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VOCATIONAL TRAINING TO EMPOWER INCARCERATED WOMEN: UNLOCKING THE POTENTIALS BEHIND THE BARS

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ABSTRACT

This research study is designed to examine the effects of vocational training on the empowerment of women prisoners and the significant effects of vocational education on the socio-economic empowerment of female convicts. The study collects and analyses data using a qualitative research approach. The sample consists of 18 female prisoners enrolled in vocational education programs offered by Karachi, Sind, Pakistan's correctional facilities and services. The material was collected through interviews and then reviewed thematically. Findings demonstrated that Karachi's correctional institutions and services provide all academic and vocational training possibilities for women to assist prisoners in developing their skills and preparing them for life outside of prison. It is suggested that courses be held in Karachi's Central Prison for women to develop more skills to empower them and address their psychological and emotional needs.

1. INTRODUCTION

Prison is supposed to provide correctional facilities to women who have already been facing enough torture outside of jail. The manipulation of female inmates during incarceration has never been carried to resolve in any Criminal Justice Court (Bucerius & Sandberg, 2022). Male-dominated society still exists in our well-developed countries, then what about the developing and under-developed countries? What is their behaviour while dealing with the matter of their female inmates? It seems like gender is a tool to dominate and create control over women in a patriarchal society (McFadden, 2015).

According to the United Nations convention, education provided in the prison settings must be per the country's education system so prisoners can continue education after release. The United Nations Convention reported that female inmates belonging to disadvantaged and marginalized societies are less likely to be employed in imprisonment settings than their male counterparts. According to the report, many female prisoners are the victims of domestic violence and bear it only because of their dependency on males in return for taking on economic expenses (UNODC, 2014; Cale et al., 2018).

Roy Walmsley conducted and assembled the study, which was released by Birkbeck University of London's Institute of Criminal Policy study (Fair & Walmsley, 2021). According to the World Female Imprisonment list, around 714,000 women and girls are confined in correctional and prison facilities worldwide. Female inmates are not safe in prisons either because the guards pose the same threats to them (Tony & Bucerius, 2022).

It has been found from the research studies that providing imprisonment training makes the inmates efficient and capable of finding jobs in their area of expertise. Finding a job is the most reported problem by the released prisoners to restart their everyday life, which encourages the inmates not to commit any crime again; earning themselves increases their sense of self-esteem (Lashari, Umrani, Burrio, 2021, Lashari et al., 2023) which results in a positive impact on their selves, society and the stakeholders from where those prisoners belong, the previous studies have noted that getting a job after release gives a mechanism of self-esteem and responsibility towards the people with they related to, which help them to live and update their lifestyle flawlessly (Shoham et al., 2017).

Research Questions

- How does vocational education support female prisoners in improving their social life?
- How does vocational education support female prisoners in improving their economic life?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are still communities where women struggle to survive and endure severe physical and psychological abuse. When women speak out against decades of extreme pressure they can no longer endure, they are labelled as dishonoured or impolite. This mental, physical, and financial dependence drives them to commit crimes to survive, but Yes! From the viewpoint of the law, it is incorrect

manner (Rizvi, 2019). Female criminals might be encouraged by correctional education or institutions to stubbornly advocate for their needs and rights (Richardie, 2001). Johnson believes jails serve as temporary holding facilities before releasing convicts. He wants to propose a suitable prison as retribution for the government. According to him, a person serving a lengthy sentence must return to the real world of nature (Alvi, 2018; McDonald, 2006).

Female prisoners need to maintain their social life because of giving birth to a child and its impact on nature and nurture. Child development is the top concern; female convicts must retain more social interaction with the outside world than male prisoners. For their children to be respected by society and develop into respectable members, they must integrate them into society (Bartlett & Hollins, 2018).

Blitz conducted a survey (2006) which reported that the female prisoners treated for mental and physical health issues have stable jobs. Treatment is a crucial factor in employment because prisoners who never get any treatment face unproductive employment experiences.

Financial disability is the major challenge they face during their imprisonment and after release. Economics is a giant factor that gives rise to many other factors, including crime and social abuse. Sudden loss of income due to the incarceration of a prominent family member causes the immediate interruption of income and social injustice. Alternatively, the whole family must live in poverty when the central income-generating family member gets imprisoned or sudden death. It is a severe problem, especially in developing countries where the state or government does not financially support their citizens. The expense burden increases because hiring lawyers, visiting courts, and feeding the other dependent family members make it difficult for the family to survive (Dickie, 2013). If someone is imprisoned and his/her family is facing financial hardships, they can appeal for financial support to the court (Mygov, 2018; Rand, 2013) in developing countries, but developing and underdeveloped countries do not have such policies to govern and support such deserving families within the state.

Prisoners benefit through their earnings by learning within the jail environment with the help of their cognitive and physical power (Mohammed & Wan Mohammed, 2015; Zoukis, 2020; Khan, Lashari & Iqbal, 2022). In such cases, vocational training is the only way to empower women, even in jails. Vocational education programs empower (Ahmed, Lashari, 2022) man particularly prisoners and help restore their self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of being responsible state citizens. Financial means of earning and living a standard life always discourage corruption and crime. Because of the monetary security, they will be aware that their negligence in breaking the law can cause problems for their families and make it difficult for them to subsist. They get strong enough, as a result, to wish to modify their behaviour for the better and regain their freedom and independence.

A study was done on the pre- and post-incarceration conditions of the inmates. According to the study (Bushway, 2003), prisoners without jobs were more likely to commit crimes again and end up in jail, but when prisons give inmates

a chance to develop their talents and lead respectable lives, the likelihood that they will commit crimes again and end up in jail is lower.

Many Western countries are working on developing and adapting the new and diverse nature of the educational and vocational programs specifically for the prisoners so that when they get released from prisons, prisoners feel a sense of responsibility and are responsible citizens of the country by earning their livelihood. An excellent earning life will help them have a good lifestyle and also help improve their living standard and self-esteem (Efrat Shoham et al., 2017; Khan, Lashari & Iqbal, 2022; Zehra, Lashari & Naz, 2023).

Findings of a few previous studies show that there is much less probability of integrating inmates into the crime line again; imprisonment training programs are the source of fighting against depression and help the prisoners live their lives pleasantly by earning from their skills (Shoham et al., 2017; Khan, Lashari & Iqbal, 2022)

The gap this study is fulfilling is knowing whether there is a change in prisoners' lives by receiving such correctional facilities. The study has focused on the prisoners' points of view, their experiences, and the life they are spending there.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

A qualitative research approach has been adopted in this research study. The target population is the female prisoners of Central Prison and Correctional Facilities for Women in Karachi. Prisoners who participate in the vocational training programs in the prisoned premises have been selected. The sample comprises female prisoners getting vocational education during their incarceration; approximately 28 female prisoners out of 44 are selected as a study sample. The researcher collected data only from the respondents enrolled in any vocational education programs on the prison premises. Data is collected after getting consent for their (respondents) participation. The purposive sampling method is used to select samples. An open-ended interview questionnaire has been used as a tool for data collection. Thematic analysis method of analysing qualitative data has been used to analyse the responses collected from the respondents. By following ethical considerations, permissions were sought from concerned departments. All ethical guidelines were followed to record the interviews and ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the data.

RESULTS

The study analyses the data using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2012). The interviews were recorded and transcribed following the protocols (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The themes were drawn objectively to understand the phenomena.

Accessibility to Vocational Education in Central Jail Karachi

Accessibility to vocational education was easy in the female prison. The jail authorities offer multiple vocational training programs with the collaboration of stakeholders like NGOs. Some of the teachers and trainers are assigned there by the NGOs. It was found that NGOs started certification courses to train the women in prison to make them able to earn money within the jails.

One of the leading vocational training programs is tailoring. There are tailor masters who train to develop skills in women, and the maximum number of female inmates actively participate in the classes in prison. Many of them have learnt to stitch, cut, and sew. They have successfully earned their certificates and are teaching their fellow inmates to make them more skilled, one of the respondents revealed,

R1: *"We are allowed to participate in any offered courses, without discriminating against inmates based on race or caste; jail authoritative staff convince us to enrol as it will benefit us. We are allowed to ask questions about any query regarding the course from the instructor."*

A healthy atmosphere fosters a healthy mind, the jail environment is healthy, and all the inmates collaborate during their free time. All the imprisoned women are allowed and have access to develop their skills with the help of vocational centres available within the jail boundaries to facilitate the prisoners' skills.

Access to IT-Based Courses

Many prisoners are illiterate and eager to learn computers, but they do not even know the computer alphabet, according to one of the respondents who mentioned that there is a computer lab in the bar where scheduled classes are held every day, and instructors are assigned to teach those basic and advanced computer skills.

R2: *"I am not educated.... aaaa I cannot read and write, but my computer teacher is teaching me how to use a computer, and my teacher has told me the names of different computer devices, for example, Monitor, CPU, Laptop, Mouse, Keyboard, etc..... now I can teach my children when I will be released from here."*

Respondent shared that Vocational Education centres in a Central Prison and Correctional Facilities for women in Karachi. I.T. or computer expertise is essential in the current technologically advanced society, and the prisoner learning facilities in the computer lab are enough. We should not deny access to this technology to inmates most in need. The I.T. lab was in good condition for the imprisoned women and those interested in participating and learning; then, there were no boundaries.

Access to Other Vocational Skills Centers

It has been observed that there are beauty parlour training courses to help the prisoners develop their skills and be economically empowered after their release. Having a program like a beautician that teaches prisoners how to groom and maintain themselves is beneficial—having such a course helps them to provide services and earn money. Several respondents appeared to be pleased with their beautician course. They discussed their experiences picking up beauty advice. Among them, one of the respondents said,

R3: *I have learned how to do facials, manicures, pedicures, thread work, etc. She said, "My instructor is beneficial. She always helped me whenever I needed her guidance.*

A beauty salon is available to teach prisoners the finest ways to groom themselves. Self-care is a constant requirement for each person, male or female. Learning in this program seems to have satisfied the prisoners.

Embroidery or Moti/Pearl work is another beautiful skill to learn in prison to earn money for life in bars. Inmates who were enrolled showed some handmade bracelets, necklaces, etc. Those were extremely beautiful and eye-catching, one of the prisoners revealed,

R4: *"There is no way here to earn through these skills. Although we want to display our work, we want to show the people outside that we are very skilled so that people can help and support us by purchasing our handmade goods. We are dependent on the family during this incarceration period. Our families financially support us, but we, skilled women, should not be burdened on our families as they have many other things to spend on."*

It has been analysed during a visit to the prison that inmates are making ready beautiful things through learning these skills. It will be very fruitful for the prisoners to portray their skills and work that can help them rehabilitate and motivate even more rapidly.

Social Empowerment

One of the primary purposes of providing Vocational Education to prisoners is to make them socially empowered to rebuild and regain their lives. One of the representatives from management shared that the Karachi Prison rehabilitation program is doing its work fantastically; they provide certificates to the prisoners for completing every vocational program. On the certificates, there is no logo for Central Prison education; those certificates are from different NGOs.

Vocational Education has brought positivity to our lives; these are the words quoted from many of the inmates who were very exotic and hopeful about their social life after release. A prisoner who was an expert in tailoring was expressed, **R10:** *"I have command over stitching, cutting and sewing; I have decided to start my training centre whenever I am released. It has given me an identity, and I can live a social life by interacting with people for my earnings".*

She poorly exclaimed,

R10: *"I will have a social life because I will be skilful to earn and live an independent life.*

The prisoners sentenced to death are learning and accepting their realities and living life to empower themselves to be more skilful.

Two young sisters were 17 and 19 years of age; they were learning tailoring, taking beauty classes, and computer classes altogether, and those girls were found very hopeful about their life after release, as they have more skills now than before, they exotically shared. While sharing their experiences, these two girls seem more confident after learning and developing such skills.

Economic Empowerment

This disadvantaged population needs to be economically Empowered. The main moto/purpose of providing Vocational Education is to make the female independent so that she takes care of herself independently. She can support her family and protect the family from the evils of society.

The social barrier is a blockage between a prosperous life and a prisoner, but facing problems is courage. Vocational Education Programs are making inmates strong enough to break the barriers of society and live according to the wishes of individuals, one of the respondents revealed,

Transformation through Vocational Training

At the time of the interview with the prisoners, I met two more prisoners who were not a part of any Vocational Education program. I asked some questions about how life was going here, and one of them told me,

R 15: *"My life here is like living in my house; everything is the same. Even though we have more facilities here than at home, we do our daily routine work and sleep."*

Whereas the second one answered the same question, similar to the first one, when I started collecting data with the prisoners who were enrolled in the Vocational Training Programs, the prisoners seemed more satisfied and were efficiently discriminating their lives from before to now.

Prisoners who were already skilled but enrolled in any Vocational Training told me there would be no change in their lives. One reason for this is that they are already skilled, and they are earning through the skills they have; one of the participants, while interview unveiled,

R16: *"I was running my tailoring institute before coming here. Now, I am helping and teaching other jail fellows enrolled in this Vocational Training Program, and she will continue her same tailoring institution after release."*

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to empower jailed women and increase their chances of successful reintegration into society, we looked at the transformative potential of vocational training programmes for these women. The results discussed in this study shed light on the numerous advantages of such programmes and their consequences for detained women in prisons and society at large.

Prisoners benefit significantly from the vocational education programmes, including proper instruction, on-time trainers, and exams leading to NGO certification and other non-governmental organisations.

One of the main conclusions of this study is the significant empowerment vocational training gives imprisoned women. By providing practical skills, these programmes increase participants' feelings of self-worth, self-confidence, and personal agency. A sense of success that transcends the classroom and permeates different facets of a person's life can be fostered by learning and mastering new abilities in the controlled environment of a correctional facility. This newly discovered ability may act as a deterrent to additional unlawful activity.

There is a dearth of vocational education provided to prisoners. They are unable to put their goods up for sale in the marketplace. They rely entirely on the jail administration to buy or sell their handmade goods; therefore, they cannot accept orders from the market. There are no paid projects for the convicts taking computer classes to perform in order to earn money, and technical boards are not actively involved in the prison's Vocational Education programs.

According to our research, giving jailed women vocational training may help them successfully reintegrate into society. With marketable skills, these women are more likely to find lucrative jobs after release, lowering their dependency on criminal activity. Reducing the total recidivism rate benefits not just the people involved but society.

Vocational training programmes give imprisoned women significant psychological and emotional advantages and skill improvement. Learning new skills in a structured learning setting can improve self-efficacy, self-esteem, and general mental health. The cycle of criminal behaviour can be broken by implementing these beneficial psychological adjustments. Furthermore, the renewed sense of purpose and optimism brought forth by such programmes might motivate people to undergo personal change.

4. CONCLUSION

The Central Prison and Correctional Facilities for Women in Karachi had functioning courses. Many prisoners are enrolled and have all passed the required exams to obtain their certificates. No requirements or restrictions are placed on who can enrol in the vocational training programmes; all courses are free. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, training staff availability fluctuated; otherwise, training personnel was punctual and consistent. When the government made its official statement, educational facilities opened, and jail vocational education trainers arrived to begin their instruction and maintain the schedule of their training sessions.

Many prisoners in vocational education programmes are optimistic about their forthcoming social lives. According to what they said during the interview, vocational education will undoubtedly help them handle a rigid society with diversity in nature and attitude. They regret the crimes in which they either purposefully committed or unwittingly participated.

Their lives are being empowered by vocational education, and they will continue to be empowered in the future. Prisoners' primary source of revenue comes from their parents or families, and their only source of income is working for other prisoners. For instance, if a prisoner wants another to wash her clothes, she must pay for it. The prisoners must be provided access to the markets to sell their handmade objects to earn profit and live a healthy life. The detainees must have taken cookery instruction. During the conversation, more than five offenders expressed interest in taking cookery classes. Inmates, mostly from tailoring institutes, suggested repairing sewing and tailoring training to solve their machine works by themselves, as they do not want to depend on their men to resolve their problems.

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