Information Needs as a Significant Determinant Factor on Spiritual Well-Being of Prisoners in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT: Spirituality is an important aspect of human life, and should therefore also be examined in relation to persons subject to imprisonment. The study aims at identifying the prisoner's various information needs. The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The sample of the study comprised 80 male prisoners in Welikada prison andsimple random sampling was used to get the male prisoners. A structured questionnaire was used to get data from prisoners and Focus Group Discussion was adopted for the Library Officers.The Study revealed that inmates have a variety of information needs which are not adequately met. Major findings showed that the prisoners are very highly in need of educational information; information for spiritual growth and better life style; on health; on legal issues, vocational, recreational and financial information for emotional growth. Poor funding, uncomfortable nature of prisons, prison policies, staffing problems, inadequate reading accommodation, lack of standard library building are all found to cause setbacks in the provision of information resources and services to meet the prisoners' information needs. A number of strategies could be used to enhance the provision of library and information resources and services to meet the prisoners' information needs. These include liaising with public libraries, NGOS and others like religious bodies and legal practitioners, liaising with professional bodies like library associations and stakeholders, granting the prisoners more access to information (even use of the internet) and developing new and using existing guidelines to enhance prison library service.
KEYWORDS: Information; information needs; spiritual-wellbeing; prisoners; prison library; Sri Lanka;

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I. INTRODUCTION

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.

Iloeje (2001) stressed that information is the heart of the world's development. Likewise, information is indispensable in the development and advancement of all aspects of human endeavor. Bruce (2005) states that, "information plays important role in our daily professional and personal lives and that we are perpetually challenged to take charge of the information that we want for work, fun and everyday decisions and tasks".

Information needs could be described as an individual or group's desire to locate and obtain information to satisfy a conscious or unconscious need. Information need is seen by LisWiki (2008) as recognition that one's knowledge is insufficient to satisfy a goal. This leads to seeking for the information from required sources so as to satisfy the need. Generally, Hjorland (2007) saw people's information needs as needs relating to people's educational activities (educational needs), research activities, professional and vocational activities (vocational needs), cultural activities and personal development – spiritually (religious needs) and physically.

Both free people in regular society and incarcerated ones have the same information needs (Shirley 2006). These needs range from basic information for survival, for educational purposes, healthy living and recreation to spiritual growth.

Prisoners, like free people, need information for different purposes. The prisoners like other counterparts require information to meet their day-to-day needs. Most of the prisoners, who are in prison today, will go back to the society after serving their punishments. For this reason, they will need information for numerous purposes both for coping with the prison situation and for when released. Providing for their information needs will help in re-socializing them into the society to become better citizens for them and the society. According to Dike (2002), often the offenders' disadvantaged educational and socio-economic status

may lead them into a life of crime. Subsequently, the prisoners need literacy training, educational and vocational programs to better equip them for a productive life. Prisoners have been seen to have the same reading interests and information needs as other people. But with a good number of them having low educational skills, they often experience difficulties in meeting their information needs (Shirley 2006).

Lehmann (2000) completed it clear that incarcerated persons normally have the same reading interests and information needs as individuals in the free world; they can, however, be considered disadvantaged in this regard by the fact that they do not have access to libraries in the outside community. This was recognized in IFLA (2005) which stated that a prisoner has not relinquished the right to learn and to access information. Though restrictions are imposed on the access to certain information usually when such access is known to present a danger to prison security, the fact remains that inmates have their own information needs.

Library and information resources and materials are needed for the information needs of the prisoners to be met. These will further help the prison authority to handle the custody of the prisoners successfully. Prisoners are regarded as disadvantaged people because they lack free access to many things in life, including libraries (Lehmann 2000). Ajogwu (2005) enumerated prisoners' information needs as ranging from legal needs, religious, health, educational, vocational, and recreational to financial needs. Most importantly, prisoners need to acquire further education as well as occupational and vocational skills to help them re-adapt into the society.

The prisoners may not be spiritually and mentally sound while moral re-direction, emotional growth and intellectual stimulation which form the basis of their information needs, can be gained through recreational reading. Enuku (2001) noted that the roles of the prison library are similar to those of a public library. But while their services are more similar than different, prison library can be more important to its users because they have no alternative. Looking at the various information needs of the prisoners, one can confidently say that the prison library is the place to seek for information to satisfy these needs. That is why Lehmann (1999) boldly asserted that incarcerated persons have a large number of unmet needs, which translate into a high demand for information, learning materials, and self-improvement resources.

Prisoners also require information for the period after their release including information on getting a job, career opportunities, housing, addresses of places, identifying funds for businesses and re-establishing family relationships (Shirley 2004). Most of the prisoners have low educational attainment (Dike 2002) and poor employability skills, as revealed by IFLA (2005), so they have need for further education and vocational training programs and informative materials to help them find useful occupations after release. Due to their incarcerated state and the boredom of the prison environment, prisoners need recreation. For the fact that most of the prisoners are spiritually and emotionally impoverished, they have need for religious / spiritual information. By the nature of their incarceration, the prisoners also have need for legal information that may help in their release in due course, their survival and their being law-abiding citizens in future. The prisons and prison authority have the main responsibility of providing for these needs by formulating required objectives and making available information resources and services through the prison library and other related sources.

Stevens (1995) revealed that the prison library plays a significant role in the reform and rehabilitation process. He identified a number of areas in which the work of the prison library can be used by inmates to have important influence. He argued that much of the information held in the prison library can be used by inmates to have a direct and positive influence on their future behavior. Helping the prisoners to have a change of life generally and improve for the better by avoiding crime should be a major part of the prisons' objectives than just punishment. Library and its resources and services will open their minds to diverse opportunities in life. This is by helping in their rehabilitation as advocated in modern civilized societies of today.

PROBLEM OF THE STUDY

Prisoners have basic information needs for survival in prison and in preparation for successful life after release. However, it has been observed that prisoners in Sri Lanka often times do not receive the library and information services they require. Lack of provision for the information needs of the prisoners may result in lack of rehabilitation, re-socialization, re-adaptation and overall transformation of the prisoners to become better citizens of the society. The ex-prisoner who cannot fit usefully into the society will likely go back to a life of crime and return to prison (recidivism). Specially, Sri Lanka is a developing Asian country, reconvicted rate is 44.7% and the Recidivist (person who has been admitted to prison on more than two occasions) rate is 30.7% (Prisons Statistics Sri Lanka, 2018). In order to overcome this problematic situation in particular, directing new and young criminals to reading books in prison is a more effective procedure; but it has not yet been properly implemented in Sri Lanka. It has been revealed that most prison libraries in Sri Lanka lack the adequate provision of library information materials/resources for inmates and also their information needs were not identified properly. This unfortunate situation has caused inmates constant challenges on how to survive and be integrated into society as better citizens. Therefore the study was conducted to identify the information needs of the prisoners and studied how their information needs can be met.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study was mainly aimed to ascertain the information needs of prisoners in Sri Lanka and how these needs could be met through the prison library and information services. The study specifically intended to:

- Identify the various information needs of prisoners in Sri Lanka.
- Identify the problems provision of library and information resources to meet the prisoners' information needs.
- Identify the strategies that could be used to enhance the provision of library and information resources to meet the prisoners' information needs.

II. METHOD

The Sri Lankan prison system consists of 04 closed prisons, 18 remand prisons, 02 correction centers for youthful offenders, 01 training center for youthful offenders, 09 work camps, 02 open prison camps, 23 prison lockups and 01 prison school are under the control of Superintendents of Prisons. The study was carried out in the Welikada prison(also known as the Magazine Prison) and it is the maximum security prison and is the largest prison in Sri Lanka. According to the prison statistic report of 2018, there were 8570 convicted male prisoners to be rehabilitated in the Welikada Prison. There were two libraries for those prisoners. However among those convicted male prisoners, only 100 prisoners were registered at the prison library. Among them 80 number of convicted prisoners were randomly selected as the sample.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research designs to provide in-depth and detailed examination of the topic.The descriptive survey method was used in collecting data from respondents in the Welikada prison in Sri Lanka. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze data in from of frequencies and percentages. Quantitative data were described numerically using measures of central tendency (means, mode and median) and measures of distribution (frequencies and percentages). The information was presented in the form of tables from which conclusions and recommendations were made.

III. RESULTS

Socio-Economics and Demographic Characteristics of Convicted Male Prisoners

The finding show that majority of the respondents (80%) were Sinhala, while 8.8%, 6.3% and 5% were Tamil, Muslim and Christian respectively.The age distribution of respondents showed that the majority (41.3%) of convicted prisoners were aged between 40-50 years (see table 01).

Table 01: Age distribution

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30-40	15	18.8	18.8	18.8
	40-50	33	41.3	41.3	60.0
	Over 50	32	40.0	40.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

The findings indicate that most of the respondents 82.5% (66) were married while 17.5% (14) were single at the time of conviction. When it comparing among ethnicity, out of the 66 married male prisoners, 55 were Sinhala, 4 were Tamil, 3 were Muslim and 4 were Christian. Based on the results all Christians (100%), 75% Tamils and 67% Muslims were married of the tested sample.This result showed that the majority of offenders were family people with various family responsibilities such as bringing up children. The result also revealed that imprisonment had led to family problems among some of the respondents.

Results in table 02, shows 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.

This is supported by Womboh (1991) revealed that most of the prisoners (about 93.8%) were not educated beyond school education. Only about 6.2% of them acquired higher education than that. The prisoners' educational level is a major factor to be considered in providing library and information services to them. 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.

Table 02: Educational Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	G10 or below	16	20.0	20.0	20.0
	O/L	32	40.0	40.0	60.0
	A/L	27	33.8	33.8	93.8
	Graduate	4	5.0	5.0	98.8

	Masters	1	1.3	1.2	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

The various information needs of the prisoners

What are the various information needs of the prisoners are the major factor of the study. This questionnaire was used to generate relevant information from the prisoners themselves on areas they need information and why they need information. The responses of the different prisoners showed that the prisoners needed information on all the areas that were mentioned. The responses are displayed in table 03.
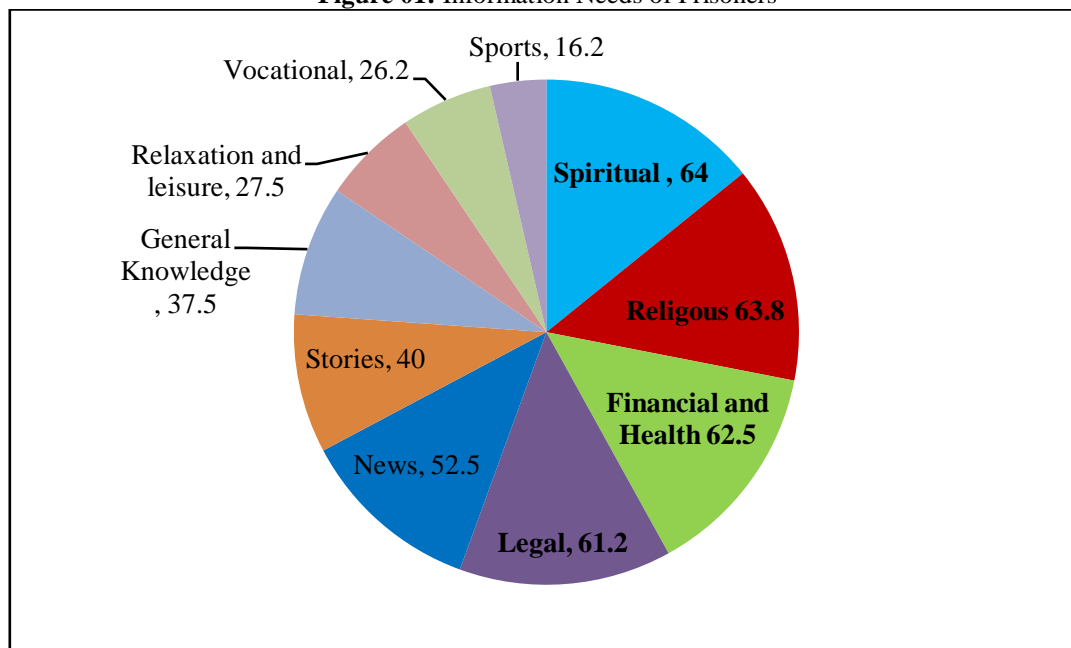
Table 03: Information Needs of Prisoners

#	Information Needs N=80	Mean	Mode	Decision	Rank
1	Legal	4.5	5	Very Highly needed	4
2	Religious	4.375	5	Very Highly needed	3
3	Health	4.55	5	Very Highly needed	4
4	Vocational	3.9	4	Very Highly needed	6
5	For Spiritual (Recreational)	4.8125	5	Very Highly needed	1
6	Financial	4.3625	5	Very Highly needed	2
7	General Knowledge	3.8875	5	Very Highly needed	7
8	Sports	2.9875	4	Very Highly needed	9
9	Stories	3.7125	5	Very Highly needed	8
10	News	4.15	5	Very Highly needed	5

The result shows that all the listed information needs are highly needed by the prisoners as they all obtained mean scores of above criterion mean ($x \geq 3$) representing "Very Highly needed". More specifically, areas such as Spiritual, religious, financial,health, legal and news are highly needed with means above the 4.00 weighted averages. Even other areas such as vocational training, stories and general knowledge information with lower means scores compared to the weighted average are also very highly needed with high mean scores. Prisoners were not interested to sport related information and results were indicated lowest mean rating of 2.98.

Indicate using a 5-point scale of very highly needed, highly needed, needed, not needed, very highly not needed, areas where the prisoners need information. According the indicated modes of the results, most of the prisoners' answer were "Very Highly Need" option for spiritual (64%), religious (63.8%), health (62.5%), financial (62.5%), legal (61.2%), news (52.5%), stories (40%) and general knowledge (37.5%). It shows, prisoners had very high need of information in these seven categories and it is shown respectively in figure 01.

Figure 01: Information Needs of Prisoners

The prisoners agreed that they had very high need for information for spiritual and emotional growth and for health purposes. They explained they spiritual information to change for the better both spiritually and emotionally. For instance, they need reading resources on religious matters like the meditation books and also stories about and the biographies of great people that lived exemplary lives like the saints. Furthermore, information was gotten from teachings of the religious groups and tracts and pamphlets provided for them during their visits to the prisons. Such materials will help to enlighten them more on how to redirect their lives in areas where they have been lacking and change for the better emotionally and spiritually.

Likewise, the prisoners needed health information to be able to keep up with hygienic measures like maintaining neatness, body cleanliness, care in using sharp objects and other tools to prevent wounds. These would help them avoid contracting diseases common with the prison environment. They especially need this information because inadequate health facilities, standard hospital facility, drugs and general healthcare are provided for them.

All the groups expressed having a very high need for legal information. Further enquiries showed that such information would enable them to know their fundamental human rights, even as prisoners. Legal information could enhance due process in the trial of those awaiting trial and hasten processes of their trial or release, as the case may be.

Most of the groups also gave a very high indication of having educational information needs. Except for those who have acquired higher education fully or half way before imprisonment, the rest indicated that they needed to acquire more education for different purposes. As for recreational information and reading, a good number of them, especially the more matured ones, indicated having high need of leisure reading materials and opportunities. In Welikada prison, many of the prisoners indicated having high need for and special interest in recreational reading like novels about adventure and fantasies which can help them overcome their boredom in the prison. The prisoners said that having adequate and varieties of recreational reading materials will definitely help them to learn on their own, improve their communication ability and cope with loneliness and boredom. This was the case in all of the prisons.

Furthermore, the study indicated that the prisoners have high need for financial information to enable them source money for use in the prison as well as after release. Some of the prisoners engage in jobs outside the prison to generate money, according to the specifications of the prison authorities. Some others took the need to be need for money to be used even as they are still in prison. In any case according to them "one cannot do without money"

Most of them also indicated that they have very high need for vocational information to help them find a career after imprisonment. Such vocational information could be provided through reading materials that teach different types of handwork as well as providing learning opportunities practically. In conclusion, most of the prisoners were of the view that no knowledge in any of those areas is a waste and one needs to be steadily informed to grow spiritually, for legal purposes, to develop one educationally, grow mentally and otherwise. Most of them felt that they found themselves in prison because of lack of education.
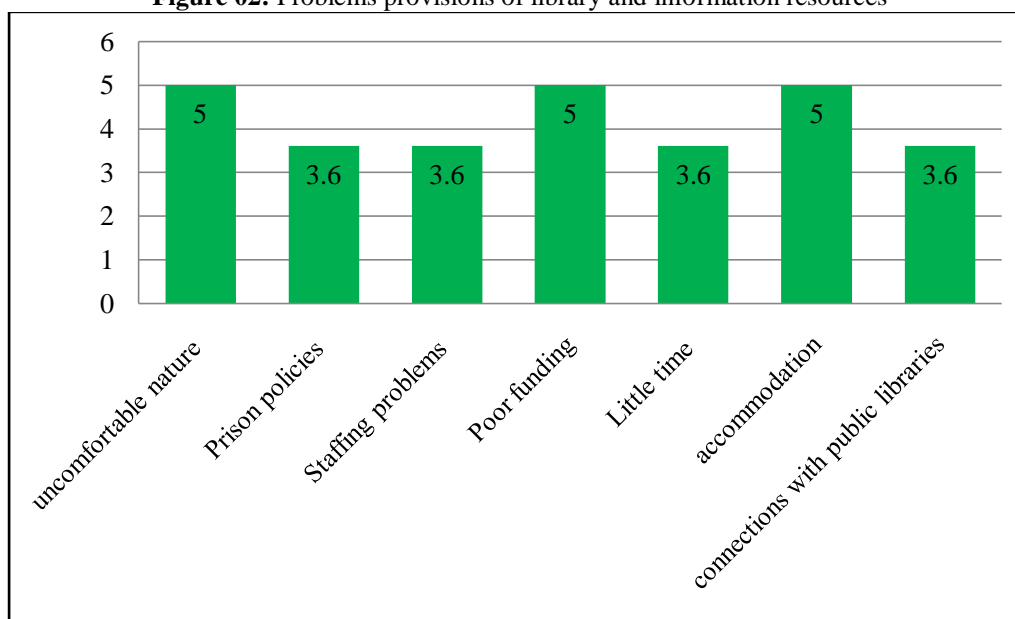
The problems provisions of library and information resources to meet the prisoners' information needs

During group discussion, the opinions of the prisoners were sought over the visualized problematic factors. The responses of the Rehabilitation and Library officers are presented in table 04and figure 02 below while the responses of the prisoners follow descriptively.

Table 04: Problems provisions of library and information resources

Problems	Mean	Mode
The uncomfortable nature of the prison	5	5
Prison policies and laws that restrict certain reading materials	3.6	3
Staffing problems – inadequate number of qualified library staff to help the prisoners and lack of training for available workers	3.6	3
Poor funding of the library and the prison as a whole	5	5
Little time allowed prisoners for interaction with outside information providers	3.6	3
The building used for library and reading accommodation	5	5
Poor connections with public libraries and other library professional bodies	3.6	3

Figure 02: Problems provisions of library and information resources

It was indicated from the above table that all the items have mean rating of 3.6 - 5.0 The problems of meeting of the prisoners' information needs to a high extent with uncomfortable nature of the prison, poor funding of the library and prison and inadequate accommodation for the library rating highest (5) being to a very high extent. Prison policies, staffing problems, little time allowed for use of information resources and services and poor connections with public libraries and other library professional bodies all hinder the provision of library and information resources and services to meet the prisoners' information needs.

Tight schedule in the prison, uncomfortable nature of the prison and inadequate accommodation for the library were cited as common factors that hinder the meeting of their information needs.

Strategies that could be used to enhance the provision of library and information resources and services to meet the prisoners' information needs
The main instrument used to gather data to answer this research objective was the Focus Group Discussion for the Library officers. Their responses were presented in table 05 below.

Table 05: Strategies to enhance the provision of library and information resources

Strategies	Mean	Mode
Connecting with public libraries, NGOs and others like religious bodies and legal practitioners	3.6	3
Connecting with professional bodies like library associations and stakeholders	3.4	3
Purchasing of reading materials by the prison authorities	4.4	3
Allowing more access to library materials	3.8	4
Mapping out time for the prisoners to use the library and other information resources	3.6	3
Developing new and using existing guidelines to prison library service accommodation	3.8	3
Allowing more information flow from other sources like religious groups	3.6	3

Data presented in above table shows the mean ratings of the responses of the Library officers on the strategies for enhancing the provision of resources and services to meet the prisoners' information needs. They indicated that purchasing of reading materials by the prison authorities will help enhance such provisions to a very high extent; thus a mean rating of 4.40. Other ways are allowing more access to library materials and developing new and using existing guidelines to prison library service accommodation with mean ratings of 3.8 each.

They indicated that connecting with public libraries, NGOs and others like religious bodies and legal practitioners, allowing more information flow from other sources like religious groups and mapping out time for

the prisoners to use the library and other information resources will help enhance such provisions to a high extent; thus a mean rating of 3.6 each.

On the part of the prisoners, their own responses agreed with those of the Library officers. They went further to emphasize the need for the government to be sensitized on the information needs of the prisoners so they might provide the needed materials for them. Almost all the groups in the prison remarked that the government should direct more attention to making the prison conditions better than their present pitiable states.

Renovating the prisons to reduce overcrowding and improving on the status of the precolonial cells will help in making the prison environment a little more conducive for accessing and utilizing information resources when provided. Also they suggested the need for the authorities to work towards the prisoners' reformation by avoiding censorship, possibly allowing the prisoners to access internet and make use of newspapers, magazines and the like.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results obtained from the study, the information needs of prisoners are found to be quite high. In the analysis presented, areas of information needs were specified which have a great impact on spiritual well-being of prisoners in Sri Lanka.

The types of information most needed by prisoners include spiritual, health information, religious information, educational support, information on legal, vocational information, information for recreation, study and life-long learning, and skills acquisition among others. On health, religious, recreational as well as legal information needs, the prisoners rated them to be very highly needed while the rehabilitation officers rated them just high.

Most of the prisoners agreed that recreational information resources will assistance them overcome boredom connected with prison setting. Ajogwu (2005) as well as Singer (2000) maintained that prisoners need recreational information for leisure and overcoming of boredom during incarceration. Furthermore, the study also showed that the prisoners highly need information on vocational needs. This will permit them to fix themselves usefully back to the society, keep themselves busy and away from offense. On vocational information need, IFLA (2005) stressed that the prisoners need vocational training programmes and informative materials to help them find useful occupation after release.

Some groups of prisoners indicated that the prison had little or nothing to offer them as regards their educational needs. These were prisoners who have acquired higher education. Some of them had a bachelor degree with an MSc or a PhD. Some of them had Diplomas or Postgraduate Diplomas. However, on the specific need for getting more education while in prison, the prisoners rated it very high, as for self-learning. It is implied from the findings that recreation, study and life-long learning, educational support, skill acquisitions are important areas of information requirements that must be provided in the Welikada prison library for the prisoners.

There is also a clear disagreement in the area of level of need for financial information and information for sports related; most of the prisoners indicated a low level of need while the rehabilitation and library officers ranked it very high.

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.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Prisoners, just like free people in the society, have a number of information needs. These information needs could be provided for through library and information resources and services. Prisoners have the same fundamental right to reading and access to information which should not be denied.

The Sri Lankan prison service has not been providing adequate library and information resources to meet the prisoners' information needs. It has been NGOs, religious groups and concerned individuals who have been trying to provide for these prisoners' information needs, rather than the prison authority which has the primary responsibility.

The Sri Lankan prison service should play a key role in working towards achieving the modern objective of rehabilitation, re-socialization and reformation of the prisoners through provision of library resources and services. There is need to implement what is being preached and advocated on the objectives of

modern imprisonment, as is the case in other advanced countries of the world. To do this requires a detailed study of these prisoners and their information needs as well as existing library and information resources and services.

This study used questionnaire and focus group discussionto ascertain the information needs of prisoners and how library and information resources and services can help meet them. This is necessary especially with the rise in the prisoners' population due to high crime rate. Moreover, the current objectives of imprisonment need to be addressed adequately through researches to sensitize the prison authority on what adequate information can achieve positively in the prisoner.

It was discovered that the prison libraries; though they have some structures and resources on ground, do not have adequate resources and services to provide for these prisoners' information needs while most of the prisoners are ready to make use of these resources when they are provided. It was also found that certain factors like poor funding, tight schedule of activities in the prison coupled with strict prison policies militate against the provision of library and information resources and services to meet the prisoners' needs.

However, strategies like liaising with NGOs, other libraries like public libraries, improving the funding of prison libraries amongst other things will help enhance the provision of library and information resources and services to meet the prisoners' information needs. Recommendations that will help enhance the provision of library and information resources to meet the prisoners' information needs were made; such as the inclusion of a standard library facility as one of the top priorities in the prison by the Sri Lankan Prison Service; special provisions to be made for the library building and maintenance, information resources and other related items in the prison budget; censorship of reading materials should be reduced to the barest minimum; prison authorities should continue to work together with the prison libraries and others concerned (other libraries, NGOs and groups) in providing for the prisoners' information needs and should make use of guidelines to prison library service in addition to mapping out time for the prisoners to consult library and information resources and services.

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