

LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE AND TRAINING OF JUVENILE PRISON AUTHORITIES ON LEARNING DISABILITIES: A KARACHI BASED STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The present research aimed to explore the Karachi juvenile prison authority's previous training on learning disability in juveniles and understand their opinion about the level of training regarding such needs.

Place and Duration: Karachi, Jail.

Sample and Method: The juvenile prison authority's training on learning disability was analysed on three levels - academic skills, cognitive skills, and social-emotional behavioral skills. A sample of 40 juvenile authorities (age 18 and above) was taken from the Women and Children Jail of Karachi, Pakistan. A quantitative survey design using an exploratory study was employed in the present research. The data was collected by using the Urdu translated version of Survey of Professional Developmental Needs for Learning Disabilities.

Results and Conclusion: The results showed that the juvenile prison's authority had no previous training of learning disability in juveniles ($p=0.00$), yet they had a positive opinion about their level of training on two levels of cognitive, and social-emotional ($p=0.00$) except the academic level ($p=0.08$).

Key Words: Learning Disabilities; Juvenile; Prison Authority; Professional Developmental, Training

INTRODUCTION

Emotionally and psychologically disabled youth are observed among the most marginalized and unfortunate of youth population around the world (United States Department of Justice, 2011). These individuals encounter serious issues and disparities in socioeconomic and civil rights in contrast to those without disabilities in both developed and developing countries. This is evident from the report of the United Nations International Children's Education Fund (UNICEF, 2012), which states that the lack of educational and economic opportunities coupled with disabilities, the exclusion and indictment, physical abuse, and isolation are commonplace for disabled individuals. Similarly, youth having mental disorders have a higher prevalence rate, especially in the Juvenile Justice System in comparison to the general population (Grisso & Barnum, 2000). Approximately 50-70% of the two million youth meet the criteria for a mental disorder who are facing the Juvenile Justice System (Gottzman & Schwarz, 2011; Grande et al., 2011). In addition, 40 – 80% of the incarcerated juveniles have a minimum of one psychological disorder (Gilbert, et al., 2013). Underwood and Washington (2016) observed that three-quarters of females and two-thirds of males in the studies related to the Juvenile Justice System and juvenile offenders in detention facilities have suffered from a minimum of one psychological disorder.

Similarly, previous researchers also suggested that youth in the majority of correctional settings often suffer from more than one mental disorder including learning disability (Abram et al., 2003; Andre et al., 1994; Ulzen & Hamilton, 1998). It has been evident that higher prevalence rates of younger individuals with learning disabilities in the Juvenile Justice System have been observed in contrast to those in the general population. For instance, studies revealed that 35.6% of Greek (Casey & Keilitz, 1990) and 46% of American youth (Quinn et al., 2001) have learning disabilities within the Juvenile Justice System. Similarly, Quinn et al. (2001) indicated that most of the juveniles in American correction facilities have received special education. Similarly, as per Ali (2005), 31% of Asian youth have a cognitive disability which includes learning disability. Another study conducted by Einat and Einat (2008) showed that 69% of juvenile prisoners have a learning disability.

As per Kvarfordt et al. (2005), within the Juvenile Justice System, the presence of a learning disability is evident and preeminent from existing studies that reveal 35.6% (Casey & Keilitz, 1990) to 46% (Quinn et al., 2001) of youth with learning disability is in correctional settings. It has been evident that the

incarceration of disturbed youth is caused mainly as a result of violence, social, and antisocial behaviors. It has been estimated by Odgers et al. (2005) that 60% of boys and 70% of girls meet the conduct disorder criteria in Canada. However, growing evidence indicates that violence and aggression are not the sole concerns and neither the key issue in the youth population (Holt et al., 2008).

Learning disability presently known as the Specific Learning Disorder in Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders - Fifth Edition Text Revision (DSM-V) is a neurodevelopmental condition that starts during the school age and involves the continuing problem in the basic psychological process of understanding, speaking, reading, writing or mathematical calculations (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This identification of a learning disability requires 3-5 times more attention in comparison to youth in public schools who are easily recognized as having learning disabilities mainly due to the inability of authorities to identify the presenting issues of the juveniles, including this specific disability (Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice, 2010).

A strong association between learning difficulties and delinquency is unquestionably clear (Leone & Meisel, 1999). While considering the multiple issues of these associations at all levels of schools, detentions, and post-adjudication facilities, it has become one of the most controversial cause-and-effect discussions. It has been evident that the identification of learning difficulties in juveniles has been a challenge within prison systems. This is resultant of the lack of training that prison employees have on apropos learning disability. Additionally, jails in Pakistan do not have a psychologist on the premises to cater to mental health issues, and Urdu measures of assessment are rarely available. Moreover, educational records of the juveniles are unavailable and not updated (CRIN, 2018).

The Juvenile Justice System is described as the procedures, standards, legislation, institutions, and mechanisms used in the conflict of law, which is specifically pertinent to children. One element of the Juvenile Justice System is the juvenile justice ordinance, which has an intervening effect aiming to secure and promote the basic rights of the child and offer the greatest possible chance of reintegration into society. The crimes committed by the Pakistani children come under the Juvenile Justice System of Pakistan. The child must be minimum of eight years of age to come under the supervision of the system (Rizvi & Cheema, 2010).

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It has been observed that the Juvenile Justice System in Pakistan has a dire need of training in the traditional as well as contemporary aspects of the law pertaining to the psychological health of the juveniles. For instance, the training related to the educational needs of children with disabilities, accommodating various disabilities, training of guardians, counseling of the juveniles, attitude correction, and discipline necessary for educational achievement are the training aspects that are usually expected and should be offered in developing countries such as Pakistan. However, a lack of knowledge and awareness results in a negative impact on the ability of the youth to complete a rehabilitation program (International Juvenile Justice Observatory, 2012).

In Pakistan, it is evident that most of the support making the criminal justice is under the Interior or Home Ministries rather than the Ministry of Justice or Human Rights. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police in Pakistan initiated a few programs along with other stakeholders for the development of an indigenous model of the Juvenile Justice System (International Juvenile Justice Observatory, 2012). Although the police were initially the most desensitized to human rights issues, with the help of a few committed groups of officers as well as local and international stakeholders, a new data collection system was initiated as a major breakthrough in juvenile justice indicators in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa by the establishment of a one-of-a-kind police Child Protection Center within the city. Similarly, the research conducted by Sajid (2009) showed that in many cases apart from the lack of training, a lack of awareness in the police is also evident. In the 5-day training organized by the Pakistan Society of Criminology for training and sensitizing, the police station clerks, commonly called Moharirs or Naib Moharirs did not have the awareness of the national and international laws of the juveniles.

As per Ali (2005), Pakistan is observed to be privileged when held in comparison to many South Asian countries concerning the existence of an extensive NGO community. However, Amnesty International's (2006) report shows that in Pakistan, the Juvenile Justice System is multi-faceted and complex, and any intervention that might conflict with the law targeting children manifests a substantial risk of aggravating and complicating the existing issues. On the other hand, little to no comprehensive documentation of the children and their experiences within the system has resulted in serious hindrance in developing prevention and intervention strategies by the smaller agencies involved in the activity (McGarvey & Waite, 2000).

Besides, the most extensive interventions involving the Juvenile Justice System within Pakistan are mainly focused on the awareness of abuse that has been indirectly reported and has high levels of advocacy. Many of these interventions have resulted in assisting the children to some extent only; however, targeted and structured directions to meet the actual requirements are rare (Smedley et al., 2003). Similarly, only a few direct interventions which resulted in the involvement of Dost Welfare Foundation's mobile treatment centers for child prisoners acted fairly and beneficially on different issues. However, evaluating and monitoring these programs has been inconsistent and lacking in many cases which has made it difficult for progress to be measured and achieved (Amnesty International, 2006).

Numerous reasons such as sexual assault, old enmity, drug addiction, money, land issues, honor killings, and illiteracy are the cause of juvenile delinquencies (Mallett, 2014). However, given the significance of the topic, unfortunately, data related to juvenile delinquency is not maintained due to the lack of resources and computing skills in prisons. The awareness and knowledge gap in professionals related to the challenges youth with learning disabilities encounter in prison are also unknown, owing to the lack of knowledge and training required to handle the subject. Therefore, the current research is a one-of-a-kind study that has not been explored before to the best of our knowledge. The research primarily is focused on contributing to minimizing the gap in juvenile prison systems, the training with the prison systems, and how learning disability is catered within.

The research aimed exploring the previous training of juvenile prison authorities. The second objective was to assess the opinion on the level of training (academic, cognitive, and social-emotional-behavioral) of juvenile prison authorities regarding juveniles' learning disability. The three levels of training are further divided into various aspects of learning disabilities in terms of recognition of the disability, understanding learning disabilities, and using appropriate communication strategies. Therefore, based on the literature gap, it was hypothesized for the second research objective that:

- There will be a positive self-assessment of juvenile prison authorities regarding their level of training (academic, cognitive, and social) regarding juveniles' learning disability.

METHOD

Research Design

This research followed a quantitative design using exploratory study.

Participants

A total of 40 personnel (Age =18 and above) were selected from the Juvenile Justice System however, the Juvenile Prisons/Court in Karachi, Pakistan. Therefore, a total of 40 participants were recruited through convenient/snowball sampling, including the Senior Superintendent, Assistant superintendent, Head Constables/Constables, Administrator, Teacher, and members and officers of the Juvenile Court such as Head Clerks/Clerks.

Inclusion Criteria

This research used the following inclusion criteria for participants

- The members and officers of the Juvenile Prisons/Courts working in the Juvenile Justice System with a minimum of 1-2 years of work experience were included.
- Members and officers who had direct interaction with the juveniles present in the prison with minimum 8th grade education were included.
- Those who did not meet the above criteria were excluded.

Measures

It included the information of participants' names, age, designation, and years of work experience along with other demographic variables.

Survey of Professional Development Needs

The questionnaire used in the study was devised by Kvarfordt et al., (2005) for their research. After the approval received from the researcher Kvarfordt, PhD, the questionnaire was used with reference to the study. The reliability of the questionnaire was 0.72; however, validity was not measured.

The questionnaire is based on four domains: assessment of previous knowledge and training of the juvenile personnel, level of training based on three categories of academic, cognitive, and social-emotional-behavioral skills, 11 myths related to learning disability, and interest in receiving training. The present

study focuses on the findings of two aspects related to this research, which entails assessing previous knowledge and training of the juvenile personnel related to learning disability and their self-assessment of the level of training based on three categories of academic, cognitive, and social-emotional-behavioral skills. The items in the questionnaire for these three levels are focused on the recognition of learning disability, understanding difficulties, and using communication strategies with the juveniles. The juvenile officials were asked to respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale where (1) *Strongly Disagree*, (2) *Disagree*, (3) *Agree*, (4) *Strongly Agree*, and (5) *Unsure*.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were followed during the entire process of data collection for this study. Confidentiality of the data was maintained throughout, and participants' consent was taken initially. Participants were told about the purpose of this research and were informed about the right to withdraw at any time they wanted.

Procedure

The survey questionnaire was used after permission from the author. Following the approval of the questionnaire, it was forward translated to Urdu for the ease of the participants given that it is the native language of the country, Pakistan. Three people translated the questionnaire including the researcher, her supervisor and a fellow colleague. The translators were aware of both languages English and Urdu; however, Urdu was their mother tongue and was the target language for translation. They were made aware that the questionnaire was to be translated at the conceptual equivalent of the words and phrases rather than the word-for-word translation. They also did not use any jargons, idioms, or colloquialism that could have been difficult for the sample. The Urdu translated questionnaire was thoroughly reviewed according to cultural relevance and then approved by the committee that included 3 language experts and 3 PhD subject matter experts.

After the successful translation of the questionnaire, the data was collected by seeking permission from the Inspector General of Sindh, Pakistan by visiting him in person, and the process of data collection was initiated by filling out a consent form at first by the participants of the research. Subsequent to their approval of being part of the research, survey forms were handed to them. The data collection took approximately 3 months per the schedule of the relevant

participants as the survey questionnaire was filled in person by visiting the juvenile prison.

RESULTS

The data was collected and then analysed and interpreted using the software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (version 21). The analysis of the questionnaire item was statistically obtained using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Training of Learning Disability of Juveniles' Authority (N=40)

Variable	F	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Learning Disability training (No)	40	1.98	1.58	-6.32	40

Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics for the training of learning disability of juveniles' authority where the frequency of the responses, mean and standard deviation have been calculated for the participants (N=40). The findings indicate that the participants have no previous training of learning disability in the detention facility of women and children indicating that no level of training is ever received for learning disability in juveniles among the juvenile prison authorities.

Table 2

The Level of Training of Authorities about Juveniles' Learning Disability

Variable	N	M	SD	t(df)	p-value
Level of Training (Academic skills)	40	8.48	1.69	1.77(39)	0.08
Level of Training (Cognitive skills)	40	9.33	1.14	7.34(39)	0.00*
Level of Training (Social- emotional-behavioral skills)	40	8.83	1.44	3.60(39)	0.01*

The self-assessment of juvenile prison authorities about their level of training regarding juvenile learning disabilities has been determined in Table 2. The results show that there is no positive self-assessment of juvenile prison authorities regarding their academic level of training in contrast to Cognitive skills and Social-emotional-behavioral skills.

Table 3

The Level of Training of Authorities about Juveniles' Learning Disability Domain-wise

Variable	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t(df)</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>Level of Training (Academic skills)</i>					
-Recognize learning disability affecting a juvenile's academic skills	40	2.75	0.77	-2.0(39)	0.48
-Difficulties in academic skills affecting juvenile's behavior	40	2.93	0.69	-.68(39)	0.49
-Using appropriate communication strategies while working with a learning-disabled juvenile	40	2.80	0.64	-.1.9(39)	0.05
<i>Level of Training (Cognitive skills)</i>					
-Recognize learning disability affecting a juvenile's academic skills	40	3.15	0.77	-6.9(39)	0.00*
-Difficulties in academic skills affecting juvenile's behavior	40	3.15	0.54	-9.49(39)	0.00*
-Using appropriate communication strategies while working with a learning-disabled juvenile	40	3.00	0.71	-8.83(39)	0.00*
<i>Level of Training (Social-emotional-behavioral skills)</i>					

-Recognize learning disability affecting a juvenile's academic skills	40	3.08	0.52	-11.1(39)	0.00*
-Difficulties in academic skills affecting juvenile's behavior	40	3.00	0.75	-8.42(39)	0.00*
-Using appropriate communication strategies while working with a learning-disabled juvenile	40	2.75	0.70	-11.1(39)	0.00*

p<0.05 SD=Standard Deviation

As per the results in Table 3, it is evident that the alternate hypothesis has been partially verified and there is a positive self-assessment of juvenile prison authorities about their level of training at two levels of cognitive, and social-emotional-behavioral skills regarding juveniles' learning disability with $p < .05$ ($p = .00$) at the statistically significant difference at 5%. However, a negative self-assessment of juvenile prison authorities is evident in their academic skill training. Similarly, the level of training of juvenile prison authorities in terms of cognitive skills, and social-emotional-behavioral skills for identification of learning disability, understanding the difficulties, and use of appropriate communication strategies based on their self-assessment is adequate considering the responses. However, the level of training of juvenile prison authorities for academic skills is observed to be negatively self-assessed on all three sub-levels.

DISCUSSION

The research was conducted for analysing the prior training of juvenile prison authorities and self-assessment of juvenile prison authorities about their level of training (academic, cognitive, and social-emotional-behavioral) regarding juveniles' learning disability. The results pertaining to the first research question shows that the juvenile's authority had no prior training in learning disability in juveniles. The findings of the research are consistent with the findings of Underwood and Washington (2016) who highlighted that within the Juvenile Justice Systems, the right treatment method to deal with the acute needs of youth is missing. In addition, the United States Department of Justice (2011), has claimed that the services of mental health offered in the Juvenile Justice Systems are either unavailable or inadequate if available.

In Pakistan, it has been evident from the report of the National Commission for Child Welfare and Development (2003) that the training manuals have been prepared by the personnel of the Juvenile Justice System in July 1999; however, its use has no evidence. Similarly, it is evident that the Juvenile Justice System has inadequate training due to being ignorant of the basic rights of the child in the prison (Ali, 2005). The key aim of prison detention facilities or rehabilitation centers is to help juveniles cope with the challenges that are present in the outside world and use their capacities to distance themselves from criminal activities. On the contrary, the condition in Pakistani juvenile prisons is far from ideal whereby the situation is extremely troublesome and terrifying. The willful negligence and ignorance of the law zconditions as mentioned by Child Rights International Network (CRIN, 2018).

Similarly, the research conducted by Sajid (2009), also showed that in any cases apart from the lack of training, a lack of awareness at the end of the police is also evident. In the 5-day training organized by the Pakistan Society of Criminology for training and sensitizing the police station clerks commonly called Moharirs or Naib Moharirs did not have a basic idea about juveniles' national and international laws indicating a clear lack of training on the part of the officials. Mallet (2014) further highlights that the training lack results in increased detention rates and recidivism. Lack of training also culminates in flawed judgements of the behavior caused by juveniles because students with learning disability and juvenile delinquents often have similar characteristics such as poor academic achievement, lack of motivation, problems of impulse control and short attention spans along with emotional problems of negative self-image, low frustration tolerance and poor social skills. Such similarities of characteristics can be distinguished by trained professionals only.

For the second research question, what opinion of juvenile prison authorities is present about their level of training (academic, cognitive, and social) regarding juveniles learning disability, the alternate hypothesis has been partially verified. There is a positive self-assessment of juvenile prison authorities regarding their level of training on two levels (cognitive, and social-emotional-behavioral skills) of juveniles' learning disability ($p<0.05$). However, the results show that the self-assessment of juvenile prison authorities about their academic level of training is negative. The findings are partially supported by the findings of Kvarfordt et al. (2005), which showed that the self-assessment of juvenile personnel have been observed to be positive whereby they claimed they can easily identify the individuals who have learning disability and are knowledgeable about it affecting their behavior, academic and social life.

Majority of the participants agreed in the questions focused on identification of learning disability and its effect on behaviour. On an average, around 65% of the respondents agreed to the statement whereby 15 % strongly agreed.

However, the reality in this context is different. The findings of the study also highlight an expression of low confidence in their ability to recognize learning disability, difficulties in academic skills affecting the juvenile's behavior, and the use of appropriate communication strategies due to the lack of their educational background. This directs towards the inability to treat and assist juveniles with learning disabilities as most of the learning disability symptoms are identified through academic problems. Besides, one of the reasons for the inability to identify academic skills is the lack of academic qualification of the juvenile authorities. Based on the reports of National Commission for Child Welfare and Development Records (2003), the officials do not have higher academic qualification when appointed in the juvenile justice system. This is evident from the demographic information of the current research participants whereby 30% of the juvenile officials had educational qualification till matriculation or less (9th class) while 40% had completed Intermediate only and did not have any higher level degree.

On the other hand, based on the findings of the first research question, lack of training plays a major role in the problems of learning disability identification. The results clearly highlight that no training has been received in terms of learning disability or any other psychological health issue within the premises and to the juvenile officials. In other words, even though the need for such training is evident, in practice there is insufficient training. Likewise, in cases where self-assessment of one's ability is positive, the attitude towards the training is often indifferent (Underwood & Washington, 2016).

Conclusion

The results of the study concluded that the juvenile's authority had no training about learning disability in juveniles, yet it showed partially that there is a positive self-assessment of juvenile prison authorities about their level of training (cognitive, and social-emotional-behavioral skills) of juveniles' learning disability only. However, their self-assessment of the academic level of juveniles' learning disability is inadequate.

Limitations and Recommendations

The primary limitation that was encountered was the unavailability of qualitative information on the topic within the region of Pakistan. The second limitation of the study is the sample size, which was 40 only. This was mainly because the juvenile and women section of the Karachi prison system has 40 employees catering the juvenile section only. This resulted in the difficulty of generalizing the results to other cities and provinces.

This study is the first of its kind as it has not been studied before to the best of our knowledge. It is, evident that this research will act as a pre-requisite for different research that focuses on understanding the level of knowledge and training of juvenile prison authorities about learning disabilities since it asks difficult questions and discussions related to juvenile prisons. The implication extends to providing psycho-education to the juvenile authorities in identifying the learning disabilities among the juveniles in prison, as it is evident from the plethora of studies researched on the topic and to the best of our knowledge that no research has been conducted on the same topic in Karachi, Pakistan; therefore, knowledge of respective topic and disability in the population of juveniles would be difficult.

The study will also be useful in creating a method of treatment for juvenile prisoner officials. The research is also helpful for Juvenile Rehabilitation Centers that must focus on the training (education, vocational or technical) provided to the child for mental, moral, and psychological development that would further help in developing bills to propose new laws and amend laws for differently-abled individuals taking rehabilitation measures. The plan of intervention can be focused on spreading awareness and identification methods for learning disability as well as on the three levels of training needs (academic, cognitive, and social) individually as well.

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