

EFFECT OF YOGA AND MEDITATION ON STRESS MANAGEMENT OF FEMALE PRISONERS IN DELHI – A REVIEW PAPER

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ABSTRACT

Studies attest the fact that meditation enhances performance physiologically and psychologically. It can improve the mental well-being of the prisoners and reduce the impulsiveness among prisoners. Prisoners everywhere survive under tough and frustrating situations that incessantly build up their stress levels. The present research focuses on the exploration of how the prisoners, especially female, benefit from meditation. The studies used in the present research help in establishing how yoga can improve mood, reduce stress and control anti- social behavior in human beings as compared to those who lack meditation sessions in their routine, all the more in women in prison, since women (and men) prisoners need constant emotional and psychological therapies to guard their anti- social instincts in future. This paper traces the positive and encouraging changes in the health of female prisoners in Delhi reported after practicing meditation, yoga and such techniques aiding stress management.

Keywords: *Female Prisoners, Indian Prisons, Meditation, Stress management, Yoga*

I INTRODUCTION

Prisons are not places of retreat and enjoyment and it is highly likely of any prisoner to go into depression, anger and frustration during confinement and not much social life. Prison can have far reaching implications for on one's psychological and overall physical working. Further, heightened levels of distress, aggression and anti-social behavior is significantly observed among prisoners (Haney, 2002; Hawkins, 2003). Stress management has to be dealt with through intervention of different stress management approaches. Within India, not much emphasis is given on the stress management programs, and thus it becomes all the more important to understand the importance of stress management tools with specific reference to yoga and meditation.

The concept of meditation for stress management dates back to early 1900s. Behanun, (1961) observes that there was a marked medical improvement in the functions of prisoners who practiced Transcendental Meditation (T.M.) for two months. These cognitive functions showed more marked improvement in case of women prisoners. Several psychosocial studies conducted in the past have reflected on the effectiveness of yoga and meditation on the overall reduction in stress levels of the prisoners (Chandiramani et al, 1998; Samuelson et al, 2007). It has also been reported by that the use of yoga and meditation further reduced substance abuse levels in prisons (Bowen et al, 2006). Findings of these studies reflect that although yoga and meditation were being adopted as spiritual practice, however, they have been proven useful in managing criminal behaviors as well. The fact that yoga has not received any scientific attention it is probably the most less explored areas when it comes to stress management among the prisoners. The research is considerably thin in Indian context and more specifically female prisoners.

II AIM OF THE PAPER

The paper aims to observe through study of how meditation can actually boost the quality of imprisonment of the female prisoners in terms of reduced stress levels and lesser anxiety among prisoners. It studies how meditation and yoga can help prisoners manage anger, aggression and anti- social behavior in prisons and also in life and so how yoga shall enable the prisoners to return back to a normal social life post imprisonment.

III LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. About stress and importance of stress management today:

Traditionally the Indian prisons have mostly male prisoners and thus the prison environment has been developed as per the needs of males. It is thus noted that needs of female prisoners remain unnoticed (Slotboom et al, 2007) and it is lack of research on the condition of female prisoners which further plague the current outlook to determine the needs of females and compare it to males. According to the statistics by the GOI, there are only 1.4% of prisons which are dedicated solely to female prisoners with occupancy rates of 112.2%. Other females are thus bound to be kept in several central jails which have been designed as the male needs (Slotboom et al, 2007). It is the unfriendly environment of the jails which can lead to stress among female prisoners. Further, according to Shrivastva (2006), ill-treatment, psychological problems, poor medical care, social stigma are among the common problems faced by female prisoners leading to high stress levels. Some of the common psychological problems cited by Murthy et al (2011), include; unhappiness, fear of loss, tiredness, headache, inability to work, depression, anxiety which makes even rehabilitation impossible. Several studies in the past have been conducted to determine the condition of female prisoners in India, however, most of them point at high stress levels as cause of these problems. Further, most of the studies reflected that the female prisoners were mothers who were stressed and anxious about the wellbeing of their

children. Further, an exploratory study Green et al (2000) indicates that high stress levels arise due to prison surroundings, lack of special food and care. Further, lack of proper medical facilities further, impact the psycho-emotional distress of female prisoners. Another study by Hairston, 1991 indicated that major reason of stress among women is lack of affection from their family members.

Anderson, (2003) observes in the study that female prisoners face various clinical and mental health issues when compared to the male counterparts, and female suffer more stress and anxiety because of their more complicated bodies and as a result their requirement for stress management is much more. Thus, it is important to adopt different stress management approaches which enable the female prisoners to manage their stress and anxiety. The next section will discuss the importance of stress management strategies currently available.

3.2. Strategies used for stress management:

Currently, prison managers or representatives from different NGOs are deployed to determine and manage stress levels among prisoners. These NGOs work towards the improvement of overall health of female prisoners by providing them with clothes, diet, bedding and medical care (Shrivastva, 2006). However, none of the programs are specifically focused on introduction of stress management tools and more so when do not realize the importance of yoga and meditation as a stress management tool. Yoga according to research scholars is a complex and dynamic intervention which involves a set of *asanas*, breathing exercises which relaxes the stress in mind. Further, a number of studies have been conducted in the past to understand the importance of yoga and meditation. Among the studies conducted in the past, yoga and meditation have been found to improve the overall mood (Shapiro and Cline, 2008) of the person, helps in improving emotional wellbeing which ensures that people remain satisfied with their lives (Hartfiel et al., 2011). Further studies have also reported about the importance of yoga in reduction of aggression, anxiety and anger levels (Nagendra et al., 2008; Yoshihara et al., 2011) thus helps in management of anger which is very common among prisoners who remain frustrated after committing the crime. Scholars have also suggested that it helps in overall reduction of stress levels and can be considered as a mood enhancer by curbing the negative impacts of depression, anxiety and anger (Granath et al., 2006; Kirkwood et al., 2005; Rocha et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2007).

Although a very research is done in India with respect to the impact of yoga and meditation on the overall well being of the prisoners, a number of studies have been conducted across the globe which proves the positive influence of same on the prison life. A number of studies conducted in the last decade indicate that with use of yoga and meditation, reduced levels of anxiety and depression (Streeter et al., 2010; Vadiraja and Raghavendra, 2009; Bekiari et al., 2006) have been observed. Further other than reducing the ill effects of the stress, the yog and meditation has also been found to stimulate cognition, spatial recall and memory (Manjunath and Telles, 2004; (Rocha et al. 2012).

Some studies have also indicated that with the use of Yog as a stress-management technique, indicated to improve the overall attention span (Rangan et al., 2009) of the individual and improved emotional wellbeing.

3.3 Yoga and Meditation as a source of reduced stress levels: Empirical Review:

Shrivasta (2006), in his research clearly indicates that female prisoners are unable to assimilate themselves in the prison environment and thus require rehabilitation to reduce their stress levels. A study conducted by Das (2013) on 35 female prisoners in Odisha indicated that most of the female prisoners were unemployed, and faced problems like dowry, poor economic background and thus were forced to commit crime and further, the surrounding environment of prison adds to their high stress levels. The study thus reflected on the need of rehabilitation among female prisoners. Similar study conducted in Texas on a representative sample of 142 female prisoners indicated that because women were stressed about not being able to meet up with their families they indicated that reintegration with the society even after getting free from the prison was among the problems which lead them to stress (Vigne et al, 2008). Further, a study conducted by Sanyal and Agarwal (1991) in their study conducted on 69 women convicts in Lucknow jail indicated that when prisoners are convicted and given punishment of life imprisonment, their stress levels increase because they develop feelings of helplessness, insecurity and anxiety. Further mother living away from children in prison also indicated to have high stress levels as they feel burdened on how they are able to support their children from prison (Browne et al 1999).

Although not many initiatives have been in India towards female prisoners, this research has a major gap with respect to Delhi prisoners. A study conducted by (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2008) observed that many Indian prisons need “humanitarian interventions” and the reports highlights the practice of NGOs in 14 states (One among this was Delhi) of India observing the prisoners’ rights that need to be safeguarded through legal aids and improvement in administrative systems through “wider sensitization and awareness programmes.” Prison friendly institutes like Art of living have conducted yoga and meditation sessions among 24000 inmates of Tihar Jail, New Delhi in order to reduce their stress and anxiety levels. The results of these interventions have been found positive with considerable reduction in overall stress levels and more relaxed and cheerful inmates. Analogy can be drawn from prisons worldwide, where Road, Farias, & Bilderbeck, (2012) explored in their study how 103 male and female prisoners, 18 to 68 years old, in seven West Midlands prisons, and divided the prisoners into two groups- ‘yoga’ and ‘no yoga’. The effect of yoga on the ‘yoga’ group, was enhancement in positive mood score which rose from 36 to 38 and the non-yoga group’s score declined from 33 to 31. The practice of meditation on the prisoners also helped in reducing stress and psychological distress from 40 to 37 and 18 to 16 respectively.

IV CONCLUSIONS

A number of studies indicate that stress is among the most common problem faced by prisoners and thus the study was undertaken to review the importance of stress management tools like yoga and meditation. Research studies prove the importance of stress management tools like yoga and meditation for the betterment prisoners and especially the female prisoners who face more stress levels when compared to male counterparts. It can be concluded from the analysis that yoga and meditation has positive impact on improved mood, reduced stress, lesser psychological distress, improved concentration and decision making and an improved ability to override impulse for female prisoners.

Yoga and meditation also help bringing in the positivity among the prisoners which help them in positive thinking and motivate to concentrate on other things in which they are interested and in which they prove their actual identity, their real personality.

Further scope of study can be focused on collecting first hand data from the prisoners in Delhi to determine the actual problems they face and what the stress management tools currently available to reduce their stress levels.

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