

# Exclusion within Exclusion: Gender Stereotyping of Vocational Training in Prison

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**Abstract** – The main objective of the study is to examine the gender differences in implementing vocational training programmes in prison. Sri Lanka has come to believe that prisoners should be economically rehabilitated and integrated to society. In this process, being gender neutral is important as the current economic system of the country requires the productive employment of both males and females to uplift the family economy which can in return avoid illegal conducts of people to a considerable degree. To make this a success, economic rehabilitation should be able to occupy the ex-prisoners in a standard livelihood minimizing the recidivism and reconviction. However, the rates of recidivism and reconviction have not been reduced making rehabilitation questionable. Female recidivism is at higher occurrence comparing to the total prisoner population. Therefore, the research examines the gender issues related with economic rehabilitation. The Magazine prison was selected as the field of study and purposive sampling was used. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected. In depth and focused group interviews and non-participant observation method were used to collect data. Data was analysed and presented in a descriptive way using narrative analysis. Through findings, it was revealed that prison overcrowding has made it hard to deliver a quality vocational training and the gender neutral access to training is limited. It has been hard to categorize prisoners according to offences or needs and all are placed in cells together. Saliently, gender stereotyping in vocational training has limited the positive impact. Additionally, the officers are not well trained to deliver an effective and gender neutral vocational training. Society labels and discourages ex-prisoners without any trust on rehabilitation. This has become a more critical issue for female ex-prisoners. Lack of financial resources and outdated programmes are dominant in minimizing the effectiveness. Finally, the most required but least planned after care process has made the issue more critical. The policy makers, the Department of Prisons and society have been provided with recommendations through the study.

**Keywords:** Gender Neutrality, Recidivism, Reconviction, Rehabilitation

## **Introduction**

The studies that have been conducted provide an overview of current rehabilitation programmes in the Sri Lankan prison space (Athukorala, 1980). According to the studies, few vocational training programmes that are conducted in prison are batik work, plumbing, baking industry, soap making, brick making, animal husbandry, coir work, garments, shoe manufacturing and so on. Particularly, these programmes are not open for both male and female prisoners equally though they prefer and there's a clear barrier in selecting the inmates to these programmes depending on their gender. Although Sri Lanka has introduced several rehabilitation techniques, the recidivist rate (both male and female) in Sri Lanka indicates that these techniques have not been successful (De Silva, 2008). So the main goal of rehabilitation of offenders does not seem to have been achieved.

Therefore, this study, mainly, questions "To what extent is the vocational training programmes equally effect the rehabilitation of male/ female prisoners in Sri Lanka?"

According to the progress report on training programmes for rehabilitees; issued by Department of Prisons (2012), number of activities which fall under certain categories of rehabilitation are being conducted for the benefit of prisoners in Sri Lanka. Namely, they are: education programmes, spiritual and mental development programmes, vocational training programmes, other programmes which provide awareness on particular sectors such as health and visiting important and interesting places which may help prisoners to mix with the other people.

Though there are many types of rehabilitation programmes for the prisoners in the prison space, this study concern about the above mentioned problem. The main objective is to examine the gender differences in implementing vocational training programmes in prison since the vocational training programmes are more effective and useful to the prisoners disregarding their gender not only when they are imprisoned but also when they complete their imprisonment period and come to the general stream of the society back. But, these vocational training programmes require a considerable attention to be more effective because of the inadequacies mentioned above.

## **Methodology**

The study is exploratory in nature. The research was primarily designed as a cross-sectional study because it aimed at finding out the prevailing effectiveness of the vocational training programmes for prisoners gender wise.

Since it is impossible to study the whole study population, a representative sample of 25 respondents was selected based on purposive sampling method as the main focus was to study the recidivists who received vocational training at the first imprisonment. Sample was contained of recidivists who received vocational training at the first imprisonment and prisoners on first conviction who are being received the vocational training in the Welikada prison space. Each group consisted of 10 respondents representing both male and female prisoners equally. Both groups were selected based on their common characteristic of receiving vocational training which is directly related to the study. It is noteworthy that none of the ex-prisoners who received vocational training and didn't become recidivists could be included to the sample due to the absence of a proper after care system that can be utilized to contact them. Except for inmates, five other respondents were selected including welfare officers, jailors and vocational trainers.

Primary and secondary sources which are comprised with both qualitative and quantitative data were collected through sample and secondary sources available. Above mentioned sample was used to collect primary data for the study while secondary data was mainly collected from the prison reports and ministerial records. Here, secondary data was collected from the Prison Headquarters, Welfare Section of the Welikada Prison, Department of Prisons and from the Ministry of Rehabilitation and Prison Reforms. In addition, Centre for the Studies of Human Rights (CSHR) of Colombo University was used to collect secondary data. Through these Primary and secondary data sources, both qualitative and quantitative data required for the research were found.

Further, to collect primary data from the sample, In-depth Interviews, focused group interviews and Non-participant Observation Method were used in this study. These methods were used to collect data as the study focused more on qualitative data and also a more explanatory and depth understanding could be achieved through these methods. In-depth and focused group interviews were used as data collection techniques and data was analysed accordingly.

### **Results and Discussion**

Simply, rehabilitating prisoners refers to all the activities that influence in renegotiating his/her identity. When a person is convicted of a crime and enters a prison, he/she is entering a closed institution, an institution much more restricted than the society. One of the major tasks of this institution is to rehabilitate the prisoner or in other words to help him/her understand what went wrong in his/her behaviour and to help them to become healthier and productive citizen in the future (Martin, 1962). In order to achieve this task, the prison officials should educate them, help in the process of developing social relationships, look into their health issues, food and sanitation, give them counselling, give them vocational training and assist them in finding employment after leaving the prison. To achieve this purpose, in the prison system, there are many rehabilitation programmes under many themes. Some of them are educational rehabilitation, religious rehabilitation, health rehabilitation, economic rehabilitation, social rehabilitation and so on.

With reference to the sustainability of this process of rehabilitation, there should be an assurance that ex-prisoners will not become recidivists. In this case, there should be a social commitment for the rehabilitated ex-prisoners when they are released. Specially, female prisoners should receive more carefully planned aftercare strategy as they are more vulnerable with the existing social attitudes to be discriminated not just as they are ex-prisoners but as they are 'female' ex-prisoners. Commonly, their role should be shifted from "ex-prisoner" to "employee" which give them a social status and acceptance. It indirectly gives them a responsibility to confirm social norms, values and laws. For this, when a person is imprisoned, there should be an economic rehabilitation programmes. The study, because of this importance, mainly focuses on the vocational training which provides economic rehabilitation.

It was obvious that technically, many areas that should be taken into consideration have been already focused. But still, when studying the effectiveness of them, it was noticeable that there are many issues in those programmes interrupting the effectiveness of those programmes. More importantly, prejudices on gender roles are highly interruptive in implementing vocational trainings. For instance, when vocational trainings are delivered, male prisoners have access to number of programmes such as Masonry, Carpentry, Electrical wiring, Plumbing, House wiring, Coir work, Baking industry etc. Though these are not recommended to segregate gender wise, females are delivered just a handful of trainings compared to males in practice such as Sewing, Beauty culture, Garments, Weaving etc. which are stereotyped as 'females' work. This limitation restricts female prisoners from learning something that is marketable and economically employable. The attitude of implementers is highly influential here. They believe that women should be taught something that is helpful to their household activities. It can be further recognized as a lack of awareness given to the officials who deliver the services and trainings. This practice represents the conservative gender role expectations which can nullify the expected effectiveness of vocational training.

On the other hand, the attitude of the male and female prisoners towards the vocational training that is received is completely contrast. Males are more positive towards the training when compared to female inmates. Male inmates consider the training as a good opportunity to learn an occupation whereas female inmates consider it as a way of time passing and a help to make the domestic work easy once they are released. Women themselves have come to believe that they are useful only in domestic affairs because of the highly stereotyped socialization process (Bhasin, 1993). This can be analysed as an internalization of the general concept of gender roles. Female inmates less consider themselves as economically important members of the family. Therefore, it can be concluded that female prisoners have excluded themselves from the

vocational training programme. Somehow, negative attitudes of the stakeholders towards rehabilitation has excluded many those who are in need for rehabilitation.

Prison overcrowding has further reduced the effectiveness as a proper segregation cannot be done. Since the prison population is unprecedentedly high and still keep climbing up, gender sensitive and well-timed segregation cannot be made. More specifically, female inmate population, being the minority compared to male inmate population, has forgotten from the planning and implementation process which again exclude them from an effective rehabilitation.

Apart from these main findings that directly influence to gender discrimination, lack of financial and technical arrangements to cater the needs of both male and female prisoners has reduced the effectiveness dramatically. Many vocational training programmes are outdated and cannot address the modern market oriented economic labour needs. Particularly, it doesn't go parallel with the modern labour force trends where women also actively participate in family economy. Further, the officers are not trained to follow new techniques to make the programmes more effective. Ultimately, financial allocations are not sufficient to make such progressive changes in prison.

### **Conclusion**

Prison system is currently conducting many rehabilitation programmes. But, the main focus of them has shifted away from the mission, vision and the motto of the Department of Prisons. Though it is supposed to provide custody, care and correction of the prisoners through imprisonment without any discrimination, what mostly happens is only custody and care. Prevailing rehabilitation programmes have been introduced to the prison system with the purpose of correction and reintegrating prisoners into the normal society as law abiding citizens who spend decent lives. But unfortunately, even the rehabilitation programmes treat males and females in a discriminatory manner which has become an exclusion within an excluded setting. It makes the vocational training and many other rehabilitation programmes ineffective for the correction process. It was long time ago that the prison system turned its aim from punishment to correction. Therefore, effectiveness of the vocational training as well as the other correctional processes should be reconsidered and immediate steps should be taken to reconstruct them as effective, gender sensitive programmes which contribute to the correction of the prisoners.

By looking at the issues that are prevailing, it can be concluded that the state level mediation is required to address the system related issues of vocational training programmes. Apart from that, it is important to address the stereotyped attitudes of both inmates and officers as to reduce the limitations that constraint the effectiveness. Even the general society should take part in making the process a success by avoiding labelling the ex-prisoners disregarding their gender.

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