



THE PRISON SYSTEM OF BANGLADESH: FROM RECIDIVISM TO REFORMATION

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Abstract

The prison system in Bangladesh faces numerous challenges, including chronic overcrowding, insufficient rehabilitation initiatives, and a punitive model that intensifies recidivism. This study critically examines these systemic issues within the correctional facilities and explores reforms necessary to transition from a punitive model to one centered on rehabilitation. The study employs a qualitative approach based on secondary data analysis, drawing from scholarly literature, legal documents, policy reports, newspapers, and case studies. This method facilitates the identification and examination of systemic barriers to effective prisoner reformation, including inadequate access to education, vocational training, mental health services, and post-release support mechanisms. These factors significantly contribute to the high rates of recidivism and hinder the reintegration of former inmates into society. By analyzing global best practices in prison reform, the research advocates for adopting rehabilitative strategies—such as restorative justice, skill development, and comprehensive reintegration programs—to reduce reoffending. The study emphasizes the importance of education and vocational training as tools for equipping inmates with the skills needed for societal reintegration and long-term success. In addition, psychological counselling is essential for addressing the root causes of criminal behavior and facilitating emotional and social rehabilitation. The findings suggest that a shift towards rehabilitation-focused reforms, bolstered by targeted policy interventions, could significantly reduce recidivism rates and foster a more just and humane prison system. This research highlights the need for holistic policy reforms that not only address the conditions within the prison system but also promote reintegration programs for former inmates to ensure their successful re-entry into society.

Keywords: Bangladesh; Criminal Justice System; Prison System; Recidivism; Reformation.

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INTRODUCTION

Prison is a fundamental component of the state's criminal justice system that holds individuals in custody against their will and deprives them of certain rights relative to the general population. The main motive behind a prison system is to protect society from criminal acts and facilitate the rehabilitation of offenders (Sykes, 2007). However, in Bangladesh, even individuals imprisoned for minor offences often reoffend upon release, sometimes committing more serious crimes than their initial conviction. This repeated offending, despite prior formal punishment, is referred to as recidivism (Tomaz, Moreira & Cruz, 2023). This is where the prison system fails extensively. Prison, which should have been a shrine of reformation, functions as a breeding ground for criminal networking and the acquisition of advanced criminal techniques. Among the South Asian Countries, the recidivism rate of prisoners in Bangladesh was 44% in 2012, 42% in 2014, and 45% in 2016, and according to the new report of the 2020 World Prison Brief, it increased to 52%. However, the percentage of the total population rate in prison was 61.1% in 2003, 73.2% in 2010, 73.8% in 2015, and 75.6% in 2022 (World Prison Brief, 2022). The result shows that the number of prisoners in Bangladesh is rising daily, which is a serious challenge to the criminal justice system in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh, prisons have been closed institutions historically. Public discourse surrounding prison conditions is a relatively recent development in the country. The Criminal Justice system in Bangladesh is under immense pressure as case backlogs run into millions, hindering swift justice (Das, 2023). Also, widespread corruption permeates nearly every aspect of the justice system, undermining its effectiveness. In such a scenario, no focus is given to reformation through imprisonment. Moreover, imprisonment is largely viewed as a retributive measure rather than an opportunity to reform an inmate's behaviour. The prison system, failing to be a reformation model of society, is plagued with systemic problems and trapped in a cycle of chronic overcrowding. Recidivist offenders in Bangladesh may indicate a fresh route or reveal an unexplored aspect of the causes influencing criminal activity.

The rate of reported cases of crime in Bangladesh dramatically rose from 2004 to 2008, and Bangladesh police warn that the trend may continue (Islam, 2022). The rate of crime, as measured by the number of registered cases, has shown a consistent upward trend over five-year intervals. Specifically, cruelty to women accounts for 10% of cases, narcotics for 64%, smuggling for 41%, theft for 5%, and murder for 5% (Miah, Aziz & Sikdar, 2015). To effectively combat this high rate of recidivism, a focus on the root causes of this rising wave of crime is necessary. The high rate of crime is closely linked to a high recidivism rate (Loeffler & Nagin, 2022). Ultimately, it can be argued that recidivism is the most significant contributor to the rising crime rate (Loeffler & Nagin, 2022).

This study, therefore, gives an overview of the key factors inhibiting effective offender rehabilitation, including socio-economic, legal, and institutional contributors to recidivism. It further presents an analysis of the historical evolution of the prison system, its current state, barriers to reform implementation, and the legal framework governing prisoners' rights. The study reveals the dire need for a rehabilitation-centric approach, improved prison conditions, and comprehensive policy reforms to support the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Perspective of the Prison System in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's prison system is deeply rooted in colonial history, the struggle for national independence, and subsequent socio-political transformations (Khatun & Islam, 2018). In essence, the historical perspective is

essential for understanding the current structure of the prison system and its ongoing challenges, including recidivism and the absence of effective rehabilitation. The Bangladesh Prison Department's origins can be traced back to the British colonial period, when the region was part of British India (Waits, 2018). The early prisons were inhumane, severely overcrowded, and fundamentally punitive, serving primarily as instruments of colonial repression. The Penal Code 1860 and the Prisons Act 1894 thus provided the needed skeleton framework of a repressive prison system focusing on deterrence rather than rehabilitation. Harsh labour, inadequate food, and poor hygiene conditions were intended to break inmates' spirits and left little room for meaningful rehabilitation. This punitive approach has remained a feature of the prison system in Bangladesh, affecting attitudes and practices even after independence.

Following the partition of India in 1947, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) inherited a colonial prison infrastructure that remained largely unchanged. The prisons continued to function with punitive laws and rules, with little focus on rehabilitation. During socio-political tumult, prisons were instrumentalised as tools of political repression. The War of Liberation in 1971 freed Bangladesh from colonial rule but strained the national prison system. The nation faced political turmoil, economic hardship, and social unrest due to the tatters of its infrastructure, including prison houses. The prison system, rooted in colonialism, was ill-suited to the needs of a modern, sovereign state, as its punitive focus remained central to incarceration practices. The evolution of the Prison System was an early attempt to reform it. Since independence, stray efforts at prison system reforms have emerged in Bangladesh (Islam, 2022). Sensing the precarious condition of the then-prison system, successive governments initiated reform measures aimed at reducing recidivism. However, many such efforts stagnated due to insufficient resources, lack of political commitment, and an entrenched punitive mindset.

More rehabilitation-oriented and humane approaches to incarceration began to gain momentum in the 1980s and 1990s (Green, 2015). Various commissions and committees reviewed the then-state of prisons and recommended reforms. These efforts brought about modest improvements in prison conditions, improved food and health care and living conditions for inmates. However, these reforms focused largely on meeting prisoners' basic physical needs, with limited attention given to comprehensive rehabilitation programming. Apart from that, the period witnessed the participation of NGOs in prison reform work. These agencies played a critical role in advocating for prisoners' rights, exposing inhumane conditions, and pressuring for legal and policy reforms. In this respect, their activities drew public attention to the condition of inmates-especially women and juveniles, who became the most vulnerable and neglected in prison.

Now, the prison system is undergoing a gradual shift toward reformation. Bangladesh's attitude toward the prison system has changed in recent years from a predominantly punitive model to one that places increasing emphasis on rehabilitation and reformation. This shift has been driven by both internal dynamics and external pressures, including growing advocacy from human rights organizations, international scrutiny, and a shifting public perception of crime and punishment. The government started reforming prisons and reducing recidivism, including educational and vocational training programs, psychological counseling, and improved prison conditions (Rahman, 2023).

Alternative sentencing options, such as community service and probation, were also introduced, primarily targeting non-violent offenders. However, these reforms remain in an early developmental stage and face numerous implementation challenges. Overcrowding, corruption, a general lack of finance, and a lack of trained personnel for various rehabilitation programs continue to burden the prison system (Rahman, 2023). Though the challenges remain, the reforms represent an important step toward transitioning the Bangladeshi prison system from a punitive to a rehabilitative framework.

Current Status Quo of the Prison System of Bangladesh

A life without proper dignity, which is an inherent right of a human being, can never be regarded as an ideal living situation for anyone, regardless of whether he is a prisoner. Prison shall be a center of rehabilitation, which should reform the prisoners to the greatest extent possible to help them become law-abiding citizens. This process highly depends on the circumstances prisoners must live and continue to face. Different problems have plagued the prison system of Bangladesh and have undermined its ability to ensure prisoners' rights to life and dignity are secured.

Although the total number of prisons in Bangladesh is 68, they accommodate approximately 80,000 prisoners. Meanwhile, the maximum population capacity of the jails in Bangladesh is around 43,000. About 76% of the total prisoners, or 67,000, await trial (Islam, 8 Nov. 2023). According to the report, each inmate was initially allocated 36 square feet of dormitory space. However, this has been reduced to 15 square feet per inmate due to more inmates in the space than it can accommodate, according to The Prison Act, 1894, and The Prisoners Act, 1900. They include all kinds of prisoners, such as hardened criminals, occasional offenders, and juvenile delinquents. The prisoners must sleep in the dormitory, which accommodates 100 to 150 people, often dominated by hardened criminals who form prison gangs, and occasionally, juvenile offenders from prison gangs sometimes plan severe crimes after being released. As a result, prisons have become "warehouses" for future criminal activity.

Furthermore, floor space allocation demonstrates the deplorable conditions in which prisoners are held. As a result of the misappropriation committed by those in authority, prisoners do not have access to adequate supplies of food, clothing, and other items. They deliberately limit the supply so that only prisoners with financial means can purchase these items (Kailash, 17 May 2008). Inside the facility, inmates have access to a wide variety of illicit substances as well as lethal weapons. Wealthy and influential inmates can buy them in exchange for monetary payment (Kanak & Chowdhury, 2014). The authorities in Bangladesh have upgraded a breakfast menu that dates to the country's colonial era and is served in all of its prisons. Bread, vegetables, sweets, and khichuri- a rice preparation laced with spice and cooked with lentils- are included in the revised menu (Sun, 2019). However, such a diet and the quality of food are rarely implemented in practice.

Although it has been stated that the Senior Superintendent and the Medical Officer shall, therefore, practice the maximum diligence in supervising food supplies when the food is cooked and ready for distribution, as well as after distribution into the prisoners' plates, it shall be inspected at least once a week, without prior notice, by the Senior Superintendent of the jail and the Medical Officer to ensure that it is adequately prepared. At this inspection, the weight of the food provided to several inmates should be measured as mentioned in the Bangladesh Jail Code, Rule 1106. However, the reality is far from such. A prisoner in Dhaka Central Jail is bound to spend around 14,000 takas monthly on extra food like eggs, fish, and meat other than the provided diet.

The Rules for the Supervision and Management of Jails in Bangladesh stipulate a diet for all inmates. Still, the rule does not specify dietary requirements for pregnant inmates (WHO, 2016). Even pregnant inmates require a special diet in this regard. As Dr. Ian Askew, Director of Reproductive Health and Research at the World Health Organization, explains, every pregnancy should be a positive experience for women, and they should be given care respectful of their dignity (WHO, 2016). However, it has been determined that there shall be a Medical Officer (who may also serve as Superintendent), and a Medical Subordinate in every prison. However, there are only four physicians for the 83,000 inmates. Out of 141 posts of physicians in 68 jails, 137 are vacant (Islam, 2022).

Privacy is essential for preserving human dignity. In the female enclosure, the jailer is responsible for all inquiries and warrant verifications. Female prisoners shall be strictly separated from male prisoners, and females awaiting trial shall, if possible, be isolated from the convicted. The female ward must be located so that it is not visible from any part of the male jail, and there must be a separate hospital for sick female prisoners within or

immediately adjacent to the female enclosure. As stated in The Bengal Jail Code 1894, rule 946, they are not required to appear before the general prison administration.

Causes of Recidivism Among Prisoners

In a study, Leighton and Roy indicated that the following are the causes of recidivism: incorrigibility, failure of the sanction, failure of support in reintegration, peer pressure and other social provocations, economic stress, mental health, and risk factors. Supporters of this view say that offenders are incapable of reform, so most punishments, “especially the lighter ones”, will not stop them from breaking the law again. When this happens, a criminal is said to choose to break the law logically and will do it again if they are not heavily punished. People already in jail are also thought to commit new crimes if their first sentence was unfair or did not work. Some sentences may be too light and not help criminals understand what they did wrong. They may also be too harsh, making criminals lose touch with social values and act criminally. Also, offenders, especially those locked up for a long time, may have trouble changing when they get out. Thieves may do illegal things to get what they want if they cannot adjust to society's changing rules (Yesmen & Mou, 2022).

Even if criminals are given fitting punishments, they are likely to return to crime because they are unwilling to change their behavior and yet show little willingness to engage meaningfully in rehabilitation. This is because of social pulls from outside sources, like group pressure. If a youth offender is in a drug rehab program and wants to stay drug-free, they may give in to group pressure and start using drugs again. In this case, recidivism is more directly caused by social factors that are outside the control of the criminal justice system. People who believe this would say that individuals may resort to crime when legal avenues fail if they cannot get it through legal means. If people who have been freed from prison cannot support themselves or feel pushed to because they do not have much money, they may engage in unlawful behaviour again. For some, a criminal's mental health may be one of the most critical factors in determining whether they will commit another crime (Halle et al., 2020). People who have a mental illness may not respond to any punishment, even if they are locked up, sent to rehab, or any other action taken because of their violent behavior (Halle et al. 2020). Because of this, they may be more likely to commit crimes again until they get help for their mental health (Halle et al., 2020).

In all three types of criminal recidivism, the risk factors for recurrence were the same (Farrington, 2020). General, violent, and sexual recidivism were all linked to being young, having a criminal record, having unstable interpersonal relationships, being addicted to drugs, and having an antisocial personality disorder (Farrington, 2020). In terms of sexual recurrence, there were some differences, however. Offenders of different groups were more likely to reoffend in general and violent categories, but not sexual ones (Put et al., 2020). Deviant sexual tastes were also linked to repeat sexual offences among individuals convicted of sexual offences, but not with repeat offences in general (Put et al., 2020).

Rights Ensured for the Welfare of the Prisoners in the International Instrument

The UDHR was the first international document that assured prisoners their rights after the establishment of the United Nations. The UDHR declares equality for all persons before the law and the right to equal protection of the law; all are equal before the law and have the right to equal legal protection. All individuals are subject to equal treatment without prejudice. This subject is addressed under Article 7 of the UDHR. The UDHR contains measures that protect the privacy of every individual. This declaration protects liberty from arbitrary or unjust interference in one's privacy, family life, home, and correspondence.

The majority of detainees remaining in their cells are subject to inhumane or humiliating treatment or punishment. As many international instruments do provide, provision is made to this effect. Accordingly, Article 5 of the UDHR addresses: “No one shall be subject to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or

punishment” (Henry, 2023). It then means that even the convicts in detention are not to be exposed to inhumane treatment or degrading punishments. A similar provision is found in the provisions of the ICCPR: "No one shall be subjected to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment," according to Article 7 of the ICCPR. In particular, no one shall be subjected to medical or scientific experiments without their explicit consent (Bikundo, 2021).

International conventions have laid down guidelines on how detainees should be handled and treated for an extended period. Of these, the most influential has been the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners. The First United Nations Congress on Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders was held at Geneva (Zijl-Smit & Dünkel, 2021). These Standard Minimum Rules require prison authorities to maintain a bound Register in which the prisoners' particulars are documented. It involves separating prisoners based on gender, age, and criminal history into different sections. It requires segregation between untried detainees and convicted offenders, women and men, and juveniles from adults.

According to the Standard Minimum Rules provisions, sleeping accommodations must meet health standards, considering climatic conditions and air cubic content, minimum floor space, lighting, heating, and ventilation. The windows shall be sufficiently sized to allow offenders to read or work by natural light. The sanitary facilities shall enable each inmate to attend to his or her natural demands cleanly and decently. Water and hygienic toiletries must be supplied to prisoners. Every prisoner shall be provided with clothing and bedding appropriate for the climate, which shall enable him or her to maintain his or her health, and a separate bed. Every prisoner must receive adequate, nutritious, and properly prepared meals that shall be adequately served during regular meal hours according to The Standard Minimum Rules, Sections 37, 40, 41.

Rights Ensured for the Welfare of Prisoners in the National Instrument

The Constitution of Bangladesh

The supreme law of the land provides specific guidelines on how to deal with and treat prisoners. Part 3 of the Constitution specifically deals with fundamental rights. Article 27 of the Constitution of Bangladesh affirms the principle of equality: “All citizens are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law.” The provision ensures not only the idea of equality among citizens but also guarantees both equality and legal protection. It is considered a fundamental right of every citizen, regardless of conviction status, to enjoy it equally in the eyes of the law.

Bangladesh Jail Code: Rules for the Superintendence and Management of Jails in Bangladesh

Following Acts and Regulations regulate the establishment and management of jails, the confinement and treatment of persons therein, and the maintenance of discipline among them:

- i. The Prisons Act, No. IX 1894 as amended
- ii. The Prisoners Act, No. III of 1900, as amended
- iii. Act No. I of 1928, the Borstal School Act
- iv. Act IV of 1965, the Factories Act
- v. The Children’s Act XXIV of 2013

It is to be noted that the Code of Civil Procedure, the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Penal Code have immense significance regarding prison administration. These Acts, relating to prisoner confinement, sentence execution, appeals, and dealing with mentally ill prisoners and other relevant aspects of prison management, are also applicable in prison administration as per The Bengal Jail Code 1894, Chapter I. Also, the Jail Code has laid down some guidelines regarding various aspects of the daily lives and welfare of prisoners, which help them gain ground on reformation.

Rule 88.3 of the Jail Code requires the appointment of one Welfare Officer, one Psychologist, and one Sociologist in each Central Jail and one Welfare Officer and a Psychologist in each District Jail. The Social Welfare Officer shall look into the prisoners' complaints and serve as a liaison between prison administration and inmates. He will also help the prisoners find jobs to get back on their feet when they leave stated in The Bangladesh Jail Code, Rule 88.4. The psychologist will help the prison administration scientifically classify prisoners so that prison officials can develop a training and treatment plan for each prisoner based on psychological assessments and rehabilitation needs, also mentioned in The Bangladesh Jail Code, Rule 88.5. Sociologists shall look into the background of the prisoners, what led them to commit crimes, how well rehabilitation and reform programs work after they get out, and additional responsibilities stated in Rule 88.6.

Prison inmates, illiteracy, and poverty, being the primary causes of their criminal behavior, should not be excluded from education policy. Every incarcerated individual lacking basic education should be required to complete their primary education. To achieve this objective, there should be a proportional number of paid teachers in each Central Jail and District Jail, as determined by the government. To aid in the reintegration of literate offenders into society, such a teacher should also serve as a social reformer and provide them with rehabilitation-focused instruction.

The Prisons Act 1894

According to this act, prisons containing both male and female prisoners should be arranged for them to be imprisoned in separate buildings, or if they are kept in different parts of the same building, they should be kept in such a manner that they cannot have any form of contact. Also, prisoners who have arrived at puberty shall be kept separate from those who have not reached puberty. Section 27 also denotes that inmates awaiting trial shall be separated from those guilty of a crime. In the same way, civil prisoners should be separated from criminals. Under section 34, civil inmates may work and pursue any trade or profession with the superintendent's approval, and their whole earnings are theirs to keep if the jail does not support them. If such activities are undertaken at the expense of the prison, the costs may be deducted from their earnings. Also, criminal prisoners may be employed as laborers under the supervision of medical officers, as stated in The Prisons Act 1894, Section 35.

The Borstal School Act, 1928

The government may establish Borstal schools by section 3 of this act at such locations as it deems appropriate, where juvenile criminals may be held, given industrial training and other instruction, and subjected to disciplinary measures and moral instruction as the government considers to be essential for their reformation and crime prevention as said in The Borstal School Act, 1928, Section 3. Also, under section 12, an adolescent may be permitted to live under the supervision and authority of any officer of the government, secular institution, religious society, or responsible person if the Inspector-General, on the recommendation of the Visiting Committee, is satisfied that there is a reasonable probability that the adolescent offender will not re-offend within six months of his or her release from a Borstal school.

Rehabilitation Programs: Successes and Failures

Rehabilitation Programs help detainees reduce recidivism by equipping them with skills, knowledge, and support that might be useful in their resettlement into society (Rahman, 2023). The concept of rehabilitation has gradually come into the spotlight in Bangladesh as the Government, along with different NGOs, recognizes the limitations of a purely punitive approach to imprisonment. These have also been made into programs with various degrees of success and failure; this reflects the complexity of reforming a system deeply rooted in punishment rather than rehabilitation.

From basic literacy classes and education to vocational training, psychological counseling, and faith-based interventions, all these rehabilitation programs have been instrumental in the last two decades in preparing ex-offenders with the required skills and support they need to rebuild their lives and avoid reoffending upon release. The combination of their efforts is commendable and has contributed significantly to prison reform in Bangladesh until now (Rahman, 2023).

Education-Vocational Training One of the cornerstones in the rehabilitation process in Bangladesh prisons has been the introduction of education and vocational training programs (Hamid & Begum, 2018). These programs have shown promising results in addressing inmates' deficiencies in proper education and employable skills (Hamid & Begum, 2018). Equipping the inmates with literacy and numeracy skills, and training in various trades like carpentry, tailoring, agriculture, and so on, the programs have been arranged to prepare them for successful reintegration into society. It has been reported that the Moulvibazar Central Jail Authority has taken some initiatives focused on the inmates' education, skill development, and income generation. Rehabilitation and skill-building of the inmates were done by establishing a clothing factory with 26 knitting machines in the Dhaka Central Jail (Daily Star, 2008). While these are commendable steps, further action is necessary to ensure prisoner welfare.

The Bangladesh Jail Administration System has developed income-generating activities, such as the Probation Centres for Child Offenders within Moulavibazar, Narayanganj, and Dhaka Central jails, to facilitate offender rehabilitation. To make those establishments successful, the Government may increase budgets for Prisons in Bangladesh, as the probation centres and 65 other jails in Bangladesh offer little to no rehabilitative infrastructure for reforming the offenders (Sejan & Chowdhury, 2019). Furthermore, Juvenile Development Centers are one of the crucial aspects of rehabilitation programs. It is responsible for providing food and safety for the committed children by catering to their needs, such as shelter, clothes, education, vocational training, counselling, and correctional and human development services. These are done by the provisions of the Children's Act of 1974, the National Children's Policy, and the requirements under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child CRC, 1989. Moreover, the Juvenile Centre aims to create a friendly atmosphere in the family and society by paying due attention to all dimensions of protection, survival, and development of the children who encounter the law.

The Training Institute acts as a center that imparts training, education, behavioral correction, and development to children referred by the juvenile court or other courts in the country. The institute provides opportunities for skill-development training in appropriate trades, compulsory primary education, and counselling services for correction and human resource development. Thus, many juvenile offenders have been educated, trained, and rehabilitated in society, helping the Government reduce criminal activities and create a favourable social environment. Most juveniles have returned to their everyday lives and engage in socio-economic activities. Through these centers, about 15800 Juvenile delinquents have been provided accommodation along with other facilities; out of these, about 11399 juveniles have been corrected, rehabilitated, and provided legal aid support (Hamid & Begum, 2018).

Major Challenges

The attempt at reforming prisons in Bangladesh to reduce recidivism and enhance rehabilitation effectively is confronted with myriad significant obstacles. These emanate from various factors, including institutional inefficiencies, social stigmas, economic constraints, and legal shortcomings. Confronting these challenges head-on could only mean that the prisons begin to provide genuine opportunities for genuinely offering the inmates an opportunity for reformation and rehabilitation into society (Rahman, 2023).

One of the Bangladesh prison system's most stressful features is severe overcrowding. Most prisons operate way over their actual capacity, which results in less-than-human living conditions and increases tensions among

the inmates. Overcrowding tends to magnify other systemic problems, including limited healthcare, little access to rehabilitation, and growing violence. For example, overcrowding has made it impossible to implement workable rehabilitation programs, as the space is not there, and neither are the means to spend the time and resources on giving each of the prisoners much-needed personal attention. Also, prisoners' health, physical and mental, deteriorates in such environments; thus, rehabilitation is much less effective in such conditions and contributes to higher rates of recidivism. Chronic underfunding hinders the Bangladesh prison system, limiting essential services such as healthcare, education, training, and counseling. Outdated facilities due to limited resources hamper rehabilitative efforts. Without adequate funding, rehabilitation programs cannot be provided, nor can conditions within the prisons be improved; thus, a cycle of reoffending is perpetuated.

Legal infrastructure relating to the prison system in Bangladesh remains outdated and punitive; it is not oriented towards rehabilitation to reintegrating the inmates into society. Reform initiatives have not been integrated into a coherent, well-coordinated endeavor because there is no comprehensive legal framework to support such reforms. Prisons primarily serve as punishment institutions with limited opportunities for serious reform. Additionally, the lack of post-release support mandated by law significantly hinders the social reintegration of former inmates (Rahman, 2023). There are also some problems to reform due to Social Stigma and Discrimination. Ex-convicts in Bangladesh often face ostracism upon their release. The discrimination extends to employers, landlords, and family members alike. Getting jobs, houses, or even social acceptance becomes significantly more difficult. It is this perception of prisoners being irredeemable criminals that hinders the process of rehabilitation of these inmates and increases recidivism rates. It is a social stigma that often closes most avenues of opportunities to the ex-inmates, setting them within a poverty/marginalization cycle that often leads to other criminal behaviors. Lack of community support only serves to isolate ex-inmates further, making it much more difficult for these offenders to piece their lives together and not re-offend. It therefore brings into focus the need for public awareness campaigns, community-based initiatives that will change societal attitudes toward the rehabilitation and reintegration challenges. Moreover, corruption and mismanagement are two significant problems in prisons that impede inmates' rehabilitation processes.

Lack of Effective Training and Support to Personnel in Prisons: Bangladeshi prison personnel, are ill-equipped due to a shortage, poor training, and inadequate support, can hardly cope with inmates and manage rehabilitation programs effectively. Without enough training, the personnel also resort to punitive responses, further alienating the inmates and making rehabilitation ineffective. More adequate training and support would be required for the prison personnel to make their culture more rehabilitative than punitive. A separation between the rehabilitative programs in prison and the structure of the community-based support system creates a gap in the reformation process, weakening the rehabilitation process (Rahman, 2023). Another factor is the lack of Public and Political Will for Reform. Prison reform in Bangladesh lacks public and political will for improvement in this regard since public opinion tends to favor punishment over rehabilitation (Rahman, 2023).

Future Studies

The call for the enactment of rehabilitation-oriented legislation for ex-prisoners in Bangladesh, similar to the United Kingdom's Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 74, is appropriate and long overdue. An efficient legal environment is crucial for the successful re-inclusion of prisoners into society and the breaking of the repeat offender cycle. There should also be a provision in the act for record sealing or expungement of those found guilty of only minor crimes after a specific rehabilitation period. This would give people a better chance to succeed, as criminal records often serve as barriers to employment, housing, and other opportunities. Reintegration should serve as the guiding principle, alongside restoring dignity and self-respect: The law should focus on reintegration, and aim at restoring the dignity of former prisoners who have committed to reform, as sentences should not expand in time beyond the time served.

Recovery times depend on the severity of the offence. Less serious infractions would carry shorter rehabilitation periods, while more serious crimes would warrant longer ones. The option to seal the record could depend on good behavior in the years that followed. Rehabilitation success can be assessed using criteria such as employment, time spent in the community, and re-offending. This would establish a clear pathway toward reintegration, with measurable outcomes. Revising the Rehabilitation Act would require legal assistance for people trying to learn about their rights and how to petition to have their records sealed or expunged. There must be increased provision of legal aid for those who cannot afford representation, so that they can navigate the court system. Public education campaigns are also important in changing how society sees those serving their time. Comprehensive public education initiatives on the value of rehabilitation could start to remove the stigma from releases and encourage active participation in their re-entry into our community.

The government should also work with employers to provide incentives to hire ex-offenders who have served their time. Tax credits, grants, or award programs could incentivize businesses to provide job opportunities to former inmates. Another crucial part of rehabilitating prisoners is increasing academic training in prison. It would give inmates the market-relevant skills in the job market and prepare them for employment when they are released, he said. Structured aftercare support should be mandated in the Rehabilitation Act. It would help these individuals reintegrate through scheduled phone calls from social workers, access to counselling, and the ability to participate in community activities. The act should also ensure that basic needs, such as housing, healthcare, and social services, are met, lowering the risk of becoming homeless or socially isolated, which are significant indicators of recidivism.

Public protection also must be considered, and there must be a balance between rehabilitation and the public. For more serious crimes, longer periods of rehabilitation may be needed, and the crime may not be eligible for record sealing or expungement. The mechanisms for sealing or expunging criminal records must be transparent, with understandable criteria and accountability. Regular oversight by the courts or a government agency would ensure that the act was not being misapplied and that public protection was still paramount. An adoption of such a Rehabilitation Act in Bangladesh could represent a fundamental move away from the criminal justice system's current punitive inclination and towards rehabilitation and reintegration. With options for sealing low-level offences, vocational training, post-release support, and a balance between rehabilitation and public safety, which also could open the door for a fairer and humane approach to criminal justice that acknowledges the possibility of change and the value of a second chance (Rahman, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The Bangladeshi jail system has long faced criticism for its harsh conditions and lack of humane treatment. Currently, the system is at a turning point. Bangladeshi prisoners often experience extreme loneliness and grief due to having their identities marginalized and their experiences obscured. However, every prisoner has the potential for recovery, which can ignite an opportunity for rehabilitation. Although Bangladesh's rehabilitation efforts are still in their early stages, they demonstrate what can be achieved by focusing on the criminal. Through education, career training, counselling, and faith-based programs, prisoners can rebuild their lives, reclaim their value, and restore hope lost through years of hardship.

Successful rehabilitation has an effect that ripples far beyond the prison walls: it affords prisoners an opportunity for a new start-in fact, not to carry over their mistakes, but a renewed beginning in their lives. In fact, such transformation influences not only the person who has been incarcerated but also extends to family, community, and society at large. Reformation is never easy; it's met with opposition from society, a lack of

resources, and labels like "ex-convict." But if there is any chance of a justice system that serves, this challenge needs to be taken on. Ultimately, inmates' lives will be the accurate barometer of the transformation of Bangladesh's prison system—not the number of cells or the sentences served.

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