

REHABILITATION OF WOMEN PRISONERS IN THE STATE OF U.P: POLICY AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

The Model Prison Manual provides rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners into society as one of the goals of the Indian criminal Justice system. Presently offenders are imprisoned not only for punishment, deterrence and incapacitation but also for rehabilitation and reintegration. This approach requires prisons to be managed not as a punitive rather as a correctional institute whereby different opportunities like vocational training, educational and employment opportunities, facilities for physical and mental health care are provided to all the prisoners so that they come out of prison as a law-abiding citizen. Rehabilitation is necessary not only for the prisoners but also for the entire community. Prisons were primarily designed for male prisoners where needs of women prisoners were ignored. Women constitute a small percentage of the entire prison population of India, so their rehabilitation is quite an ignored area of the prison administration. This paper seeks to analyse the opportunities of rehabilitation available to women prisoners in the state of U.P through an empirical study conducted in the four jails of Meerut zone of U.P and make some suggestions to facilitate better rehabilitation of women prisoners in the state of U.P.

Keywords : Rehabilitation, women prisoners, criminal Justice system.

Introduction

Model Prison Manual of India 2016 states rehabilitation of prisoners as one of the primary goals of prison administration in India. Rehabilitation of prisoners primarily means helping the prisoners to reintegrate into society so that after release, they must feel free to be a part of society(Gupta, 2019).The Indian criminal justice system stands for reforming and rehabilitating prisoners (R. Thilagraj, 2013). Rehabilitation is a condition where the person punished is no longer desirous of committing the same set of actions for which he was punished (Kamthan, 2018). Theory of rehabilitation aims at reducing recidivism by focusing on the reintegration of the offender into the mainstream of social life(Laxminath, 2006).Process of rehabilitation is

not all about behaviour change instead it culminate within itself all the efforts to take out the guilt from the mind of the offender of being an offender and facilitate his acceptance in the community as a general person((Nascimento, Andrade, & de Castro Rodrigues, 2023)) Present prison system of India follows rehabilitation approach which give importance to human dignity and social and behavioural needs of the prisoners(Mukherjee, 2004). It works with the aim of helping prisoners in returning to their normal life ((Larijani & Sorkhkoleh, 2024) Rehabilitation of prisoners requires some good practices to be present in inside the prisons for the well being of the prisoners. India Justice Report, 2025, reiterates that programmes offering rehabilitation and reintegration facilities to prisoners are an integral part of the prison system of India. Denial of rehabilitation is an implicit reflection of the lack of concern for the future life of the offender, and all this amounts to acceptance to the side effects that the prison institution creates in the life of a prisoner. It is necessary to develop meaningful rehabilitation programmes to respond to the socially damaging condition of prisoners (Rotman, 1986). Rehabilitation of prisoners is necessary not only for the prisoners but for society as well as it leads to reduced recidivism.

International standards also asserts that he prison system should work for the reformation and rehabilitation of the prisoners (ICCPR). The Aim of imprisonment as a form of punishment is to provide protection to society against crime and reduce recidivism.

Rehabilitation process is made up of several treatment including psychiatric therapy, vocational training and other techniques for the modification of behaviour (A. Laxminath, 2006). Education, vocational training and employability during incarceration are some of the primary means for ensuring effective rehabilitation program (UNDOC, 2021). Rehabilitation programmes provides for addressing the root cause of criminal behaviour of an individual by facilitating him with educational, vocational and therapeutic programs(Sridhar, 2023) Prisoners must be offered appropriate education, vocational training and work opportunities and other form of assistance which is required for effective rehabilitation. Rehabilitation programmes and other activities must be curated as per the need of individual prisoners(United Nations, 2015).

Rex Martin Argues for the availability of education and work opportunities as key components of the rehabilitation of prisoners(1990) Rehabilitation is influenced by the idea that every individual has their dignity which must be respected as well as the social obligation of the state to reform him and not just to keep him away from the society to prevent him from committing the crime again. Rehabilitation of the offenders requires well organised programs and well trained staff to correct the criminal behaviour of the individual(Meyer, 1968) Sabita Mishra Sabita Mishra believes Vocational and institutional training are first steps towards rehabilitation of prisoners. Prisoners must be provided with adequate opportunities for vocational activities to keep them busy((Mohanty, 2013)

Though Indian prisons exist for the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners into the society but this goal has lost somewhere due to several administrative and legislative issues. There is a wide gap between the theory and the practice that exists in reality. Reality is much worse in case of women prisoners.

Women prisoners constitute only 4.1% of the entire prisoner population of India. Historically prisons were structured for males and even today prison institutes do not try to incorporate the fulfilment of basic needs of women prisoners (Borah ,2021) The exclusion that women have to undergo in society due to gender bias and economic inequality, continues in jail as well. In fact exclusion that female prisoners have to undergo inside

the jail is the reflection of the discrimination that she suffers in the society(Beichner & Hagemann, 2022)
Women prisoners lack rehabilitation facilities(Kaushik & Sharma, 2009)

Women prisoners usually get little or no support from the family members whereas in case of male prisoners families are going to any extent to support them and get them released from jail. If women inmate is a mother she suffers more mental anxieties as now she is not allowed to her own children. When a women is committing a crime families are portraying her a criminal and a bad women but it is not so in case of commission of crime by a male. Male is always a father but a female is immediately tagged as a bad mother by the society and family. Female prisoners are always longing to meet their kids and denial of such meetings are putting them in distress and feeling of sadness(Sapra, 2023).

Female prisoners have to face several challenges in comparison to their male counterparts. Female lose all family support as soon as she is accused of a crime, which is not so in case of male prisoners. Families are not willing to visit female offenders as they look at her as a evil. Eroding family relations is one such factor which is more affecting the mental health of the female prisoners (Kaur & Roy, 2021)

An effective rehabilitation plan needs to be gender sensitive. They should be able to target the specific needs and root cause of the criminal behaviour of women prisoners. Histories of violence, Mental health issues, stigma, and social rejections, especially as mothers and caregivers, are some of the unique challenges that hamper the rehabilitation of women prisoners (Penal Reform International, 2020). Prisons were primarily designed for male offenders and that's the reason that administration is highly ignorant towards the needs of the female prisoners. Our prison system is not equipped to cater to the specific needs of the women offenders. All that results in difficulties in the rehabilitation of women prisoners. Our prison system lacks gender specific general needs of the women prisoners, reality is even worse in case of rehabilitation programs for the women prisoners. The reasons behind the committal of crime are different for males and females. Therefore, it becomes necessary for the prison staff to provide certain special programs and facilities for their better reintegration into society as an employable individual (John, 2020)

International standards assert it very clearly that prison system must be rehabilitative and it must take into consideration the gender specific needs of female prisoners for their better reintegration into society Bangkok rules also recognises rehabilitation as a measure of reducing reoffending. It provides for special training of staff to understand the specific requirements of women prisoners for better rehabilitation.

Objective and Methodology

The following are the objective of this study

- To study the gap between the policy and practice existing in the prisons of UP for the rehabilitation of women prisoners.
- To suggest some of the best practices for ensuring the rehabilitation and reintegration of women prisoners.

Methodology

The present study is a combination of qualitative and empirical research. Qualitative methods were used to assess the legal framework existing for the rehabilitation of prisoners. empirical method was adopted to gain knowledge about the gap between the legal framework and the practice that exists in the jails of UP for the rehabilitation of women prisoners. Jails are divided into nine zones in the state of U.P. for better administration and management.

For collecting data about the implementation of the measures of rehabilitation of the women prisoners in the state of U.P Meerut Zone was selected by way of the Random sampling method.

Out of 7 jails in the Meerut zone of U.P, the researcher purposively selected 4 jails based on the population of women prisoners in them. On that basis, the present study was conducted in the Jails of Meerut, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr, and Gautam Budh Nagar. There were around women prisoners in these 4 jails of the U.P. Out of 280 women prisoners 150 agreed and were interviewed by way of a structured questionnaire. In addition to that observation method was also used for getting an in-depth analysis of the administration of these jails. Secondary data was collected through several books, journals and manuals.

Before interviewing informed consent of each of the participating women prisoners was obtained by informing them that information provided by them will be used only for the purpose of the research. They were also informed about their liberty to withdraw themselves from the study any time. Response provided by each of the inmate have been anonymised.

Policy and Practice: Rehabilitation of women prisoners in the State of U.P

Educational and Vocational Training

Education constitutes one of the most important aspects of rehabilitation services offered to prisoners. Education has positive impact on recidivism(UN Special Repporteur)Education becomes even more important as 65% of the prison population in India is poorly Educated. Model prison Manual makes it compulsory for the prison administration to provide education to illiterate young offenders and adult prisoners. Prison should provide to its prisoner's basic facilities like classrooms, libraries and trained educational staff. Indian prisoner administration is lacking in providing qualified teachers to provide education to prisoners. one of the important hindrance in educational opportunities is lack of willingness amongst the female prisoners regarding studies as they want to get themselves engaged in something by which they are able to get money and have some financial independence.

The model prison manual (2016) accepts education to be vital factor in promoting the rehabilitation of the prisoners. Education has the capacity to reduce the criminal tendency of prisoners and it can lead to development of mental and physical faculties of the prisoners. It obligates the state government to provide facilities for education, vocational training, libraries, and recreational activities for prisoners. Educational personnel will be responsible for offering a comprehensive education programme to prisoners. For the purpose of facilitating education to prisoners, they shall be provided with a trained educational staff, classrooms and a library.

U.P Prison manual recommends offering a suitable educational plan which has the potential to increase her employment prospects to every women prisoner during her imprisonment (Rule 320, UP Prison Manual). Manual offers education as one of the compulsory activity for at least an hour a day for women prisoner. Most Indian prisons have failed to skill up even 10 percent of their prisoners(India Justice Report, 2022). The State of Uttar Pradesh spends only 51 rupees daily on food, something medical facilities, and educational facilities for its prisoners.

In the field study it was found that there is no educational staff in any the prisons. Only 3-4 women prisoners were found to be engaged in such educational activity. When women prisoners were asked how they spent their day at prison, most said they had nothing concrete to do during the day. Libraries have been set up in these jails just for the name's sake. In the name of the library, there is a small room with just an almirah where

only a few books are kept, with no table and chairs. Only Meerut jail is offering its women prison inmates a chance to study by providing them an opportunity to learn to write their name and other basic things, that too not by an educational staff. It was being offered by one of the female prisoners herself.

Model prison manual(2016) provides state shall strive to provide vocational training to its prisoners to equip them with work skill and work habits to facilitate their rehabilitation. Vocational training shall be one of the essential features of correctional programmes. Prison authorities shall not exercise any discrimination while offering vocational training

Vocational training provided to prisoners must follow the labour market trend. Programmes must be selected considering the type of jobs they are likely to be offered. Gender stereotypes must be avoided while offering vocational training to female prisoners. New avenues must be explored apart from traditional activities like embroidery, cooking, hairdressing, etc

In all four jails, vocational activities are provided, but just for the sake of the name. Vocational activities must be designed as per the interest of the women prisoner but in all the jails visited everywhere only 4 categories were available like beauty parlour, swing machine and computers. Vocational activities are not primarily designed keeping in mind the needs of the women prisoners. Regarding computer education, most of the women prisoners are not able to read and write English, so it is of no use. One of the women during interview said “ *Hum padhe likhe nahi hai to computer chalan kaise sikhe*”)I am not literate how can I learn to operate computer. Every women prisoner must get a fair chance to learn something to earn. Chairs in parlour were broken. 10-25 sewing machines are catering to 70-100 women prisoners in the jail of Dasna.

In the Bulandshahr female prisoners were given fabric to make some dresses but no one was interested to do this. One female prisoner who knew stitching was engaged in stitching dresses for other female prisoners against a payment. It was only in the jail of Dasna that female prisoners were getting some sewing work from outside for which they were paid per piece.

In all the four jails of investigation there was no qualified teacher to teach them. It was only in Meerut jail that one female prisoner was involved in teaching other interested female prisoners writing their name and basic reading and writing.

Employment opportunities

Stepping out of prison with no money in hand is one of the factors that may lead to reoffending by the women. This becomes more pertinent in cases where women prisoner in question is one who came in prison as a result of the commission of some economic offence (Olivia, 2022) (Bhandari, 2016) in her study found that generally female prisoners are financially dependent and they are not able to seek any help from their families. Families are not accepting her after her release, his kids have grown up and do not accept her, and her husband might have married someone else.

As per the prison manual, it is the right of every prisoner to get wages for whatever work they do in prison. There shall be no discrimination in the payment of wages based on gender. In the field study, it was found that women prisoners are not getting paid for every kind of work. A female prisoner informed she is engaged in cleaning work and does not get paid. She said “ *Yaha bus khana khane walo ko paisa milta hai, mai safai ka kaam karti hu mughe kuch nhi milta*”. Women who are engaged in cooking receive 75 rupees per day. Apart from that, women prisoners do not get any opportunity to earn from outside work, which comes from outside the prison. Most of the women prisoners shared that they should also get some employment to support

themselves. For how long we will be depending on our family members.

Medical facilities

Identification of health issues, physical or mental and their timely treatment are the key to successful rehabilitation. Individual programmes must be initiated to provide special care to the prisoners who are undergoing some mental health issue. (Penal Reform International, 2020). It is necessary to identify the health issue in the beginning of the imprisonment and cure it through medication or other therapies. Right to health encompasses the right to the highest attainable health for every person. UN provides for AAAQ framework for securing a better right to health. It is the duty of the state to make the right to health available, accessible, acceptable, and of good quality (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2000). Female prisoners have a greater risk of having health problems in comparison to those females who are not incarcerated. They have to undergo several health-related risks like mental health issues, drug abuse, communicable disease, etc, but they always have limited access to medical facilities (Bhandari, 2016)

The Government shall appoint a chief medical officer for every prison, and they will be responsible for visiting the prison daily, including Sundays and holidays. He will also be responsible for conducting a monthly medical examination of every prisoner.

In the study, it was found that no medical officer visits the prison daily. As per the female prisoners interviewed, a medical officer visits the prison once a week. Regarding the gynaecologist, it was informed that we have no frequent visits. *She will come as per the requirement or once in a month.*

Mental Health Care Facilities

Mohanty asserts that mental health issues are much higher in women prisoners than in male prisoners and the general population. Poor health condition during incarceration is negatively linked with the successful re-entry of women prisoners into society (Fullmer et al., 2022)

Mental illness may have various side effects post-release, such as unemployability and difficulty finding housing (Edgemon & Clay-Warner, 2019). As per the latest India Justice report, there is a recurrent increase in the number of prisoners suffering from mental health issues. Women being the primary caregiver in the family, incarceration leads to separation of mother and the child which is one of the major causes of depression, anxiety and other mental health issues (Levi et al., 2024)

Model prison manual provides for the attendance of prisoners suffering from mental health issues by an authorised medical attendant. It also mandates for the counselling of a prisoner suffering from a mental health issue by a professionally qualified counsellor. Proper evaluation of the mental health of the prisoners must be conducted to provide them adequate support. It forbids the admission of female prisoners who need medical treatment to prison rather she should be kept in mental health hospital.

In the study it was found that there is only one psychiatrist who visits them as per the need and in some cases, they said he visits once a month. Out of 150 women prisoners, 100 women responded that they are not visited by a psychiatrist regularly. There is no evaluation of the mental health of the women prisoners present in each of the jails of the study.

One of the women prisoners said visits to a psychiatrist depend on the needs of the prisoners (*Dimag ka doctor jab jarurat hoti hai tab aata hai*). How that need is identified by the prison staff is a question itself. One of the women prisoners was very much willing to meet her only daughter, and she shared I am losing my mental balance now. Prison staff shared that whenever she saw a girl child of other female prisoners, she wanted to

kill that child because of her mental imbalance. Upon asking about the treatment, prison official said we consoled her on our own and now everything is fine. Prison officials are also playing the role of mental health professionals. There is no system of counselling by a mental health professional

Accommodation

Prisoners should be provided with decent accommodation. Most of the prisons in India are overcrowded. Overcrowded prisons are directly connected with poor rehabilitation, as these prisons do provide limited access to resources for the prisoners (Nkosi & Maweni, 2020)

Out of 1314 prisons in India, 391 are overcrowded. Jails in the U.P. have been ranked the worst in terms of their occupancy ratio (Tata Trusts, 2023). Due to overcrowding, facilities for providing rehabilitation always remain unsatisfactory.

The manual prescribes three kinds of barracks to be there to house prisoners. There will be a barrack with the capacity of 20 prisoners. For prisoners who need privacy for studies there will be a single room and for keeping away the prisoners suffering from contagious disease there will be different cells.

In reality there is no such segregation of barrack. In all the jails of the study there were one or two barracks only for all the women prisoners. In my field study I found that all the 4 jails were overcrowded. I observed that women prisoners are provided only a mattress to sleep on, and they do not have any space to keep their personal belongings. They hang their belongings in bags on the wall above their sleeping area. In addition to that there was no separation amongst the convicted and undertrial women prisoners.

Family Connect

Connection with the family members has the potential impact on rehabilitation of the prisoners (Bangkok Rules, 2010) Lack of communication with the family members negatively impacts the mental health of the women prisoners (Penal Reform International, 2015- Women in criminal justice system and the added value of UN Bangkok Rules)

There are two systems of prison visits in the jails of UP i.e. closed and open. In the jails of DASNA and Gautam Budh Nagar prison visits are allowed through closed system where prisoners and family members are divided by a window in between them. Whereas in the jail of Meerut and Bulandsehar prisoners and family members can meet in an open area without any barrier between them.

Close meeting system has various problems as prisoners are not able to connect with their families in a congenial environment. Its like impossible to hear each other when several people are talking each other. Prisoners can't even share their problems with their family members.

As per rule 648 of the UP prison manual prisoners who are blood relatives or spouse and kept in the same jails they are allowed to each other once in a week as per the time and date decide by the superintendent. I was informed by few women prisoners that are allowed to meet their spouse inmate only for a duration of 20 minutes. One of the prison inmate who was interviewed said "*We are allowed to meet only for a period of 20 minutes which is too less to share everything, this time goes only in discussing the court etc.. "Bees minute bhaut kam samay hai, itna der to bus vakil ki baato me nikal jata hai hum apne man ki baat nahi kar sakte"*.

In all the four jails of U.P., there were only two telephones installed in a public area with no closure between them. Women prisoners at these jails feel that they cannot bring their hearts out to their family members because of no privacy while calling. Women prisoners are supposed to talk in open without any privacy. They are allowed to use that facility twice in a week by paying 1 rupee for a minute. Women prisoners also felt

despair about the permission to call only twice a week. One female prisoner said, “*I can't even cry. I am not able to pour out my feelings as there is no privacy while we use PCO facility. We are allowed to call only twice in a week only for five minutes.*”

The manual permits states to decide upon the rules for the communications of prisoners with family members. Consequently UP prison manual mandates e-mulakat for every jail but in the area of the study none of the jails have the provision of e-mulakat. Women prisoners longs to see their child. One female prisoners informed the participant that “*My family is from kerela, due to high travelling cost they are not able to visit her frequently. Its been six months since she has not seen her kids. It would be of great help if video call could be arranged once in a week with her child.*”

Conclusions and Suggestion

Rehabilitation facilities available in the state of U.P. are not so relevant to the needs of women prisoners. Educational opportunities need a revamp. Female educational staff are missing despite a clear mandate. There is lack of standards for evaluating the success of educational and vocational activities. Some benchmark should be placed so that quality and impact can be measured. Prison staff must be motivated enough to provide education to prisoners. Prison staff should be actively participating in encouraging them to be a part of these educational programs.

The available vocational activities are insufficient to meet the needs of female prisoners. It is required to create and provide certain programmes as per their needs to give them better opportunities for reintegration after release. The vocational programs provided are outdated and unable to offer any assistance to them outside of prison. A shift is required from traditional programs to something in the trend that can help them in getting some employment after release.

Lack of medical facilities is a big issue as women prisoners have to wait for a long time to get medical assistance. Women prisoners have lots of health issues that need to be addressed. Mental health issues are also much higher in the female prisoners. They need counselling for proper redressal of their mental health issue otherwise they might get a rejection from family members. Prison staff must be provided with mental health education so to help them in understanding the mental health issues of the prisoners. Prison officials must be promoted to develop an empathetic approach towards the needs and vulnerability of the prisoners(Irish Prison Service). It will also escalate the availability of the immediate care in case any mental health issues to the women prisoners(Ann-Marie Bright, Agnes Higgins and Annmarie Grealish, 2022).

Accommodation facilities can be made better by providing them more space. It's very difficult in an overcrowded place, especially in such a dingy environment where you can see only bags on the wall.

Communication is the key component of rehabilitation as it allows them to vent out their feelings and problems and thereby save themselves from mental health crises. Prison administration must work for a better connection between female prisoners and family members.

Following suggestions can be implemented within the state of U.P to make effective rehabilitation of women prisoners:

1. Prison administration must try to get a full-time physician and gynaecologist for women prisoners. Apart from that, specialist doctors must be made available on weekly basis.

2. Special session must be regularly organised by the state government for prison staff and other officers to make them empathetic towards the needs of the women prisoners.
3. Mulakaat must be allowed through open system whereby women prisoners can meet their family members and kids in an open area. E-mulakat must be made effective in all the prisons.
4. Women prisoners must be allowed to make a video call to their kids once in a week at least.
5. Prison administration must try to get some work for women prisoners from which they can earn money. If they will start earning inside the jail after learning some skill, they will have a motivation to the same work outside prison and earn money.
6. To keep their mental health better yoga and other sort of activities must be organised in regular basis.
7. Vocational training must be designed to make them skilled in some demanding area outside prison.

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