

Gender Behind Bars: A Critical Analysis Of The Laws, Policies, And Realities Of Women In Indian Prisons

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I. INTRODUCTION

A prison is an institution which is established to confine the persons who have violated the laws of a nation. Though the primary purpose of these incarceration facilities is rehabilitation and reformation of the offenders, yet these places often conceal instances of violence which undermine the basic goal to reform. This makes it essential to recognise and uphold the fundamental rights of the prisoners to allow their transition and enable them to join back the society. These issues are apparent especially for the female prisoners' whose needs are often ignored in these prisons.

The Prison establishments are mostly designed to fulfil the needs of men and do not address the specific requirements of women inmates. Though the women prisoners account for a smaller proportion in the global prison population, yet the number is increasing day by day (Association for the Prevention of Torture & Filippeschi, 2024). As per report of a research centre of University of London, the number of women prisoners has increased by 57% in the last two decades, whereas the male inmates proportion has increased only by 22% (Fair et al., 2024). Similarly, according to the "Prison Statistics India Report" of 2022, published by "National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs: female incarceration in India has increased at a significant pace in the last decade, rising from 15,030 in 2010 to 17,830 in 2015 and 23,770 inmates in 2022. This reflects a substantive rise of almost 58% from 2010 till 2022 (NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, 2023). This spike in women prisoners further worsens the gender specific problems, as women inmates come to prison institutions with complex past experiences. The statistical data released by "United Nation Office on Drugs Crime (UNODC) points to the fact that incarcerated women generally enter prison with their complex pasts of gender-based violence, poverty, caregiving needs and responsibilities, and that they require different responses by prison authorities (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024). Though always fewer in number than men, the incarceration rates for women have outstripped those for their male counterparts in some places, propelled in part by poverty, unjust laws and the criminalisation of survival activities including informal labour and minor offences (Biased Laws and Poverty Driving Huge Rise in Female Prisoners, 2025). International standards that apply to the protection of women's rights in prison include the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (1948) and the 1979 "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" (CEDAW) (United Nations, n.d.). Notwithstanding these instruments, women's lives in prison often do not resemble these standards, as health, hygiene and human rights are affected by overcrowding, lack of medical facilities and scarcity of women specific programs (NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, 2023).

In spite of the introduction of standards that are gender sensitive such as the Bangkok Rules in 2010, many prison systems reflect male standard systems which often result in systemic neglect of women's unique health and psychosocial needs (UN Bangkok Rules - Penal Reform International, 2021). Collection of detailed information on female prisoners has not yet been developed to the extent that would be required for evidence-based policy and resourcing (Secretariat, 2010). The incidence of

gender-based discrimination against female prisoners of war is high and takes more severe forms, including the denial of proper medical treatment for reproductive health and lack of protection from sexual violence (Me et al., 2024). The confluence of gender with caste, class and religion exacerbates vulnerabilities and underscores the importance of a gendered and intersectional approach to rights assessments (Global Report on Women in Prison Analysis from National Preventive Mechanisms, 2024). Primary concerns such as menstrual hygiene management, pregnancy care, and post release support are commonly being ignored, undermining the affected individuals (dignity and rehabilitating women in prison UNODC). It is argued that in the absence of gender responsive programming that addresses the root causes of women's offending, prisons do little to provide the foundations for reducing potential recidivism and the successful reintegration into society (Global Report on Women in Prison Analysis From National Preventive Mechanisms, 2024).

In India, State of Punjab is the perfect case study on the issue as the state has one of the highest incidences of human right violation among women prisoners across the country (Jassowal, 2020). Roughly 20% of complaints to the country's National Human Rights Commission belong to Punjab despite being a relatively small fraction of the country's population (Jassowal, 2020d). Complaints to the Punjab State Human Rights Commission have highlighted the problems such as custodial violence and lack of access to basic needs like sanitary napkins and bedding (Jassowal, 2020d). According to the reports of Punjab Commission on the Status of the Women, imprisoned women (most of whom hail from poor and illiterate backgrounds) can be taken advantage of as they are not aware of their rights. This paper critically examines the status of women prisoner's rights in Punjab by comparing ground realities with international human rights standards and national legal frameworks, ultimately proposing context-specific reforms to address the prevailing inconsistencies. The goals are (i) to map the fit between international norms and state practice, (ii) investigate the impact of gender sensitive measures in Punjab's prisons, and (iii) Make evidence-based policy recommendations to improve the protection of human rights. The scope primarily undertakes prisons under the Punjab state government's jurisdiction, with comparative references to best practices in other Indian states and international contexts, where relevant.

II. Issues and Challenges Faced by Women Prisoners in India and Punjab

Prisons have primarily been structured around the needs of male inmates, resulting in systematic ignorance of the needs of female prisoners. The administration practices and other facilities generally fail to recognize their gender-specific emotional, physical and social requirements. Despite the growth in the number of women in prisons in India, the infrastructure in prisons has not been improved, which is ultimately leading to inhumane treatment of female prisoners. The women in prisons are facing a range of issues including overcrowding, inadequate gender specific infrastructure, to hygiene and physical and mental health problems.

• Overcrowding and Inadequate Infrastructure

Overcrowding remains a significant concern in Indian prisons and the situation is not different in women prisons. According to the "National Crime Records Bureau" (NCRB), the total number of female prisoners in the year 2021 was 22,918 while the capacity of jails was enough to accommodate only 6,767 prisoners (Sns & Sns, 2022). For instance, Uttar Pradesh housed 4,809 women prisoners in 2022 against a capacity of only 540, similarly Bihar had a capacity of 202 but held 2,938 prisoners (Ramachandra & Ramachandra, 2023). Sanctioned strength of women inmates in Punjab jails were 506 and 734 was the actual strength of women inmates in Punjab jails (Ramachandra & Ramachandra, 2023).

• Lack of Gender-Specific Facilities

Many prisons lack separate facilities for women, forcing them to share the facilities with male inmates, leading to privacy violations and safety concerns of female inmates. Only 15 states and Union Territories in India have exclusive women's prisons, which means that a significant number of female inmates in the country have to adjust with mixed-gender facilities (White Black Legal, 2024). In the year 2022, around 75 % of the women staff were jail cadre staff. The 2018 Women in Prisons report by the Ministry of Women and Child Development highlighted the inadequacy of female medical personnel. Even in 2022, only 3.4% of the total women staff is medical professionals. Some states, including Gujarat,

Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Meghalaya, reported no resident or medical officers (Ramachandra & Ramachandra, 2023).

- **Inadequate Sanitation and Menstrual Hygiene Management**

The “Prison Statistics India” reported that the majority of female prisoners in India fall in the age groups of 18-30 years (29.4%) and 30-50 years (50.7%) which means that approximately 80% of women in prisons are in the active stages of their menstrual life cycle. Despite the large number, the menstrual health of women prisoners is overlooked, resulting in poor “menstrual hygiene management” (MHM) practices in prisons (NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, 2023). Sanitation facilities are mostly in poor conditions, with less than 40% of prisons facilitating sanitary napkins to female inmates. Even this is evident that some prisons offer limited quantities of sanitary products and separate charges are being levied for the same, resulting in financial exploitation of women prisoners.

- **Limited Access to Healthcare and Mental Health Services**

It has been reported that there has been a considerable scarcity of proper healthcare facilities being provided to women prisoners in India. The healthcare support system remains miserable due to a number of reasons including insufficient infrastructure, lack of initiative from prison authorities, and funding constraints. It is being reported that prison officials are not well trained and lack the basic understanding of the gender-specific needs of women prisoners, making it difficult to address the requirements (Anwer & Bhartiya, 2023). According to the “National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Prison Statistics India” 2022, there were over 23,700 female prisoners in Indian jails, yet only 84 lady medical officers were appointed across all prisons nationwide. Furthermore, more than 70% of prisons lack separate gynecological or reproductive healthcare services, which are essential to meet the unique medical needs of women (U.S. Department of Justice & Minton, 2024).

- **Sexual abuse and Custodial violence**

Sexual abuse and custodial violence against women prisoners in India are pressing human rights concerns that persist despite legal safeguards. Female inmates, particularly those from marginalized communities, often face systemic vulnerabilities within the prison system. Lack of gender-sensitive staffing increases the risk of sexual exploitation. For instance, reports have highlighted instances where female inmates have become pregnant during incarceration, raising serious concerns about sexual abuse within prison facilities. In 2017, Byculla Jail inmate Manjula Shetye was beaten to death by six prison staff, including a jailer, allegedly for minor infractions. She faced 17 fatal injuries, which was initially dismissed as a fall but later confirmed as assault (Manjula Shetye’s Death in Byculla Jail: A Year on, Little Has Changed, 2018). A 2019 report by the National Campaign Against Torture highlighted that women continued to suffer sexual violence in custody, though such incidents are underreported due to fear and retaliation (CJP, 2022).

- **Conditions of Children of Women Prisoners**

Children who reside with their incarcerated mothers in Indian prisons face profound developmental and emotional hardships compounded by inadequate institutional support. According to the 2020 report from the Prison Statistics India, over 1,628 children lived with 1,427 women prisoners nationwide (Ghasiram Panda et al., 2022). In Delhi alone, a 2011 study by the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) found 56 children under six years of age sharing space with their mothers in prison and, across seven States/UTs, 1,885 out of 6,501 female inmates had their children living with them (Pandit, 2012). NCPCR, conducted across eight prisons, revealed that 60% of children living with their mothers experienced irregular contact, while 17% met their mothers only quarterly and 13% had never met them (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 2021). Nutritional deficiencies are also alarming: in Punjab and Gujarat, some children receive “less than two spoons of milk powder per day,” often surviving without proper nursery or playground facilities (White Black Legal, 2024).

- **Limite Access to Legal Aid**

Despite constitutional provisions and directives from the Supreme Court emphasizing the right to free legal aid under Article 21, many female inmates remain unaware of their rights or lack access to legal

assistance (Ians, 2018). A 2018 report by the “Ministry of Women and Child Development” highlighted that women prisoners come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, making it difficult for them to afford bail or legal representation. Advocate and social activist Flavia Agnes noted that “legal aid is hardly available for women,” emphasizing that their poverty and lack of family support often leave them without necessary legal assistance. Furthermore, the National Human Rights Commission’s jail monitoring visits revealed that many prisons do not have legal aid cells, and very few prisoners have accessed legal aid. This lack of awareness and institutional support leads to prolonged incarceration, especially for under trial prisoners.

- **Educational and Vocational Training Deficits**

Educational and vocational training opportunities in Indian prisons are limited, particularly for women. According to a 2023 report by the parliamentary standing committee on home affairs, nearly 65% of the 554,034 prisoners across India are either illiterate or have education below Class 10 (Rai, 2020). Only 16.2% had been provided with any form of educational opportunity, and a mere 0.6% of the total prison budget was spent on vocational and educational training. In Ahmedabad’s Sabarmati Women’s Jail, for instance, there is no literacy training available, and the only work opportunity for women is in a sanitary pad manufacturing facility, where they earn far below the minimum wage. Such limited and low-paying vocational options hinder the rehabilitation and reintegration of women prisoners into the workforce.

III. Global Legal Framework Governing Woman Prisoners’ Rights

International law provides a comprehensive framework to safeguard the rights and dignity of women prisoners, acknowledging their unique needs and vulnerabilities. Key instruments and guidelines have been established to ensure gender-sensitive treatment and to promote non-custodial measures where appropriate.

- **United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules, 2010)**

Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2010, the “United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners” and “Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders” (Bangkok Rules) are the first international standards specifically tailored to address the unique circumstances and needs of women in the criminal justice system. These 70 rules supplement existing frameworks like the Nelson Mandela Rules by emphasizing the importance of gender-specific health care, particularly for pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding women, and call for non-custodial alternatives wherever appropriate, especially for women who do not pose a serious threat to public safety. Recognizing that many women enter the criminal justice system due to underlying social vulnerabilities such as poverty, domestic violence, and substance abuse, the Rules advocate for rehabilitation programs that directly address these root causes. Furthermore, they highlight the harmful impact of incarceration on women, including the psychological toll of being separated from their children and the disruption of vital social and economic ties, urging states to implement policies that prioritize the dignity, rehabilitation, and reintegration of women offenders. (United Nations, 2011)

- **United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules, Revised 2015)**

The “United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners” (Nelson Mandela Rules, revised 2015), though not explicitly gender-specific, establish fundamental principles for the humane treatment of all prisoners and serve as a universal baseline for prison management. For women prisoners, these rules are particularly significant as they provide the core standards—such as the prohibition of torture, the right to healthcare, and the necessity of safety and dignity—which national systems must uphold and adapt to meet gender-specific needs. The Rules emphasize the importance of individual dignity, the prevention of discrimination, and the necessity of access to adequate medical care, all of which are crucial for addressing the distinct experiences of women in prison, who often face issues related to reproductive health, histories of trauma, and caregiving responsibilities. The Nelson Mandela Rules thus provide the general human rights framework upon which more detailed instruments like the Bangkok Rules- which focus specifically on women offenders and prisoners—are built, ensuring that

gender-sensitive standards are incorporated into broader prison reforms. (United Nations & Government of Germany)

- **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and its Optional Protocol (1999)**

The “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women” (CEDAW), 1979, often described as an international bill of rights for women, is a landmark treaty adopted by the United Nations General Assembly to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women in all spheres of life. It obliges State Parties to take comprehensive legal, political, social, and cultural measures to ensure women's equal enjoyment of human rights, including in areas such as education, employment, healthcare, marriage, and family life. A critical aspect of CEDAW is its requirement for states to not only eliminate discrimination by law but also address de facto discrimination caused by entrenched social and cultural norms. The “Optional Protocol to CEDAW “(1999) enhances the Convention’s enforcement mechanisms by allowing individuals or groups of women to submit complaints directly to the CEDAW Committee if they believe their rights under the Convention have been violated and no effective remedy has been provided at the national level. It also empowers the Committee to initiate inquiries into grave or systematic violations of women's rights, strengthening the accountability framework and promoting the realization of gender justice globally. (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, n.d.)

- **European Prison Rules (Revised 2020)**

The European Prison Rules (Revised 2020), adopted by the Council of Europe, serve as a comprehensive framework guiding the humane and effective management of prisons across member states. One of the significant advancements in the 2020 revision is the explicit inclusion of gender-specific provisions, recognizing the distinct needs and circumstances of women prisoners. The Rules underscore the necessity of providing separate facilities for women to ensure privacy, safety, and dignity, particularly in light of the potential for gender-based violence in mixed-gender settings. This separation is not merely spatial but also programmatic, aimed at ensuring that the services, treatment, and conditions provided are appropriate to the unique challenges faced by women in prison. Moreover, the Rules stress the importance of providing access to gender-specific health care, which includes sexual and reproductive health services, mental health care, and trauma-informed approaches, given the high prevalence of abuse and violence in the backgrounds of many incarcerated women. They also highlight the significance of addressing women’s caregiving responsibilities, especially in relation to their children. The Rules recommend maintaining strong family links through child-friendly visitation policies and supporting the mother-child bond, particularly where young children reside with their mothers in prison. (Guidance Document on the European Prison Rules - Penal Reform International, 2023)

IV. Indian Legal Framework Governing Women Prisoners

India’s legal framework governing women prisoners is rooted in constitutional mandates, statutory provisions, and policy guidelines aimed at ensuring the rights, dignity, and welfare of incarcerated women. Despite these frameworks, challenges persist in implementation and enforcement.

- **Constitutional Provisions**

The Indian Constitution provides a robust framework to safeguard the rights of women prisoners through key fundamental and directive principles. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws, ensuring that women prisoners are entitled to the same legal protections and humane treatment as any other citizen, without discrimination. (Constitution of India, Article 14). Further Constitution upholds the right to life and personal liberty, has been expansively interpreted by Indian courts to include the right to live with dignity, access to adequate healthcare, and protection against cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment , critical safeguards for women in custodial settings who may face specific vulnerabilities such as sexual abuse, inadequate reproductive healthcare, or mental health issues.(Constitution of India , Article 21) Further, the Indian constitution also highlights importance of free legal aid to ensure that justice is accessible to all, particularly for indigent and marginalized women prisoners who may lack the resources or awareness to defend their rights. Together, these constitutional provisions form the bedrock of legal protection for women prisoners in India,

mandating that the state take proactive measures to ensure their safety, dignity, and access to justice within the prison system. (Constitution of India, Article 39 A)

- **Prisons Act, 1894**

The Prisons Act, 1894, although a colonial-era legislation, includes certain provisions aimed at safeguarding the basic rights and dignity of women prisoners. Section 27 mandates the separation of male and female prisoners, ensuring that women are confined in a distinct part of the prison to protect their privacy and reduce the risk of abuse. To further ensure safety, Section 15 requires that female prisoners be attended to only by female officers, thereby minimizing the possibility of sexual harassment or misconduct by male staff. Additionally, Section 37 makes special provisions for the treatment of pregnant women, including arrangements for medical care during childbirth and for the care of infants born in prison. While these sections demonstrate an early recognition of the unique needs of women in custody, they are limited in scope and lack a comprehensive approach to gender-sensitive issues such as mental health support, rehabilitation, and protection against custodial violence. As a result, there is a pressing need to reform the Act and align it with contemporary human rights standards, including the Bangkok Rules and constitutional protections under Articles 14 and 21. (Prisons Act, 1894)

- **Model Prison Manual, 2016:**

The “Model Prison Manual, 2016”, developed by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, serves as a comprehensive guideline for prison administration across Indian states and represents a significant step toward modernizing the prison system. Unlike the outdated “Prisons Act, 1894”, the Manual integrates human rights principles and international standards, including those outlined in the Bangkok Rules, to address the specific needs of women prisoners. It emphasizes the importance of gender-sensitive prison management, mandating separate enclosures for women, supervised exclusively by female staff, and ensuring access to appropriate healthcare, including for pregnant and lactating women. The Manual also recommends that children born in prison or staying with their mothers should be provided adequate facilities, nutrition, education, and medical care, without any stigma attached to their prison upbringing. Furthermore, the Manual recognizes the rehabilitative and reintegrate needs of women offenders, urging the provision of education, vocational training, and psychological counseling, especially considering the high incidence of abuse, trauma, and socio-economic marginalization among incarcerated women. It also stresses the use of non-custodial measures for women under trial prisoners and recommends regular legal aid, periodic health assessments, and mechanisms to report abuse or grievance without fear of retaliation. By addressing not only the physical and mental well-being of women prisoners but also their familial roles and future reintegration, the “Model Prison Manual, 2016” marks a progressive shift toward dignified and rights-based incarceration for women in India. However, its effective implementation remains a challenge, as prison administration is a state subject and adoption varies widely across regions. (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022)

- **National Policy on Prison Reforms and Correctional Administration, 2007:**

The “National Policy on Prison Reforms and Correctional Administration, 2007”, developed by the Ministry of Home Affairs, aims to shift the focus of the Indian prison system from a punitive to a reformatory and rehabilitative model, with specific attention to the needs of women prisoners. The policy recognizes that women in custody often come from marginalized and vulnerable backgrounds, and thus require tailored support systems that address their physical, emotional, and social well-being. It emphasizes the need for gender-specific healthcare, including facilities for pregnant and nursing mothers, and calls for the creation of child-friendly spaces for infants staying with their mothers in prison. The policy also advocates for the appointment of female staff for the supervision and management of women prisoners to ensure their safety, privacy, and dignity. In addition, the policy underlines the importance of non-custodial alternatives for women offenders, particularly those imprisoned for minor or non-violent crimes. It stresses the need for counseling, vocational training, and legal aid services, taking into account the high prevalence of trauma, domestic violence, and economic hardship in the lives of women inmates. By recommending the development of rehabilitation and reintegration programs specifically for women, the policy promotes a more humane and inclusive correctional environment. However, like many reform initiatives in the Indian criminal justice system, the policy’s impact depends largely on its adoption and implementation by state governments, since

prison administration falls under the State List in the Constitution. As such, the policy offers a forward-looking framework, but its success hinges on political will and administrative capacity at the state level. (Bureau of Police Research & Development [BPRD], 2007)

V. BEST PRACTICES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

i) Integrated Pre- and Post-Release Planning

Drawing on UNODC's reintegration model, prisons should establish personalised release plans to include vocational placement, mental health referrals and housing arrangements that commence six months or more in advance of release (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018). Implementation and monitoring can be carried out by multidisciplinary release boards, which can involve social workers, lawyers and community guardians.

ii) Scaling Successful Models

Scale up by the state-level funding and capacity building of TISS's Prayas project and from the restorative justice model from Karnataka to have consistent approach of psychosocial support across the prison facilities in Punjab (TISS, 2018). Standardized collaborations between PLSA, Swadhar Greh, TEVTA and NGOs as part of a single state reintegration task force will also facilitate the procedure of referral and resources distribution.

iii) Enhancing Monitoring and Evaluation

National or regional monitoring frameworks for indicators such as employment status, recidivism rates, and mental health outcomes are needed for ongoing improvement (Ips, 2024). With the use of digital case management systems, real-time data sharing among the stakeholders and a transparent accountability could be enabled.

iv) Enhancing Basic Facilities and Infrastructure Use normally underutilized public spaces to create temporary dormitory-style barracks with modular-level bunk beds to help reduce extreme overcrowding per NCW guidelines for modular cell design (4-6 inmates per unit) and enhanced sanitation requirements (Ips, 2024). Ensure the free and regular supply of sanitary pads, as recommended in Bangkok Rules and in PRI menstrual health awareness materials supplied to prison authorities.

v) Improving Healthcare and Mental Health Services

The tele neuropsychiatry Karnataka–Mumbai model which has proved to be efficacious should be applied to all the women's correctional centres in Punjab. With the utilization of the e-prison network of the Ministry of Home Affairs, this model can contribute to the prompt psychiatry consultation and support. Finally, mobile mental health teams of psychologists and social workers should be sent out to the field for weekly group therapy and suicide prevention workshops. This is also in accordance with age-appropriate recommendations of a few recent Indian prison mental health review articles published in Lippincott Journals, which could serve as an invaluable way to offer psychosocial support to these prisoners (Dhillon & Sasidharan, 2024).

vi) Strengthening Grievance Redressal and Oversight

To enhance grievance redressal mechanisms for women prisoners, a multi-dimensional approach was necessary. To begin with, Independent Complaint Cells should be set up in every Women's Ward in the name of Confidential Women's Grievance Cells. Such cells must be manned by independent ombudspersons and operate under the vigilance of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to safeguard the complainant's anonymity and shield them against any kind of reprisal (NHRC, India Takes Suo Motu Cognisance of the Difficulties Being Faced by the Prisoners, Including the Women Inmates and Their Children, in Various Jails Across the Country | National Human Rights Commission India, 2025). Digital grievance redressal should be prioritized by integrating e-Prisons grievance modules. These modules would allow for the real-time lodging and tracking of complaints, in accordance with the guidelines provided in the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023.

vii) Legislative and Policy Reforms

Mainstreaming prison administration, implementing necessary legislative and administrative measures will be required to reform prison governance and better preserve the rights of women prisoners. To this effect, amendment to the Prisons Act of 1894 is required at the state level to ensure obligatory gender-sensitive provisions. Such amendments must specifically refer to women's rights, privacy and the use of noncustodial measures in the colonial-era laws so that it can reflect the UN Bangkok Rules (Government of India, 2023)

viii) Gender-Sensitive Training and Capacity Building

A detailed training and incentive system should be established to increase the ability and sensitivity of prison personnel. Gender Sensitisation, Trauma Informed Care and humane handling skills should become part of the mandatory certification curriculum for all prison staff. Such training would be consistent with the specialized manuals of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and draw on input from the Punjab State Commission for Women. Professional development must be rejuvenated with short in-service refresher courses every year. Involvement in such reorientation programmes benchmarking on best practices of prison systems across the world— ought to be made mandatory and completion should be one of the eligibility criteria for promotions and annual increment.

ix) Expansion of Rehabilitation and After-Care Programs

A holistic approach centred on post-prison support and economic empowerment is needed to sustainably rehabilitate and reintegrate women prisoners. Capacity of the Swadhar Greh shelters should be increased by 200% and every one of them should be equipped with modular vocational training units. This would ensure that a minimum of 30% of women released annually from prison found secure accommodation and skills provision (Swadhar Greh Scheme| National Portal of India, 2018). Project of TISS, The Prayas Field Action Project of Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) has a unique model, now each and every district jails should draw a plan to implement it (TISS, 2018).

x). Data Collection, Monitoring, and Research

In the name of transparency, accountability, and data-driven reform in women's prisons, we need organized monitoring and evaluation. E-Prisons modules should be strengthened to record gender disaggregated data on health services, grievance redressal, participation in programs, and post release outcomes. Such data will assist in evidence-based policy reform specifically related to the needs of incarcerated women. Second, the Home Department of Punjab must be directed to bring out an annual "Women in Prison Report". This report must compare prison conditions and services to United Nations standards as well as to national standards, including benchmarks such as average occupancy rates, duration of complaints review, and the rate of success with rehabilitation.'

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