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 Headline: Ex-drug addict blames herself for family's struggles
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Ex-drug addict blames herself for family's struggles

While outsiders have doubted her, Nina's family has become her biggest motivation, source of support



CHIEW SZE ANN

"Uncle, please don't take my mother away."

These words were uttered by Nina's (not her real name) daughter, who was about four then as she pleaded with the policemen to not arrest her mother.

With 75.6 per cent of prison inmates being drug offenders, The New Paper met a family where both parents had either been in jail or drug rehabilitation centres (DRCs).

The family described the struggles they faced and how the four children had to be cared for by others.

Nina told TNP that memories of the day the police arrested her at home for drug-related crimes continue to plague her daily, even though it happened almost a decade ago.

The 51-year-old former drug addict and trafficker, who has spent more than 20 years in and out of prison and DRCs, said she fights temptation every day.

TRIGGER

She said: "Triggers are everywhere. They are in familiar places and people. Stress can also be a trigger. I have to constantly be alert to catch myself."

Her husband is a former addict too.

When TNP visited Nina's two-roomer flat on Oct 24, the family home was sparsely furnished, with just one armchair in the living room, but hanging proudly on the wall is a photograph of her oldest son winning an award at school.

There have been times when both parents were in prison, leaving their four children, now aged 18, 16, 12 and 10, in the care of relatives.

One of Nina's biggest regrets is about being separated from her husband and children.

She told TNP: "My children have had to deal with it because at school, their teachers and friends know about it."

"People look at us and say hurtful things."



Nina said that after many years of being separated from her family, the first Hari Raya they celebrated together was special.

PHOTO: TIMOTHY DAVID

She said people have called her "hopeless" and doubted she could ever turn over a new leaf and support her family.

"They regarded her a failure of another addict, but her family had become her biggest motivation and source of support."

Nina got teary-eyed as she recounted the day her second son was invited back to school to give a speech after he had successfully passed his Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) after two tries.

She recalled him saying: "When I needed my mother most, she was not there."

"But after everything, I do not regret having her for a mother. I look at my parents and I see they are really trying their best. I am proud of them."

Nina, who was released from prison in 2015, said her children are aware of their parents' troubled past and are supportive of their recovery.

Her second son, Kane (not his real name), now 16, told TNP: "I missed my mother a lot. We were separated and living in my aunt's house. I knew I had a family, but we did not live together."

"What I really wanted was to know what it would feel like to be with my own family."

He recalled an incident that

occurred when he was around seven, after his parents had been arrested again.

He said: "My sister was three then. One day, the electricity was cut off. My parents were not there, and it was dark and scary. I did not know what to do, my mind went blank."

He failed his PSLE the first time after constantly playing truant.

Kane said his mother not forcing him to return to school after her release, he would not have changed.

BULLIED

He told TNP he hated going to school because he got bullied over his family troubles.

Said Kane: "I don't remember the bullies' names. But I remember they would make fun of me because once, CNB (Central Narcotics Bureau) officers came to school to pick me and my brother up."

"I hated going to school and was angry at the circumstances. But now, it inspires me to work harder. If my mother can overcome her difficulties, why can't I? It will prove (the bullies) wrong with my studies."

While her family is supportive, Nina still blames herself for their hardships and told TNP

she regrets what her children have had to suffer.

She said she picked up drugs in her early twenties after being introduced to them by her former husband. She has tried them all, from heroin to fat and marijuana.

But Nina does not blame anyone but herself.

She said: "Maybe, I can say I was innocent and easily influenced that first time. But after that, I made those choices (to take drugs)."

"It is easy, after going through all the struggles, to just give up on myself and think that this is just my life and go back to drugs. But I never want to go back (inside prison) again."

Before she got addicted to drugs, her life was going well and she had a stable government job, all of which she lost.

Nina added: "Through this, I have lost everything - my career, family, friends and freedom. My biggest regret is disappointing my mother."

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 - Nina on fighting temptation

THE HARDSHIP

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 - Nina on going to jail

THE REGRET

"Through this, I have lost everything - my career, family, friends and freedom. My biggest regret is disappointing my mother."
 - Nina

ter how little they have.

She said: "They told me they were so happy to be able to eat food made by their own mother and it really touched me."

"When I was inside, I thought about them so much. Not hearing news and not knowing how they were doing was so painful. I was afraid they would forget me."

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By Cheow Sue-Ann

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The family described the struggles they faced and how the four children had to be cared for by others.

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They regarded her a failure of a mother and person. But her family has become her biggest motivation and source of support.

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Nina added: "Through this, I have lost everything - my career, family, friends and freedom. My biggest regret is disappointing my mother."

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