

Qualitative Study

A Qualitative Study of Drum Circle and its Impact on Jail Inmates at Nasik Central Jail

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ABSTRACT

Accepting and normalizing a life in confinement can be a stress inducing phase for inmates. The delay in judicial-legal process can prolong any possible relief from the jail term. Research affirms the multiple issues that inmates face while living their jail term. The current research does not intend to comment on systemic or administrative overhauling of the current prison scenario. The intent of the current phenomenological research is to study how does a drum circle go on to impact the inmates. **Method:** The phenomenological study has a sample of 44 male jail inmates from the Nasik Central Jail. The age range between 23-45 years. Observations and unstructured interviews were recorded. Thematic coding of the data was done. **Result:** The drum circle activity gave the inmates an avenue for expression and communication. Inmates reported feeling of relaxation, joy and reduction of sleeplessness. A feeling of generativity and 'being one with all' was reported.

Keywords: *Recreational Group Drumming, Drum Circle, Jail, Inmates, Qualitative Study.*

Living in a prison is a life in confinement. A life devoid of activities and values which the inmate thrived in. It deprives one of their family-life, community living, their professional pursuit at large. The stamp of being incarcerated goes on to inhibit mainstreaming in future life. The scope of inmates to find employability in future or a sustainable future drastically reduces too. This deprivation from their typical life also leads to increased hostility, aggression and misconduct in the jail. Imprisonment is an intentional step to align the person morally on the legally approved path, albeit with certain worrisome dangers and atrocities. This entire premise makes one question the rationale of imprisonment.

Right from their architectural structures like high walls, barbed fences, intrusive surveillance, prisons intend to nudge the conscience of the prisoner. Seclusion from their typical life doesn't imply living poorly. Having said there are many research findings indicating below par living condition of the inmates. Basic human rights of prisoners are never considered significant and are rather boldly flouted. Prisons have a diverse population, people from a varied socio-economic, religious and cultural background cohabit at the same

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time. Additionally, the reason for incarceration is also different for all of them. This leads to adjustment issues in the inmates. Additionally, an unfortunate issue in our country is the lack of semantic segregation between convicts and undertrials. This can lead to in-prison conflicts between inmates. Though the crime has not been proved in the case of an undertrial, he is treated in the similar way as any convict is.

A major concern for prisons today is overcrowding. It has a direct effect on the physical and psychological health of the prisoners. It makes the prisoners susceptible to infections and psychiatric disorders (Gurrero, 2011). It also implies a higher prisoner to prison staff ratio. This compromises the efficiency of social rehabilitation of the inmates.

This lack of space has affected their physical health and emotional and mental well-being. According to latest statistics, the current Maharashtra state prison capacity is at 24,772 while the actual occupancy is around 40,946 inmates. (Inamdar,2022). An interesting find in the data supplemented in the Executive Summary of the Prison Statistics Report of the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB), For an actual capacity of 4,14,033 inmates, prisons nationally house a total of 4,88,511. A whopping 118 percent hike in occupancy.

Prison environment is mentally taxing and makes an inmate susceptible to psychiatric issues. Their mental health issues go undetected and untreated. (Aiyrolimeethal et al,2014). Inmates have a much needed but a non-existent access to mental health help. A substantial amount of research has been done to understand the psychiatric morbidity of inmates in India.

Rationale

Inmates face stressors unlike other socially marginalized sections of the society. Stigmatizing them reduces their chances of rehabilitation in the society. Especially in case of undertrials, the cohabitation and being meted the same treatment as the convicts, go on to scar their sense about themselves. Though in confinement, the inmates deserve humane living conditions. Deficit of these living conditions can put an extra burden of adjustment and stress on the inmate.

The constitution of India under Article 21 guarantees right to life to its citizen. Access to health services, read mental health, is a justified offshoot of this right. Resort to recreational and cathartic means of stress management and for better emotion and social regulation can help to mitigate the mounting stress and distress from their life in confinement. Better prison adjustment can lead to better social integration

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a cross-sectional study by Aiyrolimeethal et al (2011), studied 255 inmates in Kozhikode, Kerala (mid-April to mid-July 2011). The study included male and female inmates, remand and convict. The psychiatric morbidity was assessed using MINI-Plus. SPSS (version 16) was used for statistical study. The socio-demographic data, criminal history and clinical history was collected. The results indicated that 175 inmates had mental illness. A 47.1% prevalence of Substance use-disorder, which was the most common among the inmates, 19.2 % had Antisocial personality disorder, 13.7% had Adjustment disorder, 4.3% had Mood disorder and 6.3% had Psychosis.

The study indicates a high prevalence of mental health issues in inmates. The study suggests a holistic approach of considering socio-cultural differences, prison settings and methodological differences while dealing with psychiatric issues of prisoners.

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Goyal et al (2011) studied 500 inmates examined the presence of psychiatric morbidity in inmates. They assessed the morbidity using the socio-demographic proforma, the Pareek Udai and Trivedi G's socio-economic status scale, Kuppaswamy's economic status scale and Present state examination. The results indicate that around 23.8 % of the population displayed psychiatric condition including substance abuse. 56.4 % of the participants had a history of substance abuse and dependence prior the incarceration. The research boldly suggests the need of psychiatric help in this marginalized segment of the society.

Wolff et al (2016), found a positive correlation between prison overcrowding and self-harm in Geneva, Switzerland. The cross-sectional study conducted between 2014-2016, findings indicate that the perpetual chase and competition for the limited resources lead to a feeling of 'deprivation'. Overcrowding in excess of 200% was found to be associated with self-strangulation/ hanging. The study reiterates how overcrowding can have destructive effect on the psycho-physio- emotional- behavioral health of the inmates.

Peters (2017), Engagement in meaningful activities keep the inmate's mind occupied. It helps in reducing incidents of violence while improving their mental health.

Kantor (2019), pointed out the issues with music making in a correctional facility. She points out to the value that music brings to the inmates, "music works like a salve, a rescue, a reward, a reminder, a motivator and a connector." Her study of correctional facility music bands across the United States of America points to music as a medium of catharsis for venting and cleansing of guilt, shame, trauma, burden of assault done to them. Spiritually, music was said to help the inmates transcend the prison.

Arya (2017), reports the music therapy program which commenced at a sub jail at Kunjalammudu in Thiruvanthapuram. Around 250 inmates participated in it. The program has been initiated with an intention to provide a platform for the inmates to learn a new skill and also to address their mounting emotional and mental issues from being incarcerated. Music was said to improve their social and emotional quotient.

Bittman et al (2009), studied the plethora of issues which hinder the effective rehabilitation of juvenile delinquents. They introduced a novel creative musical protocol as a means to improve the quality of life of the inner-city youth in a court referred residential training program. A total of 52 subjects (30 females, 22 males) from an age range of 12-18 participated in this study. They came from diverse cultural background. Bittman and his colleagues implemented a randomized controlled crossover study. The study concluded with significant improvement on various levels like school performance, depression, negative affect, negative self- evaluation, interpersonal relationship and anger issues. The sessions were conducted over a period of 6 weeks.

Bacon (2010), in his article has highlighted the benefits of using drumming in correctional facility. Bacon as a trained therapist to conduct drumming sessions for socially marginalized population has identified inmates with feelings of boredom, fear negative self-image and a feeling of disconnection. He also mentions that inmates are diagnosed with anti-social traits and also face problem maintaining social interactions. Bacon claims that drumming sessions improve the inmate's ability to express emotions, socialize, improve peer relationship and effectively manage stress.

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Sample

44 male inmates participated in the sessions. The inmates were within the age group of 23-45 years. The sessions were co-sponsored by the principal investigator and the drum circle facilitator. Necessary permissions were obtained from the prison authority. The participants were briefed about the session and the goal of the study before commencing the session. The sample was selected on the basis of purposive sampling. Participation was voluntary. Once a part of the study, attendance was compulsory. The research was conducted at Nasik Central Jail, Maharashtra, India.

Design

Before the active music making sessions commenced, the participants were part of four group counseling sessions. These sessions lasted for ninety minutes. The participants were briefed about confidentiality about their sharing and were given an elaborate understanding about the study. The intent of the counseling sessions was to understand the ground reality and issues of inmates. These sessions were conducted in a group of eleven inmates each and were conducted by an experienced clinical psychologist. Participants discussed issues like self-doubt and fear about future, lack of hope, stress, anxiety, adjustment issues amongst the inmates, lack of sleep and appetite, frustration, anger, substance dependence, poor dialogue with family. The anger on missing out their family milestones, Resentment towards the legal and administrative delay was one of the overarching issues in all the sessions. These shared concerns were then thematically mapped into separate themes.

The drumming session activity were designed with an intention to address these issues.

Procedure

The principal investigator is a certified drum circle facilitator. The sessions were co-facilitated by a professional drum circle instructor. The group counselling inputs were used to design the drum circle session.

Four weekly sessions were planned and conducted across four Saturdays of the month. One session each week. The session typically spanned for 90 minutes. The session started with 45 minutes of active drumming, followed by 15 minutes of meditative silence followed by 30 minutes of sharing.

The drum circle intended on creating a safe, comfortable, and interactive environment that allowed the participants to be fully engaged in the activities. The positive atmosphere of the circle facilitated the communication among the participants and allowed the facilitator to effectively lead the session. The use of the African djembe and the seating arrangement ensured that all participants received an equal level of attention and were actively involved in the session. Attendance of each session was also strictly enforced, ensuring all participants were present and actively engaged.

Ground rules for discipline and décor were set. Participants were asked to be mindful when others are sharing. The prison support staff was present in the background due to protocols reasons.

Each drum circle session started with a warm up activity. Participants were informed that sessions do not call for musical acumen, experience or practice. Each participant was given an individual African djembe for the session. Basic hand drumming was taught. The importance of active attention, participation and support to others was reiterated.

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Participants were encouraged to use this nonverbal technique of communication during the session. Discriminative sounds or sound sequences were played.

Data collection

Data was collected from the observations made during the sessions and on the basis of the thematic coding of the unstructured interviews and personal sharing of the subjects.

Observation during the sessions: the participants were observed for their non-verbal conduct during the session. Their body language, posture, eye contact-quantitative and qualitative changes over the weeks, the quality of their participation during the session. The events during the session were noted simultaneously during the session. The observations were coded by a clinical psychologist.

The unstructured and informal interviews were conducted at the end of each drumming session. The interviews were audiotaped for further investigations. Prior consent was taken from the jail authority and from the participants. The interviews centered around how did the participants feel emotionally and physically after the sessions.

Content analysis of the sessions and the recordings was done to derive the core themes.

RESULT

Content analysis of the recordings lead to the following themes:

The drum circle was recreational in nature and the subjects enjoyed the sessions. They found this medium as a way to let go of their pent-up frustration, they reported 'feeling lighter', they felt they 'drummed away' anxieties, anger and sorrow. They also reported the feeling of being one with all in this. They reported a 'different level of connectedness with the other participants'. Almost all of them appreciated the facilitator for bringing out a powerful connection amongst them all. Some reported that after a long time they felt that they actually expressed and feel safe at the same go. Some reported to have found this activity close to their meditative state and felt connected with their higher self. They felt a sense of achievement on completion of the sessions and their body language was relaxed and amicable. A feeling of authenticity was reported as 'they weren't forced to be right' during the session and mistakes and going off the sync was a part of the session.

On the basis of the above the dominant themes identified were as follows:

- Participant based themes
- Facilitator based themes
- Drumming based themes
- Transformation themes

Drumming based themes

1. To learn various taps and the sounds it creates.
2. To play on various areas of the membrane and create a different tonality of sound.
3. Its okay to make mistakes.
4. Mimic the leader.
5. To play on numbers: even and odd
6. To create and initiate a rhythm.
7. To play in rhythm
8. To play off beat

9. To increase / decrease the tempo
10. To add vocals to the musical rhythm
11. Mimic the leader
12. Drum battles
13. Singing and playing African song.

Participant themes

- **Disabling themes**
 1. Being shy/hesitant
 2. Not able to follow a rhythm for the required amount of time.
 3. Not able to play for a long time.
 4. Not able to follow instructions
 5. Lack of confidence
 6. Inability to initiate a rhythm.
 7. Going out of sync
 8. Creating a distraction
 9. Not fully participating as not wanting to go off tune.
 10. Social loafing

- **Enabling themes**
 1. Openness to participate
 2. Longer playing time
 3. Ready to experiment with sounds and rhythm
 4. Supportive to the group members
 5. Initiative taking
 6. Group feeling

Facilitator based themes

1. Building confidence
2. Allowing a safe space for the subjects
3. Implementing ground rules
4. Empathetic facilitation
5. Catalyst to ensure inclusivity
6. Encouragement for initiative, participation and creativity.
7. Educating the group with rhythm and the basic structure of the session.
8. Maintaining the creative flow of the session.

Transformation themes

1. Relatively more confident than before.
2. Readiness to take action and to experiment
3. Stronger group cohesion
4. Increased playing time
5. Ability to honor boundaries set by the facilitator.

DISCUSSIONS

The researcher understands that the human spectrum of emotions and behaviors is highly dynamic and cannot be simplified to binary numbers. Qualitative studies offer the potential to comprehend the intricacies of human nature in greater detail. Having said, a quantitative study can further foster and encourage the qualitative findings in this research.

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The use of drum circles as an intervention strategy is relatively new in India and the available literature is not native. In order to improve the effectiveness of drum circles, further research into both quantitative and qualitative aspects is needed. Such research would also provide the opportunity to fine-tune techniques to the needs of the domestic population.

A facilitator must possess emotional intelligence and assertiveness when handling a drum circle, particularly when working with a sensitive group of participants as in this study.

As discussed at the very beginning, the intent of the paper is not to comment on the administrative or legal working of the system,

However, following are certain areas, which if worked upon, can bring in improvement in the current living conditions of prisons in India.

- The role of non-governmental organizations is extremely crucial. An assertive civil society can question, overturn and usher better prison conditions.
- Mindful segregation between undertrials and convicts is necessary.
- Improving living condition (hygiene, level of illumination, cell-capacity, to name a few) is paramount.
- Arranging psycho-educative programs to help the inmates understand self and implications of one's action well.
- Increasing prison capacity.
- Training prison staff.
- In house skill development /educative programs to facilitate a positive social integration.
- Education of prison rights.
- Limitations: Unfortunately, very few studies are available from generic sources to study the impact of recreational or alternative intervention on the psycho emotional

Limitations

- This study was limited to male inmates, similar study with female inmates can be proposed.
- The study was limited to inmates from Nasik central jail only.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the drum circle, the inmates experienced a sense of relaxation, freedom from stress, and a sense of unity with each other. This demonstrates the power of music to create a positive and restorative environment, and highlights the potential of this activity as a therapeutic tool. As such, it is recommended that this activity be further studied and incorporated into prison rehabilitation programs.

Overall, the drum circle was a successful endeavour, with the inmates experiencing a sense of connectedness and emotional well-being. This highlights the potential of such activities in providing an effective and safe therapeutic environment for inmates.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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