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Children of Imprisoned Parents: Croatian Perspective

Parent's imprisonment influences the child's development and its wellbeing. It is important to state that each imprisoned parent situation is different and therefore the support to children should be individualized and in the best interest of the child (UN Convention of children's rights, 1989.). However, it seems that it is very difficult or sometimes impossible to determine „the best interest of the child“. According to the Children of Prisoners Europe, International Centre for Prison Studies 2013. in Croatia there were 16.308 children separated either for both parents or from one parent (mostly mother). Those children are called „forgotten children“ or „justice orphans“ because they are faced with special, mostly multiple difficulties and inconveniences. On the international level there are some researches about children whose parents are imprisoned which show that parents' imprisonment is the greatest risk for the child, but it is needed to conduct more longitudinal researches and to explore the needs and experiences of children whose parents are imprisoned.

Children of imprisoned parents need help and support from many family members, whole surrounding and especially from professionals. Professionals' behaviour and actions can influence children's lives and therefore all professionals who will be into the contact with the child of imprisoned parents should be properly educated and trained to minimise the risk for the child.

This presentation will show some experiences of professionals in Croatia who get in contact with children of imprisoned parents, their perspective of protection of the best interest of the child as well as their opinions about possibilities to improve the system of protection for children of imprisoned parents in Croatia.

It is needed to state that problem connected to children of imprisoned parents is a multidisciplinary problem and what lack in Croatia is a better cooperation between penalty system, social care system and education system. Therefore, it is necessary to improve this cooperation in order to make more quality comprehensive assessment and to better protection of children of imprisoned parents.