

## EMPOWERMENT OF COMMUNITY (WOMEN PRISONERS) THROUGH STUDENT'S PARTICIPATION IN 'SOCIAL SERVICE ACTIVITIES IN INDIA

**\*Dr. Emmanuel Janagan Johnson, #P. Suvitha**

*\*Lecturer in Social Work, The University of the West  
IndiesSt. Augustine Campus, Trinidad*

*#Assistant Professor, Guruvayurappan Institute of Management,  
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.*

### ABSTRACT

*This article offers an overview of students' participation in the community level programmes in India by bridging the gap between their institution and community. Over view of the challenges in the work environment, in Prison settings, participation in practice, challenges in empowering the society, challenges in the community participation, challenges in the community involvement, challenges in the effective community communication and overcoming the challenges. The needs to enhance student's participation in decision making and service delivery, improve service performance and increase partnership working are addressed. Drawing on experience from the students' service to the prison department in India, this article will explore ways that students can participate in promoting and providing social service programmes. It also presents the conditions needed for effective student's participation, and discusses approaches to planning, monitoring, and supporting students' teams so that they can actively participate in Community level social service activities.*

**Key words:** *Community, awareness, assessment, training, implementation, students' participation,*

### INTRODUCTION

Student's participation in social service in the society has long been recognized as an effective means of helping rural and urban people focus energy and mobilize resources to solve their health, environmental, and economic problems through educational institutions. When people from the community organize, plan, share tasks with students and professionals, contribute financially to projects or programs, and help make decisions about activities that affect their lives, programs are more likely to achieve their objectives.

Several countries have created ways for students to participate in their community level service programmes. They have found that individuals make better choices about activities when participate in the community level service program in their villages or urban neighborhoods.

## EMPOWERMENT OF COMMUNITY THROUGH EMPOWERING THE STUDENTS

When an opportunity is created for the social work students to expose their skills and talents in serving the rehabilitating the prisoners and the society they are empowered and in turn the society or the beneficiary is also empowered

Empowerment has tremendous impact on decision-making power, access to information and resources, providing a range of options from which to make choices (not just yes/no, either/or.), assertiveness, a feeling that the individual can make a difference (being hopeful), learning to think critically; learning the conditioning; seeing things differently, learning about and expressing anger, not feeling alone, feeling part of a group, understanding that people have rights, effecting change in one's life and one's community, learning skills (e.g., communication) that the individual defines as important, changing others' perceptions of one's competency and capacity to act, coming out of the closet, growth and change that is never ending and self-initiated, increasing one's positive self-image and overcoming stigma.

## STUDENTS PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Student's participation can be defined as the involvement of social work students of higher educational institutions in the community service activities to help and rehabilitate the society. Students will be given an opportunity to apply their professional skills and knowledge for the betterment of the society where ever is possible. Before participating in the community service activities, students are given an opportunity to analyze the following

**Need assessment** – Assessing the important felt needs of the community people. Expressing opinions about desirable improvements, prioritizing goals and negotiating with agencies.

**Planning** – effectively planning programmes and finalizing the starting phase and the concluding phase of the programmes. Formulating objectives, setting goals, criticizing plans

**Mobilizing** – raising awareness in a community about needs, establishing of supporting organizational structures with in the community. Mobilizing local resources or fund mobilization from the community. Program needs such as material and non-material resources can be mobilized from the community.

**Training** – Participation in formal or informal training activities to enhance communication, construction, maintenance and financial management skills.

**Implementing** – engaging in management activities, contributing directly to construction, paying of services or membership fees of community organizations.

**Monitoring and evaluation** – participate in the appraisal of work done, recognizing improvements that can be made and redefining needs.

By involving the community in delivering services, social workers can build on existing resources to improve service quality and expand access to services, for example, by organizing a team of social work volunteers to provide basic services like health education, or motivation training programs in the rural villages.( Askew.1989)

## **ROLE AND EXPOSURE OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS IN THE PRISON REHABILITATION PROGRAMME IN INDIA**

Traditionally the Indian woman has been the foundation stone of the family and society in general. She creates life, nurtures it, guards and strengthens it. In her task, as mother, she plays a vital role, and as wife and mother, she is committed to serve the family. At the societal level, she is the transmitter of tradition and culture. If there is a crack in this foundation, the society is bound to disintegrate.

Modernization, industrialization and urbanization have been invoked to account for the upsurge of female delinquency because they correlate closely with each other. As urbanization increases, traditional roles decrease with increased mobility, people lose stable, continuous personal relationships, disintegration of family life grows, and divorce rate increases, reflecting the changes in the personal and social life of women.

Coimbatore, being one of the major industrial and developed districts of Tamil Nādu State, is not an exception to this phenomenon. The number of female offenders is on the increase in the recent years and there are very few support systems to strengthen and support them, to rehabilitate them and to bring them back to the normal life.

### **CHALLENGES**

- To Reform
- To Reintegrate
- To Rehabilitate
- Share the gospel

## **UNDERSTANDING THE NEED FOR STUDENTS PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY LEVEL SERVICE PROGRAMMES**

Over the next decade, as resources become increasingly scarce, social workers will have to rely more on their participation with the community for promoting, delivering, and paying for community level

service activities. To do this, the social workers will need to create an environment in which they can actively participate in the programmes

By involving the students in promoting the community level service activities, social workers will gain greater support from the community and will find that the community takes more responsibility for making sure the program achieves its objectives.

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The social workers should discuss the strategies with members of the community, staff of other programs, and local government officials. They need to work with the community to make a plan for incorporating some of these approaches into their program. The social workers may need to phase in activities over time, or combine several different approaches that are appropriate to their particular setting. (David 1986).

## **NATURE OF WOMEN OFFENDERS IN COIMBATORE PRISON**

Regarding the nature of women prisoners from Coimbatore region, most of them belong to the rural area and most of them are illiterates doing domestic work or highly marginalized work. An analysis of the nature and extent of crime committed by them reveals that these women are involved right from high rated crimes like murder, attempts to commit murder, cheating, immoral trafficking, robbery, theft, pick-pocketing, smuggling, sale of drugs and illicit-liquor, dowry deaths, corruption and bribery, mismanagement of funds, attempt to commit suicide, petty quarrels, family fights and fight with neighbors.

According to the Prison Statistics Report 2011, women inmates constitute 3.42 per cent of the total inmate's population in the country. Most of them are confined as under trials for want of a surety. They are often given unduly long detentions. Free legal aid is not within their reach.

Women ex-offenders are more vulnerable to suspicion and rejection. The stigma of having been in prison has serious implications. These women are always looked down upon even by the family members. It was observed that there are quite a few women prisoners who are in jail even without being accused of any offence. Such women prisoners happen to be the victims of some offence committed by very close relatives or they are taken into custody for protection given against those relatives.

## PLATFORM FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Exposure in the prison rehabilitation program to the students helps them to develop their skills and potentialities. Student with the help of the faculty members and the institution can provide formal or informal vocational training to the community people that can result in greater employment opportunities. (Korten 1986)

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF WOMEN OFFENDERS IN COIMBATORE PRISON

A bird's eye view of Coimbatore prison reveals that the majority of the women prisoners belong to the age group of 30-50 years followed by women of 18-30 years. It is observed that very a smaller number of women belong to the age group of 51 and above implying that they are accused for no fault of them. It is seen that majority of these women belong to joint family and crimes committed by women coming from nuclear family, can be related to either their widowhood or desertion by their husbands. It can also be inferred that a vast majority of these women are married followed by widowhood and divorced or deserted. A large majority was reported to be illiterate and only a handful of them have entered into secondary school education. Again, a vast majority of the women offenders are from rural areas and have rural orientation in development of beliefs and attitudes.

The overview also discloses that the largest section of women offenders in Coimbatore Prison have no gainful employment in terms of money as they are involved in household work that has not been ascribed any status in our society. Only a fraction of their population is involved in gainful employment like petty business or labor which is again given a lowest status. When one goes deep into the analysis of the petty business, it is one of sale of alcohol or ganja. Despite this, a very high majority of the women offenders earn an annual income of more than Rs.25, 000/-

The above analysis confirms **concentration of women offenders amongst illiterates; in joint families; involvement of younger age groups in immoral trafficking; their rural nature; poor access to resources and desertion by husbands.**

It is therefore, necessary to reduce pressure in these vulnerable areas. It was felt that an effective rehabilitation programme is needed to re-orient these women in their attitudes and values and bring a positive change in their outlook of life. The demand on reorientation and strengthening of their family ties and educating them to change their concept of self through provision of rehabilitation services like orientation and training in income generating, self-employment oriented programmes was realized. At the psychological level, it was a vision to give psychological support through counseling and securing shelter to them and their children

## **ROLE OF STUDENTS**

Social work students as a part of their academic activity they need to go for concurrent field work training through which they will be given an opportunity to apply the techniques, knowledge and professional skills like case work, group work, community organization which they learn in the class room settings. Social work students are actively involved in conducting and monitoring various programmes in the prison.

## **PARTICIPATORY APPRAISAL TECHNIQUES (PRA)**

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) are social research techniques used in the field when resources and time are often limited. These techniques require trained facilitators and substantial time investments if they are to be fully effective. The key differences between the two methods are that

1. PRA is aimed at strengthening the analyzing a decision making power of the affected community.
2. RRA is a method used by the outsiders to acquire information about a community quickly.

RRA can be used by the implementing agency in assessment activities whilst PRA can be used in programme design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The agency can facilitate the process but it is community members that learn to analyze their situation, design and implement programme activities. (Peter, Sohrab & Babol, 2002)

## **ONGOING PROGRAMMES IN COIMBATORE PRISON**

The students were involved in organising awareness programmes, sports activities and skill development involving the social work students towards self-employment or gainful employment aiming at wholesome development. It aimed to address the needs at various levels.

Physical	–	through sports, exercises and yoga
Mental	–	counseling through qualified staff and relaxation
Social	–	Motivation, self – esteem, acceptance and positive Group discussion
Spiritual	–	Meditation and identifying a concept of God
Emotional	–	Catharsis through creative simulation
Financial	–	Training in self-employment programme

The programmes that were planned were positive, productive and purposeful by incorporating professional intervention and decentralization.

## **DECENTRALIZATION OF STUDENTS ON DECISION-MAKING IN PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES**

Decentralization as a means of improving its performance will increase the students' ability to get support from prison authority, local program providers and administrators, and local government authorities. Decentralization helps to bring the decision-making process closer to the people who will be most affected by the decisions. Under decentralization, the program office at the institution level gives authority to students' level to make certain types of decisions concerning resource allocation and the implementation of various programs. Policies that support decentralization permit students to develop strategies that are appropriate to the local environment, encourage positive attitudes toward the programme activities and improve program performance. (Rifkin, Susan, B. 1990).

Some of the programmes, which are conducted on the regular basis, have been given as under:

### **Awareness classes:**

Special Emphasis is given to awareness classes. The faculty members, extending their support and guidance to students with other resource persons, take awareness classes on immunization, healthy practices in child rearing, entrepreneurship, human rights, etc.

### **Literacy classes**

As 90 per cent of the inmates are illiterates, efforts are taken to give training in writing basic alphabets, a few words like their names, bus numbers and words which are in daily use.

### **Book reading and book reviews**

A separate library has formed for women prisoners consisting of books on morals, values, life-coping skills and biographies. The inmates who can read are encouraged to read these books and for others, these books are read out and discussions are held highlighting the importance and worth of a moral life.

### **Counseling**

It is observed that lack of psychiatric attention in prisons is a serious shortfall, which adversely affects the well-being of the women prisoners. The need for counseling was felt in Coimbatore prison also. Through counseling, attitudes towards life, towards relationships and towards job can be changed. The psychological problems like depression, anxiety, worries and stress can be relieved through counseling. The behavioral problems and behavioral changes can also be addressed through behavior modification therapies. Informative counseling is also given by the professional social work students through which information about legal aid, education and security for their children is given.

### **Rehabilitation of inmates' children**

Almost 10 children of few deserving inmates are now placed in a home called "Saranalaya", a shelter home for children nearby Coimbatore, where few other orphan children are staying. They send these children to various schools. The educational and other needs of these children are met out by our institution.

### **Rehabilitation services for the discharged women:**

The women who are deserted by their family members, and who want to lead a moral life are sent to homes called "Imayam" and "Thayagam" where these women are taught some hand work like embroidery, tailoring, etc. A girl who was arrested under prostitution case, when she was pregnant, is taken care of at Imayam. The child who was born to her was given in adoption.

### **Competitions**

Students organize various competitions like Rangoli. Drawing, Composition Writing, Singing, Debate, Flower making are conducted then and there for the inmates. The inmates participate enthusiastically in these competitions and exhibit their talents. Not only the best performer, but also all the participants are given prizes during the celebrations of important National days and festivals.

### **Celebration of Important days**

It is a great opportunity to celebrate important National days like Independence day, Children's day, International Women's day, Human Rights day, Gandhi Jeyanthi, etc. and festivals like Pongal, Christmas, etc. Special invitees are invited and the days were celebrated. The inmates and their children are encouraged to participate in cultural programmes and exhibit their talents.

### **Vocational skill development training**

The aim of starting vocational training programme is to instill in their mind self-confidence, worth of life, and to have a positive outlook towards worldly things. Some of the vocational training programmes, which were conducted for the inmates so far, have been enumerated as under:

- |                             |                      |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| * Embroidery                | * Tie and Dye        |
| * Cookery                   | * Pottery            |
| * Greeting card preparation | * Sign board writing |
| * Artificial flower making  |                      |

#### **1. Tailoring Unit**

Tailoring was identified as one such area where gainful employment is guaranteed. A tailoring unit was started in November 2003 in the Coimbatore Central Prison, Women Enclosure with 5 tailoring machines. A sewing teacher was appointed and she teaches them the basics in tailoring and stitching of garments like knickers, blouses and petticoat. So far, more than 100 women inmates have benefited out of it.



## **Remuneration**

Apart from giving training in tailoring, the highlight of this tailoring unit is the remuneration given to the prisoners. The easily saleable garment was identified as petty-coats. The orders are taken from the general public, and all the raw materials are provided by our institution. Once the inmates are trained well and they are proficient in stitching the garments finely, for every stitched garment, these women are given Rs.6/- as an incentive, when they go out under bail or on release. Arrangements have been made with the prison officials for the disbursal of money earned by these women. If any woman has earned up to Rs.1500/- during her stay in prison, she will be given a sewing machine itself. The idea behind this, is that, when they go out, they have at least some capitals in their hand through which they can start a new life.

### **2. Rexin Bag making**

Connected to sewing, the other area identified to generate income for the women prisoners is Rexin Bag making. The same sewing teacher was sent on training in Rexin Bag making and three new sewing machines meant especially for stitching rexin and leather materials were installed in women enclosure. The items which are produced in this unit are small purses and hand bags made of rexin and velvet clothes and school bags, mini lunch cum snack bags and travel bags made of rexin. Like the tailoring unit, here also the raw materials are provided by our college, and according to the type of product and the number of items they have produced, the women offenders are given remuneration at the time of their release.

### **3. Other Programs**

Apart from these two units, the college is also planning to bring out one more unit in Block Printing where the in-house expertise will be utilized. With the help of the students and faculty members, a unit in block printing will be opened at the women enclosure of Coimbatore prison in the near future and the women inmates will be given training in that.

## **CONCLUSION**

Empowerment is a process which helps the students to improve their leadership skills and their potentialities. The role played by the students by their participation in the rehabilitation of women prisoners in India and their contribution to the society during the crisis situations like Tsunami really narrows the gap between the higher educational institution and the society. No doubt these students are exposed to various social issues and through which they get an opportunity to learn the application of case work and group work methods. And also improve their professional skills and talents to serve the community in a better way.

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