

Living Conditions of Women Inmates in the Prisons of Jammu and Kashmir: A Concerned Issue

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Abstract

Crime and punishment are gendered concepts. The types of crime in which women and men engage are dissimilar and their rate of indulging in criminal activities varies considerably. Female offenders seem to experience each stage of the criminal justice system differently than do men. Women are often handled differently from men by the correctional system and it is incorrect to assume that the experience of imprisonment is identical for both women and men. Men and women adapt to the prison environment differently from each other. It is therefore imperative to look into at its depth as to factors lead to women and men perceiving the prison institutions differently. The endeavor of this paper is to understand the same in J&K Jails.

Keywords: Conditions, Crime, Criminals, Female Offenders, Jails, Prisons, Rehabilitation, Treatment and Women Inmates

I. INTRODUCTION

There are few correctional systems that provide adequate or good care. They are usually compelled to do so under court order or do so because they have unusually good medical staff. However, these systems are the rare exceptions. A picture has always emerged in mind that reflects a systematic pattern of neglect and sometimes abuse of women inmates and they are in need of medical care. While most inmates including long term adjust successfully to prison life while many do not cope well with the pains of imprisonment.

Maladaptive responses such as emotional disorders, self-mutilation, suicide attempts and misbehavior in prisons are most common during the early phases of incarceration. Most offenders who have the greatest difficulty adapting to prison tend to have difficulty of functioning in other environments too and the personal attributes of individuals along with that of environments combine to influence individual adjustments. Many women suffer from mental health problems are sent to mental health institutions for proper care and treatment.

As brought out in, "If it (imprisonment) is intended to reform the person when he come out-- the system is a dismal failure. He goes into the prison as an undergraduate in crime and comes out perhaps as a postgraduate in crime". (Shankardass, 2000)

II. AREA OF THE STUDY

Jammu and Kashmir State is divided into three divisions such as Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. These three divisions are further divided into 22 districts. There are ten districts in Jammu region, ten districts in Kashmir region and two districts in Ladakh region. The present study will be carried out in the Jails of J&K.

In J&K there are total fourteen jails i.e. two Central, ten District and two Sub-Jails. The two Central Jails are located both in Srinagar and Jammu districts having one each and the ten District Jails are located in Jammu, Udhampur, Kathua, Rajouri, Poonch, Baramulla, Leh and Kupwara, Anantnag and Kishtwar. The two Sub- Jails are located in Hiranagar and Reasi. But women inmates are lodged only in Central Jails and District Jails and not in Sub-Jails.

Table - 1
Women Inmates lodged in various Jails of J&K 2013

Central and District Jails	Women Inmates	Total Inmates
Central Jail Jammu, Kote Bhalwal	8	372
Central Jail Srinagar	15	515
District Jail Jammu, Ambphalla	21	488
District Jail kathua	1	90
District Jail Udhampur	23	236
District Jail Rajouri	11	110
District Jail Poonch	15	130
District Jail Baramulla	8	157
Total	102	2098

Source: *The Director General of Police (Prisons), J&K, Jammu*

Thus the present paper focuses on the living conditions of women inmates lodged in the eight prisons of J&K.

III. LIVING CONDITIONS

Living conditions are the conditions of being alive; the manner which conducts one's life. Living conditions can also be defined as the circumstances under which some one lives at a certain place. Today, prisons have become reformatory institutions and evolving as institutes that reform criminals into responsible citizens.

All 102 offenders were interviewed and it was found that all were satisfied with the living conditions of the Jails. In each Jail there were cells (cells are the rooms where inmates are kept) provided for their living purposes. As the population of women inmates was less, they were not the victims of overcrowding as seen in other states jails. In Jail premises, facilities like food, clothes (for convicts), bathroom facilities, medical, legal and educational facilities etc were provided to women inmates which can be discussed in detail below.

A. Central Jail Jammu, Kot Bhalwal

Total 372 inmates both males and females were lodged in jail premises, out of which 364 were male inmates and 8 were female inmates. Out of the total seven women inmates two were convicts and five were under trials and both convicts and under trials were lodged together. Women inmates were lodged in separate barrack of the same building where male prisoners were lodged. Barrack is one in number having four cells, two kitchens, two attach and two separate bathrooms. Three cells are meant for their accommodation while one cell is a vocational centre. For women inmates there were nine female warders out of which two were head warders. They are always present during the day and night duties and the duties rotate among the female warders.

Regarding accommodation celled beds were provided to them and on those beds mattresses were given with bed sheets which were white in colour. Convicts were provided with uniforms and for under trials, clothes were provided by their family members and the inmates whose family members rejected them were provided with clothes by the female warders or by other female inmates. As far as other facilities in the cells are concerned, they were given television, fans, cooler and purified water. Newspapers in Hindi and Urdu were also given to them. Upkeep of the cells was the responsibility of inmates themselves that they performed on rotation basis. There was proper lighting system like bulbs in each cell and for ventilation windows and doors are available. As the population of inmates is less in number, there is no inconvenience regarding accommodation.

Regarding food, kitchen was inclusive for both male and female inmates and the food was cooked in the male barracks by special male cooks. The female inmates were being served cooked nutritious food as per the scale prescribed in the Prison Manual and Rules. On festival days female inmates were being served with special extra food. Breakfast like tea and snacks (*kachori* and biscuits) were given for breakfast. Meal was given twice a day and wheat chapattis, rice with dal and vegetables were given for the inmates for mid-day and evening meals. In addition to the above items milk, fruits and non-vegetarian food (chicken and mutton) was also given to them once a week and the inmates who were vegetarian provided with *paneer*.

The female inmates had been provided with adequate and sufficient medical facilities and treatment with suitable medical diet to be served to the sick inmates on the recommendation of the medical officer. The sick inmates needing higher investigation, treatment and surgery were referred to higher medical centers for specialized treatment. Medical facilities were also given to them like the physician (male) was permanent in the jail while in other jails pharmacists, psychiatrists and gynecologists visited twice or thrice a week for check-ups. Hospital facility was also given to them like there was common hospital for both males and females but sick inmates were not admitted in that hospital as if they got ill they were taken to district hospital. Besides this, there was a provision of dispensary. Ambulance vans were also being provided to every jail to take serious sick inmates to the outside hospitals round the clock.

Education facility was also provided in the jail. Both academic and vocational education was provided to them. Academic education was not taken up by all inmates but some of them knew how to write their names. Female inmates who were Graduate and had secondary education taught other inmates and the children inside the Jail. As educational facilities were provided in the jail but many inmates were not interested in taking it because being in prison they all were disappointed with the life inside four walls and they want to release as soon as possible. Distance programmes like IGNOU and computer trainings through DOEACC were provided but no inmate was taking benefit of these programmes. Vocational trainings in knitting, embroidery and weaving were provided but training was not permanent and training was given for a specific period of time.

Regarding legal assistance inmates who were financially weak or other whom family members reject them, were provided with the lawyers for defending their cases by the Government free of cost. Members of NGOs visited very rarely and no counseling was given to them. There was no counseling centre in Jail premises.

B. Central Jail Srinagar

There were total 515 inmates both males and females lodged in jail premises, out of which 500 were male inmates and 15 were female inmates. Out of the total fifteen women inmates thirteen were under trials, one was convict and two were on judicial remand and convicts, under trials and inmates on judicial remand were lodged together. Women inmates were lodged in separate barrack of the same building. Barrack was one in number having four cells, one kitchen and three bathrooms, two attach and one separate. Four cells meant for their accommodation. For women inmates there were nine female warders out of which one was head female warder.

As far as other facilities in the cells are concerned, they were given proper beddings including mattresses to be laid down on the floor with white bed sheets. Other facilities in the cells include television and fans. Upkeep of the cells was the responsibility of inmates themselves that they performed on rotation basis. There was proper lighting system like bulbs in each cell and for ventilation windows and doors are available. As the population of inmates is less in number, there is not inconvenience regarding accommodation.

Regarding food, kitchen was exclusive for female inmates and the food was cooked by the inmates themselves as ration was provided to them.

Medical facilities were also given to them like the physician (male) was permanent in the jail while in other jails pharmacists, psychiatrists and gynecologists visited twice or thrice a month for check-ups. Hospital facility was also given to them like there was common hospital for both males and females but sick inmates were not admitted in that hospital as if they got ill they were taken to district hospital. Besides this, there was a provision of dispensary. Ambulance vans were also being provided to every jail to take serious sick inmates to the outside hospitals round the clock.

Education facility was also provided in the jail. Both academic and vocational education was provided to them. Distance programmes like IGNOU and computer trainings through DOEACC were provided but no inmate was taking benefit of these programmes. Vocational trainings were not provided to them as the inmates demanded sewing machines for their personal use but the higher authorities of the prison not take it seriously and the sewing machines were not provided to them.

Regarding legal assistance inmates who were financially weak or other whom family members reject them, were provided with the lawyers for defending their cases by the Government free of cost. As per the inmates not any NGO visited the prison and no counseling was given to them. There was no counseling centre in Jail premises.

C. District Jail, Jammu Ambphalla

There were total 487 inmates both males and females lodged in jail premises, out of which 487, 466 were male inmates and 21 were female inmates. Convicts, undertrials and judicial remands were lodged together. Out of the total twenty women inmates 6 were convicts and 14 were under trials. Barrack was one in number having three cells with two bathrooms one attach and one separate. Two cells were meant for their accommodation while one cell was a vocational centre. For women inmates there was a female Deputy Superintendent and fourteen female warders out of which one was head warder. They were always present during the day and night duties and the duties rotate among the female warders.

In Jail premises, all facilities were provided to women inmates like food, clothes (for convicts), bathroom facilities, medical and educational facilities etc. They were given meals (twice a day) and other than the major meals, they were given tea, snacks and milk. There was not any separate kitchen for women inmates. The kitchen was both inclusive of male and female inmates and the food was cooked in the male barracks by special male cooks.

Regarding the clothing, uniforms were given to convicts which is white in colour. Washing of clothes is done by inmates themselves and they washed their clothes depending upon their own needs. Bathroom facilities were very basic but good like there is a provision of both an attached bathroom within the cell and a separate bathroom outside. They are given toiletries like soap, water, brush, toothpaste, sanitary napkins and so on.

As far as other facilities in the cells are concerned, they were given proper beddings including mattresses to be laid down on the floor with white bed sheets, television, fans, and purified water. There was also a provision of indoor games like chess, ludo, carromboard and dholak. Newspapers in Hindi and Urdu were also given to them. Upkeep of the cells was the responsibility of inmates themselves that they performed on rotation basis. There was proper lighting system like bulbs in each cell and for ventilation windows and doors are available.

Medical facilities are also given to them like there is a proper medical staff that comprises of a Physician, Psychiatrist and a Pharmacist. While the Pharmacist (female) is permanent and physician and psychiatrist (male) visits twice or thrice a week for check-ups. Hospital facility was also given to them like there is a ten beds hospital available. Besides this, there was a provision of dispensary.

Educational facilities, both academic and vocational were provided to them. Academic education is not taken up by all inmates but some of them knew how to write their names. Female inmates who were Graduate and had secondary education taught other inmates and the children inside the Jail. Besides those inmates a lady teacher who is a wife of an employer also teaches them. For vocational education there is a separate vocational centre in Amphalla Jail and not in Kot Bhalwal Jail and in that centre weaving and embroidery is taught to the inmates. The convicts are paid for their work. There is an exclusive place for inmates to pray and they often come together for bhajana, kirtans and satsangas that become a part of their recreation and entertainment.

Inmates are also assisted in monetary matters by the staff. Their family members often deposit some money with the Superintendent that can be used by the respective inmates as and when required. They are also given cash prizes as an encouragement for their participation in various activities. There was no counseling centre in Jail premises.

D. District Jail Kathua

There were total 90 inmates both males and females lodged in jail premises, out of which 89 were male inmates and 1 was female inmate. Woman inmate was lodged in separate barrack of the same building where male prisoners were lodged. Barrack was one in number having one cell with one kitchen, two bathrooms and both were attach. One cell was meant for their accommodation. For woman inmate there were six female warders out of which one was female head warder.

Accommodation, food, clothing and legal facilities were same as District Jail Ambphalla. But there was no provision of indoor games inside the cells. The female inmates had been provided with adequate and sufficient medical facilities and treatment with suitable medical diet to be served to the sick inmates on the recommendation of the medical officer. Medical facilities were also given to them like the physician (male) was permanent in the jail while in other jails pharmacists, psychiatrists and gynecologists visited twice or thrice a month for check-ups and they came from District Government hospitals. No educational facility was given to them as the inmates also not interested in taking education. Vocational training was also not provided to them as the Superintendent of the prison told that they asked many times to the women as they want any training and the women inmates replied that they don't need it. Even on prison visit, DGP (Prisons) J&K asked the women inmates that they need any vocational training but the inmates replied that they don't need anything.

E. District Jail Udhampur

There were total 236 inmates both males and females lodged in jail premises, out of which 213 were male inmates and 23 were female inmates. All the nineteen women inmates were undertrials and lodged in the female barrack together. Barrack was one in number having one cell with one kitchen and two attach bathrooms. One cell was meant for their accommodation. For women inmates there were five female warders including one female head warder.

Accommodation, food, clothing, medical and legal facilities were same as District Jail Ambphalla. But there was no counseling centre in any Jail premises Ambulance vans were also being provided to every jail to take serious sick inmates to the outside hospitals round the clock. No educational facility was given to them as the inmates also not interested in taking education. Vocational training was also not provided to them as the officials told that they asked many times to the women as they want any training and the women inmates replied that they don't need it but the management of the jail was planning to start at least one vocational training for the women inmates.

Regarding legal assistance inmates who were financially weak or other whom family members reject them, were provided with the lawyers for defending their cases by the Government free of cost. Members of NGOs visited very rarely and no counseling was given to them.

F. District Jail Rajouri

There were total 110 inmates both males and females lodged in jail premises, out of which 99 were male inmates and 11 were female inmates, out of which ten were under trials and one was on judicial remand. All the eleven women inmates were under trials and lodged together. Women inmates were lodged in separate barrack of the same building where male prisoners were lodged. Barrack was one in number having one cell. One cell was meant for their accommodation. For women inmates there were three female warders.

Accommodation, food, clothing and legal facilities were same as other jails. But like District jail Poonch there was no provision for indoor games like carromboard, ludo and chess etc inside the cells. It's become difficult for inmates to pass the time. The female inmates had been provided with adequate and sufficient medical facilities and treatment with suitable medical diet to be served to the sick inmates on the recommendation of the medical officer. Medical facilities were also given to them like the physician (male) was permanent in the jail while in other jails pharmacists, psychiatrists and gynecologists visited twice or thrice a month for check-ups and they came from District Government hospitals. No educational facility was given to them as the inmates also not interested in taking education. Vocational training was also not provided to them as the officials told that they asked many times to the women as they want any training and the women inmates replied that they don't need it but they were planning to start vocational training of the inmates choice.

G. District Jail Poonch

There were total 130 inmates both males and females lodged in jail premises, out of which 115 were male inmates and 15 were female inmates. Barrack was one in number having two cells with one kitchen, four bathrooms two attach and two separate. Two cells were meant for their accommodation. For women inmates there were three female warders. Both Convicts and under trials were lodged together. Out of the total sixteen women inmates two were convicts and fourteen were under trials.

Accommodation, food, clothing and legal and medical facilities were same as other jails. No educational facility was given to them as the inmates also not interested in taking education. Vocational training was also not provided to them as the officials told that they asked many times to the women as they want any training and the women inmates replied that they don't need it but they were planning for starting vocational training for the women inmates.

H. District Jail Baramulla

There were total 157 inmates both males and females lodged in jail premises, out of which 149 were male inmates and 8 were female inmates. For women inmates there were a female Assistant Superintendent and four female warders who are always present during the day and night duties and the duties rotate among the female warders. All eight women inmates were under trials and are lodged together in the same barrack

Baramulla District Jail is the first prison in J&K where a separate block for female inmates is open. The block comprises a prison barrack with four cells including one female warden room, one special room and two cells for the women inmates. There are also four toilets and one kitchen and cells can accommodate 20 female inmates.

As far as other facilities in the cells are concerned, they were given proper beddings including mattresses to be laid down on the floor with white bed sheets, television and fans. Upkeep of the cells was the responsibility of inmates themselves that they performed on rotation basis. There was proper lighting system like bulbs in each cell and for ventilation windows and doors are available. As the population of inmates is less in number, there is not inconvenience regarding accommodation.

Regarding food, kitchen was exclusive for female inmates and the food was cooked by the inmates themselves as ration was provided to them.

Medical facilities were also given to them like the physician (male) was permanent in the jail while in other jails pharmacists, psychiatrists and gynecologists visited twice or thrice a month for check-ups. Hospital facility was also given to them like there was common hospital for both males and females but sick inmates were not admitted in that hospital as if they got ill they were taken district or other hospital. Besides this, there was a provision of dispensary. But there was no counseling centre in any Jail premises Ambulance vans were also being provided to every jail to take serious sick inmates to the outside hospitals round the clock.

One thing lack in the jail premises and that was education both academic and vocational as no vocational training was provided to them. Regarding legal assistance inmates who were financially weak or other whom family members reject them, were provided with the lawyers for defending their cases by the Government free of cost. As per the inmates not any NGO visited the prison and no counseling was given to them.

IV. CONCLUSION

So the living conditions of women inmates in J&K jails are better but not best. If the comparison is made among the eight jails than District jail Jammu, Ambphalla and Central jail Jammu, Kote Bhalwal are the jails where the conditions of women inmates are good and most of the facilities provided to them. In short the prisons of Jammu district are best among all.

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