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Presentation title: Who is morally responsible for the harm caused to children of prisoners?

It has been argued that the circumstances of many children of prisoners run afoul of established principles of social justice, regardless of whether we understand them in terms of equality and desert, the elimination of institutional oppression and domination, or the influential capabilities approach of Martha Nussbaum. In this paper, the proper allocation of responsibility for remedying this social injustice is discussed. Through a discussion of four principles for allocating remedial responsibility, as otherwise discussed in the context of contemporary moral and political philosophy, it is argued that the moral responsibility for children of incarcerated parents is shared among several actors, including the incarcerated parent, remaining caregivers, prison officials, other state officials, and, to some extent, members of the wider community. While incarcerated parents are partially responsible for remedying the harm caused to their children, prison officials have the responsibility to uphold the types of prison conditions under which incarcerated parents are able to fulfill their responsibilities to their children. Similarly, whereas the responsibility to care for the children of incarcerated parents falls on the caregivers (i.e., the remaining parent or other family relatives), states are at the same time responsible for implementing social welfare policies of the sort that can help caregivers fulfill their responsibilities for the well-being of these children. As for individual members of the wider community, they have an obligation not to contribute to the stigmatization and marginalization of the families of incarcerated individuals. This research has been funded by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (FORTE), grant nr 2018-01116.