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Jayasundara Gamage Chandani

University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, chandani@sjp.ac.lk

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Information Needs, Accessibility and Utilization of Library & Information Resources as Elements of Improving the Spiritual Well-Being of Prisoners in Sri Lanka

Chandani J.G.

University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka
chandani@sjp.ac.lk

Abstract:

The main objective of this research is study of impact of the prison library services on prisoners' spiritual well-being. Descriptive survey method was adopted and four null hypotheses were tested to achieve the main objective. A research questionnaire was used to collect data on the sampled 80 prisoners. Result indicated that information needs, accessibility to library information resources and utilization of library information resources are very critical ingredients in determining the spiritual well-being of prisoners. There was significant relationship between: spiritual well-being and utilization of library information resources ($r=0.660$; $(p=0.000) \leq 0.05$), accessibility to library information resources by prisoner ($r=0.341$; $(p=0.016) \leq 0.05$) and significant relationship between information needs and spiritual well-being ($r=0.433$; $(p=0.019) \leq 0.050$). In the analysis presented, providing for the needs of these prisoners will help in achieving the objectives thus spiritual well-being, rehabilitating, re-socializing, and re-integrating and preparing the prisoners into becoming better citizens who can readapt into the society after prison.

Key Words: Prisoners, Prison Libraries, Spiritual well-being, Information Literacy, Information Needs, Accessibility, Utilization

INTRODUCTION

Libraries as major custodians of information, which have been professionally processed and stored for retrieval play positive roles in every segment of society. From time immemorial, mankind has employed information as a tool in the search for solutions to problems that he has come to grapple with. Mankind has found information a veritable instrument in the constant search for knowledge and in order to attain development. Anafulu (1998) posits that the library is the engine room and power house where information is collected, stored, processed and retrieved for use.

Information, according to International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA, 2001), is very important in the development of an individual and of the society. Thus, acquiring and using information are both important activities. Information has become a primary strategic resource that is transforming the lives of many in the world today. The flow of information has made the world today a global village and we are said to be in the information age. This new age is a revolutionary period whose impact is far surpassing that of the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions.

In 1933, Hitler was removed from all libraries of Jewish, Catholic, Marxist and books written by anti-fascist writers in Germany. Prior to his power, popular books and scrolls among German people were burned presences of public. Not only was it compelled to remove the books and documents that are not suitable for the political vision of some state rulers, but also some librarians were subjected to various pressures. Therefore, it can be noted that not only the modern state rulers but also the past rulers in the past world believe that libraries can have a profound effect on society.

The provision of information for the prison population cannot be described as a straight drawn line as some critics wonder why a person incarcerated for committing a crime should be granted right to information. Nevertheless, it is important to note that prison inmates are members of the society who also yearn for information and as such have the right to information just as every other citizen.

In the past, prison libraries have been closely associated with a rehabilitative function (Fyfe, 1992). For example, in the nineteenth century, the prison library provided positive moral literature and religious texts in order to convert the inmate, both spiritually and behaviorally. Although the provision of a library within every prison establishment is now a statutory requirement, its role and purpose in relation to the spiritual well-being of the offender is unclear.

According to Sussman (2014) of Carbondale Public Library, “Reading reduces recidivism, which means it increases an individual’s chance that he will succeed at living outside of prison without resorting to crime”. In a New Zealand case study involving Whanganui prison and Whanganui district library, it was mentioned that poor literacy skills correlated with low library use and other negative factors like poor health, low income, and low community involvement, all of which are characteristics that have a greater tendency of leading to criminal activity and imprisonment (Vaccarino & Comrie, 2010).

The values and missions of the modern practice of criminal justice, in which emphasis has gradually shifted from punishment towards education and spiritual well-being, go hand in hand with a view of libraries as important players within the intellectual freedom and social justice agenda. Within this enlightened correctional paradigm, prison libraries serve as a window and a link to the outside world and represent a safe and humane environment that provides support for educational, recreational and rehabilitative programs (Lehmann and Locke, 2005).

METHODOLOGY:

The main objective of this research is study of impact of the prison libraries on prisoners’ spiritual well-being process in Sri Lanka and four null hypotheses were tested to achieve the main objective. The study was carried out in the Welikada Prison (Magazine Prison): the largest prison and one of the maximum-security prisons in Sri Lanka. According the Prison Statistics Report (2019) the total number of convicted prisoners in all prison institutions in Sri Lanka is about 29,164. Out of the total convicted prisoners, about

11,071 are prisoners of the Welikada Prison, while 10,742 and 329 are males and females, respectively. In fact, the number of inmates usually varies even within a specific period of time due to the constant imprisonments and releases. Therefore, all the convicted male prisoners in the Welikada prison, at that time in which the research was carried out, were considered the total population for this study. Further, 100 prisoners out of the total population were found to be registered members of the two libraries intended for the use of inmates at the Welikada Prison, hence, the said group was selected as the study population. The sample size was calculated at 95% confidence level and precision while Simple Random Sampling technique was adopted in the process. In order to collect data, a research questionnaire was administrated among the subjects of the study, i.e. the selected 80 male prisoners.

Following null hypotheses were developed to guide the study.

- H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between information needs and spiritual well-being of prisoners in Sri Lanka
- H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between accessibility of library information resources and spiritual well-being of prisoners in Sri Lanka.
- H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between utilization of library information resources and spiritual well-being of prisoners in Sri Lanka.
- H₀₄: Information needs, accessibility and utilization will not significantly determine spiritual well-being of prisoners in Sri Lanka.

The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, using SPSS software package. In order to fulfill necessary ethical requirements of the study, appropriate permission was duly sought from the Sri Lankan Prison Authority, having provided the overall objectives and the methodology to be used for the study.

RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of Prison:

The findings show that majority of the respondents (80%) were Sinhala, while 8.8%, 6.3% and 5% were Tamil, Muslim and Christian respectively. The result that most respondents were Sinhala is likely because the Sinhalese are the majority ethnic group in Sri Lanka and also occupy all the divisions in the Colombo district.

The age distribution of respondents showed that the majority (41.3%) of convicted prisoners were aged between 40-50 years. The majority of educated prisoners were between the ages of 40-50, including 2 graduates, 16 of advance levels and 12 of ordinary levels. Results show that majority 40% of the respondents had Ordinary Level certificate, 33.75% Advance Level, 20% up to grade ten, 5% university degree and 1.25% masters. When considered as nations, all educated prisoners were Sinhala of the tested sample. It shows four graduates and a master. There were no graduates of any other nation and they were limited to school education.

Many literacy training programmes were conducted by the rehabilitation section of the prison. Among those, Dhamma School (Sucharithodaya Daham Pasala) was the main literacy training school in the prison. In addition English classes, Tamil classes, classes of writing and reading were conducted for those who were unable to read or write. Based on results, out of 80 prisoners 28.7% were attending only secondary literacy training programmes, 17.5% were attending only primary literacy training programmes and 15% were attending both primary and secondary literacy training programmes.

Information needs of prisoners:

The result in Table 01 illustrated the testing of the information needs of prisoners. The result showed that all the listed information needs were highly needed by the prison inmates as they all obtained mean scores of above criterion mean ($x \geq 2.50$) representing "Highly needed". More specifically,

areas such as health, religious, legal support and news are highly needed with mean above the 4.00 weighted averages.

Type of Information needs		VHN	HN	ON	NN	N	
						Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Legal	53	8	17	2	4.4	0.90847
2	Religious	50	18	7	5	4.3625	1.04632
3	Health	49	25	5	1	4.525	0.67458
4	Vocational	21	38	16	5	3.9	0.94935
5	For recreation – like reading for relaxation and leisure	22	26	19	13	3.6125	1.23753
6	Financial	9	14	25	32	3.8875	1.31688
7	General Knowledge	30	29	10	11	2.75	1.22209
8	Sports	13	19	15	32	2.9747	1.37724
9	Stories	32	19	14	15	3.7125	1.39795
10	News	42	21	8	9	4.15	1.14847
Valid = 80							
Missing values = 1							
Weighted mean = 3.823750							

Table 01: Information needs of prisoners

Accessibility of library information resources:

The finding on table 02 indicated that out of the fifteen items (information resources) tested, two obtained a mean score above the weighted mean ($x \geq 3.823750$) and one obtained a mean score above the criterion mean ($x \geq 2.50$). The result also showed that textbook, novel and biography as having means scores of 3.3225, 3.9, and 3.85, respectively which is the mean scores of the items close to the criterion mean in information resources accessibility. The rest of the mean scores are 1.0 each. All these low mean scores ($x \leq 2.50$) portray the poor level of accessibility or non-accessibility of library information resources by prisoners.

Information Resources	Very easily Accessible	Easily Accessible	Occasionally Accessible	Not Accessible	N	
					Mean	Std. Deviation
Textbook	18	62	0	0	3.3225	0.42022
Novel	72	8	0	0	3.9	0.30189
Biography	68	12	0	0	3.85	0.35932
Valid = 80						
Missing values = 0						
Weighted mean = 3.676250						

Table 02: Accessibility of library information resources

Utilization of library information resources:

The result on table 03 showed that utilization of only three information resources by prisoners is quite high. This is evident in the weighted average score obtained at 3.5708 ($3.5708 \geq 2.50$). The tested items with their calculated individual mean score were: Textbook (2.9125), Novel (3.9) and Biography (3.9). The result illustrated very low utilization of all other library information resources except for biography, textbook and novel. It is also noted in the analysis that utilization of information resources by prisoners is ambiguously low. This means that the prisoners are allowed restricted access to information resources in the prison.

Information Resources	Very Highly Utilized	Easily Utilized	Occasionally Utilized	Not Utilized	N	
					Mean	Std. Deviation
Textbook	30	13	37	0	2.9125	0.91671
Novel	72	8	0	0	3.9	0.30189
Biography	72	8	0	0	3.9	0.30189
Valid = 80						
Missing values = 0						
Weighted mean = 3.567500						

Table 03: Utilization of library information resources

Hypothesis Testing:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between information needs and spiritual well-being of prisoners in Sri Lanka

The study revealed in Table 04, that there is no significant relationship between information need and spiritual well-being of prisoners. The coefficient of correlation (Pearson's R): 0.433 which is significant at .05 significance level ($r = 0.433$; $p \leq 0.05$). This means that as information needs becomes clearer, spiritual well-being of the prisoners tend to improve. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between information needs and spiritual well-being of prisoners is rejected and the alternative accepted. There is very strong evidence of a relationship between information needs and spiritual well-being of the prisoners (Chi-square = 222.439, $df = 234$, $p = 0.019 < 0.05$).

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	R	df	Significant	Remarks
Information Needs	38.2747	11.27888	80	0.433	234	0.019*	Significant
Prisoners Spiritual well-being	59.2375	14.22654	80				

Table 04: Relationship between Information Needs and Spiritual well-being of Prisoners

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between accessibility of library information resources and spiritual well-being of prisoners in Sri Lanka

The result in Table 05 illustrated the testing of the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between information accessibility and spiritual well-being of prisoners. The coefficient of correlation (Pearson's R): 0.341 which is significant at .05 significance level ($r=0.341$; $p \leq 0.05$). This implies that as accessibility to library resources and services improve, the spiritual well-being of prisoners also improves. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative accepted. Thus, there is very strong evidence of a

relationship between information accessibility and spiritual well-being of the prisoners (Chi-square = 60.387, df = 39, p = 0.016 < 0.05)

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	R	df	Significant	Remarks
Information Accessibility	11.0725	1.08143	80	0.341	39	0.016*	Significant
Prisoners Spiritual well-being	59.2375	14.22654	80				

Table 05: Relationship between Accessibility and Spiritual well-being of Prisoners

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between utilization of library information resources and spiritual well-being of prisoners in Sri Lanka

The result in Table 06, revealed that there is no significant relationship between prisoners' utilization of library resources and services and their spiritual well-being ($r = 0.660$; $p \leq 0.05$). As such the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between utilization of library resources and spiritual well-being of prisoners is rejected and the alternative accepted. This implied that spiritual well-being is associated with utilization of library information resources of the respondents. Thus, there is very strong evidence of a relationship between utilization of library resources and spiritual well-being of the prisoners (Chi-square = 90.506, df = 52, p = 0.000 < 0.05).

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	R	df	Significant	Remarks
Information Utilization	10.7125	1.52049	80	0.660	52	0.000*	Significant
Prisoners Spiritual well-being	59.2375	14.22654	80				

Table 06: Relationship between Utilization and Spiritual well-being of Prisoners

H₀₄: Information needs, accessibility and utilization will not significantly determine spiritual well-being of prisoners in Sri Lanka

The result in Table 7 illustrated the testing of the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between information needs of prisoners, information accessibility of prisoners, information utilization of prisoners and spiritual well-being of prisoners. The result showed that there is a significant cause and effect relationship between information needs, accessibility, utilization and spiritual well-being of prisoners.

It was observed from the result as represented in Table 8, that utilization made the greatest contribution in magnitude ($\beta_3=0.62$) while information needs made the lowest contribution to the dependent variable ($\beta_1=0.025$). Of these, the contributions of utilization and accessibility are significant ($p \leq .05$) while that of information needs is also significant ($p \leq 0.05$).

Factors	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Rank	t	Significance
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	0.250853	0.507			0.495	0.000
Information Needs	0.014325	0.048	0.025	3 rd	-0.299	0.026*
Accessibility	0.356828	0.125	0.238	2 nd	2.845	0.006*
Utilization	0.552805	0.074	0.620	1 st	7.448	0.000*

*Significant at $p < .05$

Table 07: Contribution of the Three Factors to Prisoners Spiritual well-being

The question of whether prisoners themselves believed information was a tool for spiritual well-being and reforming their lives was a major variable of the study, was also intended to find out from prisoners and officials alike if they thought information and library use could be a tool for positive character change.

CONCLUSIONS:

This study has demonstrated that prison libraries have great potential for information literacy development, reforming, rehabilitating and restoring offenders. Because of prisoners' restricted circumstances, libraries can play a greater role in the lives of prisoners than of almost any other group. Prisoners have the same fundamental right to reading and access to information which should not be denied. The prison library is in the best position to provide the

library and information resources and services for the prisoners to meet their information needs.

The result showed that there is a significant cause and effect relationship between information needs, accessibility, utilization and spiritual well-being of prisoners. All the areas of information needs by prisoners are found to be highly needed. Based on the results obtained from the study, the types of information mostly needed by prisoners include: health information, educational support, information on legal aid, information for recreation, study and life-long learning, and skills acquisition among others. In the analysis presented, areas of information needs were specified which have great impact on the spiritual well-being of prisoners in Sri Lanka.

As a developing country, the Sri Lankan prison library system still exists in a backward level. Although many prisons have small libraries, they are informal and elementary. There were two libraries in the Welikada prison. Worn with use, the book in the prisoner's hands is being read for the eighth time. Once a shabby corner with few books on a small shelf, the Welikada Prison Library renovated last July 2017, now has cupboards, tables and chairs with more than 5000 books of different genres. However, there is a long way to go to create the Model Library planned by the Special Committee on Prison Library Services.

The Welikada prison library has not separate buildings allotted to them; rather they have used a small room under the welfare department. Although these two prison libraries have bookshelves, they are not enough and all the shelves were small in size and old fashioned.

The prison does not even have materials on certain subject areas at all. The few available ones are outdated books donated by individuals or public libraries a long time ago. The Public Library, Colombo is giving 500 titles of books at a time to the Welikada prison library for specific periods. When after finished that time period those books should be returned and can be getting new titles from the public library. Among those books, most of the titles were novels or religious. It is evident that these libraries do not have adequate information resources to provide for the prisoners' information needs.

However, the Welikada prison service has not been providing adequate library and information resources to meet the prisoners' information needs. Many materials are screened out and restricted from entering the prison library and also, tight schedule does not give the prisoners the time to consult the few available information resources which are allowed into the prison.

The study has also revealed that a significant number of prisoners are general readers. This is so because many of the prisoners are not highly educated but most also have basic and secondary education. This could inform much of the subject needs of literate prisoners and therefore aid in a good collection development and management programme in the future.

Prisoners, just like free people in the society, have been observed to have various information needs that can be provided for through library and information services. Providing for the needs of these prisoners will help in achieving the objectives thus Improving the literacy of prisoners, rehabilitating, re-socializing, and re-integrating and preparing the prisoners into becoming better citizens who can readapt into the society after prison.

RECOMMENDATION

Prison library service is a neglected area in Sri Lanka which needs more attention, resources and planned development. Though there are thousands of inmates in prisons in Sri Lanka from all strata of society, providing them with quality library and information services is still a distant dream. The main purpose of these institutions is to rehabilitate the people and send them back to society for which the importance of quality library services is invaluable.

Therefore, in the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are being made.

Additional prison libraries to boost information services for prisoners need to be established in other prison locations across the country.

The extended services of the state and public libraries should be integrated in prison libraries through periodic lending services. This would help the

shortage of books in most prison libraries to cater for materials that cannot be readily provided for by prison authorities.

Prison library infrastructure and equipment has not kept pace with development in Sri Lanka. Lack of accommodation, library building facilities and space are problems in this regard. There is need, therefore, for urgent policy measure to addressing the perennial problem in Sri Lankan prisons for the effective provision of information services.

The prison library is currently stocked with materials that are largely religious materials. Prison libraries should accommodate a wide variety of materials to cover all subject interests cutting across the different educational levels and qualifications of prisoners. For optimum use of the information resources of the library, prisoners must be attended in the selection and acquisition of materials to satisfy their needs.

Suggested strategies for enhancing the provision of library and information resources include; connecting with public libraries, religious bodies, legal practitioners, professional bodies like library association and stakeholders, allowing more information flow from other sources like religious groups, purchasing of reading materials by the prison authorities, mapping out time for the prisoners to make use of the library and information resources and services, allowing more access to library and information materials (even use of the internet), developing new and using existing guidelines to prison library service.

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