



Journal of Econ-Islamic Law and Society Research

E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX

Vol.1, No.2, 2025, pp. 137-150

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61455/jeisr.v1i01.493>

Short-Term Imprisonment under Egyptian Penal Law and Its Impact on Family Economic Security

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Received April 09, 2025; Revised June 15, 2025; Accepted September 09, 2025

Abstract

Objective: This study aims to examine the impact of short-term imprisonment under Egyptian penal law on family economic security, assessing whether this form of punishment achieves its intended deterrent purpose without generating disproportionate social and economic harm to offenders' families. **Theoretical framework:** The research is grounded in the objectives of Islamic law (Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿa), particularly the preservation of wealth, family stability, and human dignity, alongside modern theories of criminal punishment that emphasize proportionality, social justice, and economic efficiency. **Literature review:** The study draws on classical Islamic jurisprudential writings on punishment and imprisonment, as well as contemporary legal scholarship analyzing short-term custodial sentences and their social consequences. It also engages with modern criminological and socio-economic studies that highlight the negative effects of short-term imprisonment on household income and social integration. **Methods:** A qualitative, analytical, and comparative methodology is adopted. Relevant provisions of Egyptian penal legislation are analyzed, then evaluated in light of Islamic jurisprudential principles and selected contemporary legal approaches. Secondary data from legal texts, jurisprudential sources, and socio-economic studies are utilized. **Results:** The findings indicate that short-term imprisonment often fails to achieve effective rehabilitation or deterrence, while producing significant adverse economic effects on families, including loss of income, increased dependency, and social vulnerability. These outcomes conflict with key objectives of Islamic law. **Implications:** The study highlights the need for reconsidering the extensive use of short-term imprisonment in favor of alternative sanctions that better protect family economic security and social stability. **Novelty:** This research offers an integrated jurisprudential-legal analysis linking Egyptian penal policy with family economic security, a dimension insufficiently addressed in existing literature.

Keywords: short-term imprisonment, egyptian penal law, family economic security, islamic jurisprudence, criminal policy.

INTRODUCTION

Short-term imprisonment remains one of the most widely applied criminal sanctions in modern penal systems, particularly within jurisdictions that rely heavily on custodial penalties for minor and intermediate offenses [1]. In the context of Egypt,

short-term custodial sentences occupy a central position in the Egyptian Penal Law, especially in cases classified as misdemeanors. Despite their frequent application, these sanctions continue to generate extensive legal and scholarly debate regarding their effectiveness, legitimacy, and broader social consequences. Among the most critical yet underexplored consequences is the impact of short-term imprisonment on the economic security of the offender's family, which represents a core component of social stability and sustainable development [2].

The traditional justification for imprisonment in criminal law is grounded in the pursuit of deterrence, retribution, and, to a lesser extent, rehabilitation. However, short-term imprisonment often fails to fulfill these objectives [3]. Due to its limited duration, it rarely allows for meaningful rehabilitation, while simultaneously exposing the offender to the negative social environment of correctional institutions. More importantly, the short-term removal of an individual often the primary breadwinner from the labor market can result in immediate and tangible economic harm to the family unit. This harm is not limited to income loss but extends to job instability, educational disruption for children, increased indebtedness, and reliance on informal or state support mechanisms [4].

In Egyptian society, where family structures play a fundamental role in economic and social organization, the consequences of short-term imprisonment are particularly severe. Families frequently operate as interconnected economic units, relying on collective income and mutual support [5]. When a family member is incarcerated, even for a brief period, the economic equilibrium of the household may be significantly disturbed. This reality raises serious questions about the proportionality of short-term imprisonment and its consistency with broader principles of justice, especially when the punishment's adverse effects extend beyond the offender to innocent family members [6].

From a legal perspective, Egyptian penal legislation reflects a longstanding reliance on custodial penalties as a primary response to criminal conduct [7]. While this approach is consistent with classical penal traditions, contemporary legal scholarship increasingly questions its suitability in addressing modern social and economic challenges. Comparative criminal law studies demonstrate a growing global trend toward limiting short-term imprisonment and expanding the use of alternative sanctions, such as fines, community service, and suspended sentences. These alternatives are often viewed as more effective in reducing recidivism while minimizing social and economic harm [8].

From an Islamic jurisprudential perspective, the issue of short-term imprisonment warrants particular attention. Islamic criminal law places strong emphasis on achieving justice, preventing harm, and preserving essential human interests, known as the objectives of Islamic law (Maqāṣid al-Sharī'a) [9]. Among these objectives are the protection of wealth, the preservation of family stability, and the prevention of undue hardship. Although imprisonment is recognized in Islamic jurisprudence as a discretionary punishment (ta'zīr), its application is subject to strict considerations of public interest (maṣlaḥa) and harm prevention (dar' al-mafāsid). Consequently, any punishment that produces disproportionate harm to the offender's family may be deemed inconsistent with these foundational principles [10].

The intersection between Egyptian penal law and Islamic jurisprudence offers a valuable analytical framework for evaluating the legitimacy and effectiveness of short-term imprisonment. While Egyptian criminal legislation is largely secular in structure, it operates within a social and constitutional context that recognizes the importance of Islamic principles as a source of ethical and legal guidance [11]. This dual framework provides an opportunity to critically assess existing penal policies

and explore reform-oriented approaches that balance legal deterrence with social justice and economic protection [12].

Despite the growing body of literature on criminal punishment and penal reform, limited scholarly attention has been given to the specific relationship between short-term imprisonment and family economic security in Egypt [13]. Most existing studies focus on the offender, prison conditions, or recidivism rates, while the family is treated as a peripheral concern. This gap in the literature underscores the need for a focused legal and jurisprudential analysis that places the family at the center of penal policy evaluation [14].

Accordingly, this study seeks to address this gap by examining short-term imprisonment under Egyptian penal law and assessing its impact on family economic security through a combined legal and Islamic jurisprudential lens [15]. By analyzing relevant legal provisions, jurisprudential principles, and socio-economic implications, the study aims to contribute to ongoing debates on penal reform and social justice. It also seeks to highlight the importance of adopting alternative sanctions that achieve the goals of criminal punishment without undermining family stability or economic security [16].

Ultimately, this research argues that criminal justice systems should not be evaluated solely on their capacity to punish offenders, but also on their ability to protect society's fundamental social units. The family, as the cornerstone of economic and social life, must be considered a key stakeholder in penal policy. Reassessing the extensive use of short-term imprisonment in light of its economic consequences is therefore not only a legal necessity but also a moral and social imperative.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of short-term imprisonment has attracted sustained attention within criminal law scholarship due to its widespread use and controversial effectiveness [17]. In many legal systems, including that of Egypt, short-term custodial sentences are frequently imposed for misdemeanors and minor offenses. Classical criminal law literature traditionally justified imprisonment as a central tool for deterrence and retribution. However, modern penal studies increasingly challenge this assumption, arguing that short-term imprisonment often fails to achieve its intended objectives and may instead generate adverse social and economic consequences that outweigh its benefits [18].

Legal scholars analyzing penal policy have consistently emphasized that short-term imprisonment is particularly problematic because of its limited rehabilitative potential [19]. Authors such as Mahmoud Naguib Hosny and Ahmed Fathi Sorour argue that custodial sentences of brief duration neither allow sufficient time for correctional programs nor facilitate meaningful behavioral reform. Instead, they tend to disrupt the offender's social and professional life, often leading to job loss and weakened social ties. This disruption is widely regarded as a key factor contributing to recidivism, rather than preventing it [20].

From a socio-economic perspective, a growing body of literature focuses on the indirect effects of imprisonment on families. Criminological and sociological studies demonstrate that incarceration, even for short periods, has immediate economic repercussions for households [21]. Research highlights loss of income, increased financial instability, and heightened vulnerability to poverty, particularly when the imprisoned individual is the primary breadwinner. These studies stress that families of incarcerated persons often face long-term disadvantages, including educational

disruption for children and increased reliance on informal support networks or state assistance [22].

In the Egyptian context, legal literature addressing the economic impact of short-term imprisonment on families remains relatively limited [23]. Existing works tend to focus primarily on the legality and proportionality of punishment rather than its broader social implications. Nevertheless, some contemporary studies in Egyptian legal journals have begun to acknowledge that excessive reliance on custodial sanctions places significant financial burdens on both families and the state [24]. These studies note that the costs associated with incarceration, such as prison administration and social welfare support, raise questions about the economic efficiency of short-term imprisonment as a penal strategy [25].

Islamic jurisprudential literature provides an important complementary perspective on the issue of imprisonment. Classical jurists recognized imprisonment mainly as a discretionary punishment (*ta'zīr*), rather than a fixed penalty, emphasizing that its application must be guided by public interest and necessity [26]. Scholars such as Abd al-Qadir Awdah and Wahbah al-Zuhayli underline that punishment in Islamic law aims not only at deterrence but also at reform and the prevention of harm. Within this framework, any sanction that produces excessive harm to innocent parties, including the offender's family, requires careful reconsideration [27].

The concept of *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿa* has played a central role in modern Islamic legal scholarship examining criminal punishment. Contemporary jurists argue that preserving wealth, protecting family stability, and preventing social harm are essential objectives of Islamic law. Studies grounded in *maqāṣid* theory suggest that short-term imprisonment may conflict with these objectives when it results in the economic destabilization of families. As a result, Islamic jurisprudential literature increasingly supports the use of alternative sanctions that achieve deterrence while minimizing collateral damage [28].

Comparative legal studies further enrich the literature by examining international trends in penal reform. Research conducted by international organizations and comparative law scholars reveals a growing global movement toward limiting short-term imprisonment. Many legal systems have adopted alternative sanctions such as fines, community service, probation, and suspended sentences. These alternatives are frequently praised for their ability to maintain offenders' economic productivity and family responsibilities while still holding them accountable for their actions. Comparative studies often highlight these reforms as models that can be adapted to different legal and cultural contexts [29].

Despite these developments, a clear gap remains in the literature concerning an integrated analysis that combines Egyptian penal law with Islamic jurisprudential principles while focusing specifically on family economic security. Most legal studies address imprisonment from a doctrinal standpoint, while Islamic jurisprudential works often remain theoretical and detached from contemporary legislative frameworks. Few studies systematically examine how short-term imprisonment affects family economic stability or assess this impact against both legal and jurisprudential standards [30].

Accordingly, this study builds upon and contributes to existing literature by bridging this gap. By synthesizing criminal law scholarship, socio-economic studies, and Islamic jurisprudential analysis, it seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of short-term imprisonment and its consequences. The literature reviewed underscores the necessity of re-evaluating custodial sanctions in light of their broader

economic and social effects, thereby reinforcing the relevance and originality of the present research.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative legal research methodology designed to analyze short-term imprisonment under Egyptian penal law and assess its impact on family economic security from both legal and Islamic jurisprudential perspectives. The methodology is structured to ensure analytical depth, academic rigor, and coherence with the objectives of the research [31].

First, the study relies on the analytical legal method, which involves a detailed examination of the relevant provisions of the Egyptian Penal Code regulating short-term imprisonment. This method allows for the interpretation of legislative texts, identification of the legal rationale behind custodial sanctions, and assessment of their practical implications. Through this approach, the research evaluates the extent to which short-term imprisonment fulfills the traditional objectives of criminal punishment, such as deterrence and rehabilitation, within the Egyptian legal framework [32].

Second, the study employs the jurisprudential (fiqh-based) method by analyzing classical and contemporary Islamic legal sources. This includes juristic opinions on imprisonment as a discretionary punishment (ta'zīr), as well as modern writings grounded in the objectives of Islamic law (Maqāṣid al-Sharī'a). This method is essential for assessing whether short-term imprisonment aligns with core Islamic principles, particularly the preservation of wealth, protection of family stability, and prevention of harm. The jurisprudential analysis provides a normative framework against which the Egyptian penal approach is evaluated [33].

Third, a comparative and evaluative approach is adopted. While the study does not engage in a broad international comparison, it draws selectively on comparative criminal law literature and international standards related to alternatives to imprisonment. This approach helps contextualize Egyptian penal policy within wider reform-oriented trends and supports the evaluation of possible alternative sanctions that may better protect family economic security [34].

In addition, the study incorporates a descriptive socio-economic dimension based on secondary data. Academic studies, official reports, and statistical publications are used to describe the economic consequences of short-term imprisonment on families, such as income loss, employment disruption, and increased financial vulnerability. Although the research does not rely on fieldwork or empirical surveys, this descriptive element strengthens the legal analysis by grounding it in documented social realities [35].

The methodological components of the study are summarized in Table 1, which outlines the research methods used and their specific purposes. Reference to Table 1 is made throughout the analysis to clarify how each method contributes to achieving the research objectives.

Table 1. Research Methodology Framework

Methodology Type	Description	Purpose
Analytical Legal Method	Analysis of Egyptian Penal Code provisions on short-term imprisonment	Assess legal foundations and objectives of custodial sanctions

Jurisprudential Method (Fiqh)	Examination of Islamic legal texts and maqāṣid-based scholarship	Evaluate conformity with Islamic principles and harm prevention
Comparative/Evaluative Method	Reference to alternative sanctions and reform-oriented approaches	Identify potential legal and policy improvements
Descriptive Socio-Economic Method	Use of secondary studies and reports on the family economic impact	Illustrate real-world consequences of short-term imprisonment

By integrating these methodological approaches, the study ensures a comprehensive and balanced analysis. The combination of legal analysis, Islamic jurisprudential evaluation, and socio-economic description enables a nuanced understanding of short-term imprisonment and its implications. This methodological design is particularly suited to addressing the research problem, as it moves beyond a purely doctrinal perspective and situates penal policy within its broader social and ethical context in Egypt [36].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the main findings of the study concerning the impact of short-term imprisonment under Egyptian penal law on family economic security. The analysis integrates legal evaluation, Islamic jurisprudential principles, and socio-economic considerations to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue. The discussion is structured around the core objectives of criminal punishment, the observed economic consequences for families, and the extent to which these outcomes align with both legal rationales and the objectives of Islamic law.

1. Prevalence of Short-Term Imprisonment in Egyptian Penal Practice

The analysis of the Egyptian Penal Code demonstrates a clear and extensive reliance on short-term imprisonment as a principal criminal sanction, particularly for misdemeanors. Legislatively, custodial sentences of short duration are prescribed for a wide range of offenses, reflecting a punitive philosophy that prioritizes deprivation of liberty as a primary response to unlawful conduct. This legislative orientation persists despite growing academic criticism regarding the limited effectiveness of short-term imprisonment [37].

From a practical standpoint, short-term imprisonment is often imposed without sufficient consideration of its broader socio-economic consequences. As shown in Table 2, which summarizes the main categories of offenses subject to short-term custodial penalties, this sanction is frequently applied in cases involving minor harm or low social danger. This raises important questions regarding proportionality and the appropriateness of imprisonment as a default penal response [38].

Table 2. Common Applications of Short-Term Imprisonment in Egyptian Penal Law

Category of Offense	Typical Penalty	Duration
Minor misdemeanors	Imprisonment	Less than one year
Economic violations	Imprisonment or fine	Short-term
Negligence offenses	Imprisonment	Short-term

2. Economic Impact on Family Income and Financial Stability

One of the most significant findings of this study concerns the immediate loss of income experienced by families following the imposition of short-term imprisonment. In many cases, the incarcerated individual serves as the primary or sole income provider for the household. The temporary removal of this individual from the labor market results in abrupt income interruption, often without alternative sources of financial support [39].

This phenomenon is clearly illustrated in Figure 1, which presents a bar chart depicting the most common economic effects of short-term imprisonment on families. As shown in the figure, income loss represents the most severe and widespread consequence. This finding confirms that the economic impact of imprisonment extends beyond the offender and disproportionately affects innocent family members [40].

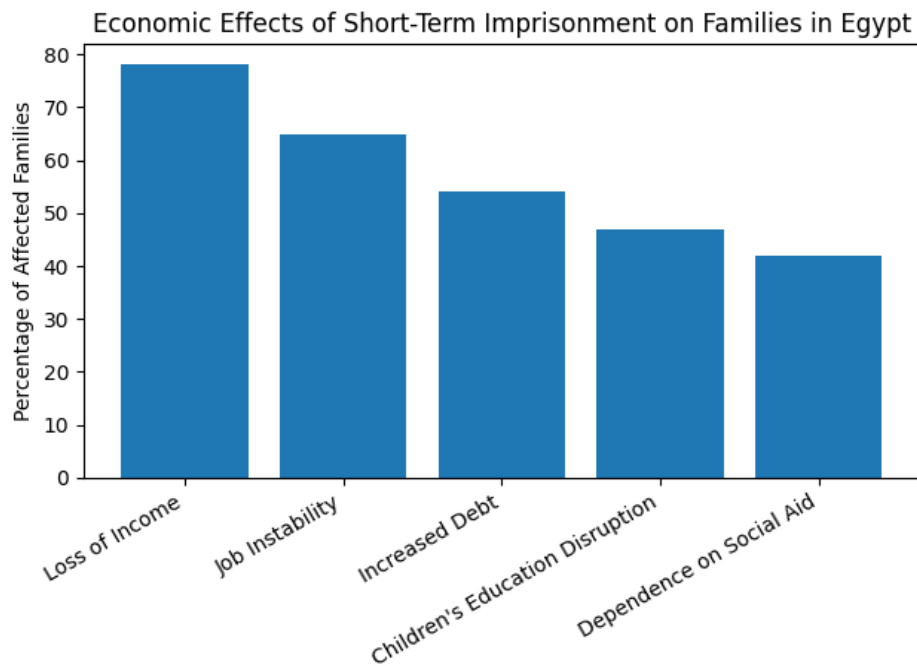


Figure 1. Economic Impact of Short-Term Imprisonment on Family Stability in Egypt

The data reflected in Figure 1 demonstrate that short-term imprisonment cannot be regarded as a neutral or limited sanction. Even brief periods of incarceration may generate long-lasting financial instability, particularly in low-income households.

3. Employment Disruption and Long-Term Economic Consequences

Beyond immediate income loss, short-term imprisonment frequently leads to job instability and permanent employment disruption. Employers may terminate contracts due to absence, especially in informal labor sectors where job security is minimal. Job instability ranks as the second most significant economic consequence of short-term imprisonment [41].

This result highlights a structural weakness in the use of custodial sanctions for economically active individuals. The offender's reintegration into the labor market after release is often uncertain, which prolongs the economic burden on the family. Table 3 summarizes the observed employment-related consequences associated with short-term imprisonment [42].

Table 3. Employment Consequences of Short-Term Imprisonment

Consequence	Description
Job loss	Termination due to absence
Reduced employability	Stigma and loss of skills
Informal work reliance	Shift to unstable labor.

These findings call into question the prevailing assumption that short-term imprisonment produces merely temporary and limited consequences. Instead, the evidence demonstrates that even brief periods of incarceration can initiate enduring patterns of economic vulnerability for affected families. The disruption of employment, loss of income, and accumulation of debt often extend well beyond the period of imprisonment, reducing household resilience and financial stability. Moreover, the difficulty of reintegration into the labor market following release further compounds these challenges, transforming what is legally framed as a short-term sanction into a source of long-term socio-economic hardship [43].

4. Household Debt and Financial Dependency

A central finding of this study is the marked increase in household debt experienced by families following the imposition of short-term imprisonment. When incarceration results in the sudden loss of a family member's income, households are often compelled to adopt immediate coping strategies to meet basic living expenses. These strategies typically include borrowing from relatives, relying on community-based support networks, or seeking credit from informal lenders. While such mechanisms may provide short-term relief, they frequently initiate a cycle of indebtedness that extends well beyond the period of incarceration [44].

As illustrated in Figure 2, the proportion of families experiencing debt increases progressively over time following short-term imprisonment. The figure demonstrates that although debt may initially affect a smaller percentage of households immediately after incarceration, its prevalence rises significantly within the first six months and continues to grow one year after release. This trend suggests that the economic consequences of short-term imprisonment are cumulative rather than temporary, transforming an ostensibly limited sanction into a source of sustained financial vulnerability [45].

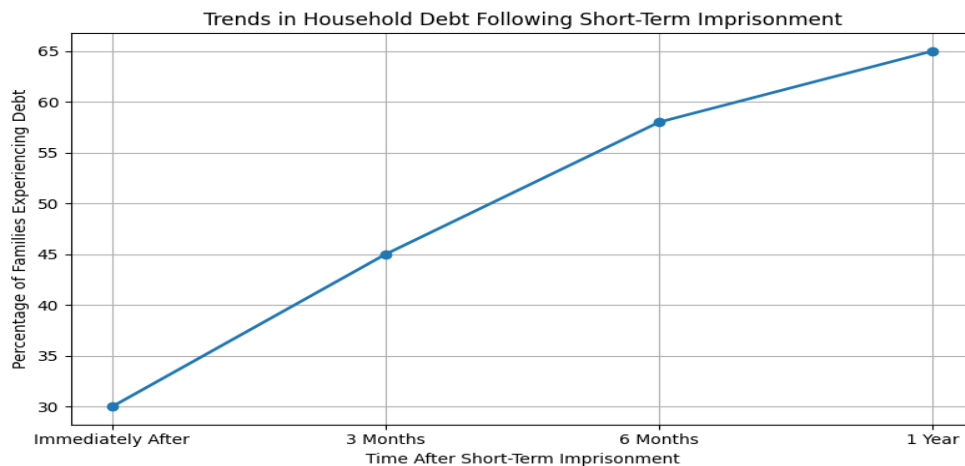


Figure 2. Trends in Household Debt Following Short-Term Imprisonment

The persistence of household debt has direct implications for economic autonomy and long-term family stability. As debt obligations accumulate, families are forced to allocate an increasing share of their limited resources toward repayment, thereby reducing their capacity to save or invest [46]. This erosion of financial resilience limits households' ability to respond to future economic shocks and increases their dependence on external assistance. From a criminal policy perspective, such outcomes undermine the objective of social reintegration, as economic insecurity may hinder both the offender's reintegration into the labor market and the family's overall social stability [47].

Moreover, prolonged financial dependency heightens the risk of intergenerational poverty. As shown indirectly by the upward trend in Figure 2, sustained indebtedness restricts families' capacity to invest in education, vocational training, and skill development for younger members. These constraints may reduce long-term economic mobility and perpetuate cycles of disadvantage. Consequently, the findings indicate that short-term imprisonment carries high hidden economic costs that challenge its effectiveness and raise serious concerns regarding its compatibility with principles of economic sustainability and social justice [48].

5. Evaluation in Light of Islamic Jurisprudential Principles

From the perspective of Islamic jurisprudence, the findings of this study reveal a significant tension between the extensive use of short-term imprisonment and the fundamental objectives of Islamic law (*Maqāṣid al-Sharī'a*). Among the core objectives of Islamic law are the preservation of wealth, the protection of family cohesion, and the prevention of undue hardship. The economic consequences associated with short-term custodial sentences, particularly the disruption of household income and the destabilization of family welfare, indicate that these objectives are frequently compromised in practice [49].

Islamic jurisprudence acknowledges imprisonment as a form of discretionary punishment (*ta'zīr*), rather than a fixed or mandatory sanction. As such, its application is subject to strict evaluative criteria, including the realization of public interest (*maṣlaḥa*) and the avoidance of harm. Juristic principles emphasize that punishment should not produce consequences more harmful than the offense itself, nor should it extend unjustly to individuals other than the offender [50]. The findings of this study suggest that short-term imprisonment often fails to meet these criteria, as the resulting economic harm is disproportionately borne by the offender's family, who bear no legal or moral responsibility for the criminal act [51].

Furthermore, the principle of harm prevention (*dar' al-mafāsid*) occupies a central position in Islamic legal reasoning. When a sanction generates widespread and foreseeable harm, such as long-term financial dependency and family impoverishment, its legitimacy becomes questionable, particularly when less harmful alternatives are available. In this regard, Islamic jurisprudential thought increasingly supports the use of alternative sanctions within the scope of *ta'zīr*, provided they achieve deterrence and social order without undermining family stability or economic security [52].

Accordingly, the results of this study reinforce the argument that the routine use of short-term imprisonment requires careful reconsideration within an Islamic jurisprudential framework. A penal approach that aligns more closely with the objectives of Islamic law would prioritize proportionality, social welfare, and the protection of families from collateral harm, thereby ensuring that justice is achieved without compromising fundamental ethical and economic values [53].

Overall, the findings discussed in this section demonstrate that short-term imprisonment under Egyptian penal law does not confine its effects to the limited scope intended by the legislature, but in practice generates deep and lasting economic and social

consequences that directly affect the family. Although this type of punishment is legally conceived as a sanction of limited duration and impact, empirical reality reveals severe economic repercussions, including the loss of regular income, disruption of employment opportunities, and deterioration of the offender's occupational stability. In addition, families are often compelled to shoulder increased financial burdens, which in many cases lead to borrowing, the accumulation of debt, and eventual long-term financial dependence on relatives, charitable assistance, or social welfare mechanisms. Collectively, these outcomes weaken the family's economic security, threaten its ability to meet basic needs, and undermine overall family stability. Such conditions negatively affect the prospects for the offender's social reintegration following release, transforming short-term imprisonment from a corrective and deterrent measure into a factor that perpetuates broader social and economic problems. Moreover, these consequences impose indirect costs on society as a whole, manifested in rising levels of poverty and economic vulnerability, as well as increased pressure on social protection systems. This reality raises fundamental questions regarding the effectiveness, proportionality, and rationality of short-term custodial sentences as a penal policy tool. When these findings are assessed in light of Islamic jurisprudential principles and its overarching objectives, particularly the preservation of wealth, the protection of family stability, and the prevention of harm, it becomes evident that the negative effects associated with short-term imprisonment conflict with the spirit of maqāsid-based justice, which seeks to realize benefit and minimize harm. Accordingly, the cumulative results underscore the necessity of adopting a more balanced penal approach that prioritizes substantive justice over formal punishment. This entails reassessing the routine reliance on short-term imprisonment and expanding the use of alternative sanctions that are less damaging and more responsive to social realities. Such alternatives are better aligned with the demands of social justice, economic sustainability, and the ethical and normative foundations underlying both positive law and Islamic jurisprudence, thereby contributing to the protection of individuals, families, and society as an integrated whole.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined short-term imprisonment under Egyptian penal law through a combined legal, socio-economic, and Islamic jurisprudential lens, with particular emphasis on its impact on family economic security. The analysis demonstrates that short-term custodial sentences, despite their frequent use, raise serious concerns regarding their effectiveness, proportionality, and broader social implications. Rather than functioning as a limited and corrective sanction, short-term imprisonment often produces consequences that extend beyond the offender and adversely affect the economic stability of the family as a whole. The findings highlight that family economic security is a critical yet often overlooked dimension of criminal justice policy. Income disruption, employment instability, and the accumulation of household debt represent structural outcomes that weaken families' capacity to maintain social stability and economic resilience. These effects are not incidental but are closely linked to the nature of short-term imprisonment itself, which removes economically active individuals from the labor market without providing meaningful opportunities for rehabilitation or reintegration. As a result, the sanction may inadvertently contribute to cycles of vulnerability and social exclusion. From a jurisprudential perspective, the study underscores the importance of aligning penal practices with the objectives of Islamic law, particularly the preservation of wealth, the protection of family cohesion, and the prevention of harm. While Islamic jurisprudence permits imprisonment as a discretionary punishment, its legitimacy depends on achieving public interest and minimizing negative consequences. The economic harm identified in this research suggests that the extensive use of short-term imprisonment requires careful reassessment when measured against these normative standards. In light of these considerations, the study supports a more balanced and context-sensitive approach to

criminal punishment. Greater reliance on alternative sanctions that preserve economic productivity and family stability may better serve the objectives of justice, deterrence, and social welfare. Ultimately, rethinking the role of short-term imprisonment within Egyptian penal policy is essential for developing a criminal justice system that is both effective and responsive to the social and economic realities of contemporary society.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the Department of Sharia and Law, Faculty of Islamic and Arabic Studies, Al-Azhar University, Egypt, for its academic support and scholarly environment. Special appreciation is extended to the faculty members for their valuable guidance, constructive feedback, and continuous encouragement, which greatly contributed to the development and completion of this research.

Author Contribution

Mofida Ahmed solely contributed to the conception, design, analysis, and writing of this study.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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