mothers. 71% of the participants were non-Hispanic African American. In-depth interview. Exploratory data analysis | Desistance Turning points | No clear description of the analysis. No consideration and discussion about the researcher's relationship |

Table 3. Continued.

| No | Authors, year and country | Aim/objective | Methods (Sample, Data collection, analysis) | Key findings/themes in the paper | Limitations and CASP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | with the participants CASP = 8/10, very good |
| 11 | Michalsen, (2011), USA | Explore the relationship between attachment to children and desistance from criminal behavior. | Exploratory qualitative study with 100 mothers. 71% of the participants was non-Hispanic African American. In-depth interview. Moustakas' (1994), approach of exploratory qualitative data analysis | Why Desist? Do Children Discourage or Encourage Desistance . . . or Both? Mothering in Reentry as a Stressor | The analysis process is not rigorous CASP= 8/10, very good |
| 12 | Mitchell and Davis (2019), USA | To understand black mothers' lived experience of motherhood after incarceration. | Phenomenological study with 5 Black mothers. Semi-structured interview. Thematic analysis | Black mothers' concern for their children Black mother raising their children without support Black mothers battling mental illness and addiction | Inadequate justification and description of the research design. Limited description of the analysis process No consideration and discussion about the researcher's relationship with the participants CASP= 7/10, satisfactory |
| 13 | Robison and Miller (2016), USA | To explore the experiences of mothers who are under state supervision, focusing on narratives from mothers who transitioned to a halfway house as part of their reintegration. | Grounded approach with 8 mothers on parole or probation or had recently been released including Black (n = 4), White (n = 3) and Hebrew Sicilian (n = 1) In-depth interviews Thematic analysis | Reimagining Good Mothering"Being There" for their children as discourse and decision Re-centering on Self as Good Mothering in the Halfway House Mothering Under State Supervision: (Non) negotiable Responsibilities | Insufficient information about participants' selection, interview process and ethical issues. Limited description of the analysis process CASP= 6/10, satisfactory |
| 14 | Schinkel, (2019), UK | To examine the interaction between trajectories of parenthood and trajectories of desistance in order to understand how these interact over time. | A qualitative study with 29 men (n = 16) and women (n = 13) parents, all participants were White British Semi-structured Interview Thematic and narrative analysis | Stages of motherhood | Insufficient information about interview, data collection process and researcher relationship with participants. Limited description of the analysis process CASP= 6/10, satisfactory |

into three analytical themes. Formerly incarcerated mothers experience the post release period as a time for the following:

- *Re-claiming motherhood, a process mediated by the challenges of the transition back into society,*
- *Reflecting on the impact of the previous incarceration on their parenting and the relationship with their children,*
- *Experiencing support systems and their impact on their mothering role after leaving prison.*

There are some commonalities or overlap between the themes; however, each theme has its distinct and unique characteristics of mothers' experience of motherhood after incarceration. The order of the presented themes is not based on importance or frequency of occurrence in the paper.

### Re-claiming Motherhood, a Process Mediated by the Challenges of the Transition Back into Society

Research participants highlighted that they wished to become good mothers and thus by definition well-adjusted citizens, but this was an identity that these mothers needed to negotiate with society once they were released.

> I wanna be a good member of society, I wanna be a woman and a mother that I know that I need to be, and I know that I could be. Without drugs, without doing negative behaviours, and, you know, it's, it's time for me to change. (Michalsen, 2011, p. 358)

The process of re-claiming motherhood and maternal rights after prison was a challenging and lengthy process for many formerly incarcerated mothers. They stated imprisonment tarnished their identity as a "good mother" and subjected them to stigmatization. They also found themselves defined negatively by others and that their role in the family was undermined. This negative view was an essential element in their self-identity and self-esteem (Baldwin, 2017; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Gunn et al., 2018).

> In … [name of prison] … it felt like we [the mothers] … were basically looked on as bad mothers, actually worse than that … mothers who didn't deserve to have kids. (Baldwin, 2017, p. 5)

Most of the formerly incarcerated mothers also had multifaceted and unresolved issues that seemed to impede them achieving the ideal of mothering and to live out this mothering ideal they had constructed post incarceration (Hayes, 2009). They mentioned a range of complex challenges after release, including substance misuse, mental health problems, situational vulnerability like unemployment and economic problems and discrimination including experiences of racism (for black mothers) (Arditti & Few, 2008; Baldwin, 2017; Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014; Mitchell & Davis, 2019).

Majority of formerly incarcerated mothers showed a strong desire to reunite and regain custody of their children. However, the unification process and custody battles were challenging and often unexpected (Arditti & Few, 2008; Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019). For many formerly incarcerated mothers, if they won these custody battles and had their children returned to them, severe practical concerns like financial problems, housing, living arrangements and insecurity in these then became an issue (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Michalsen, 2011).

> Getting my son back was mainly fears. Because I haven't had him, how was the relationship going to be between us, was I going to be a good mother, was I going to be able to take care of him financially, was I going to be able to love him the way he needs to be loved? (Michalsen, 2019, p. 948)

Despite the many challenges the formerly incarcerated mothers faced during reentry, they also showed resilience and commitment to being a better mother. In their everyday mothering role, they exhibited strong self-sacrifice and thoughtfulness and they aimed to protect their children from violence, crime and further involvement in the criminal justice system. They were also committed to educate their children so that their children could have a better life than them. Some of the formerly incarcerated mothers even gave up custody of their children to stable caregivers in order to protect them from being influenced by their own drug use. Because of the guilt they felt toward their children's suffering due to their absence, some formerly incarcerated mothers showed a strong motivation to avoid re-incarceration. The efforts involved obeying the terms of their probation, attending rehabilitation and counseling programmes regularly and making an effort to stay away from drugs (Arditti & Few, 2008; Baldwin, 2017; Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014; Gunn et al., 2018; Gurusami, 2019; Hayes, 2009; Michalsen, 2011; 2019; Mitchell & Davis, 2019; Robison & Miller, 2016; Schinkel, 2019).

### Mothers Reflecting on the Impact That Their Previous Incarceration Had on Their Current Parenting and Relationship with Their Children

Being incarcerated had a significant impact on child rearing, and formerly incarcerated mothers felt that they lost influence or authority in their relationship with the child. They described how their incarceration had disrupted the whole family and negatively affected their relationships with their loved ones, especially their children. These relationships seemed to be shaped by them first leaving and then reuniting with children (Brown & Bloom, 2009; Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014). The formerly incarcerated mothers reported that their physical absence from the home made them lose authority in disciplining, monitoring, advising, and taking responsibility over their children's life. For formerly incarcerated mothers, whose incarceration had led to long-term separation from their child, the parent child relationship had become fragmented, and the emotional bonding between them was impaired (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014; Hayes, 2009).

> My daughter got this hatred towards me and at first it really hurt. She called my mother and said, "Can you believe my mommy didn't have nothing to do with me?" (Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014, p. 1309)

Further, formerly incarcerated mothers reported that their imprisonment had impacted their children in a negative way, which made their parenting more difficult. Some formerly incarcerated mothers said their children had deliberately emotionally distanced themselves from them, fearful of their mother's re-incarceration. They reported that their children exhibited unstable emotions of anger, hopefulness, fear, clinginess and/or withdrawal during reunification, and some of them even exhibited behavioral changes like drug addiction and criminal activities. Some formerly incarcerated mothers believed that they were responsible for their children' bad behavior because they had been a bad role model (Arditti & Few, 2008; Baldwin, 2017; Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019; Gurusami, 2019; Hayes, 2009), as illustrated in these quotes

> The worst part about my crime was that I dragged my daughter along with me. She was in the house. So she got arrested when I got arrested. So that was really hard for me to deal with. Just that I had to worry about her. She can't get a job at the airport now because of the arrest (Brown & Bloom, 2009, p. 318).

> I see so much of me in her that it scares me. (Arditti & Few, 2008, p. 310)

The formerly incarcerated mothers noted how communication with children through letters, phone calls, and visits while incarcerated had strongly shaped their parenting after prison. The formerly incarcerated mothers, who had had limited or no contact with at least one of their

children during the incarceration period, struggled with a loss of the relationship upon release. Those who had frequent or regular visits had a better relationship with their children post incarceration (Baldwin, 2017; Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019; Michalsen, 2011, 2019). One formerly incarcerated mother believed that her ability to bond with her children during her incarceration gave her the strength that she needed to accomplish change in her life after release (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014). However, the children's visits during their incarceration period tended to be bitter-sweet because of the poor handling of children's need by caregivers and the type of place and space available in relation to these visits, which left their children sad and confused (Arditti & Few, 2008; Baldwin, 2017).

> I enjoy seeing them. The hardest part is seeing them walk out the door. (Arditti & Few, 2008, p. 310)

> I was so upset after that first visit, she wasn't dressed in anything I'd pick, she was frightened, she looked untidy and I felt like she hated me. (Baldwin, 2017, p. 5)

Incarceration affected the mother-child relationship, and her absence was a barrier to rebuilding the relationship with children after prison. As a result, many formerly incarcerated mothers reported that reestablishing and re-claiming their status as a mother and caregiver post incarceration was a complex endeavor. The anger, resistance and distrust felt by their children, as well as those caregivers who had looked after the children during the incarceration period, and the formerly incarcerated mothers' own feeling of guilt and shame, meant that returning to a mothering role was not a smooth journey (Arditti & Few, 2008; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019; Gunn et al., 2018; Gurusami, 2019; Hayes, 2009; Michalsen, 2011; Robison & Miller, 2016).

> It's more than you think you're going to come home and parent … On top of it is really harder getting out of prison and not taking a child development class and thinking you're going to raise the kid that's already been raised by somebody else. (Hayes, 2009, p. 231)

### Experiencing Support Systems and Their Impact on Their Mothering Role after Leaving Prison

Formerly incarcerated mothers described their experience of formal and informal support systems available to them on release and the significance of this for their mothering role.

### Formal Support

Formerly incarcerated mothers describe their experiences of formal support systems as mainly related to rehabilitation programmes, support from a variety of professionals and employment opportunities. They stated that the availability of formal support during and after prison was limited. For example, some formerly incarcerated mothers experienced psychological distress, but no systematic mental health care was available for them. Formerly incarcerated mothers' unmet mental health needs were connected to their histories of depression, current reentry challenges, and persistent and worsening depressive symptoms (Arditti & Few, 2008). They needed rehabilitation services that focus on mental health, education, training and preparing them for life after prison. They also stated their need for skills and resources, including drug rehabilitation programmes and community services that would allow them to construct healthy family environments (Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014; Gunn et al., 2018; Michalsen, 2011, 2019; Robison & Miller, 2016).

> Help us. Educate, educate, educate, educate, educate… if I knew better, I would've done better. But now that I know better, I am doing better. And I know better because people have taught me. (Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019, p. 98)

Most of the formerly incarcerated mothers, on release, had some contact with professionals from the child welfare, mental health as well as criminal justice systems and report having experienced mistreatment and humiliation by these professionals (Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019). The formerly incarcerated mothers said that upon release they felt disempowered. They wished to be heard, educated, recognized and treated with dignity by the people who possessed the capacity to help them, in this case the welfare professionals. They emphasized how a friendly and simple gesture of kindness by professionals in the criminal justice system (e.g. caseworkers, judges and prison officers) made a difference in their recovery process (Baldwin, 2017; Gurusami, 2019).

### Informal Support

The formerly incarcerated mothers also discussed their experiences of informal support like family support, intimate relationships and religion or faith groups and the impact of this on their reintegration process and mothering role. Most formerly incarcerated mothers had had an unstable and chaotic childhood themselves with poor family support, lack of trust, molestation and traumas. They believed that these childhood experiences had paved the way to their current mental illness, drug addiction, poor decision-making and bad mothering (Arditti & Few, 2008; Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014; Hayes, 2009; Robison & Miller, 2016).

The formerly incarcerated mothers' intimate (romantic) relationships were often characterized by abuse, violence, economic dependency and men's attempt to control their lives. Many of them stated that they have insecure relationship with their children's father and that the men were unable or reluctant to be a "good husband or father". Some formerly incarcerated mothers were stigmatized by their partners, and they described this stigma as a danger to their recovery and reentry process. Some of them described how they had started these romantic relationships for economic benefit to support themselves and their children. They described these relationships as a means to pay the bills, rent and court fines but that they did not get the emotional support they needed from an intimate partner (Arditti & Few, 2008; Baldwin, 2017; Beichner & Rabe-Hemp, 2014; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014; Gunn et al., 2018; Michalsen, 2011; Robison & Miller, 2016).

Finally, mothers also described the positive role of faith and religious support:

> Now that I'm back in church, you know, and I'm staying focused, and I'm keeping my sights on God and faith, I'm seeing things positive happening again for me in my life. Ha! You know, I'm happy, I'm at peace, I'm content, you know? I'm seeing things happening for me that I've lost. I'm stronger, you know, my spirit is stronger. (Michalsen, 2019, p. 953)

Some formerly incarcerated mothers described their spirituality and having a higher power (God) as a good informal support and contributed toward a positive lifestyle and good mothering (Cooper-Michalsen, 2011; Cooper-Sadlo et al. 2019; Michalsen, 2019; Robison & Miller, 2016).

## DISCUSSION

This review of the lived experience of motherhood after prison found three main dimensions in formerly incarcerated mothers' experience of their motherhood after release. These are the challenge of re-claiming motherhood, the impact of their previous incarceration on their current parenting and relationship with their children, and finally their experience of support systems and their impact on their mothering role post-release.

### Re-claiming Motherhood

Most formerly incarcerated mothers in the study had a high expectation of caring for and reuniting with their children after release; however, many of them mentioned re-claiming motherhood on

release as stressful. They also indicated that imprisonment tarnished their identity as a "good mother" and exposed them to stigma and discrimination. This negative view was an essential element in their self-identity and self-esteem, and it also affects their motherhood identities in their own eyes and those of their families (Moore, Stuewig & Tangney, 2016). Arendell (2000, p. 9) and Skott (2016) argue that mothers who deviate from the conventional or patriarchal framework of motherhood like mothers with incarceration experience are often subject to discourses of deviance about motherhood and its harsh effects. These "deviance discourses" comes from this ideological construct of motherhood that are used to target women who do not fit the standard of full-time biological motherhood. These mothers face gender bias and discrimination—that they have failed as mothers, just as women are expected to sacrifice all their wants and needs for their children. Therefore, in order to help formerly incarcerated mothers, it is necessary to move away from imposing the impossibility of patriarchal institutionalized motherhood and take a step toward a re-articulated mothering practise that understands mothers, mothering and motherhood beyond the expectations of what constitutes "good mothering" (Fiona, 2015).

In addition, formerly incarcerated mothers are often the primary caregivers of children, and they return to family situations that require them to find a living income not only for themselves but also for their children and families (Cnaan et al. 2008). Situational vulnerabilities such as housing, employment and economic problems made it very difficult for them to perform the mothering role as they expected. Despite their motivation to be good mothers and reunite with their children, these practicalities usually ended up taking precedence over reunification and building relationships with their children (Garcia, 2016; Haney, 2010). Nonetheless, for many formerly incarcerated mothers in the review, motherhood was still a key motivating factor and turning point in their efforts to reenter a better and healthy life. They showed a strong commitment and resilience to protect their children from any harm. Some of the formerly incarcerated mothers in the review even relinquish their primary caregiving role and place their children to stable caregivers to protect them from the influence of their drug use. For them, the safety and healthy development of their children becomes the priority rather than their primary caregiving role after incarceration. The concept of family resilience involves more than coping with stressful conditions. It includes the potential for personal and relational transformation and growth that can be constructed from adversity (Walsh, 2003). A crisis can be a chance to focus on what is important, and it can become an opportunity to rethink priorities (Aiello & McQueeney, 2016; Walsh, 2003).

The family resilience framework emphasizes the importance of using a strengths-based approach by enabling families and individuals to make sense of their adverse experience through an understanding of the socio-cultural context in which they function (Hawley 2000; Walsh, 2003). In order to provide a context for safety, adaptability and change, the provision of integrated care, the development of a social network and the facilitation of family and community change are crucial (Walsh, 2003). In particular, creating an environment that promotes parenting skills, finding employment and managing finances helps formerly incarcerated mothers adjust to society. Governmental and non-governmental agencies should also provide mental health and drug rehabilitation programmes during and after incarceration to help formerly incarcerated mothers fulfill their mothering roles with sober minds. Criminal justice system professionals and social workers must recognize the growing number of incarcerated women by developing relevant and coordinated programmes to empower formerly incarcerated mothers and their families after incarceration. They should also advocate and educate society about the unique needs and challenges of incarcerated mothers to combat discrimination and marginalization.

### A Reflection on the Impact of Incarceration on the Mother-Child Relationship

Formerly incarcerated mothers reflect on their time in prison, and they describe a break down in emotional attachment when incarceration occurred over an extended period of time. Their observations reflect the premises of attachment theory, in which long-term cognitive, social, and

emotional difficulties are attributed to a poor parent-child relationship and the separation of the child from the mother over a long period of time (Bowlby, 1952). Maintaining or strengthening family ties during the mother's incarceration would then be central to minimizing the impact of physical absence on the mother-child relationship after incarceration. However, in-prison programs provide incarcerated mothers with little connection to their children and do not prepare mothers for what to expect when they return home; they are not designed to help incarcerated mothers think through reentry. (Aiello, 2013, 2016; Aiello & Mccorkel, 2018; Aiello & McQueeney, 2016).

A quantitative study in Australia and New Zealand (Casey-Acevedo et al., 2004) has shown that interventions that promote communication between mother and child while in prison affect recidivism rates upon release. Our review additionally suggests that improving communication is important not only when the mother is in prison, but also when she is out trying to rebuild relationships with her children. Although some of the literature in the review suggests that formerly incarcerated mothers valued frequent or regular visits with their children after release and this led to better relationships with their children after incarceration (Baldwin, 2017; Cooper-Sadlo et al. 2019; Michalsen, 2011, 2019). Some studies outside of the review criteria on incarcerated mothers' perceptions when still in prison do not always concur with this, as some suggest that face-to-face prison visits with children increase depression in incarcerated mothers and negatively affect their well-being (Houck & Loper, 2002; Poehlmann, 2005). Seeing their children in prison may be good for maintaining the relationship, but it can still be upsetting for incarcerated mothers. A balance may need to be struck between the pain of seeing their children in prison and maintaining the relationship with the child.

Therefore, the accounts of formerly incarcerated mothers of the harms of separation to their children suggest that the criminal justice system and social workers should pay attention to optimize and facilitate the mother-child relationship during and after their incarceration. This could include regular visits with their children during incarceration with child-friendly visitation spaces in prison, allowing enough time during the visit to provide education or training for incarcerated mothers on parenting skills, and facilitating cyber-visits such as video conferencing as an alternative when physical visits are not possible (Mignon & Ransford, 2012). Providing family therapy and expanding family preservation services inside and outside of prison should be one of the areas of focus in criminal justice systems. Maintaining these relationships also has benefits for the child (Cnaan et al, 2008) as the children of incarcerated individuals constitute a group of vulnerable children with special needs and attention (Philbrick et al., 2014).

### Experience of Support Systems Post Release That Impact the Mothering Role

Post-release support is one of the most important aspects of successful reintegration, connecting formerly incarcerated mothers to potential opportunities and providing them with appropriate services in the community. Yet, formerly incarcerated mothers felt they lacked adequate and appropriate services both during and after incarceration. Some reported mistreatment and abuse by these professionals both inside and outside of prison.

Any insufficiencies or gaps in the care and support available to incarcerated individuals after release can contribute to recidivism and a stressful reintegration process (Wikoff et al., 2012). Healthy interactions between incarcerated individuals and professionals inside and outside of prison are critical to the success of rehabilitation and reentry programmes. Such relationships are best achieved through regular communication that enables professionals to understand the rehabilitation and reentry needs of incarcerated individuals and any difficulties they may face inside and outside prison (UNODC, 2015). This can be particularly important for formerly incarcerated mothers who suffer from a range of issues such as childcare and discrimination. To play a positive role in this process, child welfare, mental health and criminal justice professionals need to be carefully selected and provided with appropriate and ongoing training, including a gender-

sensitive approach and the concept of human rights and dignity. They should also be able to work in safe conditions and be well supported by their managers (UNODC, 2015).

Sociologists such as Lareau (2003, p. 251) argue that "social and economic resources play a key role in shaping the child-rearing process; as parents" own social class position shifts, so do their cultural beliefs and practices in childcare'. The incarceration history of formerly incarcerated mothers and the associated economic and material difficulties such as unemployment, housing problems, and custody issues during reentry negatively shape their motherhood and parenting experience. In addition, the limited and inadequate formal support system may force incarcerated individuals to rely on informal support systems (Haney, 2010). Although further study is needed, this may be why some of the formerly incarcerated mothers in the review stated that they stayed with their abusive intimate partners to obtain financial support. They described these relationships as a means to pay the bills, rent, and court fines (Arditti & Few, 2008; Baldwin, 2017; Beichner & Rabe-hemp, 2014; Few-Demo & Arditti, 2014; Gunn et al., 2018; Michalsen, 2011; Robison & Miller, 2016).

Relying primarily on often unprepared and unwilling informal social support networks after release has been shown to negatively impact incarcerated individuals' chances of successful reentry in general (Willging et al. 2016). While social support theory asserts that "close relationships (with family, friends, and intimate partners) are fundamental to thriving because they help individuals successfully cope with adversity" (Feeney & Collins, 2015, p. 6), this does not appear to be the case for formerly incarcerated mothers. For incarcerated individuals, including mothers, to effectively reenter society, support groups and supportive family members and friends are critical and are a source of strength, motivation, and refuge in adverse circumstances (Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2002). However, these networks must be provided with the necessary resources to adequately reengage and support the formerly incarcerated mother. When a mother is incarcerated, child welfare agencies and social workers must support her family and the children on the outside to maintain stability and prevent family breakdown.

In general, the review suggests that both formal and informal systems are essential for a formerly incarcerated mother to reclaim her role as a mother and rebuild an effective relationship with her children, but currently both systems are inadequate. Access to sufficient and quality rehabilitation services and a combination of formal and informal supports could give them a chance to achieve recovery more quickly and with less turmoil and alleviate maternal distress. These supports also help formerly incarcerated mothers better parent and care for their children and reduce recidivism (Lareau, 2003). Formal supports that address the unique needs and characteristics of formerly incarcerated mothers are important in addition to informal supports. The latter include rehabilitation programmes, counseling support for formerly incarcerated mothers and their children, and community-based reentry services. Helping professionals should also assist them and their families to better coordinate the system of available services, as well as identify any assistance that needs to be developed.

### Implication to Policy

The findings have important policy implications. In general, most post-incarceration policies restrict basic civil rights such as employment, housing, economic and emotional care for families and children, and education. In some countries (e.g., the United States), this extends to voting rights and primary forms of transportation, such as automobiles (Hall et al. 2016). These policies have mainly focused on the use of parole and community supervision in relation to drug use and other illegal activities, but not employment and other basic needs of formerly incarcerated individuals including mothers (Hall et al. 2016). In some countries, there are no post-incarceration policies at all (Dissel, 2007). Therefore, governments and other stakeholders should focus on developing new policies that can help formerly incarcerated individuals for successful reentry. These policies should also be gender sensitive so that they address the specific needs of women. Existing policies should be amended and developed into more inclusive and less discriminatory

policy frameworks that offer formerly incarcerated individuals, including mothers, a second chance to become law-abiding citizens (Hall et al. 2016). Criminal justice policies and interventions should be informed by evidence-based and empirical research that engages formerly incarcerated individuals, their families, professionals, and their wider community. Many governments and policies around the world spend billions of dollars on incarceration (Schmitt et al., 2010), but they should also focus on allocating a few million more to return incarcerated individuals to the community to reduce recidivism. Finally, policies need to work holistically on the issues along the life course that influence women's path into offending in the first place. Investing in educational opportunities and equal participation in the labor market for girls and women is critical to preventing their involvement in illegal activities.

### Limitations of the Review

Although the overall quality of the included papers was good and satisfactory, there were limitations in the methodology used in the reviewed studies. There was insufficient information on ethical issues and unclear descriptions of the design, participant selection and analysis process. However, to ensure that the research included was ethically and methodologically sound, only peer-reviewed papers were included.

With only 14 papers retrieved, the review demonstrates a lack of available internationally published material that exhaustively captures the voice of incarcerated mothers after release. The few studies available are only from the Western countries of the USA and the UK (see Table 3), so other international perspectives are missing. The restriction of the search strategy to English- language articles may contribute to this limitation. There may be studies in other non-English speaking countries that have not been published in English and are missing from this review. We therefore currently have limited understanding of the experiences of mothers after imprisonment in other national contexts, particularly from the Global South. Formerly incarcerated mothers in these countries may have different experiences due to socio-cultural and economic differences. This affects the reliability and inclusiveness of the review findings.

Finally, most of the studies focused on the general reentry experiences of formerly incarcerated mothers, and specific accounts of their experiences as mothers were shallow. They talked a lot about the past (see themes 2 and 3) in terms of bad experiences in prison and their poor childhood and informal support systems, but what seems to be missing is a thorough examination of the here and now. The current literature lacks in-depth knowledge of what relationships with children, wider family and intimate relationships are like now. Although formerly incarcerated mothers report a lack of access to support systems, they do not thoroughly discuss how they currently access post-release rehabilitation programmes and the challenges of accessing these services.

In summary, many formerly incarcerated mothers find it much more difficult to fulfill their mothering role after incarceration, although motherhood continues to be an important motivating factor in their reentry process. The findings of the review highlight the challenge of resuming the mothering role after incarceration and shed light on the importance of developing a coordinated support system to better meet the needs of formerly incarcerated mothers at various levels. With adequate material and social supports, many more mothers than in the past will be able to contribute to the well-being of their children and families as they navigate the reentry process. This review also identified the knowledge gap regarding reunification of mothers after incarceration and paved the way for future studies in this area.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors have agreed on the final version and meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Significant contributions to conception, design, analysis and interpretation of data and
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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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# Appendix 8 Descriptive Phenomenology (Paper 2)

**TITLE: Beyond the Prison Wall: Experience of Motherhood after Incarceration in Ethiopia, A Descriptive Phenomenological Study**

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## ABSTRACT

Incarceration negatively harms motherhood and maternal duties; however, little is known about mothers' experiences of re-entering society after imprisonment in Ethiopia. This study explores women's experiences of motherhood after release using a descriptive phenomenological approach incorporating in-depth interviews with released Ethiopian mothers (n=9). The study reveals that post-prison motherhood involves striving for the best for their children and accepting the self-sacrifice that comes with the role, but also worrying about their ability to provide for their children due to unemployment and poverty exacerbated by discrimination. The mothers also shared their concerns regarding their fractured relationship with their children due to incarceration. The paper argues for the need for post-prison programs that are responsive to gender and cater to the unique childcare responsibilities of released mothers. Furthermore, the study recommends adopting non-custodial measures and restorative justice to help the mothers reintegrate into society and find employment to support their children.

**Keywords**: Criminal justice system, Ethiopia, incarcerated women, motherhood, qualitative approach

# INTRODUCTION

This study explored Ethiopian mothers' lived experiences of motherhood after prison by adopting a phenomenological approach. Its main aim was to give the mothers an opportunity to share their experiences and views on motherhood. To date, this has been limited and neglected due to their criminal history, negative status as offenders, and lack of personal autonomy (James, 2013).

Motherhood in Africa is deeply shaped by its social context, culture, religion and local traditions (Nourse, 2021; Mochache et al., 2020; Semley, 2020; Akujobi, 2011). For example, motherhood is typically perceived as a God-given role, which is therefore sacred and esteemed as creators, providers and nurturers who have great power over the lives of their children (Akujobi, 2011). Like other African societies, motherhood in Ethiopia is considered a source of respect and social recognition for women. Many see motherhood as a means of personal fulfilment, a meaningful element in life, and a guarantor of satisfaction (Crivello et al., 2019; Tefera et al., 2017). Motherhood is also central to a woman's sense of self-worth and is understood as a social practice rather than an innate personal trait (Crivello et al., 2019; Tefera et al., 2017).

The notion of self-sacrifice in motherhood, which refers to sacrificing their own needs for the interests of their children, highlights the centrality of the construction of motherhood in African and Ethiopian societies. For this reason, mothers are expected to adhere to social norms and standards of "good mothering", which includes placing the child above everything (Couvrette et al., 2016:5). Such expectations are assumed to apply to all women (Thubauville and Gabbert, 2014). However, such expectations do not consider the diversity of experiences of motherhood, which are influenced by socioeconomic conditions, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, age or other cross-cutting identities that are implicated in social inequality (Couvrette et al., 2016). Given this narrow normative model, many mothers are marginalised and are more likely to be perceived as inadequate and

"bad mothers" in society (Lewis, 2002). One such group is women who have been incarcerated.

Globally, since 2000 there has been a 50% increase in female prisoners compared to a 20% increase in male prisoners (World Prison Brief Report, 2017). Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, with 120 million inhabitants (World Population Review, 2022). Of these, there are 110,000 prisoners in the 120 regional and 6 federal prisons, of which 4.2% are female prisoners (World Prison Brief Report, 2017). This figure does not include women detained in police stations, military camps, administrative units and rural areas (Human Right Watch, 2013). Most female prisoners are mothers of dependent children (Alemineh et al., 2022). Typically, they are single mothers with custody of their children (Gobena and Hean, 2019). Child-rearing, therefore, falls predominantly on these women, and they often lack someone to care for their children during and after their incarceration (Gobena and Hean, 2019). When these mothers eventually return to the community, they experience significant social adjustment problems within the family and community, such as unemployment and discrimination (Alemineh et al., 2022).

In Ethiopia, little is being done to address the challenges faced by women reintegrating into society following incarceration. Our knowledge of how mothers manage this transition is limited. This may be attributed to people with criminal records being marginalised by the general population, including by researchers (Gobena and Hean, 2019). This marginalisation may be increased based on the high societal value placed upon motherhood and, as such, those who "fail" (by going to prison) are socially deemed of little value (Zerihun et al., 2021). The combined result is that the voice of these mothers is silenced.

This is concerning given the increasing number of female offenders in Ethiopia and the importance of service users' voices in achieving best practices and supporting women leaving prison. In reviewing the international literature on the experiences of motherhood after

prison, Gobena et al. (2022) found that released mothers tended to look back and report/reflect on their time in prison but did not reflect on their actual situation post-release and what it meant to be a mother after prison. Gobena and colleagues (2022) also criticised the lack of an international perspective on what it means to be a mother in this context, especially for mothers in low- to middle-income countries. There is a particular dearth of African literature, which is concerning because of the different socio-economic and cultural circumstances of women in this environment. To address this gap, this study explored the lived experience of motherhood after prison in the Ethiopian context. Exploring these experiences will help criminal justice professionals, social workers, policymakers, and other professionals in the care system provide appropriate, adequate, and culturally sensitive support to formerly incarcerated mothers during their re-entry process.

## METHODOLOGY

Phenomenology is the study of human experience (Giorgi, 2009). Whilst phenomenology has philosophical origins, it has recently been recognised as a research method (Giorgi, 2009).

In the descriptive phenomenological approach, the phenomenon is described rather than explained or interpreted. It starts from a perspective free from hypotheses and concerns consciously putting aside the researcher's preconceptions about the phenomena (Giorgi, 2009) to learn something new. The negative attitudes towards mothers who have been in prison make it challenging for researchers to gain access to these individuals as they are hidden and sometimes considered non-existent in society. Consequently, descriptive phenomenology was chosen as it privileges and honours the voices and stories of the mothers. It also provides a rich description of individuals' experiences so that these can be understood and illuminated in a novel way (Langdridge, 2007). By revealing the essential general meaning structures of the phenomenon, referred to as "essence" and "constituents", the researchers find "insights that apply more generally beyond the case under study to emphasise

what we have in common as human beings" (Todres and Holloway, 2010:178).

**Sample**

A purposive sampling approach with maximum variation was taken (Langdridge, 2007). This meant sampling women that all shared the common experience of the phenomenon of being a mother released from prison. Within this group, maximum variation was ensured by recruiting women of different ages, marital status, education levels and geographical locations (Dahlberg et al., 2008). Ensuring maximum variation helped to discover those features of the experience of motherhood that differ across perceptions and those unaffected or invariant across perceptions (Langdridge, 2007).

Achieving maximum variation can be challenging in practice, particularly with underserved groups such as former prisoners. This is because most of them hide their history of incarceration and tend to change their living arrangements due to discrimination and marginalisation in society (Gobena and Hean, 2019). In Ethiopia, there is no systematic system that follows up on the lives of offenders after their incarceration. This kind of work is mainly done by non-governmental organisations. However, the programmes and services they provide are limited and inadequate. Therefore, the recruitment of participants occurred through gatekeepers and snowballing. The use of gatekeepers has been recognised as essential in accessing these types of groups (Andoh-Arthur, 2019). Gatekeepers included the Ethiopian Federal Correctional Administration, a lecturer from Addis Ababa University, the non-governmental organisation "Prison Fellowship", a political party, and trusted individuals, such as a pastor. Women were included in the study if they had experience of being in prison, were mothers, and understood Amharic (the official language in Ethiopia). Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, the use of interpreters was deemed inappropriate. A total of 9 participants from various demographic backgrounds were included in the study. For protection and confidentiality, each mother was assigned a pseudonym (Table 1).

As the focus was not on the crime which led to imprisonment, information on the nature of the offence was not sought.

**Table 1**. Biographical detail of the mothers

| | *Pseudonym* | *Age* | *Education level* | *Children* | *Marital status* | *Geographic location* | *Time of release* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1* | Selam | 35 | Higher education | 3 | Married | Addis Ababa | 2 months earlier |
| *2* | Askale | 50 | High school | 3 | Divorced | Addis Ababa | 1 year earlier |
| *3* | Demitu | 52 | Higher education | 4 | Married | Amhara region | 2 years earlier |
| *4* | Nardos | 35 | High school | 1 | Divorced | Oromia region | 4 years earlier |
| *5* | Rahel | 35 | No formal education | 5 | Divorced | Oromia region | 7 months earlier |
| *6* | Hana | 38 | Primary school | 2 | Widowed | Oromia region | 4 years earlier |
| *7* | Azeb | 25 | Primary school | 2 | Married | Oromia region | 6 months earlier |

| 8 | Bayush | 45 | No formal education | 2 | Divorced | Oromia region | 7 years earlier |
| 9 | Alem | 60 | No formal education | 8 | Married | Oromia region | 3 years earlier |

## Data Collection

In the context of descriptive phenomenological research, interviews are unstructured and include an "experience question" that asks participants to share concrete descriptions of the chosen phenomenon (Giorgi, 2009). In this study, the interviewer asked the following question: *"I am interested in hearing about your life as a mother after prison. Could you please tell me what it is like to be a mother after you leave prison?"*.

During the interviews, follow-up questions were asked based on the women's responses. Because interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic (between Sept-Nov 2020), the in-depth interviews were a mixture of face-to-face (n=7) and telephone (n=2). They lasted about 1 hour and were conducted in Amharic and recorded. Interviews were conducted in a location chosen by the participants to help them to feel comfortable and safe enough to tell their stories. Most interviews were conducted in a public place, such as a church (as they are public yet quiet) to protect the participants and the researcher from potential harm. These locations were chosen mainly based on the participants' wishes.

## Ethics and Rigour

This study was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). During the informed consent process, participants were

provided with information in Amharic about the research project and their rights. Both written and verbal consent were used as the interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by telephone. Confidentiality formed part of informed consent; participants were informed that the interview would be recorded and transcribed and, whilst excerpts from the interviews may be used, they would be anonymised.

**Analysis**

Some of the Amharic terms used by the participants were culture-specific (bound) and challenging to translate into English. Therefore, the analysis was conducted in the original language and then translated into English. The interview data were analysed using Giorgi's three-stage descriptive phenomenological method (Giorgi, 2009). First, the data were transcribed verbatim, and each transcript was read to get a feel for the full description of the individual's account. Once a sense of the whole had developed, the transcripts were divided into smaller "meaning units" for a more thorough analysis. This involved re-reading the entire transcript from the beginning, and each time a shift in meaning occurred, a mark was noted in the written transcript. From a psychological perspective, and mindful of the phenomenon being researched, a meaning unit was determined whenever the researcher experienced a transition in meaning (Giorgi, 2009). This continued until all the raw data was broken down into meaning units. In this process, a phenomenological attitude was crucial, that is to say, a willingness to put aside one's perspective referred to as "bracketing" and see the phenomenon with fresh eyes, being open to what had not been seen before (Giorgi, 2009). Bracketing concerns not letting previous knowledge about the phenomena influence the current analysis of the experience (Giorgi, 2009). This bracketing process was challenging because the researcher had to be consciously aware and not influenced by previous knowledge about the experience and the findings from the literature review. The researcher had to deliberately put aside their knowledge and bias to create space for

new insights and a new perspective on the phenomenon of motherhood after imprisonment throughout the data analysis.

Finally, the participants' accounts of their experiences were transformed into phenomenologically sensitive expressions to reveal the essence of their motherhood experiences. This step is central to the phenomenological attitude (Giorgi, 2009). It involved returning to the beginning of the description that had been divided into meaning units. Each meaning unit was then examined to identify psychologically sensitive expressions and see how motherhood's life-world description could be more appropriately expressed. Participants' life-world expressions were then transformed into expressions that highlighted the psychological meanings they experienced. This requires free imaginative variation, i.e., dwelling on the transformed meaning unit to identify the participant's psychological meanings and make implicit factors explicit.

The trustworthiness of the data was established by paying attention to the development of trust between the researcher and the mothers (Morrow, 2005), which resulted in these women sharing private, honest, and in-depth information that reflected their lived experiences of motherhood after prison. The fact that the interviewer was conducting the study in her country, came from a similar cultural context, spoke the same language and was a woman, helped to build rapport and trust with the participants. A clear formulation of the research journey was recorded, shared with the authors, and discussed. As the authors are of various nationalities, translating the analysis process from the original language into English facilitated conformity, communication, and discussion between the research team.

**FINDINGS**

The analysis of the nine in-depth interviews produced six constituent structures of the phenomenon of motherhood from the perspective of formerly incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia.

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**The Constituents**

*Constituent 1: feeling frustrated and fearful of the lack of opportunity and inability to support their children.*

The first constituent of motherhood identified was the mothers' frustration and fear because of the lack of opportunities and the inability to provide for their children. They talked about feeling impoverished and discriminated against, and feeling judged by society as their identity as a person and a mother was clouded by the negative broader societal perception of them as criminals. This made them feel worthless and inadequate. Although the mothers felt that they had made amends for their past mistakes, they thought society still felt threatened by their presence. They believed that this discrimination left them with few available opportunities and precluded them from getting work that would help them support their children.

> *It is very difficult to find employment after prison due to the stereotypes that society has toward former prisoners* (Selam)

The lack of employment opportunities and poverty forced some mothers into financial dependence on their adult children and family members. Although they felt confident in their work skills and had the necessary motivation to work, they were frustrated that they still could not find a job or start a business due to discrimination. This dependency and inability made them feel fearful and inadequate as mothers in the face of the pressures of daily life.

> *The thing is that I can do anything. I just don't have the means and money. And that makes me feel helpless and insufficient. Thinking about that makes me frustrated* (Rahel)

> *I currently don't have a job, and I am waiting on my children to pay the bills. I did not find a job. I had nothing when I came back. Being dependent on my*

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*children pisses me off. The thing is that I can do anything. I just don't have the means and money. And that makes me feel helpless and insufficient. Thinking about that makes me frustrated* (Rahel)

Additionally, some participants felt that motherhood itself and its responsibilities limited their employment options.

*A kid is like a rope. It ties you to where you are, and you can't be as you please. If it weren't for my kids, it would be easier to move around and consider other workplaces. I could even try to go abroad and work, but I couldn't* (Bayush)

*Constituent 2: feeling guilt and shame.*

The second identified constituent of motherhood is that mothers have feelings of guilt and shame when facing their children. For most of the participants, incarceration had a negative impact on their lives and their role as mothers during and after prison. Some described their prison experience as "hell" and "unbearable", some felt suicidal and considered taking their own lives due to feelings of guilt, regret, and shame.

*When I was in prison, I tried to commit suicide, but it was the officers that stopped me* (Askale)

This sense of guilt was due to mothers having missed important events in their children's lives due to their incarceration, which they felt had negatively impacted upon their children's lives.

*I have missed the most important days of my children's lives. I can honestly say that my children's lives were ruined because of my being sent to prison* (Demitu)

*I think of everything in my past, and I wonder what I would have done if I wasn't in prison, what I would be*

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*doing for my children, and how I would not be waiting
on my children's support (Rahel)*

*I can honestly say that my children's lives were ruined
because of my being sent to prison (Demitu)*

For a few participants, the guilt and shame arose from the menial work they felt forced to do to provide for their children. They felt ashamed and worried that their children might be ashamed of them for taking a low-paid job, feeling that they were hurting their children's feelings.

*I feel ashamed for working as a daily labourer at a
construction site. I am sure my children also don't like
it* (Azeb)

*Constituent 3: mother's feeling of self-sacrifice.*

The third identified constituent of motherhood is the mother's feeling of self-sacrifice; giving up their own needs in the interest of their children's wellbeing. They felt that their children must take precedence over everything else in their lives. The mothers did not regret or resent this sacrifice and, in fact, wished they could do more.

*I have given my life entirely to my son once I came back
from prison. I can't put the amount of sacrifice I pay
for him. I rather do something for him than for me
because he always comes first in my life. I do not think
I did enough for him, but I am trying as a mother*
(Nardos)

Although most participants spoke of the self-sacrifice of motherhood, their experiences were perceived and embodied differently. Some described their experience of sacrifice in taking on the pain, disappointment, frustration, and emotional turmoil that comes with life after prison. To protect their children from distress, they preferred to suffer in silence rather than burden their children,

sacrificing their own need for support to promote their children's happiness and mental stability:

> *I am keeping my sickness from my kids because, as a mother, I should be keeping it to myself in order not to worry them (Rahel)*

> *Well, the thing is, I make sure my children do not see how much I am hurting. Because I know it would hurt them. I keep things to myself* (Demitu)

Other participants embodied their sacrifice through their renunciation of a second marriage or their commitment to remaining single. For them, life after prison became increasingly complicated; they feared that another person might not want to take responsibility for their children. For these reasons, they preferred to raise their children alone. For these mothers, keeping their children safe came first – before their happiness or needs as a woman:

> *Well, how many men came asking for my hand? But what if I got married and the man turned out to be a bitter stepfather to my kid? So, I refused to get married. You do a lot for your kids. And I will stand by this for my kids' sake (Bayush)*

The final experience of sacrifice relates to two participants with a history of political imprisonment. These participants have been actively involved in Ethiopian politics for an extended period, which has led to their imprisonment on multiple occasions due to their political beliefs. During their incarceration, they endured violations of human rights and were denied due process of law, as well as access to rehabilitation services, a privilege that was afforded to other prisoners. Despite all the challenges these mothers experienced, they both believe that all the sacrifices they have made through their participation in politics have been for democracy, freedom and a better country for their children. They believe that sacrificing their freedom and struggling for justice is part of their role as mothers, which makes their experience unique. They want

their children to live in a more just and democratic country so that they can reach their full potential without fear or intimidation:

> *And now, while trying to be a mother, I am also fighting for my country. Unless you make sure you leave a country better than it is right now, their lives won't change in any way. Basically, live the same life I did. So, trying to build a country everyone can peacefully live in, where my children can have a better life* (Demitu)

*Constituent 4: feeling a need to rebuild the fractured relationship with children and compensate for lost time.*

The fourth constituent of motherhood identified is the mother's feeling of a need to actively work to rebuild or repair the fractured relationship with their children. Most mothers interviewed felt that the mother-child relationship was negatively affected by their incarceration, especially when the children did not enter the prison with them. They believed this resulted in a loss of trust with their children because they left their children. For this reason, some participants noticed a change in behaviour in their children – they became overly clingy, distrustful, withdrawn and suspicious. The mothers felt that their children lived in constant fear of losing them again because of their previous incarceration and separation.

> *And when I left to come to see you, my 14-year-old came with me. Yes. He does not trust me; none of them does* (Rahel)

> *Well, my daughter is now not sure that I will always be around. She thinks that I would just get up and leave. Every time I leave the house, she asks if I am staying for long or what time I will be back. And that made her want to get closer to her father than me because I once left and did not come back for a while* (Selam)

Mothers who experienced their children's mistrust wanted to improve their mother-child relationship. Yet, many mothers expressed that this was hard work, painful and complicated. Despite these challenges, they were determined to mend the fractured relationship now that they were out of prison. The mothers felt they must compensate for the lost time. All they thought about was how to give their children a better life – be it food, clothing, emotional support or whatever they wish for – to help them forget the misery and time spent apart.

> *He suffered with me for eight years, and I do all this hoping that he forgets the prison time. It might be for his meal, clothing, school, whatever he asks for. I am trying to make up for my absence* (Nardos)

*Constituent 5: feeling responsible to act as a guide and positive influence in the lives of their children.*

Mothers feel responsible to act as a guide and positive influence to steer their children in the right direction. Although they did not see themselves as good role models due to their incarceration history, the mothers felt a strong sense of responsibility for influencing their children positively.

> *I tell my son to be patient about things, and he listens to me. I try to teach him what life is all about from my own experience and that of everyone around us* (Nardos).

> *Teach them not to steal or take drugs. All I want is to keep my son from everything wrong (Hana)*

Although most of the mothers were not highly educated, they strongly believed in the power of education. All the mothers interviewed wanted their children to be educated and successful. For the participants, being a mother means striving to be a positive influence and seeing all the possibilities in the world through their children's eyes.

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*So, I tell them to live to be sufficient for themselves. 'Learn and get somewhere' is my usual message for them. I don't want them repeating my life* (Bayush)

*Constituent 6: seeing the children as a source of happiness and courage.*

The final constituent of motherhood identified is mothers seeing the children as a source of happiness and courage. Despite the many challenges, the mothers said that there was nothing in the world that compared to motherhood; it was incomparable and irreplaceable. They felt that their children were a source of their happiness and courage, without which they could not imagine life. They felt that the time they spent with them was extraordinary and believed that their children were a gift from God. The mothers identified having a second chance to be a mother as one of the greatest and most indescribable feelings of happiness in their lives.

*Happiness, what else? What if I was alone by myself if they weren't around? Money is nothing to me. It makes me happy that they are here* (Hana)

*Doing all that for my son…I can't put it in words; it makes me very happy… (laughing)* (Nardos)

*I lost three children consecutively; I gave birth to these two children after coming here in '95. No one else was with me except them. Because I was punished by the death of children…. (cries), these two children are my only hope. Who else do I have? These kids mean the world to me. I have no mother, no father, and no sister. It's just them and God. I lift my head up and see God. And when I return my eyes to the earth, I see my kids* (Bayush)

**The Essence of Motherhood after Prison in Ethiopia**

The core of the descriptive phenomenological method is to bring out the phenomenon's essence, i.e., the aspects that are invariant across specific situations (Giorgi, 2009). Distilling the content of the six constituents of the phenomenon leads to the conclusion that the essence of *motherhood after incarceration in Ethiopia* means wanting the best for their children and seeing them as a source of happiness and courage. It means embracing the self-sacrifice that the role requires but also worrying about their ability to support their children, given their poverty and their experiences of discrimination by Ethiopian society, including in the labour market. It is a complicated experience that interweaves their feelings of inadequacy with the fear and frustration of not being able to care for their children.

In addition, the mothers constantly feel guilty and ashamed of the time they were separated from their children and wish they could have done things differently. Now that they are out of prison, they want to rebuild their fractured relationship and compensate for their previous absence and lost time, even though the process is complicated. As a result, the mothers strive to positively impact their children's lives, despite not feeling adequate role models, but hope to prevent their children from following the same path. Ultimately, it is about giving their children a better life and meeting their needs to help them forget the misery and the time of separation.

**DISCUSSION**

The lived experience of motherhood described by formerly incarcerated mothers in Ethiopia offers additional perspective to the existing literature. In many ways, the women expressed similar elements to those of any mother, including the idealised mother (Hays, 1996). These included mothers who feel and welcome the self-sacrifice of motherhood, wish to be a guide for their children and see their children as a source of happiness and courage. Listening to the participants' narratives, we see that formerly

incarcerated mothers embraced motherhood as a valued identity, similar to the Ethiopian culture that sees motherhood as a form of self-sacrifice, personal fulfilment, and a meaningful element in life (Crivello et al., 2019). These findings were also supported by a study in the USA that reported that incarcerated mothers value their motherhood identity and are enthusiastic about their children's lives (Allen et al., 2010). In these, we see the connection between all mothers despite their different life experiences, culture and geographic location and are reminded that formerly incarcerated mothers are human and experience motherhood similarly to other women. These findings demonstrate our common humanity and give insights that apply universally beyond the cases studied, emphasising what we have in common as human beings (Todres and Holloway, 2010) and the importance of seeing incarcerated mothers beyond their criminal past.

However, in contrast to the idealised "good mothers" (Hays, 1996), the challenges these formerly incarcerated mothers face when leaving prison are multi-fold (Gobena et al., 2022). Participants expressed feelings of fear and inadequacy, manifested in their experience of stigmatisation and lack of opportunities to support their children. Goffman (1990) described this concept as enacted stigma, where people with a particular background, identity and experience are openly discriminated against, denied opportunities, and made to feel less worthy than they would otherwise be. Although the mothers described employment as a crucial factor in the success of the reintegration process and motherhood experience, it is difficult to find a job due to discrimination and the label that society attaches to former prisoners. Some studies show that ex-offenders face numerous and complex adversities in getting a job (Lo, 2014). In the United Kingdom, two-thirds of ex-offenders lost their jobs due to their conviction (Stewart, 2008). Meanwhile, 74% of ex-offenders in Ethiopia stated that securing a job was quite a challenge, as it took them an average of almost a year after their release to secure work (Zerihun et al., 2021).

The lack of employment affects all offenders, but for mothers, the impact is doubled as they have the additional responsibility of supporting their children and fulfilling their mothering role (Baldwin, 2018; Glaze and Maruschak, 2008). Despite this additional challenge, it is usually the responsibility of mothers to navigate the labour market and other opportunities to support themselves and their children in Ethiopia, as shown by the findings of the current study. This is because reintegration services are highly dependent on the charity of non-governmental organisations and lack critical legal and financial support from the government (Zerihun et al., 2021). In addition, the few available services do not adequately consider the unique challenges of female offenders and lack a proper follow-up system and support during re-entry at the federal and regional levels (Zerihun et al., 2021; Gobena and Hean, 2019).

The other challenge that participants experience post-prison, highlighted in this study, is the mothers' feelings of guilt and remorse – which they all struggled with when thinking about leaving their children for a prolonged period – and the impact this had on their children. Most of the mothers interviewed felt that the mother-child relationship was negatively affected, and they believed that they had lost their children's trust because they were left insecure, neglected and without adequate care. There is a resonance between these findings and other studies of parent-child separation during incarceration (Briggs-Gowan et al., 2019; Murray and Murray, 2010). These studies show that incarceration abruptly disrupts motherhood and the parent-child bond (Baldwin, 2018; Lockwood, 2018) and leads to insecure attachment in young children and difficulties bonding with caregivers after release from prison (Briggs-Gowan et al., 2019; Murray and Murray, 2010). An insecure attachment leads to approaching relationships with fear or uncertainty. It usually arises from the volatile and unpredictable care provided by parents/caregivers, which leads children to view their parents as unreliable (Abdul Kadir, 2017). The mothers in the current study also reported how the loss their children's trust made it complicated to mend the mother-child relationship after

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incarceration. This finding raises the question of whether it is necessary to keep women and girls, especially mothers, in prison or if other alternative measures could be used. This is because the incarceration of mothers and their long-term separation from their children harms not only the motherhood experience but also the healthy emotional and physical development of their children (Jensen, 2021). Recently, the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) (2021) has also emphasised the need for legislative changes and recommended protecting the right of female prisoners (especially mothers) to bail so that they can conduct their trials outside the prison as far as possible.

Finally, while mothers released from prison in Ethiopia have similar aspirations to other mothers in terms of their best wishes and desires for their children to follow a positive path, unlike other women, society and processes are stacked against this, as evidenced by the findings. These challenges may inadvertently lead them back to prison and promote recidivism. Therefore, addressing situational challenges such as employment and discrimination, as well as fostering a healthy mother-child relationship after incarceration, will further promote desistance, a process by which people come to cease offending behaviour, and sustain the cessation (Maruna and Farral, 2004). A study also shows that employment, children and intimate family relationships are among the most important motivating factors for change among incarcerated individuals (Celinska and Siegel, 2010).

## Implications for Practice and Recommendations

One of the core roles of professions like social work is to protect the rights of people in society who are often dismissed, abandoned or forgotten, such as formerly incarcerated mothers (Patterson, 2019). It is crucial to cooperate with both criminal justice experts and social workers to identify the appropriate rehabilitation services for offenders or individuals who require intervention, as well as to provide assistance to the families affected by such acts. There are various services that can be provided to help formerly incarcerated

mothers on different levels. Most participants in the current study experienced challenges in rebuilding the mother-child relationship and expressed inadequacies regarding their mothering role. One way to help them could be through mentoring programmes and parenting training. Mentors and advocates could help mothers navigate the various systems that affect them and their children. In addition, the findings indicated that some children experience behavioural changes like mistrust and withdrawal because of the mother-child separation. Therefore, a trauma-informed approach is also crucial to help the young child and family work through separation and reunification (Hines et al., 2020). When working with a trauma-informed approach, professionals routinely examine traumatic events, assess all family members who may have experienced trauma, use an evidence-based treatment approach that is culturally sensitive, reduce exposure to secondary traumatic stress, and focus on building resilience and protective factors (Hines et al., 2020).

Furthermore, community-based programmes that support neighbourhoods, working with these women and linking them to the services they need, could be incredibly beneficial because they are subject to discrimination in society (Gobena et al., 2022). This helps mothers find employment and participate in micro-enterprises, given that they are usually the sole provider for their children. The support should include ways for these women to explore what brought them to prison by examining their multiple exclusions, family histories and experiences of abuse to better understand the cycles and patterns that led them to crime in the first place. Gender-specific (or gender-responsive) programmes are helpful since they explicitly address the essential and unique experiences of women, such as motherhood and caring responsibilities (Edwards et al., 2022). These programmes must create an environment that reflects the realities of women's lives in the criminal justice system and addresses their specific challenges and strengths.

Solutions to the challenges the mothers face require not only gender-sensitive prison reforms, but more emphasis should be placed on preventing women from entering prison in the first place. It is,

therefore, imperative that non-custodial measures be considered at every stage of the criminal justice system. The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures (Tokyo Rules) (1990) and The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) (2010) were also adopted to shift the focus to non-custodial measures and incorporate the gender dimension into the criminal justice system. Determining alternatives to pre-trial detention should take gender into account. For example, bail conditions or house arrest conditions should consider a woman's child-care responsibilities. Using non-custodial measures can also reduce the social and economic costs of imprisonment, the prison population, and the recidivism rate.

Another potential solution to mothers' problems is restorative justice programmes, which can address the discrimination and stigma they face after imprisonment. These programs aim to reintegrate offenders into society through forgiveness, acceptance, redemption, and reconciliation. The UN Basic Principles on the Use of Restorative Justice Programs in Criminal Matters (2002) support using these programs at every stage of the criminal justice system. Offender-victim mediation in prison is a part of this, where prisoners can make amends for their crimes. In restorative justice, victims and offenders communicate directly to establish a framework for acknowledging guilt, compensating victims, and improving behaviour (Menkel-Meadow, 2007). By empowering victims and offenders through dialogue, restorative justice aims to transform the commission of wrongs into opportunities for growth and change and reduce recidivism. This alternative could help women better integrate into society and find employment that they may have been at risk due to discrimination.

Finally, criminal justice professionals and social workers should also focus on what is meaningful for the person being rehabilitated rather than just addressing their needs. The study results show that although the mothers' ability to perform parenting tasks is full of challenges, they are motivated and committed to providing for their

children's physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Their perceptions were the same as those of mothers from comparable socio-economic backgrounds who had not committed crimes. Using the Good Life Model, which is responsive to offenders' particular interests, abilities and aspirations (Purvis et al., 2011), and the strengths-based approach in social work (Healy, 2014), criminal justice professionals, in collaboration with social workers, should encourage mothers to work with the positive, which gives them meaning in their lives. This could be done by building strong ties to family and community, recognising their worth, developing feelings of hope and self-efficacy, and gaining a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives (Maruna and Farrall, 2004).

**Implications for Policy**

This research also highlights policy considerations. In Ethiopia, there is currently no post-incarceration / reintegration policy, according to an office of the Federal Correctional Administration. New policies must be developed to help released offenders reintegrate successfully. This paper shows that mothers (like many ex-prisoners) have difficulties finding employment, and their struggle is particularly acute as they have dependent children. Policy measures must therefore be taken to address the discrimination that has led to fewer employment opportunities for this group. This could take the form of investment in employment programmes such as education, training, and tax relief. In addition, policies must holistically address the life course issues that influence women's pathways to crime in the first place. Usually, incarcerated women commit crimes related to economic problems and poverty in Ethiopia (Gobena and Hean, 2019). Therefore, investing in educational opportunities and equal participation in the labour market for girls and women is crucial to preventing their involvement in illegal activities.

**Limitations**

It can always be argued that there are methodological limitations.

This study does not seek generalisability in a quantitative sense, as phenomenological research aims to understand and elucidate the universal essences of common experiences in the lifeworld of individuals (Dahlberg et al., 2008).

## CONCLUSION

The study delves into the experiences of motherhood after imprisonment in Ethiopia, providing a more comprehensive and inclusive perspective on the subject. Using a descriptive phenomenological approach, the study sheds light on the complex stories of fear, poverty, discrimination, sacrifice, shame, happiness, and hope that are part of the post-prison motherhood experience. The research also reveals the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated mothers, including the lack of employment opportunities and poverty. To combat these challenges and support these mothers' unique and essential childcare responsibilities, criminal justice professionals, social workers, the government, and non-governmental organisations should collaborate on gender-responsive post-prison programs. These programs could include mentorship, parent training, and community-based programs that connect these mothers to the services they need. The paper also recommends implementing Non-Custodial Measures and restorative justice at all stages of the criminal justice system to integrate these mothers into society better and help them find employment. The integration of interprofessional collaboration within these programs is crucial. Furthermore, a new policy that addresses the problems faced by women with incarceration experience is necessary, as there is currently no reintegration policy in Ethiopia.

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# *Appendix 9 Reflexivity (Paper 3)*

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# The challenge of western-influenced notions of knowledge and research training: lessons for decolonizing the research process and researcher education

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**ABSTRACT**

In this paper, based on fieldwork experiences in Ethiopia, we have taken an African and Indigenous perspective to highlight and critically reflect on how Western notions of knowledge and research training for social work sometimes fail to engage meaningfully with local realities and disregard cultural and religious practices. This paper argues, from an Ethiopian and African perspective, for culturally appropriate research training. It proposes this can be achieved by making researcher training curricula more inclusive, by reassessing funding flows, and for research supervisors to foster critical reflexivity in their students, reminding them that cultural histories and geographies of research participants are central to the research process.

## Introduction

Traditionally, the term colonization has been associated with territorial control and has been used to describe the structural effects of political domination of one nation over another subjugated country (or countries) (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Coloniality, on the other hand, to be differentiated from colonialism, refers to the established power structures that emerged as a result of colonialism and define culture, relations, and knowledge production far beyond the strict boundaries of colonial administrations (Quijano, 2007). Consequently, coloniality survives colonialism and is kept alive in books, in cultural patterns, in cultural and social norms, in people's understanding of themselves or others, in aspirations for the self, in standards of academic achievement, and in various other aspects of our modern experience (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

The process of "decolonization" has evolved from the desire to remove this colonial domination and coloniality and to liberate local/Indigenous knowledge, practice, and culture from the incumbent power (Emnet, 2021). A "decolonial turn" or "decolonial attitude" is required that questions the impact of colonization on modern subjectivities, the production of knowledge, and critical thinking (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). A decolonial stance involves responsibility and willingness to take many perspectives, especially the perspectives and viewpoints of those whose existence is questioned and portrayed as insignificant (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). "It is about making the invisible visible and analyzing the mechanisms that create this invisibility" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 262). Decolonization fundamentally challenges the global hierarchy and the Westernized notion of knowledge production and epistemic hegemony, which claims that the values of the Global North are the closest to objective truth and, thus, should form the standard for rationality, reality, and civilization in the Global South (Emnet, 2021). Decolonization is not only about the Global South having their local

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perspectives usurped by Global North perspectives when these may not be appropriate to the local context. It is the predominance of any external nonlocal perspective on the local.

Taking such a singular perspective dominated by Western-centric frameworks negatively impacts the development of inclusive epistemologies and frameworks in many disciplines, including social work (Gray & Fook, 2004). In fact, many consider social work in postcolonial contexts to be a Western invention, and social workers around the world are increasingly raising their voices against the forces of "professional imperialism," particularly in the Global South (Gray & Fook, 2004). Over the past three decades, social work researchers have sought to raise awareness of the dominance of Western influences on local social work practices and the assumptions and cultural biases associated with such dominance. This Western dominance overshadows the potential contribution of other theories and models of practice for Indigenous and other non-Western communities (O'leary et al., 2013).

"We do not live in space; we live in places. To live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in" (Casey, 1996, p. 18). This statement by Casey relates not only to the lives of ordinary people, but also to the activities of social work researchers and to the importance of local context for their understanding and research. It fits into the growing global decolonization movement and specifically calls for the decolonization of research and research agendas, and it is about developing a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values that underpin research practice (Smith, 2012). Conducting research without considering coloniality poses risks for Indigenous/local communities such as producing studies that are culturally insensitive, lack relevance, produce a Western-based analysis and interpretation that does not reflect the local reality or context, and do not benefit or contribute to positive change for the local community (D. Wilson et al., 2019). Often such research also results in laying the blames for these problems at the door of the individuals themselves rather than challenging the structural and cultural aspects that perpetuate oppression for Indigenous peoples. Coloniality can disempower Indigenous/local communities and can reinforce stigmatization and discrimination (ibid.). As African scholarNdlovu-Gatsheni (2018) asserts, there is a need to establish "epistemic freedom" and "cognitive justice" as essential prerequisites for beginning genuine and problem-solving studies in Africa and the wider Global South.

Researchers conducting studies in the Global South and in Indigenous communities have been accused of historical exploitation of Indigenous or local knowledge without proper acknowledgment and compensation (Abbott et al., 2018;D. Wilson et al., 2019;Kuruk, 2020). They are accused of unauthorized disclosure of sensitive information about Indigenous/local communities, of insensitivity to Indigenous/local cultural norms, and of conducting research studies that fail to benefit local communities (Abbott et al., 2018;D. Wilson et al., 2019;Kuruk, 2020). A history of exploitative research practices leads to mistrust and forces Indigenous communities to start from a position of caution and skepticism when it comes to participating in research (Abbott et al., 2018).

Despite these challenges to researchers conducting studies in culturally diverse settings, the discussion of coloniality and decolonization processes, particularly in the Global South, is limited. There is in particular a lack of attention when it comes to documenting practical real-world experiences of the researchers involved. Further, there have been increasing efforts in recent years from various theoretical perspectives, particularly in Australia and New Zealand, to critically interrogate and reflect on the impact of colonialism in past and present institutions and practices and in the production of knowledge in the Global North (Aliverti et al., 2021;Rynne & Cassematis, 2015). However, in the Global South, particularly in Africa and Ethiopia, discussions of research methodologies informed by Indigenous knowledge systems are rarely used in studies. Much of the discussion that takes place is found in the fields of health, education, politics, and literature (Emnet, 2021).

To address this gap, this paper explores and critically reflects on one social worker´s (first author) experience of conducting a qualitative social work-related project in the criminal justice environment in Ethiopia. We, as a research team, reflect on the first author's experiences as a researcher who conducted her PhD research in her home country of Ethiopia, whilst registered in a European PhD program and supervised by European supervisors. It explores how a Western-influenced notion of social work knowledge and research education that formed part of this researcher´s training

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sometimes failed to relate meaningfully to the local context of Ethiopian and African realities and cultural and religious practices. By doing this, the article offers social work researchers' insights into the impact coloniality may have on their research projects and their interactions with research participants in culturally diverse contexts. This perspective will help them develop new theoretical insights and to engage with and reflect on cultural and historical differences (Cunneen, 2011). It is important to emphasize that this article is not a rejection of all Western methods and theories. Rather, it is a call to explore, evaluate, and use Indigenous knowledge and approaches on an equal footing with Western knowledge and methods when appropriate.

## A social work research project in Ethiopia as the illustrative case

We ground our discussion and decolonization analysis in our experience of a social work-related project conducted on the lived experience of motherhood after incarceration in Ethiopia. The study adopted a descriptive phenomenological approach by using in-depth interviews to elucidate the essence of the phenomenon of motherhood after prison from the detailed description of each mother. The first author (EB) interviewed nine mothers who had experienced incarceration in different cities in Ethiopia between September and November 2020. The study was conducted in a country whose traditions and religious practices date back thousands of years (Henze, 2000) and that is known for its diverse traditions and ethnicities (more than 80 ethnic groups and languages) and religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and other traditional religious and shamanic rituals) (Henze, 2000). Although (EB) had no personal experience of incarceration and is not a mother, she grew up in a culturally diverse community in Ethiopia and was born and grow up in Addis Ababa. She also speaks the local language (Amharic) and is part of the dominant ethnic groups, which are the Oromo and Amhara. These aspects make her both an insider and an outsider in the cultural and religious group being studied.

Drawing on the first author's (EB) experiences in the field and her position as a young ethnic Ethiopian woman, we reflect on the challenges faced in conducting doctoral research within a culturally diverse environment using the framework of the *coloniality of knowledg*e. The coloniality of knowledge is one of the key dimensions of coloniality, which is evident in the dominance of Western perspectives, theories, methods, and language in education and research in the Global South, especially in the African context (Maldonado-Torres, 2007;Quijano, 2007). It also raises epistemological questions, such as who creates what knowledge and for what purpose, and how specific knowledge disempowers or empowers certain peoples and communities (Quijano, 2007). The framework of the coloniality of knowledge prompted (EB) to reflect on her existing knowledge of what it means to be a social work researcher and the implications and challenges this has for knowledge production in the Global South, particularly in Ethiopia, in the next section. In what follows, we use the pronoun "I" to refer to (EB), as she is the principal researcher.

## Lack of connection from the local context

### *Ambiguous professional boundaries*

Although research training has made much progress in recent decades, many researchers still do not receive enough culturally appropriate training for conducting research with Indigenous or non-Western communities (Datta, 2018;Smith, 2012). Although researchers are not necessarily expected to remain unemotional in qualitative research, I was unsure how to maintain professional boundaries while sharing the participants' emotions in a culturally diverse context in Ethiopia. See the excerpt from my reflective diary below:

> The story one participant told me was emotionally heavy, and it was emotionally hard to respond to, and I was unsure how to react. Especially the story she told me about her husband (how she witnessed his suicidal moment along with her son) was very hard to take and made me very emotional during the interview. As she cried, I, too,

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> struggled with my tears. I was also confused at that moment about whether I should cry with her and hug her or not. But I thought I should be professional and held back my emotions and tears and continued the interview after I gave her some time to cry and calm down. (Research Journal)

As qualitative researchers and working with participants, we sometimes forget the importance of creating relationships on a human level because we are influenced by the Western philosophical tradition that sometimes views emotions as obstacles to academic research and professional boundary (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009). As a researcher and social worker, I went through a long socialization process in Ethiopia (undergraduate studies) and mainly in Norway (Masters and PhD studies), where being professional and setting ethical boundaries are of utmost importance. These ethical approaches have been developed to address the power imbalance and risk of exploitation that can arise in relationships with research participants within the domain of professional research practice (Bank, 2006). Yet, they are based on a more general conceptualization, have more prescriptive guidelines, and do not adequately take culture into account (O'leary et al., 2013).

The Ethical Principles of Social Work (International Association of Schools of Social Work and International Federation of Social Workers, 2018), for instance, emphasizes the importance of culture and context in professional work and in setting boundaries. However, there are gray areas in research that need to be addressed. What do culturally sensitive boundaries look like practically? How can we as researchers find out about these boundaries? How can we discuss and understand boundary setting in a culturally affirming and responsive way? How much room for maneuver do researchers have within culturally sensitive boundaries? This shows that while ethical principles may be uncontentious on the surface, on closer inspection, they are highly dependent on culture, space, and time (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019). This is particularly important in the Global South, such as Africa and Ethiopia, where professional socialization can create barriers to social work research (Al-krenawi & Graham, 2001).

Conducting research with vulnerable groups such as women with experience of incarceration in a culturally diverse country like Ethiopia means working with people of different cultures, religions, and life experiences. Although the Norwegian guidelines (NESH, 2019), which guided my research, urge researchers to pay specific attention to vulnerable groups and to have knowledge about local traditions, cultural and social matters, and so forth when conducting research on various cultures, they nevertheless present unique challenges for researchers for which they may not be adequately prepared. While such research guidelines serve as tools for researchers and are used to identify relevant factors that researchers should take into account, they also acknowledge that researchers often have to weigh such factors against each other, as well as against other conflicting requirements and obligations. My experience of research courses was that they focused on teaching a scientific approach, i.e., instead of helping me acquire practical and context-specific skills and knowledge such as how to interact with participants, how to build relationships with local communities, why we need to care about the cultural nuances and norms of our participants, and how to identify their needs in a way that benefits the local community or group.Sewpaul and Henrickson (2019) argue that:

> Social work has become far more than a liberal humanist profession whose center was located on a European-North American axis. Given the range of taken-for-granted assumptions and the rhetoric that underscores social work ethics, the rootedness of social work ethics in hegemonic liberal humanist discourses makes them a poor fit with Indigenous, Asian, Arab, and African realities. (p.1470)

To some extent, this argument is also consistent with the postmodern emphasis on the importance of "situatedness" or "contextuality," which holds that knowledge and identity are situated in that they each emerge and change in relation to the local context and perspectives of different actors (Gray & Fook, 2004).

## Ambiguous researcher responsibility

The other challenge is related to our responsibility as researchers, which is at times ambiguous and unclear.Hean et al. (2021) extend Miller's (2001) concept of distributed responsibility and the

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researcher's responsibility to promote change rather than just being an observer of change. However,Datta (2018) andS. Wilson (2008) have noted that it can be a major challenge when researchers are not well informed about their responsibilities, andHean et al. (2021) explore how a lack of preparation can have fatal consequences for researchers who actively, but perhaps naively, engage in volatile fields. This reminds me of two incidents that occurred in Ethiopia a few years ago. In the first case, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of California was killed in an attack by anti-government protesters in the Oromia region while conducting her research (Whitcomb, 2016). The second case occurred in the Amhara region, where three researchers from the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa traveled to a village called Gonji to study intestinal worms and the eye disease trachoma in a local school. Two of them were killed by a mob who believed they were there to poison the children (Irungu & Berhanu, 2019). These unfortunate incidents are an indication that inadequate preparation with the necessary knowledge and under-standing of local social, cultural, and political realities before starting fieldwork can have serious consequences.

Although I was born and raised in Ethiopia, I was not aware that I had lost a number of values from my own culture, perhaps due to the years of living abroad and being socialized with Western values and education. During the Ph.D. study, most of the interviews were conducted in the church at the request of the participants because it was a quiet and safe place for both of us and most of them were followers of the Orthodox Christian Church. At first, I did not notice and was not aware of it, but I observed that some people in the church looked at me with a strange look because I did not adhere to the expected and appropriate dress during the interviews (covering myself). During one of the interviews, the church security guard even refused to let me enter the premises because I looked different. I was more focused on my "professional" academic protocol, such as consent and con-fidentiality toward the participants than on my responsibility to be sensitive to their cultural and religious protocols. The lack of sensitivity to cultural and religious protocol posed a risk to the interview process. Although the Norwegian ethical guidelines (NESH, 2019) place great demands on the initiation, planning, and execution of research projects when conducting studies in other countries or in minority cultures,Lavallée (2009) argues that researchers trained in Western science and ethics tend to favor the academic research protocol and pay less attention to the culture, and religion, and values of the participants.

The responsibility of supervisors is also another aspect of this issue. Could they have done more or done better in training our awareness and skills?Hean et al. (2021) argue that we are advocating for researchers and students to take a more active role, but they wonder if we are adequately preparing them to take on this responsibility.Taylor et al. (2017) also argue that although many institutions insist that doctoral students undergo appropriate training at the start of their studies, supervisors have a role in ensuring that students comply with and manage the rules of academic integrity. Supervisors have a responsibility to prepare prospective researchers and students for the messy real work of research, for the barren land of blood, sweat, toil, and tears that can be encountered, and for situations where many things can go wrong (Taylor et al., 2017).

In my experience, our research training focuses on how to behave responsibly as a professional researcher, but not on what our responsibilities are to research participants in a socio-economically and culturally diverse context, even though our responsibility as researchers is also to make mean-ingful impacts on people's lives. For example, some of the study participants questioned the benefits of the research project in their lives. They explained that researchers use their stories and experiences to gain academic degrees, publish articles, and secure funding without any significant benefit to the women participating in the project. They were so desperate for any form of help I could give them. At such moments, I found myself in a difficult position, wondering: what impact will my research have on the lives of my participants? Is it practical and connected closely enough to the local context to bring about meaningful change? Or am I doing the research just to get my degree? Answering these practical questions was difficult. I felt that in some cases, my answers did not correspond to the reality of the local context in the Global South, i.e., the socio-economic and political situation of the countries.

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Vulnerable groups such as women with incarceration experience regularly find themselves in a powerless, dependent position in their relationships with researchers, service providers, and authority figures (Agozino, 2002). These different power relations in this socio-political context, including between researchers and participants like formerly incarcerated mothers, pose a central problem of accountability in research studies with such groups. Colonialism is far from over (Smith, 2012), and invisible power dynamics embedded in the research agendas, aims, and frameworks are particularly evident in studies with vulnerable groups. If these are not adequately explored, our research will not yield the desired outcomes. These challenges in my academic and professional research work have led me to rethink my role as a researcher and my responsibilities toward my research and research participants.

## Future direction and recommendations

### Reorientate social work education and training

In recent years, there have been significant changes in the restructuring and reorientation of the profession of social work. For example, the 2014 Global Definition of Social Work emphasizes the importance of indigenous knowledge and points to the need to rethink the way we teach social work students and conduct research (Sewpaul & Henrickson, 2019). The full definition reads as follows:

> Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that facilitates social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and Indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

*The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.* (International Association of Schools of Social Work and International Federation of Social Work, 2014)

To our knowledge, however, there still might be a gap in the preparation of researchers and students in the way that this global definition envisions. The higher education system still lacks meaningful connections to the context, culture, and traditions of diverse communities around the world, both in Ethiopia and the Global South (De Sousa Santos, 2018;Emnet, 2021). For example, while social work as a profession is recognized in countries in the Global South such as Ethiopia, its curriculum and its ethical and professional standards and principles are strongly based on the Western approach (Kebede, 2019). This is because there is no established body in Ethiopia responsible for codifying the fundamental values, ethical principles, and standards in line with the socio-cultural and political context of the country (ibid). Such disconnection of a system from the experiences and context of societies limits the ability of researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to develop and deliver solutions that can address the problems of target communities and groups. It also leads to knowledge production that is less relevant to local problems.Connell (2019) argues that the situation in higher education is related to contemporary forces of globalization and neoliberalism that have served to rewrite Northern or Western hierarchies of knowledge. These hierarchies are evident in the unequal distribution of research funding, resources, and personnel, in the creation of global university rankings, and in the dominance of English in global academic publishing (Connell, 2019;De Sousa Santos, 2018).

It is evident that current research education curricula are also tied to the labor market in order to ensure economic growth and a knowledge-based economy. This leads to greater formalization and a generic curriculum (Andres et al., 2015) that inadequately prepares students and researchers to deal with different contexts. This shows that the curriculum does not consider the increasing diversification of our universities (Connell, 2019). Many university classes, especially in urban areas, are made up of students who come from countries in all parts of the world. Researcher mobility has also increased worldwide, with approximately 3.6 million students enrolled as international students in tertiary education (Auriol et al., 2013). This professional migration and interest in different countries has

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brought to light the previously taken-for-granted expectation that researchers should have the ability to work in countries other than the one in which they received their professional training (Hugman et al., 2010).

Although they are usually one-way or non-reciprocal (Greenfield et al., 2012;Razack, 2002), especially for countries in the Global South, many universities have also developed exchange programs that aim to broaden the experience of students and staff through study and research in another country (Crisp, 2017). An example of this is the Norwegian Partnership Program for Global Academic Cooperation (NORPART, 2022), which aims to increase international mobility and partnerships with universities in the Global South. This is an important step toward an inclusive program. However, this points to the need to recognize and include different knowledge systems, research methodologies, cultural practices, and values in our research education at universities so that we can prepare students and researchers to be aware of the importance of culture in our research projects and collaborations.

As our universities become more international and educate students from diverse cultural backgrounds, curricula and course content should be designed to prepare social work researchers for these challenges. The Global Statement on the Ethical Principles of Social Work (2018) states:

> Social work employer organizations and educational and research institutions must work to ensure that infrastructural arrangements and development opportunities are in place to facilitate the achievement of the ethical imperatives. It is not only social workers who must ensure ethical practices; organizations must fulfil their obligations in supporting ethical practices. (p.2)

Social work is both an international and a local profession (Healy, 2001). Therefore, research education in social work needs to be redesigned to accommodate multiple geographical, socio-political, economic, and cultural differences (O'leary et al., 2013). In the process of decolonizing research training and methods, academic and ethical principles that have been dominated by Western standards need to be transformed into more culturally sensitive principles that help researchers deal appropriately with different contexts. Theoretical frameworks need to be eclectic and draw on Indigenous paradigms so that researchers can stretch beyond the prevailing Western-dominated standards. Indigenous scholars argue that the Indigenous lens should be used at all stages of research, including when working with communities to set the research agenda, when questioning the choice of theoretical framework and methods used, and when identifying how research findings can be translated into actions that promote social justice for Indigenous/local communities (Smith, 2012; Zavala, 2013). Indigenous knowledge here refers to the understanding, worldview, and skills developed by communities and passed down from generation to generation over long periods of time (Keane et al., 2016).

There are various philosophical underpinnings around methods that are often ignored in epistemological debates and education, particularly because of disciplinary positioning. For example, some researchers tend to adopt a "positivist view" in research and/or a "constructivist view," while others tend to favor "quantitative" methods over "qualitative" methods. Decolonizing research education and methodology will therefore bring in different ontological and epistemological perspectives, such as Ubuntu philosophy (Seehawer, 2018). Ubuntu prescribes desirable and (communally) acceptable forms of human behavior, and this includes how they should interact with each other (Seehawer, 2018).Mbiti (1969) has illustrated the concept of Ubuntu as follows:

> Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges, and responsibilities towards himself and other people. The individual can only say: 'I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man. (p.106)

The ontology of many Indigenous peoples states that we are in relationships. Among the truths that emerge from an understanding of relationality, therefore, is that researchers, as relational producers of knowledge, are themselves responsible for maintaining healthy relationships with the group, the environment, and the ideas they are researching (S. Wilson, 2008). An Ethiopian proverb also says: "When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion," reflecting a relational way of thinking like Ubuntu.

It is therefore important to decolonize research education and methodology by focusing on the concerns and worldviews of non-Westerners and respectfully learning and understanding theory and research from the previously "other (ed)" perspective (Datta, 2018;Smith, 2012). This can only be achieved by democratizing the dominant but exhausted knowledge system (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). The Global Standard for Social Work Education and Training states that universities should strive to develop curricula that reflect the needs, values, and cultures of their respective populations (Ioakimidis & Sookraj, 2021). The standard also highlights the importance of ensuring that curricula help students to develop critical thinking and openness to new experiences. This is also rooted in Ethiopia's Indigenous knowledge system, which places "wisdom" at the center of a thriving and encourages people to constantly seek wisdom wherever it exists (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018;Woldeyes, 2017). One of Ethiopia's most renowned philosophers, Zara Yacob, emphasizes the importance of loyalty in critically examining all beliefs and customs (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). In our classrooms, we need to think critically about how we are constantly shaped and interconnected by our history and our current realities (Razack, 2009). The other important point is that considering research principles and standards from the perspective of the community and groups we are studying is very important because this also benefits our research projects (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). The experience from the PhD study also affirms this argument. In Ethiopian culture, when something is offered, Ethiopians usually extend an invitation several times. Someone is expected to politely decline the gesture first before accepting the second or third offer. This exchange is polite because insisting on the invitation shows hospitality, and the initial refusal shows humility and that one is not greedy; in Amharic, we call this "megderder." Being familiar with the cultural norms of Ethiopian society, I had to try to offer some potential participants an invitation to my research project more than once to give them the opportunity to accept it on the second and third attempts. In this way, I attracted two more participants to the Ph.D. project. However, this cultural norm or etiquette is somewhat at odds with the ethical principles I have learned for many years, which is to give free and informed consent and to respect the participants' decision without any coercion. Because of this ethical and cultural dilemma, I was initially very confused and found it difficult to decide which path to take. Working with hard-to-reach groups and desperate for more participants, I eventually followed the cultural protocol and succeeded with some participants. This shows that sometimes considering broad Indigenous and local perspectives is beneficial to research.

## Supervision

Supervisors should also contribute to the process of decolonizing research training. One practical strategy that PhD supervisors could use to work toward epistemic justice in research education is "time mapping" Time mapping is a visual methodology that positions life stories as critical tools for reflexivity in doctoral education. Time mapping uses art and potentially other creative practices to explore the impact of history, geography, and cultural knowledge on our educational and research projects (ibid.). Time mapping is a form of narrative art that can encourage imagination and curiosity and stimulate discussion, all of which are important elements of supervision pedagogy This method of time mapping can be used in supervision as a starting point to locate and share the intellectual and cultural histories and geographies of students and supervisors, which can then be used to shape the research. By asking students and their supervisors to consciously draw on their cultural knowledge systems, symbols, and languages, they convey that these intellectual and cultural histories and geographies are central to the research process, not just background (Manathunga et al., 2019).

## Critical reflexivity

Finally, it is essential for qualitative researchers, especially those working with oppressed and under-served groups such as women with incarceration experiences, to examine and decolonize their methodological approach to their research through critical reflexivity. Being reflexive implies

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engagement in the ongoing process of reflecting ideas and experiences on oneself as an explicit acknowledgment of one's locatedness in the research (Cole & Knowles, 2008). It is a fundamental approach for researchers to decolonize research and examine the researcher's epistemological assumptions, power dynamics, and position concerning the research. Epistemological assumptions determine how one sees the world, organizes oneself within it, what questions one asks, and what answers one seeks (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

There are different but interacting dimensions of reflexive processes: personal, interpersonal, and contextual Personal reflexivity requires researchers to reflect on and clarify their expectations, assumptions and conscious and unconscious responses to contexts, participants, and data Interpersonal reflexivity refers to how the relationships surrounding the research process influence the context, the people involved and the outcomes The relationships between researchers and participants are probably the most important. A thoughtful approach to interpersonal reflexivity involves recognizing and valuing participants' unique knowledge and perspectives and attending to their impact on the research process. The final type of reflexivity is contextual reflexivity; it refers to situating a particular project in its cultural and historical context (Walsh, 2003).

We can use different methods to achieve the above dimensions of reflexivity through writing and collaborative reflection. Writing includes forms of documentation such as researcher memos, field notes and other written or recorded reflections that occur at any point in the research process. The second strategy of reflexivity focuses on collaboration. It recognizes that qualitative researchers rarely reflexively work alone, in isolation from the research team; instead, research collaborators often rely on each other to ask difficult questions about assumptions and make decisions (Francisco et al., 2022).

## Limitation

The challenges and dilemmas discussed in this paper are from a decolonizing perspective. However, alternative explanations and understandings may explain the dilemmas the researcher faced during fieldwork, which points to further research and reflexivity to expand our understanding as researchers.

## Conclusion

As we live in a globalized 21st century, the intricacy and scale of the world's environmental and social problems require a genuine dialogue between diverse knowledge systems. Today, global coloniality acts as an invisible power environment that shapes and perpetuates unequal power relations between the Global North and the Global South due to stronger economic states and greater influence over the provision of research funding and personnel. This limits the capacity of countries in the Global South, especially in Africa, to act in knowledge production because of the priorities, rules, principles, ethics, and standards already established. Drawing on the experiences of a PhD research project on the lived experience of motherhood after incarceration in Ethiopia, we discussed and reflected on how Western-influenced notions of knowledge and research training sometimes fail to connect meaningfully with local realities and disregard cultural and religious practices in Ethiopia or elsewhere in the context of the Global South through a decolonizing perspective. Our focus was on aspects such as professional boundaries and the responsibilities of researchers, and we note that while social work education has made progress toward an integrative approach in recent years, research training in our universities still fails to relate meaningfully to the local context and inadequately prepares students and researchers to deal with diverse contexts. This paper, therefore, highlights the need to understand the powerful forces shaping research and the need to support a conscious and ongoing engagement between the currently dominant view and alternative views. By paying attention to Indigenous knowledge and methodologies, we can perhaps take the first step toward redistributing and realigning power so that alternative methodologies and views can be incorporated into our research training. This can be achieved by firstly making curricula more inclusive and through supervisors' active

engagement in enhancing students' awareness and skills by encouraging students' critical reflexivity through methods such as time mapping that can be used during supervision sessions to remind students that cultural histories and geographies are central to the research process and not mere background. This will help to produce progressive and inclusive studies that can directly impact local communities and our research participants. This will also inform policy, deepen understanding, and provide evidence for future best practices.

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## Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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