



# WOMEN IN PRISON: IMPACT OF IMPRISONMENT ON MENTAL HEALTH OF WOMEN PRISONERS IN LUCKNOW JAILS

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## Abstract

A prison is a type of correctional facility used to imprison criminals. The inmates' reformation is the penitentiary system's goal. Despite this, prison institutions frequently conceal violence and vice behind their closed doors, which is harmful to prisoners' chances of changing their ways. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge and uphold the fundamental rights of inmates in order to support their reformation.

When considering female prisoners, the issues associated with incarceration are magnified. Jail systems are not well-equipped to meet the unique requirements of women in prison because they are primarily built to serve men. According to the most recent figures, 19,913 women were housed in Indian prisons as of the end of 2019. Only 19% of these women are imprisoned in facilities just for women, with the bulk being kept in female sections of general jails. There is widespread consensus on a national and international level that the conditions of prisons and the women who reside there need to be urgently improved.

In order to inform development efforts, this research examines the situation of women in Indian prisons, specifically in the Lucknow Women Jail.

An attempt has been made to analyse the status of basic necessities available to women inmates with prime focus on the impact of imprisonment on their mental health. Furthermore, the paper seeks to provide potential suggestions for the betterment of the women prisoners.

Keywords: Women prisoners, Mental health, Imprisonment

## Introduction

*“Turn your demons into art, your shadow into a friend, your fear into fuel, your failures into teachers, your weaknesses into reasons to keep fighting. Don't waste your pain. Recycle your heart.” – Andrea Balt*

Humans have a unique feature of individuality which could be their power or their weakness, depending on their nature. The research signifies women's mental aspect of being imprisoned in a country like India, where gender discrimination has been a historical practice. Equality, secularism, and democracy are vital features of the Indian Constitution and though this has been practiced to a major extent, there still exist a lot of gaps in its implementation and practice. The research displays one of the imperative yet most ignored concerns in Indian society, and that is mental health. Considering Lucknow women's jail situation, its prisoners, their background, their condition in and outside the bars, cultural aspect, religious aspect, day-to-day requirements, societal norms, married life, and various other factors, the impact of all these on the women and her mental status is acknowledged.

The research investigates the various aspects of the lives led by the women imprisoned in the Lucknow jail. Men and women have different requirements, different mindsets, and different approaches as is clearly stated in the book of John Gray, Men are from Mars and women are from Venus. To maintain balance on earth, even the creator has maintained its ratio of emotions, ability, skills, actions, thoughts, and all other aspects in these two genders. The weakness of one is the power of the other and this way the creator has framed the puzzle blocks to be set on earth (Anwer & Bhartiya, 2018). This is where the research serves as an eye-opening tool, as it provides the various factors where the imbalance is being practiced behind the bars and under Indian laws and regulations.

Women have been suppressed in the name of religion, culture, responsibilities, social values, etc. The research provides insight into the mental health concerns of women prisoners. Suppression on rights always existed for women which is one of the reasons for the increase in the number of women prisoners, women are still not provided with basic needs behind the bars. The research provides with the help of primary data, the basic, physical and mental stress that the women go through, in the Lucknow jail, to be specific. Though the issue is experienced all through the globe, the study provides the situation of the Lucknow women's jail, which displays the majority of the problems. Acknowledging women behind the bars is experienced to be not different from exploring women outside the bars, as suppression, discrimination, mental illness, family responsibility, and child's concern all are the same at both ends. The primary data collected through a survey displays some highly efficient and accurate information on the lives of women prisoners as well as life after imprisonment.

This paper focuses on the mental illness or the stigma that women prisoners go through during and post the imprisonment. The causes of such illness are specified in this paper with the reason for the causes.

### **Methodology**

The study is centered on the Women in Lucknow jail, their mental illness, and the stigma that they go through during their imprisoned life. Unlike, physical illness, the cause of mental illness requires regressive analysis and exploration to find out the main or the actual cause of its existence. For this, the study utilizes a regressive and well-structured survey questionnaire for the women prisoners. Taking up the Quantitative method, served the study with accurate and numerical acknowledgment of the problem. The study focused on signifying the multiple causes of mental illness among women prisoners, through understanding their views and experiences behind the bars. For this reason, proper formatting and structuring of the data collection tool were done, with a specification for the statistical analysis and primary data collection.

Taking up the primary data collection method, the population is selected through being specific and only one criterion, women prisoners in Lucknow Jail. The population was direct and easy to select as the study focused on one particular segment of people. The women prisoners in the Lucknow Jail were provided with the questionnaire which included closed-ended and Likert scale formats. The closed-ended questions are known for providing clear and specific answers with minimal time. The choices become easy for the respondent and hence the interest sustains to attend all the questions. The questionnaire was framed under demographic factors, mental illness, basic requirements, children's care, skill enhancement, and a few others. These factors were considered while framing up the questionnaire and hence it served with proper data collection on specific domains.

Random sampling was considered through the survey with the intention to gain diverse data. The data collected included the age group from 21 years to above 60 years which helped in understanding the years of existence of the concerned problem. The respondents were selected randomly and hence, the experiences of new as well as old prisoners were recorded. Thus, adding authentication to the data. The study expresses multiple variables which impact the women prisoner's life behind the bars as well as after their imprisonment. Mental illness, basic needs, child care, family life, profession, sexual needs, social life, and a few other factors have been the variables of the study which served with diverse views on life behind bars for women in Lucknow Jail. Changes in the above-mentioned variables could change women's lives behind bars and thus, after imprisonment too. Though it could be a long process, initiation needs to be done for experiencing the same. Since primary data originates from a direct source, it is more precise and trustworthy. This helped the study to gain accuracy and effective results.

## Results

The survey conducted in the Women Lucknow Jail highlighted some of the situations during and post the imprisonment that the women face, leading to strong mental illness. The results as acknowledged through the SPSS tool presented the darker side of imprisonment in a simple and realistic manner. The majority of the respondents were married, with 51% in total 30% were widows and 19% were unmarried. These numbers display that illness, issues, and causes of imprisonment all have a high number of married women, and hence, getting married at an early age or to the wrong person could be one of the reasons for the increasing number of women prisoners. Lower education is another common feature among the prisoners that are identified, as only 34% of the respondents were graduate or post-graduate while 66% were either illiterate or took only primary education. Lower education or illiteracy could be one of the reasons for early marriage creating a chain of causes for women's imprisonment. Lower or no education leads to improper professions or no professional life at all for women, hence it could be a reason for unwanted or unsatisfied life. 95% of the respondents belonged to the industrial daily labor class or housewives. Murder, assault, and theft have been the major crimes that the respondents have committed with 26%, 17%, and 27% respectively. On checking the age data, approximately 60% of the respondents fall in the age group of 40- above 60, thus conveying that it's in the second half of the life stage that women tend to get inclined towards such serious actions. It carries another perspective of getting frustrated with the lives they lead. On checking the data on the duration of confinement, 91% of respondents have been behind the bars for more than a year to 5 years and more. Looking at the age and the marital status of prisoners, being a mother is quite natural and 32% of the respondents have been unaware of their children's living which serves as a trigger to their mental illness. Though the jail provides the facility for children to stay with their mothers for 5 years since birth, only 60% of respondents had this privilege and the remaining were unaware of it. These have been the reason or triggers for women's imprisonment which could also be stated as the cause of their mental illness. These are the scenarios that display the discrimination and frustration that women go through and till they reach their mid-age, get saturated leading to some serious offense. Though these actions are not justifiable, the research goes into detail about what are their major concern in the prison and where they see themselves once their punishment is over.

The Likert scale displays the basic requirements of day-to-day activities within the jail, that are not fulfilled to some extent for the women imprisoned. 34% stated that their living condition is not well as no proper ventilation is available, with improper clothes and light. These scarcities are noted by a lower number of respondents but it does exist and even if a single woman is not provided with basic requirements, then it is a matter of great concern, as every life counts.

Being a woman brings on multiple additional basic requirements, which are not required for men, and hence, this should be regarded as the difference between men and women, rather than the discrimination that is practiced all over the world (Maryam *et al.* 2022). The menstrual cycle is one of the significant discriminating factors between men and women which brings on the additional basic requirement for women, yet these requirements are not met by 16% of the respondents in the Lucknow jail for women. As the data reveals, 89% stated that there are no regular health check-ups organized in the jail, and no proper arrangement for sanitary napkins was stated as issue, by 16% of the respondents, which is a huge number as per the problem. Women with any form of mental illness are not provided with any psychiatric assistance which is supported by 100% of the respondents. This is a sensitive concern and it requires immediate action by the government.

As it is stated by Mareeswaran *et al.* (2019), family and friends are the only way to reduce mental pressure or anxiety, 42% of the respondents face issues in meeting with their families and friends while 35% are not able to contact their known ones through letters or other means of communication. This conveys an important reason for growing mental concern within the women in Lucknow jail. Communicating with known ones is one of the best therapies to console and work on past experiences. It was noted that families of some prisoners do not support them and in most cases, they have been abandoned which impacts their mental health adversely. Newspapers, magazines, and books are not adequately provided to the prisoners, as 23% stated that they are not served with the same while 33% claimed that no meditation or yoga training services are provided. These numbers reveal that the prisoners are not served with the environment or the essentials to enhance their mindset or come out of the darker world. Though crimes cannot be justified as said by Shankardass (2020), every prisoner has a right to change their actions through learning and enhancing their skills. Prisoners should be provided with a platform to enhance their skills, learn to work, and add to their knowledge, as these services with an opportunity to gain a positive vision and after their imprisonment is over, they could lead a better and satisfactory life. But the survey data reveals that Lucknow women's jail is not well equipped with these

facilities and this is leading its prisoners to a darker world. They are not being provided with an opportunity to learn and enhance their skills, neither they are being provided with mental wellness.

Data reveals that 57% of the respondents suffer from physical disability yet, no medical care facility is provided to 31% of the respondents. As per Adhikari (2021), committing a crime be it major or minor, is directly related to the mental status of the person, and for this reason as per laws, every prisoner is supposed to go under mental illness programs or medication behind the bars, yet 73% of the respondents stated that they do not receive any such services within the Lucknow jail. Over these unfollowed practices, 73% conveyed that they often get infected in the bars, which reveals the unhygienic practices. Though the law should punish the prisoners for their crimes and actions but maintaining hygiene and other basic needs is every soul's right.

Married women, in the age group of 40-60 and above years, having children, yet committing crimes like murder, drugs, and other unlawful practices is no women's choice but action under mental pressure. Demoralization is a natural consequence for every prisoner, and staying away from family and children is an important pain for 40% of the respondents with 50% claiming it to be a very important pain. Demoralization is a common and significant cause of mental illness thus leading to mental stigma. Prisoners' demoralisation has been a consequence of the objective of imprisonment, which as per the survey states that custody of prisoners is highly supported as an objective, with 71% of response. On viewing it other way, 67% states that correction and reformation of the prisoners are not the objective for imprisonment. These states the imbalance maintained within the people.

Family acceptance is one of the crucial thoughts that impacts the prisoners, and it is one of the major aspects of discrimination in Indian society. 47% of the respondents were not sure if they would be accepted by their family while 42% stated that they have almost no expectation of being accepted. This huge number signifies that women have a major reason for being attacked by anxiety and depression, as they are not left with anyone to each out after their imprisonment is over. Thoughts on future, is the major reason for their worry as, 33% agreed to it with 29% favouring anxiety and helplessness. On an overall concern, 35% are not satisfied with the life served in prison due to negligence of basic requirements. All these reveals that women are left with no other option, but to get drowned in depression and anxiety once they get behind the bars.

Lucknow Women Jail is acknowledged through various aspects from the prisoner's perspective and it revealed some hidden facts with a scope of improvement and need for enhancement on various concerns which could lead to an improvised health system both on mental and physical aspects. The mental stigma needs to be broken by bringing on new practices and implementation behind the bars.

## Discussion

Numerous protections in the form of laws, regulations, and directives safeguard women from exploitation in prison and provide for their fundamental needs. Women have a number of challenges in the execution of these rules, which is determined to be mainly deficient of issues while incarcerated.

Women have the right to obtain an education while incarcerated, however, aside from basic literacy resources, educational facilities are virtually absent. Every prison is designed to offer these services, which are likewise seen as crucial components of reformation. The majority of courses teach skills that are unmarketable, financially unviable, and hence of little utility to women after release, rendering efforts in this direction generally ineffective. Every prison should provide a legal aid cell to assist with situations including complaints, undertrial proceedings, appeals, and other legal issues since every prisoner has a right to legal representation. Some prisons lack these, and connections with State and District Legal Service Authorities might be strengthened.

The rules governing the safety of women in prison and how to handle their complaints must be properly adhered to, which is not the case at the moment. Prisons are isolated environments, so it's critical for women especially to stay in touch with their outside social network to make a smooth transition following release (Akbar *et al.* 2018). While there are no restrictions on the number of letters, phone calls, or visits that women prisoners can receive, more needs to be done to support them in maintaining contact and overcoming the social stigma associated with female convicts.

In situations where no other suitable arrangements can be made for their care, many women are forced to reside in prison alongside their young children (under the age of 6). Children who spend their formative years in prison can suffer greatly, therefore it is important to take extra precautions to safeguard their physical and

emotional health, as well as their education and enjoyment. It is also important to consider the health of expectant mothers and new mothers. Many female convicts find it difficult to reintegrate into society because they must deal with significant social stigma, the loss of their families and jobs, a lack of financial independence, and other issues after their release (Baranyi *et al.* 2019). It is necessary to take action to guarantee that women are provided with all essential services while incarcerated, are safe from violence, and are given support once released so they can successfully reintegrate into society.

A National Commission for Prisons should be established, as suggested by the Mulla Committee, to offer a national perspective on prisons and serve as a focal point responsible for them. Prisons should undergo comprehensive and routine inspections to make sure the regulations are being followed. This should be implemented in all jails, with inspections carried out impartially and reports distributed to other government departments. All prisons should have a strong grievance procedure in place to guarantee that inmates' rights are upheld and that their complaints are heard fairly.

Inmates should be able to voice their complaints through both internal and external channels.

Needs for both physical and mental health should be properly and frequently met. When necessary, female prisoners should have access to physicians and psychiatrists. According to the convicts' abilities, educational opportunities should be offered (Bartlett & Hollins, 2018). Upgrades should also be made to the prison's vocational training and skilling facilities, which can enhance inmates' everyday lives and provide them with financial support following release.

The living conditions of female detainees should be addressed in terms of bedding, proper lighting, enough restrooms, and options for apparel that reflect their culture, among other things. Implementing legal assistance provisions should involve connections with the District and State Legal Service Authorities (Forrester *et al.* 2018). Women should be informed of all their rights and entitlements in a language they can comprehend.

In India, there is a great deal of convicts awaiting trial. If they are unable to pay sureties upon release, steps should be taken to enable their early release under Section 436A of the Criminal Procedure Code. Additionally, non-custodial punishments like community service, shelter housing, etc. should be preferred in the case of female offenders.

A thorough aftercare program can assist women to integrate back into society following release and reduce recidivism. This should include assistance with a variety of facets of life after incarceration, such as housing, work, marriage, child custody, avoiding harassment from the local police, etc.

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