SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF WOMEN PRISONERS IN CENTRAL WOMEN'S JAIL, AIZAWL, MIZORAM

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Abstract: This study examines the socio-economic profile of women prisoners in the Central Women's Jail, Aizawl, Mizoram. For this study, particular attention is paid to important demographic and sociological factors, including age, marital status, the nature of the family, residential status, educational qualifications, and monthly income. The sample consists of 141 female inmates selected through purposive sampling, and the data were collected using an interview schedule and were analysed using SPSS. After a brief introduction, the paper starts with a review of the literature, followed by the methodology, and ends with findings and discussion.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Profile; Women; Prisoners.

INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic background of inmates significantly influences their paths into legal conflict, their experiences while incarcerated, and their chances for societal reintegration. Female inmates are a vulnerable group whose criminal conduct is frequently shaped by social, economic, and cultural disadvantages (Sudbury, 2014). Thus, analysing their socio-economic profile is crucial for comprehending the underlying reasons that contribute to female incarceration.

Studies conducted in various contexts indicate that incarcerated women often exhibit similar socio-economic traits, including poor educational levels, unstable familial backgrounds, restricted job prospects, and inadequate income (Bloom, Owen, & Covington, 2003). Poverty, lack of education, and inadequate social support systems not only heighten women's vulnerability to crime but also intensify the stigma and marginalization they experience both during and after incarceration (Carlen & Worrall, 2004).

The issue of female imprisonment in India is especially complex, as it connects with cultural norms, gender roles, and institutional injustices. Research indicates that female inmates are frequently youthful, financially underprivileged, and originate from dysfunctional or chaotic family backgrounds (Raghavan, 2019). Their participation in criminal activities is often associated with survival tactics, substance abuse, or pressure,

rather than with aggressive or intentional actions (National Crime Records Bureau [NCRB], 2022).

In Mizoram, where women historically hold significant social and family positions within a tight-knit society, imprisonment presents distinct issues. The socio-economic profile of female inmates at the Central Women's Jail, Aizawl, provides significant insights into the interplay of factors like as age, marital status, family structure, residence, education, and income in shaping women's lives and vulnerabilities. Comprehending these features is crucial for both criminological analysis and the formulation of gender-sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration methods.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Bhandari (2016) contended that those engaged in criminal activities typically originate from households of poor socioeconomic standing. They are raised in a household that has encountered unemployment, marital strife, neglect, abuse, mental health issues, and often belongs to a poor socioeconomic position. Kaushik (2015) demonstrates in their research that the majority of incarcerated women are educationally and economically disadvantaged, based on studies conducted in three Indian prisons: Varanasi, Jaipur, and Ferozepur.

Bharati (2022), Singh and Singh (2022), and Kattimani (2018) have conducted research in Tripura, Allahabad, and Dharwad that demonstrates that low income, illiteracy, and

unstable familial support systems are significant factors that contribute to women's engagement in criminal activity. According to Bhuvaneshwari and Chandrasekaran (2017), research conducted in Chennai reveals that the majority of inmates come from rural or semi-urban regions, have a low level of education, and are employed in menial jobs, which limits their livelihood possibilities.

Sohail (2023) conducted research in Karachi and also revealed a similar correlation between female crime and unstable family situations, unstable incomes, and substance misuse. For example, dowry disputes, marital abuse, and financial despair are all examples of socio-economic constraints that are often the root cause of women's criminal behaviour, according to broader national evaluations (Sharma, 2021). According to Pachuau et al. (2019), there is data that indicates the junction of marital instability, poverty, and poor education in Mizoram. These factors, when taken together, intensify vulnerability and pathways that lead to incarceration. Global monitoring indicates that, despite women constituting a minor fraction of the jail population, their numbers have escalated more rapidly than those of males since 2000, with many imprisoned for non-violent and low-level offenses associated with economic marginalization and drug policy (PRI, 2023; Association for the Prevention of Torture [APT], 2024).

METHODOLOGY

For the present study, a descriptive-exploratory research design and a non-probability sampling design, precisely purposive sampling, were used. The universe for this study includes 8 District Jails located in Aizawl, Lunglei, Siaha, Champhai, Kolasib, Serchhip, Mamit and Lawngtlai District of Mizoram. A separate Central Jail and Central Women's Jail are also located in Aizawl District of Mizoram. However, since the majority of female inmates are found in Central Women's Jail, Aizawl Mizoram, as shown in Mizoram Female Prisoners Daily Population Report, Prisons Department (Home), Government of Mizoram. The Central Women's Jail Aizawl is purposely selected for the present study. As of 13th Sept 2023, the last date of my fieldwork, the total number of female inmates in Central Women's Jail was 280, Lifer- 1, Convict SI-10, Convict RI-33, UTP- 236. Of the total 280,

50 percent are interviewed, which is 140, including one additional respondent who keenly requested to be interviewed. The total number of inmates interviewed was 141. The categories of respondents are categorized based on Lifer, Convict S.I. (Simple Imprisonment), Convict R.I. (Rigorous Imprisonment), and UTP (Under Trial Period), as well as based on the types of crime committed and habitual and 1st timer among each category. Therefore, the sample consists of 141 female inmates. Data was collected using an interview schedule. The acquired data was analysed using SPSS.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

AGE

Age, it has been said, is a "brute fact of criminology" (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983, p.552). The phenomenon referred to as the "age–crime curve" exemplifies this reality, as practically all criminal activities have reached their peak during late adolescence and subsequently declined (Rocque, M., Posick, C., & Hoyle, J. 2015). Studies indicate that incarcerated women predominantly fall between younger and middle-aged age ranges, highlighting socio-economic vulnerabilities and societal pressures linked to these life phases (Sharma & Kaur, 2019).

In Mizoram, where communal norms and familial obligations significantly influence women's identities, age is a particularly crucial factor. Women during their reproductive and caregiving phases encounter interruptions that negatively impact both their own growth and the welfare of their dependents.

The age distribution of the sample respondents can be seen from Table 1.

Table 1: Age

In years	Frequency	Percentage %
15-25	23	16.3
25-35	47	33.3
35-45	47	33.3
45-55	17	12.1
55-65	5	3.5
65-75	2	1.4
Total	141	100.0

Source: Field Survey

The age distribution of the respondents presented in Table 1 indicates that the majority of women prisoners belong to the 25–35 years (33.3%) and 35–45 years (33.3%) categories, followed by the 15–25 years group (16.3%). This suggests that most incarcerated women are in their early adulthood to middle age, a stage generally associated with economic responsibilities, family care, and child-rearing. Smaller proportions were found in the 45–55 years (12.1%), 55–65 years (3.5%), and 65–75 years (1.4%) age brackets.

These findings highlight that women in their productive and reproductive years are more prone to incarceration, often due to socio-economic hardships, peer influence, or involvement in subsistence crimes. The concentration of women in these age groups also points to the disruptions caused by imprisonment, not only to the prisoners themselves but also to their dependents and households. In the context of Mizoram, where familial and community bonds are strong, the incarceration of women in these critical age brackets creates a ripple effect on both social and economic structures.

MARITAL STATUS

Marital status is a crucial socio-demographic variable in the study of female inmates, since it directly influences their social identity, obligations, and vulnerabilities. The engagement of women with the criminal justice system is frequently linked to their marital and familial situations, including domestic violence, economic dependency or divorce. Research indicates that a significant proportion of jailed women are either currently married or formerly married, with many disclosing experiences of marital discord, separation, or domestic abuse (Sharma & Das, 2021). Marital instability is recognized as both a precursor and a result of incarceration, since imprisonment frequently disrupts familial dynamics and weakens marital bonds (Kumar, 2018).

In Mizoram, where marriage and family significantly influence women's social standing and communal integration, married status is especially crucial. Married female inmates endure the double challenges of separation from their husbands and children, whilst widowed, divorced, or single women frequently encounter heightened stigma and marginalization (Lalnunpuii, 2020).

Table 2: Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage %
Unmarried	13	9.2
Married	50	35.5
Divorced	51	36.2
Widowed	27	19.1
Total	141	100.0

Source: Field Survey

As indicated in Table 4.3, a significant portion of the respondents are divorced (36.2 %) or widowed (19.1%), together making up 55.3 % of the total sample. This indicates a probable correlation between separation from spouse and a greater vulnerability to criminal engagement, which might result from mental instability, social isolation, or financial hardship.

Whereas 50 (35.5%) consisted of married inmates, indicating that a substantial number of inmates face legal issues while they play an important part in their families. Their being in prison could have serious consequences for their dependent children and household stability; this could also raise concerns about the impact of imprisonment on their family. Merely 9.2% of inmates are single, indicating that the majority of acts or circumstances resulting in incarceration might happen later in life or be influenced by relational problems, such marital discord, domestic violence, or abandonment.

A high proportion of divorced and widowed inmates suggests a correlation between marital instability and increased likelihood of criminal behavior. Divorced and widowed constitute more than 50 percent of the total inmates, which is 55.3 percent. This suggests that more than 50 percent of the inmates are without partners. This reflects the fact that criminal behavior is more prevalent among individuals who have experienced divorce or are separated from their partners.

Marital status serves as a major determinant in the lives of female inmates, influencing their vulnerabilities and societal position. A significant percentage of inmates are divorced or widowed, highlighting the impact of marital instability, separation, and grief on heightened vulnerability to criminal behaviour due to financial hardship,

mental stress, or social isolation. Married women constitute a substantial proportion, signifying that incarceration undermines not only their personal life but also familial structures and the welfare of dependents. A mere minority remains unmarried, indicating that marital difficulties, including domestic abuse, abandonment, or instability, frequently correlate with pathways leading to imprisonment.

NATURE OF FAMILY

The composition of family structure is a significant socio-economic element in examining the backgrounds of female inmates. In India, family structures are often categorized as nuclear or joint families, each influencing socialization, support systems, and coping strategies in distinct ways. Women from nuclear families may have heightened economic vulnerability and mental distress owing to restricted assistance in times of crisis, whereas women from joint families may gain from shared resources yet still confront disputes and pressures within broader family networks (Chaudhuri, 2018). Research has shown that a significant percentage of female inmates originate from nuclear homes characterized by financial instability, inadequate supervision, and little emotional support, which may heighten their vulnerability to criminal behaviour (Sharma & Kaur, 2019). Conversely, women in joint families may face intricate dynamics, including inheritance disputes, home difficulties, and interpersonal tensions that can occasionally lead to crimes (Kumar, 2020).

In Mizoram's socio-cultural setting, characterized by robust community life and clan affiliations, the family structure significantly influences women's experiences prior to and during incarceration. Nuclear families are more prevalent in the city of Aizawl, frequently resulting in the erosion traditional safety nets. Determining whether female inmates are part of nuclear or joint households offers insights into their social support levels and highlights the influence of family structures on the prevention or aggravation of imprisonment pathways.

Table 3: Nature of family

Type of family	Frequency	Percentage %
Extended family	54	38.3
Nuclear family	87	61.7
Total	141	100.0

Source: Field survey

From the above table 4.4, a significant 61.7% of the women prisoners come from nuclear families, while 38.3% of the women come from joint families, where traditionally, a wider support system exists through extended family members. In nuclear families, women have less social and emotional support, especially during marital conflict or economic hardship, which can increase their vulnerability to criminal involvement. They have more responsibilities in managing domestic, financial, and emotional roles within the family, this could be an extra burden for the individuals.

The evidence indicates that family structure significantly influences women's lived experiences, coping strategies, and potential paths toward incarceration. Comprehending the characteristics of familial backgrounds is essential for formulating specialized rehabilitation programs, mental health assistance, and preventive social interventions for female inmates. Under the nature of family, the number of family members, the number of children, the number of working hands in the family, and the number of dependents in the family will be considered.

Considering the number of families is important, as some studies suggest that larger families, especially those with more children, may have higher rates of delinquency among children. This can be due to the difficulties in providing attention, supervision, and resources to each child. Larger families may also be associated with lower income, which increases the risk of children engaging in criminal activity to fulfil unmet needs. While smaller families may provide more resources and attention to each child, there is also research suggesting that smaller families, particularly those with only one child, may experience greater stress in cases of high parental expectations or overprotection. The dynamics of these families can sometimes lead to issues with socialization, leading to potential behavioural problems in children.

Table. 3.1: Number of family members

In Numbers	Frequency	Percentage %
0-5	104	73.8
5-10	33	23.4
10-15	4	2.8
Total	141	100.0

Source: Field survey

As indicated in the above table, the number of family members is categorized into three groups: family members between 0-5, 5-10 and 10- 15. As shown in the table, a dominant 73.8% of the women prisoners belong to families with 0–5 members, suggesting that small family units are common. This aligns with the earlier finding that 61.7% of respondents come from nuclear families, where smaller household sizes are typical. Smaller families may also imply fewer support systems during times of crisis or legal issues, increasing vulnerability.

23.4% of respondents have moderately large families. These may reflect joint or extended family living arrangements, though less common. In such families, internal conflicts, inheritance disputes, or domestic pressure may contribute to legal involvement. Only 2.8% of women come from very large families, indicating that traditional large joint family systems are rare among the respondents.

Larger families may provide emotional and economic support, although they can also be sources of marital conflict, particularly for women who frequently hold subordinate positions within patriarchal family structures. In smaller families, isolation, economic dependence, and insufficient support may compel women into circumstances that lead to incarceration. The data indicate that most women prisoners come from small families, which often correlates with nuclear living arrangements and limited support systems

HAVING CHILDREN

The number of children for whom parents are responsible is important in studying criminal behavior, especially among women. In any case of divorce or separation, children are usually in the hands of the mother. In such cases, if the mother is unemployed, the burden to meet the needs of the children solely depends on the unemployed mother.

The burden of taking care of their children often tends to force women to engage in criminal activities. The economic instability, the burden to meet the needs of their children, and the well-being of their children tend to be the causes of mothers committing crimes.

Table 3.2: Having children

Having Children	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	125	88.7
No	16	11.3
Total	141	100.0

As shown in the above table, a striking 88.7% of women prisoners have children, indicating that most incarcerated women are mothers. This emphasizes the extensive social consequences of women's incarceration, especially for dependent children who may have emotional, educational, and economic difficulties resulting from the absence of their primary caregiver. Only 11.3 % are without bearing children. This small group of women includes younger women and unmarried individuals.

The high rate of motherhood among incarcerated individuals highlights the necessity to investigate the impact of maternal imprisonment on the stability of the family, especially for the welfare of children left behind.

NUMBER OF EARNING MEMBERS IN THE FAMILY

The number of income-generating persons inside the household is a significant consideration. If the number of earners in the family is less as compared to the family size, it can lead to financial strain. Larger families, particularly those with many children, often face greater financial strain, especially in low-income households. Economic stress can lead to frustration and a feeling of hopelessness, which may increase the likelihood of crime. In particular, children in economically disadvantaged families may turn to crime or delinquency due to a lack of resources, education, or job opportunities.

Table. 3.3: Number of earning members in the family

In Numbers	Number of earning members Frequency (%)	Number of dependents Frequency (%)
None	5 (3.5)	18 (12.8)
One	55 (39.0)	17 (12.1)
Two	40 (28.4)	33 (23.4)
Three	32 (22.7)	33 (23.4)
More than 3	9 (6.4)	40 (28.4)
Total	141 (100.0)	141 (100.0)

Source: Field Survey

As indicated in the above table, the largest group (39.0%) reported only one working member in the family. This indicates a high degree of economic dependency, likely leading to financial stress, a known risk factor for conflict, vulnerability, and involvement in crime. 28.4% have two working hands, and 22.7% have three, showing that about half of the families (51.1%) have multiple income earners. While better off than single-income families, these families may still struggle to meet basic needs, particularly in larger households.

Only 3.5% of families have no working hands, reflecting extreme economic vulnerability or complete dependency on external aid or illegal means. Just 6.4% reported more than three working members, indicating that financial stability is rare among these households.

The data indicates that the majority of female inmates originate from financially disadvantaged families, with a significant proportion depending on a single income earner. This economic adversity undoubtedly contributes to the socioeconomic vulnerability that overlaps with their pathways toward incarceration.

Likewise, if the number of dependents is more compared to the number of earners in the family, it signifies that the family is economically unstable. The family members might lack basic necessities of life, including financial and emotional support. This can lead to frustration for the earner as well as the dependent in the family which can lead to criminal activities among the family members.

The largest group (28.4%) of respondents reported having more than three dependents in the family. This suggests a significant economic and caregiving burden, which could contribute to stress, conflict, or involvement in criminal activities to meet basic needs.

46.8% of women have 2 or 3 dependents, showing that nearly three-fourths (70.2%) of the respondents bear moderate to high family responsibility. This reinforces their role as central figures in family survival, often with limited support or resources. 2.8% reported having no dependents, and 12.1% had just one.

The presence of multiple dependents increases pressure on women, especially when combined with limited income sources (as shown in previous tables). This can lead to desperation-driven offenses such as theft, fraud, or involvement in illicit trade. The data also affirms that a significant number of incarcerated women were likely primary caregivers, and their absence may disrupt family life, especially for children and elderly dependents.

This data highlights the significant familial obligations shouldered by the majority of female inmates, especially the substantial percentage having three or more dependents. These obligations frequently converge with economic adversity, establishing a cycle of stress, marginalization, and criminalization.

Overall, the familial framework significantly impacts the lives of incarcerated women. Numerous individuals originate from nuclear homes characterized by restricted emotional and financial support, rendering them more susceptible to stress and conflict. Although joint families may provide broader support, they can also entail conflicts and pressures that aggravate challenges. The incarceration of women, who predominantly serve as mothers and primary caregivers, has significant repercussions on their children and dependents. Economic hardship is prevalent, as households frequently depend on a single salary to

sustain several dependents. The combination of insufficient support, substantial caring responsibilities, and financial hardship influences the paths that result in the imprisonment of several women.

RESIDENTIAL STATUS

Under this, the residence, their present address, whether it is rural or urban, the district in which their present address is located, whether they own a house or stay in a rented house, and the type of house they reside in are taken into consideration. As this will suffice for the economic status of the individuals.

Residential status is a crucial socio-demographic element in comprehending the context of women inmates, as it indicates their living conditions, social connections, and resource availability before incarceration. The location of women's residence, urban or rural, permanent or

rented, or temporary shelters, has considerable consequences for their socio-economic stability and vulnerability to crime. Studies indicate that women residing in insecure or disadvantaged environments such as slums, rental properties, or temporary housing are more susceptible to poverty, family strife, and restricted access to education or work, factors that may lead to criminal activity (Sharma & Das, 2021).

In India, urbanization has prompted heightened migration and relocation in urban areas, frequently weakening communal support networks (Patel, 2018). This transition can present both possibilities and challenges for women, especially in the absence of familial support. In Mizoram, where communal networks and land-based livelihoods are important, residential status signifies both the socio-economic state of women and their level of societal integration.

Table 4: Residential Status

Rural	Urban	Total	East Districts	West Districts	North Districts	South Districts	Outside Mizoram	Total
Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
56 (39.7)	85 (60.3)	141(100)	8 (5.7)	1 (0.7)	114 (80.9)	6 (4.2)	12 (8.5)	141 (100)

Source: Field Survey

As indicated in the table above, the respondents' present address is considered. A significant majority (60.3%) of the women in jail are from urban areas, while (39.7%) come from rural areas. This suggests that urban areas contribute more to the prison population of women, which could relate to increased visibility and law enforcement in urban areas, increased socio-economic pressures, or urban crimes, and potential migration of women from rural to urban areas, resulting in heightened vulnerability. Although rural regions frequently exhibit lower socio-economic status, the greater urban representation indicates urban offences such as drug-related crime. Urban women may have distinct obstacles, including insufficient support systems and job-related pressures.

The district-wise residence is subdivided into four major zones including East District, which consists of Khawzawl and Serchhip district, West District, which consists of Mamit district, North district, which consists of four districts, namely, Aizawl, Champhai, Kolasib and Saitual. South

district consists of four districts namely, Hnahthial, Lunglei, Lawngtlai and Saiha. Those living outside Mizoram is also taken into consideration.

From the above table, an overwhelming 80.9% of the women come from the North District(s), making it the primary source of incarcerated women. East, South, and West Districts contribute marginally (East: 5.7%, South: 4.2%, West: 0.7%), showing very low prison population representation. Outside Mizoram accounts for 8.5%, which is notable and may point to migration from other states as refugees, which is a heightened problem Mizoram in facing recently.

The fact that over four-fifths of the women come from a single region (North Districts) calls for a focused investigation into local socio-economic, cultural, or criminal factors affecting women in that area. The North district consists of the capital district Aizawl which most populous as compared to other districts. Champhai is also one of the biggest districts in Mizoram, and it lies on

the border of neighbouring Myanmar, Saitual district also lies on the border of Myanmar. Kolasib district also shares a border with neighbouring Assam. This suggests that the majority of the women inmates live where border areas that are vulnerable and major drug trafficking routes within the State.

TYPE OF HOUSE

The kind of home a person lives in is a crucial socioeconomic indicator that shows their social standing, level of life, and financial security. Housing conditions influence not just physical well-being but also social inclusion and resource accessibility. In India, types of housing are often classified into permanent (pucca), semi-permanent (semi-pucca), and temporary (kutcha) structures, which reveal disparities in wealth distribution and social inequality (Desai & Joshi, 2019). Women

prisoners coming from inadequate housing conditions are frequently linked to poverty, economic stress, and social marginalization, factors that may indirectly contribute to their involvement in criminal activities (Kumar, 2018).

Research has shown that inadequate housing conditions and the absence of ownership are frequently associated with financial instability, reliance on others, and susceptibility to interpersonal conflicts (Sharma & Kaur, 2020). Conversely, women residing in pucca or superior housing may still face challenges such as familial discord or drug addiction, but housing stability frequently offers a more robust social safety net. In Mizoram, the housing of women criminals before jail provides significant insights into their socio-economic status and the influence of material hardship on their criminal pathways.

Table 4.1: Owned house/ Rented House and Type of House

House Rented	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Type of House	Frequency	Percent
Owned	71	50.4	Kutcha	68	48.2
Rented	70	49.6	Semi- Kutcha	12	8.5
Total	141	100.0	Pucca	60	42.6
			Homeless	1	.7
			Total	141	100.0

Source: Field Survey

As the above table indicates, 50.4% of the women prisoners have their own house, which is almost similar to the number of inmates who live in a rented house, constituting 49.6%. This indicates a lack of substantial prevalence of either housing type among the respondents. Those who live in their own house can be regarded as an indicator of relative economic stability. The fact that roughly half of the women had owned homes indicates a varied socioeconomic background. The nearly equal distribution suggests that criminal conduct may not be confined solely to economically disadvantaged populations.

As shown in the previous table, the rural-urban divide among the inmates shows that a significant 60.3% are from urban areas, which is more than half of the total respondents. Urban areas are considered to be more economically stable than rural areas. This could indicate an even proportion between female inmates who owned homes and

those who rented, suggesting a diverse socioeconomic profile.

As the above table shows an almost equal distribution of owned houses and rented houses among the respondents. The type of house could determine a more specific economic status of an individual. Poor housing conditions and inadequately maintained structures are frequently associated with higher crime rates. Such situations may indicate neglect or insufficient investment, hence inviting criminal activities. Public housing developments frequently exhibit elevated crime rates compared to privately owned properties. This is occasionally attributable to elevated poverty levels, insufficient investment in security measures, and the socioeconomic difficulties encountered by people.

The table is categorised into Kutcha house, Semi-Kutcha House, Pucca, and Homeless. Kutcha houses are built without concrete; the materials

used are usually bamboo, plywood, and tiles. The cost of the houses is also cheap. Semi Kutcha is a mixture of cemented structure and bamboo, wood, or plywood. Pucca houses are on the other hand, well well-constructed dwelling houses built with bricks, cement, concrete, or timber. Homeless indicates an individual who doesn't have either a Kutcha, Semi-Kutcha, or Pucca house.

As indicated in the table above, almost fifty percent (48.2%) of the female inmates resided in kutcha houses, which are generally constructed from impermanent materials. This reflects substandard housing conditions and potentially lower economic status. The nearly equivalent distribution of owned and rented residences in the preceding table, indicative of a diverse socioeconomic background, can be elucidated by examining the household type, as 48.2% reside in a Kutcha house, characterized by low construction costs.

However, a substantial percentage (42.6%) resided in pucca houses constructed from resilient materials such as bricks and cement. This implies that not all inmates originated from disadvantaged backgrounds, signifying diverse socio-economic origins. A minority (8.5%) resided in semi-permanent constructions, indicative of a transitional dwelling status between kutcha and pucca. Only one woman (0.7%) experienced homelessness. Despite the limited number, it shows the profound vulnerability and social isolation experienced by certain respondents.

Above all, a total of 56.7% (kutcha and semi-kutcha) of respondents resided in substandard housing, indicating a predominant economic disadvantage. This could be a contributing factor to criminal conduct, or it could correspond with inadequate access to education, healthcare, and legal assistance. The table reveals that most of the respondents lived in kutcha or semi-kutcha homes, reflecting a prevalence of poor housing conditions.

From the above, it is shown that most inmates come from urban areas, especially the northern districts of Mizoram, including Aizawl and other border regions that are vulnerable to drug trafficking. This highlights how urban pressures, migration, and border-related issues may contribute to women's pathways into crime. Housing further reveals their economic situation. While some women owned homes, many lived in rented or poorly constructed dwellings, with a large proportion residing in kutcha or semi-permanent houses. Such conditions point to financial instability, limited resources, and social marginalization. At the same time, a notable number lived in pucca houses, showing that imprisonment is not confined to the poorest sections of society. Overall, residential status indicates that many women inmates experienced insecure housing, urban pressures, and weak social support systems, all of which intersect with economic hardship and increase vulnerability to criminal involvement.

EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

Education is a critical socio-economic factor that affects an individual's prospects, decision-making, and quality of life. It is crucial in influencing women's access to work, understanding of rights, and capacity to navigate socio-economic difficulties. Inadequate educational achievement is often linked to restricted employment opportunities, poverty, and susceptibility to exploitation, thereby heightening the risk of legal conflicts (Bhattacharjee, 2019).

Research indicates that illiteracy and school dropout rates among women are frequently associated with early marriage, poverty, and gender discrimination, all of which impede women's personal growth and economic autonomy (Sharma & Das, 2021). In Mizoram, despite relatively high literacy rates compared to many Indian states, disparities persist in access to higher education, especially for women from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Consequently, several female inmates in the state may be deficient in the educational prerequisites necessary for securing steady employment, rendering them more vulnerable to participating in behaviours that result in incarceration.

The table is classified into illiterate, without having any formal education, not knowing how to read or write. The primary level of education includes classes I- IV. Below HSLC signifies till class X. HSLC is still class X. Higher Secondary indicates till class XII. Graduate and post-graduate follows.

Table 5: Educational Qualifications

Educational Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage %
Illiterate	3	2.1
Primary	29	20.6
Below HSLC	42	29.8
HSLC	35	24.8
Higher Secondary	27	19.1
Graduate	3	2.1
Post-graduate	2	1.4
Total	141	100.0

Source: Field survey

As indicated in the table, the largest group is those below HSLC (29.8%), followed closely by HSLC (24.8%) and primary education (20.6%). A combined 75.2% of the respondents had education up to HSLC or below (Illiterate, Primary, below HSLC, and HSLC). Only 3.5%, Graduate and Post-graduate, totalling 5 respondents, had a college-level education. This indicates a significantly low degree of higher educational attainment, potentially reflecting restricted access to advanced education or early school dropout. 97.9% are literate, which is relatively high—only 3 women (2.1%) were illiterate. This suggests that fundamental literacy is prevalent, however, it does not inherently contribute to higher educational or employment prospects.

The educational background of the respondents is marked by minimal formal education, with around 75% failing to advance beyond high school. Despite a relatively high literacy rate, advanced education is uncommon, reflecting a wider socioeconomic disadvantage. The data indicates that insufficient education is associated with susceptibility to criminal activity, potentially due to a deficiency in career opportunities, awareness, or empowerment

Studies indicate that those who discontinue high school or possess minimal educational qualifications are at an elevated risk of criminal involvement. Withdrawal from education is frequently linked to socioeconomic difficulties, diminished employment prospects, and heightened interaction with deviant peers, all of which elevate the probability of criminal behaviour. In economically disadvantaged communities, a cycle frequently emerges wherein inadequate education results in restricted employment prospects, heightened poverty, and, consequently, elevated crime rates. Individuals with limited educational qualifications may resort to criminal activity as a strategy to address financial difficulties or the absence of relevant employment opportunities. Restricted educational possibilities and diminished academic performance can elevate the likelihood of criminal conduct, especially in underprivileged populations.

Table 5.1: Drop-out rate from school

Drop Out	Frequency	Percentage %
Yes	127	90.08
No	11	7.8
Illiterate	3	2.12
Total	141	100.0

Source: Field Survey

As shown in the above table, an overwhelming 90.8% of the women prisoners dropped out of school before completing their education. This serves as a critical indicator of educational discontinuity, highlighting entrenched social and economic difficulties. Early departure from formal education is a common trait among the respondents. Only 11 respondents (7.8%) finished their education without discontinuing. This figure is exceedingly low. This indicates that educational determination is low among the respondents. The 3 women are illiterate or never enrolled in school, consistent with the 2.1% illiteracy rate

The high dropout rate aligns directly with the low levels of educational attainment. As indicated in the previous table of educational qualifications, 50.4% of respondents had education only up to primary or below HSLC. There are only 3 graduates and 2 post graduates making up to 3.5 % only. This indicates that the majority of women either did not finish secondary education or withdrew before or during the early years of high school. Educational vulnerability is a key feature in the lives of these incarcerated women.

Education is a significant vulnerability in the lives of female inmates. Although the majority of respondents were literate, most had received just a minimum education, with relatively few achieving higher academic qualifications. A notable characteristic is the heightened high school dropout rate, with the majority of women exiting schooling before to finishing secondary level. This trend indicates underlying difficulties such as poverty, early marriage, and insufficient opportunity, which constrain women's prospects for permanent work and economic autonomy. Consequently, inadequate educational achievement and interruptions in education heighten vulnerability to exploitation, marginalization, and criminal engagement.

MONTHLY INCOME

Monthly income is a vital socio-economic indicator that signifies the economic stability and living conditions of female inmates. Income levels directly affect access to education, healthcare, housing, and general quality of life. Women experiencing poor or irregular income are more susceptible to financial strain, exploitation, and criminal actions associated with survival tactics, such as drug trafficking, petty theft, or informal labour (Kumar, 2018). Research repeatedly indicates that poverty and economic deprivation are significant determinants of female imprisonment, since women with constrained financial resources frequently lack choices to address their challenges (Sharma & Kaur, 2019).

In India, women's earning potential is influenced by educational qualifications, gender norms, familial obligations, and restricted access to formal career options. A significant number of jailed women originate from low-income households and participate in informal, unskilled, or subsistence-level employment prior to incarceration (Tripathi & Jain, 2020). In Mizoram, where women significantly contribute to small-scale commerce and domestic administration, unpredictable or insufficient income might heighten vulnerability to economic crimes or risky survival methods.

Table 6 Monthly income of family

Monthly Income (Rupees)	Frequency	Percentage %
Below 50000	105	74.5
50000- 100000	26	18.4
100000-250000	5	3.5
250000 above	5	3.5
Total	141	100.0

Source: Field Survey

A significant majority (74.5%) of the respondents originated from households with monthly incomes below ₹50,000, reflecting widespread economic distress. About 18.4% belonged to moderately better-off families. Only 10 respondents (7%) came from higher-income families (split equally between Rs.1L–Rs.2.5L and above Rs.2.5L). The significant prevalence of low-income households, with three out of four women, indicates an extensive connection between poverty and incarceration. Financial distress may result in engagement in survival crimes, participation in the drug trade, or exploitation by others for illicit activities.

Cross-analysis of the above-mentioned variables, including educational qualifications and types of housing, clarifies a comprehensive understanding of multi-dimensional poverty. Low income aligns with high school dropout rates, which is 90.08%. 56.7% lived in kutcha or semi-kutcha houses and 50.4% lived in rented

accommodation. The data definitely indicates that poverty is a fundamental underlying issue in the lives of the majority of the respondents. Approximately 75 percent of families earn less Rs.50,000, indicating that economic marginalization is compounded by inadequate schooling and poor housing conditions.

The monthly income is a critical factor in comprehending the socio-economic context of female inmates. The majority of offenders are from low-income families, indicating pervasive economic distress and restricted access to stable prospects. Poverty, coupled with inadequate housing and limited educational achievement, consistently manifests in their lives, frequently driving women to choose survival methods such as minor criminal activities, drug trafficking, or informal employment. The research undoubtedly indicates that economic hardship, compounded by social and educational disadvantages, is a primary factor influencing women's susceptibility to imprisonment.

AN OVERVIEW

The socio-economic profile of female inmates in Mizoram illustrates a complex interaction of structural inequalities, familial relationships, and societal pressures. The age distribution indicates that the majority of imprisoned women are in their productive and reproductive years, worsening the social and economic consequences for dependents and households. This emphasizes how incarceration interrupts women's functions as caretakers, providers, and community members (Sampson & Laub, 1993).

Marital status intensifies these vulnerabilities, since a significant percentage of inmates are divorced or widowed, illustrating how marital instability, grief, or abuse can lead to criminal routes through financial strain, social exclusion, and mental distress (Agnew, 1992). Imprisonment disrupts family structures and threatens children's welfare, even among married women, reflecting the focus of feminist criminology on the interplay of gender, familial obligations, and criminal justice findings (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013).

The kind of family and household circumstances indicates that numerous women originate from nuclear homes with restricted emotional and financial assistance, or from joint families characterized by discord and stress. These dynamics align with social disorganization theory, which associates poor familial and communal connections with a greater vulnerability to misbehaviour (Shaw & McKay, 1942).

The residential status reveals that the majority of inmates are from urban, economically vulnerable households, with many residing in kutcha or semi-permanent dwellings, indicative of financial instability and marginalization. This finding supports strain theory, which argues that restricted access to lawful pathways for attaining stability frequently compels individuals to resort to unlawful adaptations (Merton, 1938).

The educational background contributes to this vulnerability. Despite the prevalence of literacy, the majority of inmates discontinued their education prior to finishing secondary school, highlighting obstacles such as poverty, early marriage, and gender discrimination. The proven function of education as a protective factor against crime indicates that low attainment is significantly associated with restricted work prospects and a heightened risk of deviance (Hirschi, 1969).

Monthly income appears to be the most critical element, given the majority of responders were from low-income households. Poverty not only limits access to possibilities but also overlaps with educational and housing obstacles, forcing women to resort to survival methods such as petty criminality or drug-related activities. This reflects the structural oppression paradigm, which contextualizes women's crime within wider patterns of economic hardship and gender inequality (Daly, 1992).

The socio-economic profile of female inmates in Mizoram illustrates how poverty, familial instability, and limited opportunities influence pathways to imprisonment. The majority of offenders are in their prime working years, rendering incarceration harmful not just to themselves but also to their dependents. A significant percentage are divorced or widowed, indicating how marital instability, abuse, or grief heightens vulnerability to crime. Numerous individuals originate from nuclear families with inadequate support structures, while urban living and border regions further subject them to threats such as drug trafficking.

Education is a significant influence, as the majority of women discontinued their studies prior to completing high school, limiting their access to permanent work. The prevalence of widespread poverty, characterized by a majority residing in low-income families, compels many individuals to resort to survival measures such as minor crimes or drug-related activities. Incarceration reflects the intersection of economic hardship, fragile familial support, and social marginalization, highlighting the systemic factors contributing to women's susceptibility to crime in Mizoram.

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