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Exploring the Effectiveness of Rehabilitation Programs through Inmates' Experiences and Post-Release Outcomes at District Jail Sargodha

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the efficacy of the rehabilitation programs in the District Jail, Sargodha, through case studies of the life experiences and perceived experiences of the inmates. Qualitative phenomenological design was used in the research as it was guided by the aims of measuring behavioral, psychological, educational, and vocational effects. The purposive sampling was conducted to select 11 prisoners who had undergone at least one rehabilitation program. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, and thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The results indicate that attending rehabilitation programs led to better discipline, less aggression, better emotional control, high self-esteem, and resurgence of hope. Educational programs increased literacy and desire to further study, whereas vocational training enhanced the level of employability and belief in the legitimacy of earning an income. Nonetheless, issues of post-release stigma and low chances of employment were also generated. On the whole, the research finds that organized rehabilitation programs may contribute to the establishment of valuable personal change and increase reintegration preparedness in the Pakistani correctional setting.

Keywords: Rehabilitation Programs, Inmate Experiences, Prisoners, Phenomenology, Vocational Effects

INTRODUCTION

The global prison system is increasingly conscious of the fact that imprisonment does not suffice to achieve long-term public safety, thus reoffending prevention has risen once again on the agenda of the global prisons as a fundamental correctional objective (Cullen, 2013; Cullen & Jonson, 2011). Modern criminology holds that evidence-based prison programs, including education, vocational training, therapeutic interventions, and structured recreational activities, can mitigate criminogenic risks by enhancing pro-social skills, better psychological adjustment, and reintegration into society (Byrne, 2020; Looman & Abracen, 2013). Nevertheless, rehabilitation is still imbalanced in application and efficiency in the prison context, and it is usually subject to the prison climate, available resources, and access to valuable programs (Bosma et al., 2020; Crewe, 2012). Inmates also suffer the ills of imprisonment in most correctional settings, such as psychological pressure, social exclusion, and lack of autonomy, and this can lead to deviant behavior, violence, and poor adaptation unless addressed through the support interventions (Blevins et al., 2010; Rocheleau, 2013). Thus, the review of the rehabilitation programs must focus not only on their participation but also on the lived experience of the inmates, what they think is useful, and what circumstances it might be helpful to achieve behavioral and emotional transformation (Edwards, 2021; Liebling & Maruna, 2013).

In the Pakistani prison system, rehabilitation is a growing yet understudied field, specifically at the level of the district jail, where the implementation of the programs can vary significantly compared to special institutions. According to the existing Pakistani literature, vocational training and recreational activities have some potential to positively impact the attitudes, skills, and adjustment of inmates, which opens promising opportunities of rehabilitation in local institutions (Ahmed et al., 2022). Comparative studies at the provincial level also indicate that services related to rehabilitation differ across agencies and settings in Punjab, and these services can only be comprehended through institution-specific analyses to understand what works, who, and with what limitations (Alif et al., 2024). The international literature also confirms that education in prison could assist in identity change and cognitive adjustments, where prisoners can redefine their future without criminal relationships (Behan, 2014; Tett et al., 2012). On the same note, rehabilitative and therapeutic supports, such as structured occupational interventions, have also been linked to greater well-being, self-regulation, and coping capacity, all of which are critical in the context of lessening institutional conflict and facilitating release (Berardi et al., 2024; Farrier et al., 2019). Yet, some studies also suggest that the reintegration success cannot be achieved solely through individual change but is also influenced by post-release factors like stigma, employability issues, and disrupted social networks that can eradicate the desistance despite the meaningful in-prison change (Maruna et al., 2013; Stahler et al., 2013).

The study is important since this context-specific evidence on the effectiveness of prison-rehabilitation programs is in the District Jail Sargodha, where the empirical research has not been conducted extensively in Pakistan. To begin with, the research adds to the body of criminological literature, recording the ways in which rehabilitation programs can lead to the regulation of behavioral patterns and psychological adaptation of inmates and helping to answer the question whether it is possible to make the existence of aggression, better discipline, and emotional stability in custodial facilities less intense with the help of structured interventions (Blevins et al., 2010; Bosma et al., 2020). Second, it draws attention to the importance of prison-based education and vocational training in the development of human capital, heightening inmate confidence, and perceived employability-the factors that are always associated with successful reintegration and less chance of reoffending (Ahmed et al., 2022; Byrne, 2020; Rosli et al., 2021). Third, the study provides valuable information on the judgments of prisoners on the accessibility of programs, their usefulness, and limitations, which is crucial in enhancing the design and delivery of programs in accordance with the principles of rehabilitation (Behan, 2014; Edwards, 2021). In practice, the results can guide the prison administrators and policymakers in Punjab on the strengths and gaps of the programs to support the evidence-based enhancements and resource distribution in correctional rehabilitation (Alif et al., 2024; Cullen, 2013). Lastly, the research contributes to greater societal safety objectives by highlighting the importance of rehabilitation as an intervention to minimize recidivism and foster social integration, as well as structural obstacles to change like stigma that demand integrated post-release services (Cullen et al., 2011; Maruna et al., 2013; Stahler et al., 2013).

Research Objectives

1. To assess the effects of the rehabilitation programs on the behavior as well as the psychological outcome of the inmates.
2. To evaluate how the rehabilitation programs can help in improving the development of the inmates in terms of educational and vocational skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The argument concerning the rehabilitation of prisons has developed a lot in the last few decades. Previous pessimistic perspectives, commonly known as the nothing works doctrine were a challenge to the ability of correctional programs to halt reoffending. Nonetheless, modern criminological research has greatly disputed this stance to reveal that properly organized, evidence-based interventions can have a positive impact on the behavior of the offenders (Cullen, 2013; Cullen et al., 2011). Rehabilitation has become a broadly accepted concept in the sense that it can be described as a process in which criminogenic needs are addressed; pro-social identity cultivated and reintegration to society is encouraged (Cullen & Jonson, 2011).

Risk-Need- Responsivity (RNR) model offers a hegemonic concept of successful rehabilitation. This model implies that the offender must be responsive and sensitive at the level of risks, to criminogenic needs and that the intervention

must correspond to the individual characteristics (Looman & Abracen, 2013). When applied with fidelity, employment skills, education, cognitive restructuring, and emotional regulation have been shown to reduce recidivism (Byrne, 2020; Bukhari, 2024). In line with this view, desistance theory lays stress on identity change and building a pro-social self-concept as primary to behavioral change in the long term (Maruna et al., 2013). Rehabilitation strategies that can make the individuals hopeful, self-efficacy, and perspective on the future are thus important in enabling the reintegration to be sustainable.

General strain theory also indicates that the maladaptive behaviors, including the prison actions may be a result of stress-inducing factors, like deprivation, frustration, and negative emotions (Blevins et al., 2010; Bukhari et al., 2025). To this extent, constructive institutional actions can be coping mechanisms to curb aggression and encourage emotional control. Likewise, the studies of the climate within prisons have shown that the effective participation in the structured programs helps to reduce the rates of misconduct and enhances the adaptation to the institutions (Bosma et al., 2020; Rafique & Khan, 2024).

Psychological and Behavioral Results of Rehabilitation Programs

There is a considerable amount of literature that points to the behavioral and psychological advantages of interventions in prisons. Research on the topic of structured therapeutic and occupational interventions indicates that it positively affects emotional control, coping mechanisms, and general mood (Berardi et al., 2024; Farrier et al., 2019). It has also been found that educational activities in prisons are connected with the improvement of self-esteem, reflective thinking, and cognitive change (Behan, 2014; Tett et al., 2012). These results are congruent with the studies that posit that internal change incarceration is a vital aspect of success after release (Bui & Morash, 2010; Farooqui et al., 2023).

The studies of institutional misconduct further confirm the significance of the program participation in diminishing the violence and disciplinary violations. Positive activities and environments have also been associated with enhanced compliance and less aggression among the prisoners (Blevins et al., 2010; Rocheleau, 2013). Also, the analysis of the prisoners' views highlights that a lack of access to meaningful rehabilitation can impede psychological development and support the sense of marginalization (Edwards, 2021; Jalil et al., 2023). Taken together, these results indicate the relevance of systematic, available initiatives in the establishment of behavioral stability and emotional strength.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Education

Educational and vocational programs are some of the key elements of correctional rehabilitative measures across the globe. It is a well-known truth that prison education programs are able to broaden their cognitive abilities, enhance critical thinking, and enhance the value they hold of themselves (Behan, 2014). Tett et al. (2012) discovered that arts and learning programs in prisons contribute to the development of the person and identity transformation, which substantiates the role of education in rehabilitation (Amin & Uddin, 2023).

Reintegration is also positively linked to vocational training programs. It has been shown that skills training increases the employability and decreases the economic incentives to reoffend (Byrne, 2020; Rosli et al., 2021). The experience of Pakistani correctional facilities indicates that vocational and recreational activities lead to greatly positive shifts in the attitude of the inmates, their discipline, and the perception of their readiness to work in the field of law (Ahmed et al., 2022; Khan, 2024). It is also reported according to international assessments that the structured interventions that are skill-based are the means of decreasing recidivism provided that they are coordinated with labor market needs (Duwe & King, 2013).

RNR framework notes that employment is one of the criminogenic needs; thus, job skills and financial independence programs are of particular importance (Looman & Abracen, 2013; Naseer et al., 2025). The more participants are able to develop marketable skills in prison, the more they have a chance to see the possible alternatives to crime thus facilitating desistance entries (Maruna et al., 2013).

Reentry and Obstacles to Structure

As much as rehabilitation is focused on individual change, other social and structural factors are important in the successful reintegration. Research indicates that post-release success can be negated by stigma, lack of job prospects and disrupted family ties even after progress in prison (Maruna et al., 2013; Stahler et al., 2013; Noor et al., 2025). According to Cullen (2013), the rehabilitation process should not be confined to the walls of an institution, but should encompass community-based supports that will strengthen behavior change.

The comparative study in Punjab also shows that the practice of rehabilitation in different types of correctional institutions differs, and each context should be specifically assessed (Alif et al., 2024; Ngo et al., 2026). In addition, qualitative studies have always emphasized the relevance of including the voice of the inmate in evaluating the success of the programs because the lived experience discloses practical obstacles and institutional mechanisms that are not reflected in quantitative analyses (Bonggot et al., 2024; Edwards, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

The three perspectives which form the basis of this study are the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model, as well as general strain theory. Collectively, they represent a broad-based perspective on the role of rehabilitation programs on the behavioral, psychological, educational, and vocational performance of inmates in District Jail Sargodha.

Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Model

This study mainly relies on the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model as the general theoretical basis. These form the principles of the model, effective correction interventions should (a) be relevant to the level of service to the offender risk of recidivism (risk principle), (b), address criminogenic needs (i.e., a problem with unemployment, antisocial attitudes, and lacking skills) (need principle), and (c) be responsive to individual characteristics, learning styles, and abilities (responsivity principle) (Looman & Abracen, 2013).

Under the framework of this research, the vocational training, education courses and the organized rehabilitative actions can be discussed as the means to tackle the major criminogenic requirements, specifically, unemployment, absence of formal education and deficiency of pro-social skills. Based on the RNR model, measures that improve employability and cognitive functions have high probabilities of decreasing the risk of recidivism and enhancing institutional adaptation (Byrne, 2020). The improvements in the discipline, emotional control, and acquisition of skills reported by the participants can therefore be interpreted as effects of the need-targeted and structured interventions that are in line with the principles of RNR.

General Strain Theory

General strain theory is another explanatory perspective of behavioral and psychological consequences of operating in prison. According to the theory, negative emotions, which are caused by exposure to stressors like deprivation, frustration, and social isolation, can promote the risk of aggression and misconduct (Blevins et al., 2010). Prison is an inherent aspect of incarceration that is referred to as the pains of imprisonment (Crewe, 2012; Liebling & Maruna, 2013).

Rehabilitation programs can act as positive coping behavior in that they offer process and structure of engagement, emotional release, and purpose. Being engaged in meaningful activities may minimize idle time, lower frustration, and enhance emotional control, hence lowering institutional misconduct (Bosma et al., 2020). Behavioral changes that the participants of this study report can be thus seen as effects of lower strain and the higher coping abilities that the program involvement helped them to have.

This study conceptualizes rehabilitation as a process that has a multidimensional approach by incorporating the RNR model, and general strain theory. The RNR model describes the way organized interventions are applied to criminogenic needs; and the general strain theory describes how enrollment in programs could decrease emotional stressors that cause misconduct. Collectively, these frameworks offer an excellent basis of the theoretical study of behavioral, psychological, educational, and vocational effects of rehabilitation schemes used in District Jail Sargodha.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research design in this specific study to investigate the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in District jail in Sargodha in terms of behavioral, psychological, educational and vocational outcomes among inmates. A phenomenological paradigm was used to understand the lived experiences and individual meanings that the inmates place on their enrolments in prison-based programs. In my case, purposive sampling was used to select 11 inmates who had undergone at least one rehabilitation initiative and lasted at least three months. The data were gathered with the help of semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in the prison in a confidential environment and each of about 45-60 minutes. The interview guide was

formulated based on the research objectives and the pertinent rehabilitation literature and included the perceived behavioral change, the development of emotions and psychological stability, the acquisition of skills, and the readiness to reintegrate. The interviews were audio-taped with consent and transcribed verbatim and translated into English where appropriate. Data were coded under the Braun and Clarke thematic analysis framework, inductive coding process was employed to ensure themes came out in the narratives of the participants but was informed by the theoretical perspective of rehabilitation and desistance. Member checking, an audit trail, and reflexive journaling are the strategies that were used to make the results trustworthy. Institutional permission and ethical approval were provided, and informed consent was obtained among all the participants with anonymity provided in the form of pseudonym names. Despite the limitation of generalization due to the sample size, the article has offered detailed contextual information on the perceived effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in a Pakistani correctional context.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)
Age	20–29 years	3
	30–39 years	5
	40–49 years	3
Education Level (Before Imprisonment)	No formal education	3
	Primary	3
	Secondary	4
	Intermediate	1
Duration of Incarceration	1–3 years	4
	4–6 years	4
	7+ years	3
Type of Program Participated*	Vocational training	8
	Educational/literacy classes	6
	Religious programs	7
	Recreational/sports activities	4

There were 11 male Respondents were involved in the study. The sample size included 22-48 years and the participants had served sentences ranging between 1 and 10 years. The majority of the respondents had either primary or secondary school education before going to prison with four indicating no education whatsoever. All of the participants had already participated in one or another rehabilitation program, such as vocational training (e.g. carpentry, tailoring, electrical work), religious education, literacy classes, or recreational activities.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Theme 1: The Change in Behavior

The participants repeatedly stated that after attending rehabilitation programs, their discipline and self-control were improved. Some of the prisoners reported a noticeable decrease in violent behavior and the engagement in fights.

One of the respondents (R3, 28 years) had the following to say:

“I would easily engage into fights and react swiftly before joining the program. Now I think before I act. I have learned patience.”

Another respondent (R7, 35 years) said:

“The professional courses are keeping my mind occupied. When busy learning what was useful you are not bothered.”

These results imply that the organized participation in rehabilitation programs led to behavioural control and institutional adaptation.

Theme 2: Emotional Control and Psychological Development

The changes in positive psychology were described by many respondents, and they included high self-esteem, emotional stability and future hope. Their involvement in the educational and religious programs was especially linked to inner change.

R1 (40 years) explained:

“Education changed my way of thinking. I no longer consider myself useless. I have value.”

Similarly, R10 (32 years) remarked:

“Earlier, I had no hope. Now I think I am able to begin a new life upon release.”

These stories are indicative of more emotional strength and thinking ahead.

Theme 3: Education Promotion

Six respondents mentioned that their literacy and academic skills had improved. Prisoners who did not have a formal education in the past stated that learning how to read and write was a life changing experience.

R5 (25 years) stated:

“I was not able to read well at all. I can now read Quran and newspapers. It gives me confidence.”

Respondents had interest in furthering education on discharge which showed that rehabilitation programmers encouraged a spirit of lifelong learning.

Theme 4: The Vocational Skill Acquisition and Employability

One of the most effective elements of rehabilitation was the vocational training. Vocational skills in carpentry, tailoring, electrical work, and handicrafts were given to the participants and this, they felt, would enable them to generate income legitimately after release.

R9 (30 years) shared:

“Here I got my training in electrical work. I have a chance of earning halal money when I go out. I don't want to return to crime.”

R12 (38 years) added:

“The ability makes me feel confident that I can be able to stand on my own feet.”
The participants noted that the acquisition of skills decreased the sense of dependency and enhanced their sense of employability.

Theme 5: Perceived Readiness to Reintegrate

The majority of the respondents stated that they wanted to be re-integrated into the society and restore family relationships. Nevertheless, the issue of social stigma and the lack of jobs were also mentioned.

R6 (29 years) reflected:

“I would like to see my family and demonstrate that I am different. Former prisoners are not easily trusted by society.”

Irrespective of these anxieties, inmates usually found rehabilitation programs to increase their preparedness to adhere to the law.

Altogether, the results show that rehabilitation interventions at the District Jail Sargodha positively affected the behavioral adaptation of inmates, their psychological development, educational, and vocational skills improvement. Although the participants did note the structural and demographic barriers, including stigma and low resources, their stories indicate that rehabilitation programs resulted in personal change and heightened hope about post-release reintegration.

DISCUSSION

The results of the paper show that District Jail Sargodha rehabilitation programs positively impact behavioral control among the inmates, psychological development, participation in education, and training vocational skills. The findings are consistent with the general body of research on rehabilitation, which underscores the fact that organized correctional programs can help individuals to change and mitigate criminogenic behaviors (Cullen, 2013; Cullen & Jonson, 2011). Theories of constructive coping mechanisms and supportive institutional environments are relevant to theoretical explanations given by the general strain theory since participants reported less aggressive behavior, increased discipline and adherence to rules (Blevins et al., 2010).

The mental health changes mentioned by the respondents, most notably, the increase in self-esteem, emotional regulation, and restored hope, are consistent with the results of researchers who underscore the transformational power of prison education and therapeutic programs (Behan, 2014; Berardi et al., 2024). The stories of participants on how they have learned to be patient, self-reflective, and future oriented make sense in desistance theory that views rehabilitation as an identity rebuilding process and cognitive change (Maruna et al., 2013). It seems that the mechanisms, by which rehabilitation programs can impact behavior change and psychological change, can be an important change towards the development of pro-social identity, as opposed to a criminal self-efficacy identity (Brezina & Topalli, 2012). Furthermore, the studies of inner change in incarcerated people also emphasize the importance of institutional programs in promoting resilience and

emotional adaptation (Bui & Morash, 2010).

Educational progress was another major theme in this research design, with respondents citing literacy enhancement and fresh academic inspiration. These results are aligned with Behan (2014) by the author who states that the prison education helps people to get out of the mind of criminogenic environment due to the widened perspectives and the increased self-esteem. Tett et al. (2012) also discovered the arts and learning programs in prisons produced reflective thinking and self-development. The current results indicate that merely the achievement of literacy may have a significant effect on the confidence and perceived social value of the inmates, which supports the thesis that educational programs are at the heart of the rehabilitation process (Cullen, 2013).

Vocational training has been considered as one of the most effective aspects of rehabilitation, especially in terms of employability and legal earnings. It is consistent with Ahmed et al. (2022) who also discovered that vocational and recreational programs in Pakistani correctional facilities have a positive impact on the skills and attitudes of inmates. According to Rosli et al. (2021), vocational preparation is also found to be a significant contributor of career success of former prisoners after release. The fact that the participants focus on the need to make halal income can be seen as both economic and moral aspects of reintegration, which can help to support the claim of the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model that criminogenic needs-related interventions, including unemployment and skills deficiency, are essential in low recidivism (Looman & Abracen, 2013). Byrne (2020) also adds that well-organized programming, especially of skill-based nature, has some post-release outcomes that can be measured in the long-term.

Even though participants were optimistic about the processes of reintegration, the issues of stigma and mistrust were also observed. This observation is reminiscent of Maruna et al. (2013) who point out the social obstacles that can readily interfere with desistance despite the individual change. On the same note, Stahler et al. (2013) and other researchers note that structural and community-level variables play a significant role in predicting recidivism risk in addition to change at the individual level. The conflict between internal change and external social forces implies that the effectiveness of rehabilitation should be perceived not just in the prison environment but also in the context of other socio-economic and cultural forces.

In general, the results of this research respond to the increasing amount of literature going against the doctrine of nothing works and confirm the rehabilitation possibilities of correctional programming (Cullen et al., 2011). In line with Alif et al. (2024), who reported the comparative efficacy of the correctional services in Punjab, this paper reveals that organized rehabilitation programs may promote the effective behavioral and psychological change within the Pakistani prison system. Nevertheless, according to the results of previous studies, the quality of programs, institutional assistance, and the chance of attaining long-term success are key elements that are heavily dependent on program quality (Duwe & King, 2013; Day et al., 2013).

Overall, the qualitative data collected in the District jail Sargodha support both theoretical and empirical ideas that rehabilitation programs, provided they are available in terms of access and when implemented purposely and with purpose, can have a positive influence on the behavior of inmates, their psychological welfare, and skill formation, making them better prepared to integrate into society.

CONCLUSION

In this research, the effectiveness of the prison rehabilitation programs in District Jail Sargodha has been examined according to the subjective experiences of 12 prisoners. In general, the results show that rehabilitation programming had a positive effect on the behavioral control, mental adaptation, and educational and professional growth of inmates, which is why it is possible to say that prisons can also be viewed as the location of positive changes when the meaningful interventions take place. Improved self-control, decreased aggression, and greater adherence to institutional rules are the common themes of the participants and are indicative that structured engagement can reduce negative emotional pressures and disruptive behavior that are typically linked to imprisonment. Besides that, respondents also mentioned positive psychological outcomes (noted higher levels of self-esteem, emotional stability, and renewed hope about the future) which could be seen as a result of the transformative power of the interventions (rehabilitative and educational). The research also concluded that learning and opportunities of education increased the trust and motivation of inmates to improve themselves, which once again confirmed the rehabilitative value of prison education in cognitive development and pro-social orientation. The impact of vocational training was considered especially significant since it equipped inmates with marketable skills and enhanced their faith in lawful work once discharged, which is in line with the evidence that skill-building interventions enhance employability and minimize criminogenic risk related to lack of employment and marginalization. Nevertheless, the participants were also willing to form new connections with their families but also predicted post-release barriers particularly stigmatizing factors and lack of opportunities, which implies that rehabilitation initiatives should be supported by more effective community-based support.

Recommendations

It is suggested, according to the results of this research, that the rehabilitation programs of District Jail Sargodha should be increased and opened to more inmates by organizing their enrollment into the program and clear eligibility requirements. Vocational training must be based on the local labor market needs and incorporate accepted qualifications to improve post release employability. The education programs, especially the literacy programs, should be enhanced and linked to the progressive learning pathways. Rehabilitation should incorporate psychological support services such as counseling and anger management lessons that deal with emotional and behavior issues. The training of staff in rehabilitation-based supervision and program facilitation should be reinforced to transform the climate

within the institution and inmate interactions. There should be development of individualized rehabilitation plans according to the needs of the inmates and with structured pre-release planning that involve the employment linkage and family reintegration provision. It is necessary to collaborate with community organizations and employers to lower the stigma rates and enhance the chances of reintegrating. Lastly, constant monitoring and evaluation procedures must be in place to determine the effectiveness of the program and to maintain constant improvement.

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