

BEYOND CONFINEMENT: UNVEILING MOTIVATIONAL DRIVERS AND SKILL GAINS IN VIYYUR CENTRAL PRISON'S FOOD UNIT PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT:

This qualitative study examines the motivational dynamics and skill-acquisition outcomes of a prison-based food unit program in Kerala, India. Using a purposive sampling strategy, semi-structured in-depth interviews, observational data, and focus groups were conducted with 20 inmates participating in the program. Thematic analysis revealed seven key motivational themes: personal growth, social connections, autonomy, economic empowerment, stress alleviation, purposefulness, and future orientation. The program's impact on inmates' skill development, including culinary expertise, teamwork, communication, time management, and entrepreneurial capabilities, is also examined. Findings underscore the significance of prison-based initiatives in facilitating rehabilitation and reintegration. By elucidating the complex interplay between motivational factors and skill acquisition, this research informs evidence-based strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of prison rehabilitation programs.

Keywords: Prison rehabilitation, entrepreneurial training, motivational factors, skill acquisition, food unit program.

INTRODUCTION

Once solely focused on punishment and retribution, the criminal justice system has evolved to prioritise rehabilitation and restorative justice. This shift acknowledges that imprisonment can have a profound impact on individuals, families, and communities and that effective reintegration is crucial for breaking the cycle of recidivism. In response, correctional facilities have introduced programs to equip prisoners with essential skills, promote self-reliance, and foster a sense of purpose.

In India, the Kerala Prisons Department has been at the forefront of this transformation, implementing innovative initiatives to enhance prisoners' lives. The Food Unit Program at Viyyur Central Prison is a notable example, providing inmates with vocational training in food production, processing, and management. By engaging in productive activities, prisoners can develop valuable skills, earn a stipend, and cultivate a sense of accomplishment.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of such programs remains a subject of debate. What motivates prisoners to participate in these initiatives? What skills do they acquire, and how do these skills impact their lives upon release? This study addresses these questions, exploring the motivational drivers and skill gains associated with the Food Unit Program at Viyyur Central Prison.

By examining the intricacies of this program, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics at play in correctional settings. This research aims to provide insights into the successes and challenges of rehabilitation programs, ultimately informing strategies to optimise their impact and support the successful reintegration of prisoners into society.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the Kerala government's investments in prison industries, aimed at rehabilitating inmates through entrepreneurial orientation, the persistently high re-imprisonment rate of 28% raises concerns about the efficacy of these programs. The Viyyur Central Prison's food unit program, in particular, has been touted as a success story, but a critical examination is necessary to determine whether it genuinely:

- Provides motivational drivers for inmates to abandon criminal behaviour.
- Imparts relevant skills for sustainable livelihoods upon release.
- Fosters a transformative environment for inmates to reintegration into society.

This study aims to bridge the knowledge gap by investigating the program's impact on participants, exploring the intersection of entrepreneurial orientation and rehabilitation, and identifying areas for improvement to enhance rehabilitation outcomes and reduce re-imprisonment rates.

OBJECTIVES

1. To evaluate various motivational factors that encourage inmates to participate in the food unit program at Viyyur Central Prison in Kerala.
2. To identify various skills acquired by inmates as part of this project.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an action research cycle model, inspired by Lewin's framework, to investigate the motivational drivers and skill gains of inmates at Viyyur Central Prison in the context of entrepreneurship. The research adopted a qualitative approach, aiming to capture the depth and nuances of the inmates' perspectives and experiences regarding entrepreneurship.

The sample consisted of twenty inmates, selected purposively to ensure representation of the diverse backgrounds and experiences present within the prison population. This deliberate sampling strategy was instrumental in gathering rich, comprehensive insights into the inmates' views on entrepreneurship, offering a broad spectrum of attitudes, perceptions, and motivations.

Data collection was carried out through three complementary methods, employed in tandem to ensure triangulation and robustness of the data. Firstly, in-depth interviews were conducted with the inmates to elicit detailed, personal narratives of their attitudes, perceptions, and motivational drivers towards entrepreneurship; these interviews provided a nuanced grasp of the individual experiences and underlying motivations of the participants. Secondly, observation of the inmates' interactions and behaviours within the prison environment, documenting contextual elements that contributed to a deeper understanding of their daily routines and social interactions. Thirdly, open discussions—framed as dialogues—were held with the inmates, serving as additional channels to access their thoughts and feelings about entrepreneurship, thus enriching the data.

The qualitative data obtained through these methods underwent a systematic analysis process. Initially, the data were coded using the Atlas.ti software, whereby themes and patterns emerging from the interviews, observations, and dialogues were identified and labelled. Subsequently, a thematic analysis was performed on the coded data to distil and interpret the key themes that encapsulated the essence of the inmates' attitudes, perceptions, and motivations on entrepreneurship.

Throughout the research process, utmost priority was given to protecting the rights and dignity of the participants. Oral consent was secured from each inmate before their participation, ensuring they were adequately informed about the study's objectives, their role in it, and the voluntary nature of their engagement. Confidentiality was rigorously maintained to safeguard the identities and privacy of the participants. Furthermore, the study strove to cultivate an open and collaborative atmosphere during the interactions, fostering trust and encouraging the inmates to express themselves freely. Mindful of the cultural contexts of the participants, the study was conducted with respect for the inmates' backgrounds, aiming to authentically capture their perspectives without cultural misinterpretation or distortion.

LIMITATIONS

1. Sample size and selection bias: The study may be limited to a single prison (Viyyur Central Prison) and a specific program (food unit), which may not be representative of all prisons or programs in Kerala.
2. Time constraints: The study may be limited by time constraints, affecting the depth or breadth of data collection and analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The interviews were conducted in Malayalam and were later translated into English. Atlas.ti9, a qualitative software package, was used for data management and analysis. Following the principles of grounded theory, we have done two main cycles of coding (Hennink et al., 2011). In the first cycle, primary codes were developed

both inductively and deductively. In the second cycle, code groups were created. In this paper, our empirical data are presented in the form of narratives by prison inmates of Viyyur Central Prison who were part of the food unit. To allow for the greatest possible diversity of perspectives, each of the selected respondents is from various sections and possesses entirely different characteristics.

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS AFFECTING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS AMONG PRISON INMATES

In the confines of prison, a spark of hope ignites within the hearts of inmates. Entrepreneurship becomes their beacon, guiding them towards a brighter future. For some, it's a chance to redeem themselves, to make amends for past mistakes. Others see it as an opportunity to break free from the shackles of their past, to forge a new path.

As they embark on this journey, they discover a sense of purpose. Entrepreneurship becomes their passion, their driving force. They pour their hearts and souls into their ventures, determined to succeed. With each obstacle overcome, their confidence grows. They begin to see themselves in a new light, as capable individuals with a future worth fighting for.

The prison walls, once a symbol of confinement, have now become a backdrop for innovation. Inmates collaborate, share ideas, and support one another. A sense of community develops; a bond forged through shared struggles and triumphs. Mentors and peers offer guidance, encouragement, and valuable insights.

Financial stability, once a distant dream, has now become a tangible goal. Inmates work tirelessly to build sustainable businesses, create wealth and secure their futures. With each success, their motivation grows. They begin to envision a life beyond the prison walls, a life filled with promise and possibility.

Through entrepreneurship, inmates find redemption, purpose, and hope. They discover a sense of fulfilment, a feeling that they are capable of achieving greatness. As they look towards the future, they know they will face challenges, but they are ready, for they have discovered the power of entrepreneurship—a power that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

As they continue on their entrepreneurial journey, inmates begin to realise the impact they can have on their communities. They start to see themselves as leaders, as agents of change. Entrepreneurship becomes more than just a means of financial stability for them; it becomes a way to make a positive impact on society.

Mr A, who had experience working in the prison's kitchen, developed a business plan for a catering service that specialises in traditional cuisine from his community. He is planning to partner with a local restaurant to offer his services and eventually hire other former inmates to work with him.

Mr B, who has a passion for baking, excels in the Food Unit Program's bakery section and developed a business plan to open his bakery upon release.

Through their business plans, inmates begin to rebuild their lives, to rediscover their sense of purpose. They start to see themselves as more than just their past mistakes, as capable individuals with a future worth fighting for.

As they near their release dates, inmates feel a sense of excitement and nervousness. They know that they will face challenges on the outside, but they are ready. They have developed the skills, the confidence, and the determination to succeed.

One by one, they walk out of the prison gates, their heads held high, their hearts full of hope. They know that they will face obstacles, but they are ready to overcome them. They are entrepreneurs, leaders, and agents of change.

Years later, they return to the prison, not as inmates, but as successful entrepreneurs. They share their stories, their struggles, and their triumphs with the current inmates. They inspire, they motivate, and they guide.

The cycle continues, as more and more inmates discover the power of entrepreneurship. They learn to believe in themselves, to trust in their abilities, and to strive for greatness. And as they do, they begin to change their lives, their communities, and the world around them.

Table 1

Themes on motivational factors affecting the entrepreneurial skills of prison inmates.

THEME	CODES
Personal growth and development	Value of money, future orientation, self-improvement
Social relationships and support	Healthy relationships, positive interactions, social connections, and official support
Freedom and autonomy	The desire for freedom, outside of prison, autonomy, and return to society.
Economic empowerment	Employment experience, financial stability, and work environment
Stress relief and coping	Stress relief, tension reduction, coping mechanisms, relaxation
Purpose and engagement	Intrinsic motivation, productivity, and employment
Future orientation	Future planning, release preparation

Source: data from the researcher



Fig 1: Bakery unit running inside the Viyyur central prison.

SKILLS ACQUIRED BY PRISON INMATES AS PART OF THE PROJECT

As the gates of Viyyur Central Prison open, a new chapter unfolds for its inmates. The Food Unit Program, a pioneering initiative, offers them a chance to break free from the shackles of their past and forge a new future. Within the prison walls, a transformative journey begins. Inmates encounter complex challenges that test their resolve, creativity, and resilience. They learn to navigate these obstacles, developing problem-solving skills that will serve them well in the uncertain world of entrepreneurship. As they work together, inmates discover the power of teamwork and collaboration. They learn to communicate effectively, delegate tasks, and contribute to collective goals, forging bonds that will last a lifetime.

But that's not all. The Food Unit Program also equips inmates with technical skills, from operating machinery to mastering computer software. These skills open doors to new opportunities, enabling them to pursue entrepreneurial ventures with confidence. Time management, discipline, and organisation become essential tools in their toolkit. Inmates learn to prioritise tasks, set achievable goals, and allocate their time efficiently, developing the habits necessary to succeed in business. Effective communication becomes their strength. Inmates refine their skills through interactions with peers, mentors, and stakeholders, learning to articulate their ideas, listen actively, and adapt their messaging to different audiences.

As they face new challenges and opportunities, inmates develop adaptability and resilience. They learn to navigate uncertainty, embracing change and innovation as essential components of their entrepreneurial journey.

And finally, they discover their leadership potential. Inmates take initiative, motivate their peers, and guide collaborative efforts towards common goals, unlocking the skills necessary to inspire and lead others.

Through the Food Unit Program, inmates transform their lives, gaining the skills, confidence, and creativity necessary to build sustainable businesses and contribute positively to society. As they walk out of the prison gates, they carry with them a newfound sense of purpose, ready to face the world with hope and determination. As they embark on their entrepreneurial journey, inmates turn their passions into businesses. Mr Z, who had a talent for baking, decided to start a bakery with his friend. He believed that creating delicious treats would help for quickly gain popularity. The prison walls, once a symbol of confinement, now represent a launching pad for their entrepreneurial dreams.

Their creativity and resourcefulness will inspire others, and soon, the prison will become a hub of entrepreneurial activity. Inmates from different backgrounds and skill levels come together, sharing ideas and expertise, and supporting one another in their pursuits.

And when they walk out of the prison gates, they're not alone. They're accompanied by a network of peers, mentors, and supporters, who believe in their potential and are committed to their success. Together, they're unstoppable. They're a testament to the power of entrepreneurship, and a reminder that, no matter where we come from, we all have the potential to create positive change in the world.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to evaluate the motivational factors that encourage inmates to participate in the food unit program at Viyyur Central Prison in Kerala and identify the various skills acquired by inmates as part of this project. Through a qualitative analysis of inmate responses, we uncovered seven themes that motivate inmates to participate in the program: Personal Growth and Development, Social Relationships and Support, Freedom and Autonomy, Economic Empowerment, Stress Relief and Coping, Purpose and Engagement, and Future Orientation.

Our findings indicate that inmates are motivated by a desire for personal growth, social connections, and economic empowerment, as well as a need for stress relief and purpose. The program provides inmates with various skills, including culinary skills, teamwork, communication, time management, and entrepreneurship. These skills not only enhance their employability but also contribute to their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

The study highlights the importance of prison programs like the food unit initiative in promoting inmate rehabilitation and reintegration. By understanding the motivational factors and skills acquired, prison authorities and policymakers can develop targeted interventions to enhance the effectiveness of such programs. This research contributes to the existing literature on prison rehabilitation programs and provides insights for future research and practice.

In conclusion, the food unit program at Viyyur Central Prison offers a unique opportunity for inmates to acquire skills, build relationships, and develop a sense of purpose. By tapping into the motivational factors that drive inmate participation, we can unlock the full potential of such programs and promote a more effective and humane approach to rehabilitation.

In the depths of incarceration, where hope often seems lost, the food unit program at Viyyur Central Prison shines as a beacon of redemption. This study has unravelled the intricate tapestry of motivational factors that drive inmates to participate in this program, revealing a profound desire for personal growth, social connection, and economic empowerment. Through the acquisition of culinary skills, teamwork, communication, time management, and entrepreneurship, inmates are empowered to reclaim their lives and forge a new future.

As we conclude this journey into the hearts and minds of Viyyur's inmates, we are reminded that rehabilitation is not merely a correctional goal, but a fundamental human right. The food unit program stands as a testament to the transformative power of compassion, dignity, and purpose. Let us cherish and expand such initiatives, so that the darkness of imprisonment may be illuminated by the light of hope and the promise of a second chance. In the words of a wise inmate, "The food unit program is not just about cooking; it's about cooking up a new life." May this study inspire a culinary revolution in correctional facilities worldwide, where the aroma of rehabilitation wafts through the corridors, nourishing the souls of those who hunger for a brighter tomorrow.

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