

Project name - MENTAL HEALTH CARE FOR ALL IN PRISONS

Final draft for Ministry of health prepared by team of experts from National Health Services.

Introduction –

We all are aware that prison imposes many mental health issues in prisoners and staff as well. Therefore, the subject of mental health in prisons deserves to be given urgent priority because imprisonment has adverse effects on the mental health of a significant number of prisoners, and the prevalence of mental ill health in all prisons is very high. We have statistical data which shows that there is an increase in prison population by 30% during the past decade. This overcrowding will cause more mental health issues in prison which will impact everyone in prison including staff and that is why reform is very essential. The promotion of mental health in prisoners will ascertain many benefits to prisoners, staff, families and prison itself.

1. **For prisoners** - increased emotional and physical well being, increased confidence and social skills; better coping skills for offending behaviour, social inclusion and improved rehabilitation prospects, reduction in the likelihood of developing mental disorder, or in the degree of mental disorder experienced; early detection and treatment of mental disorders.

2. **For families and community** - better relationships between family members, safer environment for children to grow up, lower risk of developing mental ill health in family members, better socially inclusive society, safe environment in society, better value for money from money for prisons because all the factors listed.

3. **For staff** – better job satisfaction and high motivation, better mental health and less stress.

4. **For prison** – improved security, safe environment, better industrial relationships, better vocational rehabilitation, cost effectiveness, reduced sickness absence ratio and greater efficiency without any additional cost.

(Ref – Mental Health Promotions in Prisons, report on WHO meeting, 1998)

Objectives –

1. To improve access and availability of mental health care in prisons.
2. To reduce incidence and prevalence of drug addiction, major mental disorders, common mental disorders.
3. To prevent all types of abuses completely and develop zero tolerance policy for torture and abuses.
4. To reduce overcrowding in prisons

Strategies -

1. Integrate mental health care with prison's present health care system at every level; Develop proper mental health services in prison and rehabilitation facilities
2. To increase awareness among prisoners and staff which should help in early detection of mental health issues.
3. Develop special facility for immigrant prisoners

4. Develop proper monitoring facilities
5. To make infrastructural changes in prison
6. Try to reduce immigrant population in prisons
7. Try to treat prisoners with severe mental disorders in separate mental health facility.

Plans –

1. Building a quality mental health services for prison with following actions

- a) We need to integrate mental health care into primary health care system of prison to reduce stigma and to improve access of mental health care for all.
- b) We need to have optimum and trained mental health professionals. Also all types of medications have to be available.
- c) All prisoners should have mental health assessment at first entry as they have general health check up . So that early detection of vulnerable population can be done.
- d) We need to develop emergency psychiatric services for suicidal and violent patients. They need to be monitored and followed up frequently. Also there has to be regular suicidal risk assessment with severely depressed or vulnerable prisoners . In first year of their arrival suicide risk screening should be monthly and then it can be quarterly in coming years.
- e) We need build up stress management services for prisoners and prison staff. Prisoners should have regular physical exercise and yoga or art therapy sessions. They should be encouraged to cultivate good hobbies . There should be regular entertainment programmes for all prisoners.
- f) We need to appoint separate deaddiction counselor who can visit 2-3 times in a week for prisoners with drug addiction / abuse.
- g) We need to have tailor made vocational rehabilitation facilities and social reintegration programmes. For which we need to include families of prisoners in this programmes which will help prisoners to reintegrate with their families.
- h) We need to form internal review body which will comprise prison authority , psychiatrist, social worker . They will meet periodically to discuss issues and monitor services. They need to follow objectives.

2. Raising awareness among prison staff and prisoners about mental health issues – This will help to increase identification of mental health issues , build a security among prisoners and their families and also there should be efforts into building therapeutic relationship between prisoners and staff . This will strengthen prisoner's emotional resilience.

- a) We need to train prison staff intensively for detection of early signs of mental health issues and particularly they should receive training for assessing suicidal risk. So that staff member

should know when to refer a prisoner to mental health facility.

b) Prison staff will have to update knowledge about mental health issues periodically and should learn about stress management. Prison staff themselves should have separate counselor for their own stress management.

c) There has to be regular awareness raising programmes for prisoners and their families at least once in a month. Also awareness can be generated through cultural events and sports activities.

d) We need to identify and train some volunteers among prisoner's who can become a counselor. So that he will be near to prisoners and can form good bond between prisoners and staff.

3. Special facilities for immigrant prisoners -

a) Immigrant prisoners should be assessed in presence of interpreter appropriate to their country of origin. We need to have special visiting counselor who can address mental health issues of immigrant prisoners.

b) Immigrant prisoners are more vulnerable for abuse and torture so prison staff should have close monitoring for them.

c) We can take a help from NGOs who are working in this field so that they can provide us expertise to deal with mental health issues of immigrant prisoners.

4. Forming state level monitoring bodies -

a) We need to form mental health review body specially for prisons comprising retired judge , prison authority , psychiatrist , family member , NGO representative . All members should have fare experience and expertise in this field. Also they need to be well versed with international human rights standards.

b) They need to monitor mental health facilities periodically with special goal of prevention of all forms of torture and abuses.

c) Prisoners can contact any member of review body via complaint form or telephone call.

5. To prevent overcrowding in prisons -

a) We need to build more residential blocks to accommodate everyone. All prisoners should have good leaving / sanitary conditions. As bad leaving conditions are directly related to mental health.

b) We need to have separate sport facility and gym, place for vocations rehabilitation.

c) We need to have separate policies at national level to reduce inflow of immigrant prisoners as they cause extra burden on existing system.

d) Also it will better if we can transfer prisoners with severe mental disorders to special mental health facility.