

The road to develop prisoners' skills and attitudes: an analytical study of contemporary prison-based rehabilitation programme in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Purpose – *The place of rehabilitation programmes in the reformation and transformation of prison inmates has continued to be on the front burner of professionals such as educators, counsellors, social workers, psychologists and medical doctors. Analysis has taken something of a top-down approach, and consideration has been placed on how the organizational context of individual prisoners interact with those rehabilitation programmes has been neglected. Drawing on interview data, this study aims to add to our understanding how rehabilitation programme affects inmates' skills and attitudes in Sri Lankan prisons.*

Design/methodology/approach – *This study used an inductive qualitative case study approach as it requires a deep understanding of the effect of rehabilitation programme on inmates' skills and attitudes and how inmates view rehabilitation programmes.*

Findings – *The study identified seven views of inmates regarding rehabilitation programmes conducted and understood that rehabilitation programme facilitates inmates to acquire strong self-assurance of future career options and deal with potentially destructive feeling such as anger, frustration and loneliness. However, inmates who showed a strong propensity to suffer injustice and internalized blame have found no substantial impact on their skills and attitude through the programme.*

Practical implications – *It is arguable that operation of meaningful prison-based rehabilitation programme is influenced by comprehensive picture of the profile of the prison population, shortages in resources, the attitudes of prison staffs, inability to meet real world settings and network building with a wide range of private, public or voluntary providers.*

Originality/value – *This study represents the first prison-based study to understand the inmates view on the rehabilitation programmes in Sri Lanka.*

Keywords *Skills, Prison, Rehabilitation, Attitude, Qualitative study, Labelling theory*

Paper type *Research paper*

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Introduction

International law specifies that imprisonment should not be restricted to punishment rather it has to incorporate the opportunities for inmates to obtain knowledge and skills that can be useful for them to move on in their lives after release, find careers and avoid future offence. The International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) emphasises that the penitentiary system shall comprise treatment of prisoners the essential aim of which shall be their reformation and social rehabilitation ([The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime \(UNODC\), 2017](#)). Accordingly, the Nelson Mandela Rules (the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners) very clearly establish the provision of

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rehabilitation programmes in prisons which foster the willingness and ability of prisoners to lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life upon release and improve their prospects of reintegration, self-esteem and morale.

Rehabilitation is a term that is broadly accepted to mean a planned intervention which aims to bring about change in some aspect of the offender that is brought to cause the offender's criminality, such as attitude, cognitive processes, personality or mental health (Cullen and Gendreau, 2000). This fundamental principle is backed by many rehabilitation programmes for inmates around the world, and those programmes provide recreational activities, namely, furniture-making, soap-making, toilet roll production, manufacturing aluminium pots, masonry, carpentry, tailoring, metal works fabrications, worship services, religious courses, prayer services and scripture study courses and so on (Asokhia and Agbonluae, 2013; Alós *et al.*, 2014; Bullock *et al.*, 2018). Thus, rehabilitation covers a wide variety of activities such as education, vocational training and work in prisons.

The term "rehabilitation" itself simply means the process of helping a person to readapt to society or to restore someone to a former position or rank. However, this concept has taken on many different meanings over the years and waxed and waned in popularity as a principle of sentencing or justification for punishment. The means used to achieve reform in prisons have also varied over time, beginning with silence, isolation, labour and punishment, then moving onto medically based interventions including drugs and psychosurgery. More recently, educational, vocational and psychologically based programmes, as well as specialized services for specific problems, have typically been put forward as means to reform prisoners during their sentence.

A cursory review of the literature shows that a growing body of research has identified effective and ineffective prison-based rehabilitation programmes (Andersen and Skardhamar, 2015; Brewster, 2014; Bullock *et al.*, 2018; Clark and Duwe, 2015; Patzelt *et al.*, 2014; Rowe *et al.*, 2018; Taylor, 2014). In line with that, some studies emphasise the success of these programmes and others find that their results are mixed. This controversy of mixed results requires more research to be conducted based on prison-based rehabilitation programmes. One of the issues in the constant argument over rehabilitations is that the prior studies have drawn very little attention on systematic empirical knowledge about the success or failure of rehabilitation programmes with different recreational activities and in different institutional settings. Further, prior studies were not well enough to focus prisoners' motivations to select their vocational training, how the organisational context of individual prisoners interacts with that govern programmes or their attitudes about their work or training (Bullock *et al.*, 2018). Thus, this study contributes to the growing body of research with an evaluation of the rehabilitation programme that is offered in Sri Lankan prisons.

The prison-based rehabilitation programmes are established in Sri Lankan prisons for the purpose of reducing criminal recidivism, addressing social integration challenges faced by inmates and fostering their employability upon release. The vision of Sri Lankan prison is "Social reintegration of inmates as good citizens through rehabilitation." Ultimately, it targets to contribute to the creation of a more civilized society by proper rehabilitation of prison inmates enabling them to become law abiding and humanitarian person. In other words, it expects to encourage inmates' ability to successfully reintegrate into society (Performance Report, 2017). Accordingly, rehabilitation of inmates is to be conducted through the set of mechanisms consisting of educational services (teaching of literacy and numeracy), skills acquisition activities (tailoring, masonry, woodwork, metal work, bakery, soap making), recreational activities (music, scout) and religious services. The programme covers the life skills including group work, case work session, recreational activities, religious services, educational development project, skills acquisition programme and mid-range industrial production. Hence, the rehabilitation programme is the longest running skills programme that is nationally recognised in Sri Lanka. According to Clarke *et al.* (2004), life-skills

programme has focused on a cognitive-behavioural approach. Cognitive-behavioural approach addresses maladaptive behaviours and dysfunctional thought processes and ultimate intention is to reduce recidivism. It is worth to note that lifestyle change programme (Walters, 1999), programme designs to develop inmates' pro-social decision-making skills, is not structured into the rehabilitation programme in Sri Lankan prisons.

Concerning the past decade prison records in Sri Lanka, criminal behaviour (rape, drug trafficking, kidnapping, murder, fraud and theft) has become more serious, and there is a high tendency of criminal recidivism (Prison Statistics of Sri Lanka, 2016; 2017; 2018). This seems that high rate of criminal behaviour and recidivism is of great concern to the society, and the rehabilitation programme does not have a highly structured cognitive-behavioural approach. Further, authors identified that prison authorities may be hesitant to increase the capacity of rehabilitation programme because they are not certain about the value of the programme and its effectiveness to the inmates. As such, there is a contemporary need to evaluate and focus on the effectiveness of prison-based rehabilitation programmes in Sri Lanka. It is highlighted that well-designed programmes can reduce reoffending, however, fallen short of expectations. Thus, introducing the prison-based rehabilitation programmes into prison environment has not been straightforward. In so far as literature reviewed, programmes move from principles to practices, they are moulded by various organisational, technical, behavioural and contextual factors (Hill and Hupe, 2002; Mews *et al.*, 2017).

Meanwhile, inmates' perspectives are essential for successful delivery of the programmes, but how inmates view the rehabilitation programme is less well understood. It is disconcerting that prisoners are subjected to punitive disciplinary actions and their views do not complement the principles of effective programme. However, inmates' view can also shape what is achieved. In this sense, the present study is intended to add to our understanding of assessing how inmates view the rehabilitation programmes in Sri Lankan prisons and how rehabilitation programme affects inmates' skills and attitudes. Based on inmates' perspectives, the study further highlights the attributes of effective rehabilitation programmes and provides guidance on how to make existing programmes more effective at reducing recidivism.

As far as our knowledge is concerned, there is a dearth of literature on understanding the impact of rehabilitation programme on inmates' skills and attitudes in developing context. The prior studies primarily focused on developed context such as USA, UK, South Africa, Canada and so on. Yet, there has been a strong propensity to see that rehabilitations programmes in developing countries framed on the basis of approaches that originated from the developed context. It is vital to note that rehabilitation services seem to have its own characteristics in each context (Asokhia and Agbonluae (2013). Hence, the research needs to be placed within its natural settings to get a deeper understanding of the attributes of effective rehabilitation programmes. An even more important reason to focus on the rehabilitation programmes in developing context, in this context, is operating within or near to poverty setting and less regulated institutional environment. This study examines research evidence to improve the outcomes achievable through proven "what works" rehabilitation programmes in Sri Lanka.

In following sections, we first briefly review the current literature on prison-based rehabilitation programme. Second, we explain the research method. We then detail the main findings of the study and we end by discussing the implications of our findings.

Literature review

Rehabilitation is identified as any discourse or practice that speaks of transforming or normalising the criminal into a socially defined non-deviant citizen. A broad definition of rehabilitation refers to social relations with others, education and vocational skills and employment. The intervention is intended to make the offender less likely to break the law in

the future, or to reduce recidivism (Cullen and Gendreau, 2000). Literature in different disciplines framework a large number of different theories, positions, models and approaches to rehabilitation; however, the concept of rehabilitation is subject to debate yet (Yanique and Linda, 2016).

The labelling theory is a criminological theory that contends formal sanctions amplify, rather than discourage, future criminal behaviour (Blumer, 1971; Kavish, 2017). The theory proclaims that policies are implemented to address social conditions collectively defined by society as problems, where Blumer (1971) argued that social problems, and their remedies, exist in how they are defined by society. In this sense, crime has long been viewed as social problem, and “get tough” approaches to crime control have dominated public discourse about how to address these problems (Mears *et al.*, 2016). Accordingly, the labelling theory serves as a stark alternative to address crime from a policy perspective. Rather than crime-control through “get tough” approaches to punishment, the theory claims that crimes are reduced by stymying secondary involvement in deviance through reintegration efforts, diversion, de-labelling, promoting pro-social identities and non-intervention (Walters, 2016). The results of prior examinations of crime have been supportive of labelling theory (Kavish, 2017). However, the popularity of labelling theory decreased when diversion attempts seemingly failed to obtain expected results (Akers *et al.*, 2016). These unexpected circumstances were occurred because of the inefficiencies in policies and programme implementation (Widdowson *et al.*, 2016). This underlines that rehabilitation is not only a social project, although it requires social inclusion of the individual as a member of the group. First and foremost, it must be based on an individual moral project that cannot and should not be forced on a person, but that can be facilitated legally and practically (Yanique and Linda, 2016). This calls for prison-based rehabilitation programmes to be designed and implemented in effective manner to label inmates reintegrating with their local communities. In this study, it is not our primary intention to take a stand in these debates on rehabilitation. But our focus is on revealing how rehabilitation is understood by the inmates and how rehabilitation programme affects inmates’ skills and attitudes.

Although prior studies (Elison *et al.*, 2016; van Ginneken *et al.*, 2018) have described the nature of the faltering processes of prison reform, the recent (that is, post-2004) literature does not provide a comprehensive description and analysis of the factors that have undermined the process of prison reform and rehabilitation process. Incarceration carries with it the responsibility of offender rehabilitation. It is morally and fiscally the right thing to do, especially with historically high rates of incarceration, longer sentences and the revolving door of recidivism. The UNODC, for example, puts forward two arguments in favour of prison reform: human rights and financial. They argue that “ the detrimental impact of imprisonment, not only on individuals but on families and communities, and economic factors also need to be taken into account when considering the need for prison reforms” (UNODC, 2014).

The study conducted by UNODC (2017) argued that rehabilitation structure of the prison needs to be covered with a wide variety of activities – including medical and psychological treatment, counselling and cognitive-behavioural programmes; this study focuses on the three core areas: education, vocational training and work in prisons. There are several reasons for expanding activity in these areas. And one of these is the fact that learning and working are an exercise of fundamental human rights which should, apart from the constraints inherent in imprisonment, be also enjoyed by people deprived of their liberty. Education, particularly the teaching of literacy and numeracy, is the foundation upon which almost all personal change and development depend on (Harding, 2014; Visher and Travis, 2003). Vocational training and work, on the other hand, are very straightforward ways of engaging large numbers of prisoners in constructive activities, fostering their employability upon release and therefore their ability to successfully reintegrate into society (Maguire and Raynor, 2006). While investment in infrastructure and prison staff may be needed to

implement these activities, it should be possible to make relatively rapid improvements in all three areas in countries with differing levels of resources, and to achieve a positive impact both inside the prison walls as well as for prisoners upon release (Yanique and Linda, 2016; UNODC, 2017).

Brewster (2014) focused on the rehabilitation programme that has been used by prison, and the researcher has explained the programme through the impact of prison arts programmes on inmate attitudes and behaviour. The surveys included attitudinal scales adapted from the "Life Effectiveness Questionnaire" (LEQ) measuring: time management, social competence, achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, emotional control, active initiative and self-confidence. In addition to positive correlations between arts education and life effectiveness attitudes, they found a reduction in disciplinary reports and greater participation in academic and vocation programmes. This study supports the findings of other prison arts evaluations in this country and elsewhere. In recent years, there has been growing pressure on policymakers and practitioners to identify and support evidence-based programmes shown to be effective in helping incarcerated men and women develop positive attitudes and life-effectiveness skills to prepare them for re-entry into their communities (Mews *et al.*, 2017; Mullan *et al.*, 2018). This study was intended to add to their understanding of how one type of prison-based programming, instruction in fine arts, affects inmates' attitudes, behaviour and identity. Classes in poetry, writing, theatre and visual arts were offered at three northern California state prisons and one southern California prison. The prisons involved were: San Quentin (poetry and theatre), Soledad (visual arts), New Folsom state prison (writing and poetry) and the California Rehabilitation Center (CRC) at Norco (theatre) (Brewster, 2014).

A large number of studies focuses only on prison reform under their economical social cultural structure (Muntingh, 2012). Muntingh (2012) discussed South African prison reform after the 1994. Accordingly, the study explored and analysed the reasons why the reform of the South African prison system, from an arrangement inherited from the previous regime to one compatible with a constitutional democracy, has faltered. However, this study also did not focus in rehabilitation process or prisoners' skills or attitudes.

Asokhia and Agbonluae (2013) examined the assessment of rehabilitation services in Nigerian Prisons in Edo State. The study was aimed at determining the status of rehabilitation services in Nigerian prisons in Edo State. The study revealed that provision for rehabilitation services is still neglected and not international best practices compliance; prison inmates of these prisons prefer one rehabilitation service to the other. Accordingly, the most preferred rehabilitation service is recreational activity – football. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that deliberate efforts should be made by the Federal Government and prison service providers to reform the Nigerian prisons and make it international best practice compliance. Further, the study indicated that it is also the need to introduce more rehabilitation services, facilities and reformatory programmes such as training inmates on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and giving adequate awareness programmes so as to rehabilitate prison inmates and stop recidivism.

Yanique and Linda (2016) analysed the effect of that rehabilitation with the perspectives of inmates and officers. According to their study not only revealed conflicting views on rehabilitation but also pointed to some key issues within Viken Prison concerning isolation, mental health problems, inmate drug use and resource scarcity. These issues may seriously affect the inmates' motivation and ability to participate, and may also affect the prospects for successful rehabilitation more generally Yanique and Linda (2016).

The study in Viken prison provided reason for further discussion on several topics. First, it called for discussion about how the conceptualisation of rehabilitation among inmates and officers relate to an adequate theory of rehabilitation, and to a successful realisation of rehabilitation strategies in prison. Their findings explained how this impacts the inmates'

and officers' attitude towards engaging in activities, programmes and services. Officers and inmates, respectively, seemed to view rehabilitation in distinctly different ways. The officers' opinions of rehabilitation seemed closely integrated with their training, and reflected the legal view on rehabilitation, whereas the inmates' perspectives were more nuanced and based on their experience. Both inmates and officers asserted that rehabilitation has a place and a function within the prison. Ireland *et al.* (2016) evaluated the cognitive skills programme of male prisoners in the UK prisons and highlighted that cognitive skills programmes may be best considered as precursors to longer term therapies, whereas activities should focus on improvement and not recovery.

Bullock *et al.* (2018) recently argued that the outcomes of prison-based correctional programmes have often fallen short of expectations, and the programmes are shaped by features of the organisational environment and how they interact with programme processes and staff. Further, authors indicated that the "what works" movement was propelled by findings from studies which demonstrated that well-designed programmes, especially those based on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), could produce reductions in reconviction. However, extant evidence draws attention to difficulties moving from demonstration to real-world settings, lack of programme practitioner preparedness, deficiencies in resources, the attitudes of staff in the prison and the nature of the prison setting itself, matters to achieve main intention of prison-based correctional programmes. In addition, Mullan *et al.* (2018) explored the experiences of offenders who attended a social skills treatment component implemented within a high-secure personality disorder treatment service. The study revealed that client group experienced treatment, shared learning experiences and the conflict participants experienced facilitate the effectiveness of social skills treatment and they are effective in meeting their needs and some that would benefit from improvement.

Roadmap for the Development of Prison-based Rehabilitation Programmes was initiated by Criminal Justice Handbook Series which was introduced in UNODC (2017). Accordingly, the programmes discuss the need of education, vocational training and work for prisoners, and it has explained giving prisoners opportunities to learn new skills and build work experience, and how they will help them to stay away from crime when they leave prison, thus contributing to the overall mission of prison administration to contribute to public safety. As mentioned above, there is a good body of research that shows that in many countries:

- prisoners have low levels of education and basic skills; and
- that improving these skills can have a positive impact on recidivism, social reintegration and employment outcomes.

Prison-based rehabilitation programmes therefore help to make communities safer and reduce the levels of dependency of former prisoners (UNODC, 2017).

Although several studies have been conducted based on rehabilitation, they are not well enough to focus prisoners' motivations to select their vocational training or their attitudes about their work or training. In other words, analysis has taken something of a top-down approach and consideration on how the organizational context of individual prisoners interact with programmes that govern is less well understood (Bullock *et al.*, 2018). Especially in the Sri Lankan context, there is a dearth of literature on this subject disciplinary. Sri Lankan prison reform highly focuses on vocational training. However, without any experiment, time to time they implement various kinds of programmes. Results of this are that there is no visible considerable beneficiary or benefits and government spends large amount of financial and human resources to continue this task. Our attempt is to identify and suggest the best solutions or mechanism for the rehabilitation process in Sri Lankan context (auditable standards based on those guidelines should be developed to motivate action in individual prisons).

Methodology

Design and setting

An inductive qualitative case study approach suits this study as it requires a deep understanding of the effect of rehabilitation programme on inmates' skills and attitudes and how inmates view the rehabilitation programmes. In general, case studies are chosen when researching a less well-known phenomenon (Yin, 2003). The case study is likely to generate novel insights and embodies a deep understanding of the dynamics of a single setting (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The study used a convenient sampling to select a group of inmates in a largest prison in Sri Lanka. This prison is recognized as the largest prison population per square foot in Sri Lanka.

Although it is difficult to access for outsiders into prison context, the authors got a special permission to make personal contact with prisoners. The prisoners were randomly selected by the prison authority and there were 43 prisoners initially. Though the selection of respondents was not materialised according to the procedures of the authors, the study required to adhere to the rules and regulations of the prison authority. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were held with prisoners and a total of 37 interviews were conducted. From the selected prisoners, six prisoners refused to participate in the interview. The interviews were open-ended and followed a protocol that involved an initial unstructured narrative section in which the participants were asked to tell life stories and give an account of their offences. The second section of the interview consisted of a set of specific questions, probing: what rehabilitation service they involved, prior experience they have on particular activity, how they recognise the rehabilitation programme, what are the benefits they get and what difficulties they face when following the programme and what are their future plans after release. Interview protocol was granted by the prison authority. The interviews with participants were conducted face to face by the first author (who has a background in psychology and criminology) and the second author (with a background in management). During the interviews, only the two authors and the selected inmate were present in a room (given by prison authority), and the inmates were guaranteed that their responses were confidential and would only be reported in a way that maintained anonymity. For the purpose of triangulation, we accompanied data from interviews with informal discussion between prison staff and prison leadership and ourselves.

The interviews were conducted in Sinhala, translated into English, and then back-translated into Sinhala to check for consistency. In the process of translation, the authors acquired the service of a professional bilingual translator. Interviews lasted about 45 to 60 min to complete, and they were recorded and transcribed. The authors then examined, coded, categorised and synthesised the transcripts per interviews.

The participants cover distinctly different age, civil status, education level, religion, offences, prison-terms and different occupations before imprisonment. The demographic characteristics of the respondents are shown in [Table I](#). As shown in [Table I](#), sample of the study consisted of inmates who were participating in several rehabilitation programmes, namely, educational service, skills acquisition activities, recreational activities and religious services.

Further, [Table II](#) provides details about the participants constituting our sample in terms of their age, occupation before imprisonment, education, criminal record, reason for imprisonment, prison term and whether they engage in the rehabilitation programme willingly. To protect anonymity, we use artificial names that begin with a letter R.

Analysis and findings

The study analysed the collected data with open mind in order to facilitate the data to tell the story. Although we were aware on rehabilitation programmes, we did not have

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>(%)</i>
<i>Age</i>		
20-29 years	02	05
30-49 years	20	54
More than 50 years	15	41
<i>Civil status</i>		
Married	28	76
Not-married	09	24
<i>Religion</i>		
Buddhist	26	70
Hindu	02	05
Catholic	06	16
Muslim	04	09
<i>Educational level</i>		
No attend to school	03	08
Grade 1-5	06	16
Grade 6-10	07	18
G.C.E. O/L	13	35
G.C.E. A/L	03	08
Graduate/Post-Graduate	03	08
Other standard courses	02	07
<i>Offences</i>		
Stealing and robbery	05	13
Rape and sexual abuse	10	27
Murder	11	29
Drug dealing	02	05
Illegal business	03	08
Hardly injured and bBeating	02	05
Tried to kill	03	08
Unable to settle bank debt	01	04
<i>Prison Terms</i>		
Less than 5 years	04	11
5-20 years	22	60
21-60 years	05	13
Life-time	03	08
Death penalty	03	08
<i>Rehabilitation programme</i>		
Educational	02	05
Recreational	13	35
Skills acquisition	18	48
Religious activities	03	08
None	01	04
<i>Satisfy on rehabilitation programme</i>		
Highly satisfy	18	49
Moderately	08	21
Not satisfied	11	30

predetermined ideas about the effect of rehabilitation programme on inmates' skills and attitudes and how inmates would vary in their responses to the programme.

Inmates view on the rehabilitation programmes.

Initial stage of our analysis focused to identify first-order codes (Van Maanen, 1979) regarding how participated inmates describe their views on rehabilitation programmes conducted in the prison. It allowed us to identify the specific phrases and terminology used.

Table II Participant descriptive data

Code	Occupation before imprisonment	Age	Education	No. of time in prison	Reason for imprisonment	Prison-term	Willingness to engage rehabilitation programme
R1	Helper at store Electrician	37	Up to year 2	1	Stealing	8 years (7 years over)	Yes
R2	Labour (Packing division)	42	Up to year 10	1	Rape	22.5 years (6 years over)	Yes
R3	Smuggling, gambling, stealing contract killer	40	Up to year 9	4	Murder	10 years (1 year over)	No
R4	Peon at Pradeshiya Sabha (Government office)	31	Up to year 6	1	Robbery	7 years (2.5 years over)	Yes
R5	Mason, tiler, cook	53	Not attend	1	Murder	10 years (6 months over)	Yes
R6	Worked at farm (looking after cows)	41	Not attend	1	Rape	20 years (6.5 years over)	No
R7	Musical band player Electrician	42	Up to O/L Not passed	5	Drug selling (Marijuana)	2 years (1 year over)	No
R8	Bus driver	53	Up to 10 year	1	Murder	62 years (10 years over)	Yes
R9	Tea taster Lighting and Sound setter	41	A/L CIMA (partly completed)	1	Robbery jewellery and computer shops	12.5 years (9 years over)	Yes
R10	Army Security officer	54	O/L	1	Murder	Death penalty (Appealed)	Yes
R11	Bus conductor	29	O/L (not passed)	1	Fraud money printing	10 years (1.5 years over)	Yes
R12	Army	38	O/L	1	Tried to kill Judge	33 years (15 years over)	Yes
R13	Retailer Singer	52	O/L	1	Drug dealing	Lifetime	No
R14	Mason	43	Up to year 7	1	Tried to kill his wife	(20 years over)	Yes
R15	Business, Agriculture	48	Up to year 4	2	Try to kill person	10 years (5 years over)	Yes
R16	Mason, Agriculture	53	Up to year 5	1	Rape	7 years (6 months over)	No
R17	Fruit business	57	Up to year 2	1	Sexual abuse	18 years (8 years over)	No
R18	Machine operator at tyre factory	35	O/L/ not passed	2	Robbery House	37 years (5 years over)	Yes
R19	Hotel manager	50	O/L	1			Yes

(continued)

Table II

Code	Occupation before imprisonment	Age	Education	No. of time in prison	Reason for imprisonment	Prison-term	Willingness to engage rehabilitation programme
R20	Senior medical secretary - hospital	54	Degree holder	1	Illegal labour immigration	5 years (4.5 years over)	No
R21	Teacher	43	degree holder	1	Illegal Jam business	14 years (14 years over)	No
R22	Agriculture	53	Up to year 3	1	Robbery and kept weapon	22 years (6 years over)	Yes
R23	Police (PC)	35	A/L	1	Rape case	18 years (5 years over)	Yes
R24	Woodshop	45	O/L		Second degree murder	8 years (4 years over)	Yes
R25	Business (cloth, vegetable)	57	Up to year 6	1	Murder	Lifetime (15 years over)	Yes
R26	Army (Sargent)	44	Up to year 8 Completed 5 causes in Army	1	Rape case (own daughter)	9 years (1 year over)	Yes
R27	Musical group member	29	O/L	1	Murder	16 years (6 years over)	Yes
R28	Army captain	60	Degree holder	1	Hardly injured people	1.5 years (3 months over)	Yes
R29	Army officer	63	A/L	1	Murder (wife)	Death penalty	Yes
R30	Business	53	Chartered accounting	1	Hit and murder person	Appealed	No
R31	Labour	38	Up to year 9	2	Unable to settle debts	5 years (9 months over)	Yes
R32	Business	62	Not attend	1	Bankrupt his business	6.25 years (4 years over)	No
R33	Police (PC)	35	A/L	1	Murder	16 years (8.5 years over)	Yes
R34	Business	69	Up to year 6	1	Murder	Lifetime (18 years over)	Yes
R35	Navy officer	37	O/L	1	Rape case	8 years (3 years over)	Yes
R36	Driver, Farmer	42	Up to year 5	2	Rape case	15 years (11 years over)	No
R37	Farmer	59	O/L	1	Rape case	16 years (1.5 years over)	No
					Beating and assaulting a person	2 years (1.5 years over)	No
					Murder	Death penalty	No

Then, we classified common codes and assigned first-order codes into them. As with these steps, we identified common themes that describe the view on rehabilitation programmes.

From the 37 participants who constitute the cases of this study, 14 indicated that rehabilitation programmes exhibit future employment opportunities. They identify the programmes as future investment opportunities for them where they can carry out the skills learnt and practiced. This is a positive sign of the life-skills programme because it includes any type of training that builds basic personal management skills (Lipsey *et al.*, 2001) which lead inmates to “thinking for a change”. Old ties must be cut and new ones created (Bales and Mears, 2008).

Six inmates revealed that the programme is good for mental relaxation and helps them to maintain quiet and calm mind. As indicated by 7 respondents, the rehabilitation programme allows them to overcome loneliness in prison because it makes them to pass the time. Crimes are the response to opportunities available to people with little self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990). The present study revealed that certain social controls can be a turning point. There is a certain therapeutic function that is essential to link resocialization and reintegration of inmates into the society. Three inmates believed that because of participating in rehabilitation activities their prison term lessens. Even though it is rare occasion to lessen the prison terms, engagement in rehabilitation programme should be tailored to adding frustrations to inmates who accrue a heavy burden of failure.

Additionally, two inmates highlighted that the programme was good as they received monetary incentive. As Wilson *et al.* (2000) insisted rehabilitation programmes may be perceived either as transformative or merely as a means to earn money while incarcerated. Regarding monetary incentives in prison, inmates are paid day allowance for the selected recreational activities namely furniture-making, soap-making, bakery, metal work, woodwork and tailoring. The incentive is regulated as; 1 Rupee (R) per day paid for first year in prison, 2 R per day for second year and after two years it is 2.50 R per day. The incentives earned by inmates are deposited to their bank account once in three months.

Relative to others, two inmates specifically mentioned that the programme allows disseminating their knowledge to others. These two inmates help others to learn skills specifically in woodwork and printing work. This encourages inmates to share their work habit, work experience and motivation to desire from crime. Alós *et al.* (2014) clearly specified that inmates can influence other inmates to confirm the importance of the programme in teaching behavioural patterns and habits (self-discipline, punctuality). Similarly, Hunter and Boyce, 2009 insisted that rehabilitation programmes should focus on “work + motivation”, where motivation can be driven through inmates themselves.

Finally, five inmates imperially indicated that the rehabilitation programme was unserviceable and it was just waste of public fund. Building upon this work, the study explored the view of a personal agency mind-set in a prison setting, and the contribution that such a mind-set played in programme resistance (Alós *et al.*, 2014). This is why Bushway (2003) argued that the resistance is possible because inmates have a poorly rooted work condition that is hard to change in the closed prison society. In sum, there were seven different views emerged during the classification of inmates' view on rehabilitation programme. In Table III, we illustrate the different views on rehabilitation programme with relevant evidences.

How do rehabilitation programme affects inmates' skills and attitudes?

From the 37 participants who constitute the cases of this study, 13 exhibited unwillingness of engaging the rehabilitation programme conducted in the prison. Those who persevered in unwillingness revealed different mind-set. As Patzelt *et al.* (2014) indicated in the context of our study inmates' helplessness was reflected. In particular, they replicated the lack of control over their lives after prison, gloom about the future and accusing others for their

Table III Inmates' view on the rehabilitation programmes

Theme	Evidence	Responder code and activity engaged
Future employment opportunities	<i>I can face society without any difficulties because of this training. I got trained skills to carry out enjoy it</i> <i>I was mason worker. In here, I learnt new things than I knew earlier . . . try to learn more to carry out my career after getting release</i> <i>I am going to start my own business [.]. I don't have money but I can get bank loan using my Bakery certificate (he received a certificate for successfully completed Bakery training)</i>	R9 Lightning work R14 Masonry R4 Bakery
Mental relaxation	<i>I was used to get angry very quickly . . . now I value this experience of working with patient. It helps me to maintain quiet and calm mind</i> <i>Because of music I try to overcome my sadness and frustration</i>	R26 Sewing R18 Musical band
Overcome loneliness	<i>Enjoy my time spending with music . . . I don't feel that I am in prison</i> <i>When I am working here I don't know how time is moving (laugh) it is good to overcome loneliness</i>	R5 Musical band R12 Iron work
Lessen prison term	<i>I am doing this because I can get early release. There is nothing to learn from it</i> <i>I am learning at Sunday school. If I pass the exams, they (authority) will reduce my prison-term</i>	R1 Electrical work R10 Not received, because he gets death penalty
Monetary incentive	<i>This is very difficult; my hands get burning because of materials used. I am doing this because I get small salary (laugh)</i>	R17 Soap making
Disseminate knowledge to others	<i>. . . I am doing this because knows it well. I help others to learn this skill</i> <i>I did not like to engage this work because I won't be able to go out, but I learnt lots and now I am willing to teach my skills to others . . . I am really enjoying teaching</i>	R24 Wood work R32 Printing work
Waste of public fund	<i>. . . nonsense, I can't practice these skills. There are no opportunities at my village, such a waste of money (angrily)</i>	R6 Bakery work

imprisonment. For examples, R6 stated that “*I am here for a crime that I didn't do [. . .] the judge didn't hear my case clearly. Why should I learn this [. . .], I can only do tea plucking job in my village*”. Similarly, R36 said “*I am going to get released soon but I am not sure whether I am useful any more for my family [. . .] I am confused with what to do when I get released soon*”. R3 also admitted, “*this is useless and a waste of money and completely fraud. I can earn a lot from my previous business (illegal) so why should I need these skills*”.

As we highlighted here, we found that different set of beliefs forced inmates' willingness of engagement in the programme. It is very clear that those who were unwilling to engage showed a strong propensity to suffer injustice. R21 complained, “*I hate this entire society which stole everything from me. So, why should I learn these and serve it again, why?*” The existing literature also indicated that internalizing blame (individuals who blame others) was one of barriers for learning (Shepherd *et al.*, 2011). Accordingly, those are unable to understand what they have to change in life to get rid of crimes in future. In addition, those who are unwilling to engage in the programme blamed that training should be given based on the willingness of prisoners, and then they will engage in it with interest. For example, R35 stated, “*I don't get anything from it, because I don't like it [. . .] I do it because I am forced to do it by Prison officers. We should have a chance to select what we like to do*”. In these senses, the programme has been found to have no substantial impact on inmates' skills and attitude. Further, it is interesting to note that when looking at the descriptive data of inmates who were willing to engage in it, such as age, education level, reason for imprisonment and prison terms, there was no clear association among them with unwillingness to engage.

In contrast, those who showed willingness of engagement in rehabilitation programme exhibited strong self-assurance about future career options, optimistic about future and ability of controlling their post-prison lives. For example, R8 expressed *“now I can face the society without any difficulties because of this training. I have trained skills to carry out.”* In his assessment of prison life, R15 emphasised *“I try to learn a new skill in woodwork, then I can carry it out after getting released”*, and then according to them the programme is the opportunity for inmates to reconnect with the society through their skills learnt.

Second, we explored that those who were willing to participate the programme took responsibility for their offences. They admitted the crime and are now suffering for their actions. For example, R2 stated *“this is my Karma, I made a mistake. I feel guilty about what I did, I am an alcoholic [...], it is fair that I need to get punishment”*. R26 admitted, *“it was true that I made a mistake, I did it because I couldn’t control my anger. This training helps me with how to keep quiet and calm mind [...], I don’t want to come here again”*.

Another principle benefit of rehabilitation programme is that it can act as a gateway to further learning through building self-esteem (Brewster, 2014). On average, our responses indicated that the programme encouraged them to engage with mind relaxation practices. As R26 admitted, the training was highly valued for him as it allows to learn how to work with patience. Similarly, R30 believed that the training helps him to do things in relax mind set. R27 stated, *“this teaches us how to overcome our misbehaviour, this can be taken as a lesson of not doing the mistakes again”*. According to R12, *“it is good to have these things in prison, otherwise how are we going to overcome this loneliness”*. It is interesting to see the response of R32, who gets life-time prison term. R32 mentioned, *“I know I wouldn’t be able to go out. So, first I thought it was useless to learn these things, but now I feel proud about myself because I teach others what I learnt. I really enjoy teaching now (laugh).”* This has extended the viewpoint of Ross (2009) and Mullan *et al.* (2018) that the rehabilitation programme can provide an incentive for good behaviour and shared learning experiences; and is thought to produce more responsible, mature individuals who have a calming influence on other prisoners. Thus, these evidences suggest that the programme can provide learning facilities that inmates can deal with potentially destructive feelings such as anger, frustration and loneliness and help inmates to self-regulate their behaviour even while living inside the walls. In these senses, the programme has been identified to positively impact inmates’ skills and attitudes.

Attributes of effective rehabilitation programmes

While security and rehabilitation are sometimes seen as opposites, well-run rehabilitation programmes actually enhance safety and control inside prisons (UNODC, 2017). The rehabilitation programmes in prison need to be designed to teach prisoners about general employment skills, or skills needed for specific professions and industries. The main intention of the programmes is to reduce prisoners’ risk of committing further offences by teaching them marketable skills which they can use to find and retain employment upon release.

The Nelson Mandela rules (No. 04 and 05) indicate that prison administrations should offer education, vocational training and work, as well as other forms of assistance that are appropriate and available, including those of a remedial, moral, spiritual, social and health- and sport-based nature. All such programmes should be delivered in line with the individual treatment needs of prisoners and should seek to minimize any differences between prison life and life at liberty that tend to lessen the responsibility of the prisoners or the respect because of their dignity as human beings (UNODC, 2017). Thus, for any meaningful rehabilitation to take place in prisons, rehabilitation services must first be improved upon, adequate provisions made and these should be accessible to the inmates. The rehabilitation programmes, particularly those based on the principles of cognitive-behavioural psychology, can play an important role in changing prisoners’ attitudes and

behaviour. As such, theorists suggest that improvements in cognitive processing, communication abilities and enhancement of long-term prospects afforded by education and training may result in pro-social behaviours, emotional maturity, empathy and control (Bandura, 1977). Undoubtedly, the effective rehabilitation programmes can be complex, expensive and demanding.

According to Gillies *et al.* (2014), there are specific aspects which need to be considered when vocational training and work projects are being planned and implemented in prisons. In line with that, knowing about prisoners' existing skills and aspirations, their typical education level and professional skills, availability, attitude and perceptions of prison staff, availability of programmes and cooperation with which other (non-)governmental stakeholders are important factors related specifically to the prison context. Further, Watts (2010) indicated that peer pressure and the highly unpredictable nature of prison life influence the success of rehabilitation programmes in prison. Additionally, public attitude that favours punishment rather than rehabilitation (Drake and Henley, 2014), adequate and sustainable fund allocation and duration of the programmes (Czerniawski, 2015) and capacity of prison officers to enhance or undermine the goals of the prison (Kjelsberg *et al.*, 2007) are socially and materially impact on the outcomes of rehabilitation programmes. Finally, Bullock *et al.* (2018) stated that difficulties moving from demonstration to real-world settings, lack of programme practitioner preparedness, deficiencies in resources, the attitudes of staff in the prison and the nature of the prison setting itself cause the outcomes of prison-based correctional programmes have often fallen short of expectations.

Reviews of the criminological literature point out that while a considerable work has been published on the influence of religion on the level of crime in the general population; however, the connection of rehabilitation to religion has been insufficiently explored (O'Connor and Perreyclear, 2002). Religious programs for offenders, while framed in the language of offender rehabilitation, remain largely unevaluated and thus unlikely to conform to the evidence-based standards (Adam and Andrew, 2010).

Sri Lankans have different religious beliefs and practices. It is likely, that religious belief and practices, which remains extensive in Sri Lanka. The religious activities in Sri Lankan prisons are made possible through the services of religious leaders and volunteers from the community. The formal religious programmes such as worship, alms given, bible study and discussion are conducted. The findings revealed that if inmates are to benefit from the religious experience, it seems they must become involved at a certain level of intensity. For example, R37 expressed, "*we have ('seela vadasatahan') ceremonial sessions every Poya Day and I engage them. It gives good practices or living a peaceful life. So, because of religious activities, I have no frustration about prison life [..]., I know life is now also about cause and effect. I have to think before I do*". The lack of spirituality was expressed by R16 who was not religiously involved when he insisted there is no hard working to do with religious activities, very easy. Officers are not forced to do other work if we are engaged in religious activities; good for time passing, nothing more than that"

Whilst the data reported here are inconclusive, the attempt to evaluate is important, and should be of interest to those with views (both positive and negative) about the potential value of religious activities in the rehabilitation programmes.

Concerning the important reasons of planning and implementing prison-based rehabilitation programmes, providing the right programmes in Sri Lankan prisons comes with many challenges and these are discussed in the next section.

How to make existing programmes in Sri Lankan prison more effective at reducing recidivism?

The literature suggests that prison-based rehabilitation programme is almost twice as cost-effective as incarceration alone as a crime control policy (Bazos and Hausman, 2004). Rehabilitation programmes in Sri Lanka prisons therefore should be aimed at increasing the

vocational skills of inmates and their chances of success upon release. To accomplish these goals, inmates are encouraged to participate in rehabilitation programmes made available to them while in prison. With this sense, question should be asked about whether prisoners can exercise personal choice about which training programme to join. Interviews conducted with prison staff in the selected prison revealed that currently inmates are assigned to the training programmes based on decision of prison authority. Assigning decision of the prison authority preliminary depends on the basic information about the personal and family situation, offence and criminal record of the prisoner and training availability. However, in particularly, knowing about prisoners' existing skills and aspirations, their typical education level, whether they have any professional skills and can contribute to training is very much essential to get answers to this basic question. Developing a mechanism to find out about the education, skills level and work history of prisoners may be a solution to assess prisoners' level of motivation and ability to work. In addition, establishing such mechanism also facilitates to select prisoners for appropriate training, as well as to assess whether it is transparent, fair, reasonable and open, as much as possible, to prisoners' expressed preferences, or whether it is susceptible to discrimination or corruption. Thus, it is important for prison authorities to have a comprehensive picture of the profile of their prison population as well as the existing range of training and work activities in their prisons.

In line with the personal choice about training programme, prison staff continuously claimed that there are resource constraints in terms of space, staff and equipment, and they have become severe burdens. It is true that establishing and maintaining rehabilitation activities will usually require additional resources, including for refurbishment work, the procurement of equipment and payment of additional staff. Such resources may be obtained from governmental sources, organisations, charitable foundations or international donors. To attract funding for prison-based rehabilitation programmes, it is essential to inculcate social and material benefits of the rehabilitation programmes towards the society (Drake and Henley, 2014). At present, our selected prison carries out leather bag manufacturing unit at the prison premise. This unit is fully funded and maintained by a well reputed private firm in Sri Lanka. All necessary training and materials are provided by the firm and nearly 20 inmates are working at the unit and earn Rs.300 per day. As such, developing and maintaining strong relationships with a wide range of private, public or voluntary providers is essential if rehabilitation activities are to be made available on the necessary scale. Those providers should therefore be involved in design and development of new rehabilitation programmes and be encouraged to implement and sustain the programmes. Aforementioned, space constraint is often the reason given for the absence of rehabilitation activities. Correspondingly, the calculation will need to carry out whether available space is fully used and renovate unused spaces. To address the human resource constraints, contribution from volunteers or interns may be able to take as support roles. Finally, it is worth to note that prisoners themselves are an under-used resource. Within careful risk assessment and supervision, their involvement can be occupied to develop and maintain rehabilitation programmes.

At present, prison-based rehabilitation programmes in Sri Lankan prisons consist of educational services (teaching of literacy and numeracy), skills acquisition activities (tailoring, masonry, woodwork, metal work, bakery, soap making), recreational activities (music, scout) and religious services. According to UNODC (2017), now it is relevant to find out how decisions are made about the use of training, whether prisoners are trained according to a recognized national standard and receive accredited qualifications for their learning and whether vocational skills training programmes are chosen and designed in a way which lends itself to assist prisoners in obtaining jobs upon release, that is in line with actual market needs. Bullock *et al.* (2018) indicated that difficulties moving from demonstration to real-world settings become one of the barriers to success prison-based programmes. Thus, before embarking on the development of new rehabilitation

programmes, it is important to know about the quality of activities undertaken in prisons, to have a comprehensive picture of the profile of their prison population, to identify the market requirements and to assess the opportunities they present for expansion. Making such assessment looks not only at the deficits and weaknesses in existing programmes but also at their strengths and potential for change. The prison authority then might wish to develop a standardised template which would identify the programmes to be initiated and improved, and the corresponding requirements for change in prison context.

Kjelsberg *et al.* (2007) highlighted that prison officers are in day-to-day contact with prisoners and their attitudes towards them affect either to motivate or de-motivate prisoners. The drive to accomplish effective rehabilitation programmes then depends on how prison officers look at the programme and pay their attention towards it (Bullock *et al.*, 2018). With that much influence, it is moral obligation of prison officers to talk about the fact that rehabilitation programme intends to prepare inmates for their eventual release back to their communities through attitudinal and behavioural changes and give attention to details in an effort to complete the training to the best of their ability. In addition, when private firms involve in providing work for prisoners, the smooth functional relationship among prison administration, private firms and prisoners needs to be undertaken.

Further, interviews with inmates exhibited that their willingness of engaging the rehabilitation programme motivated because of monetary incentives they received. Even though prison is not a profit-oriented or income-earning institute, prison authorities can accompany private firms or international donors to coordinate work and vocational training given to prisoners. This mechanism requires to obtain win-win situation for all parties (prison administration, private firms and prisoners). For example, when undertaking prison-based vocational training by private firms or international donors, it is important not to over-promise in terms of economic benefits. This is because the productiveness of prisoners tends to be lower compared to similar business in the community. Prisoners are special workforce that is subject to a higher rate of change or working hours are limited because of the prison regime and security issues and industrial business skills may be lacking.

While, well-designed prison-based programmes can reduce reoffending (Bullock *et al.*, 2018); however, sustainability of these programmes is doubtful because of the limited opportunities to continue with vocational training upon release. It is further important to know whether there are actual opportunities for prisoners to continue vocational training or work activities upon release. The Nelson Mandela Rules (Rule 88(1)) clearly indicated that the treatment of prisoners should emphasize not their exclusion from the community but their continuous part in it. As such, it is necessary to require consultations with vocational training providers as well as potential employers in the community. Community agencies should therefore be enlisted wherever possible to assist the prison staff in the task of the social rehabilitation of prisoners. The above notwithstanding, it is important that some form of dedicated unit is responsible for the development and management of prison-based rehabilitation programmes as well as to mentor support so that inmates can continue to progress through training and employment on release. As observed, this can also be done by ex-offenders who have successfully reintegrated after they have themselves left the prison.

Conclusion

The place of rehabilitation programmes in the reformation and transformation of prison inmates has continued to be on the front burner of professionals such as adult educators, counsellors, social workers, psychologists and medical doctors in recent time (Asokhia and Agbonluae, 2013; Alós *et al.*, 2014; Tanimu, 2010; Bullock *et al.*, 2018). These professionals seem to be at an agreement that prison-based rehabilitation programmes facilitate inmates to acquire the much-needed social skills, vocational training, attitudinal and behavioural changes and education to be more useful to themselves and the society upon release. To

achieve the above, rehabilitation programmes in Sri Lankan prisons have been defined as services provided for prison inmates to restore them to physical, mental, psychological, social, vocational and economic usefulness which they are capable. However, designed prison-based programmes have not been straightforward and outcomes have often fallen short of what was anticipated. As such, this study intended to add to our understanding of how rehabilitation programme affects inmates' skills and attitudes.

The study has highlighted seven emerged views on the rehabilitation programmes conducted in a Sri Lankan prison. Accordingly, the selected inmates viewed that the programmes as future employment opportunity, mental relaxation, overcome loneliness, lessen prison term, monetary incentive, opportunity for disseminate knowledge and waste of public funds.

The results of the study showed that engagement in rehabilitation activities majorly facilitate inmates to acquire strong self-assurance about future career options, optimistic about future and ability of controlling their post-prison lives. They also indicated that the programme further facilitates inmates to deal with potentially destructive feelings such as anger, frustration and loneliness and helps inmates to self-regulate their behaviour even while living inside the walls. These findings reflect the implications of [Jolley \(2018\)](#), indicating that life skills are an important component in rehabilitation, and it needs to develop with necessary tools such as planning, recognition, interpretation, reflection and response. However, inmates who showed a strong propensity to suffer injustice and internalized blame have found no substantial impact on their skills and attitude through the programme, as well as blaming that such programmes are waste of public funds.

Among the important effective skills and attitude to live a successful and happy life is the ability to learn, collaborate, cooperate and work with others. The prior studies and experiences suggest that prison-based rehabilitation programmes have significant benefits and positive outcomes for the incarcerated, their families, the prison environment and society ([Andersen and Skardhamar, 2015](#); [Brewster, 2014](#); [Bullock et al., 2018](#); [Clark and Duwe, 2015](#); [Patzelt et al., 2014](#); [Taylor, 2014](#)). Unfortunately, Sri Lankan prison-based rehabilitation programmes are victims of limitations and still struggling to achieve their ultimate objective. Ensuring that these matters are properly considered in the planning of activities requires meaningful rehabilitation to take place in Sri Lankan prisons, rehabilitation activities must first be improved upon; adequate provisions made and these should be accessible to the inmates. Initially, it is important for prison authorities to have a comprehensive picture of the profile of their prison population as well as the existing range of training and work activities in their prisons. Identifying the market requirements with regard to employment opportunities and to assessing the opportunities present for expansion allow the prison authorities to ensure the applicability of existing programmes to the current market requirement. For an example, there is a dearth of skilled workers in the fields of construction and agriculture. The findings of the study further provide greater insight into the nature of religion activities in prison setting and support the view that religion can be an important factor in the process of inmates' rehabilitation. [O'Connor and Perreyclear \(2002\)](#) speculate that engagement in religious programmes facilitates to establish social attachment and prosocial learning through interaction with volunteer communities. Thus, religion may help to bring into the correctional setting, motivation to change and introduce important ethical, social and religious ideas of respect to others, forgiveness, love of one's neighbour and care about other people. Finally, developing and maintaining strong relationships with a wide range of private, public or international donors will assist to overcome the resource constraints in terms of space, staffs and equipment in the prison.

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