

## **Enhancing library and Information Resources and Services for Incarcerated Persons: A Survey in Prison Libraries in Sri Lanka**

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper was to answer the question of why important of enhancing the library and information resources and services for incarcerated persons in Sri Lanka. The study employed qualitative research designs to provide in-depth and detailed examination of the topic and descriptive survey method was adopted. 5 Rehabilitation and Library officers and 10 male prisoners were randomly selected as the sample of the study from the Welikada prison. Structure questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) schedule were the instruments used to generate data for the study and descriptive method of analysis was used. Findings also showed that the varieties of library resources and services as well as human resources provided are grossly inadequate considering the population of the prisoners. Findings showed that a number of strategies could be used to enhance the provision of library and information resources and services to meet the prisoners' information needs. They include liaising with public libraries, NGOs, religion bodies, legal practitioners, liaising with professional bodies like the library associations, granting the prisoners more access to information and developing new and using existing guidelines to prison library services.

**Key Words:** Prison libraries, Sri Lanka, Information resources and services, Problems and strategies, Prisoners

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Information is a major resource in human development as access to it could improve their knowledge. Iloeje (2001) submits that information is the heart of the world's development. He further explains that increased access to timely, accurate, relevant, reliable and current information remains a significant precursor to technological innovations. Information, according to International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA, 2001), is very important in the development of an individual and of the society. Thus, acquiring and using information are both important activities. Information has become a primary strategic resource that is transforming the lives of many in the world today. The flow of information has made the world today a global village and we are said to be in the information age. This new age is a revolutionary period whose impact is far surpassing that of the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions.

Prisoners, like free people, need information for different purposes. According to Dike (2002), often the offenders' disadvantaged educational and socio-economic status may lead them into a life of crime. Subsequently, the prisoners need literacy training, educational and vocational programs to better equip them for a productive life. Prisoners have been seen to have the same reading interests and information needs as other people. But with a good number of them having low educational skills, they often experience difficulties in meeting their information needs (Shirley 2006).

The main objective of imprisonment was to punish the offender in confinement. This objective is changing from not only punishment of the offender, but also rehabilitation and re-socialization of the prisoners through educational, library and related programs for the prisoners to be re-integrated back into the society after serving. In the prison context it means preparing prisoners to return society, as useful and law-abiding members of the wider community. It was indicated to us in evidence that 'rehabilitation' can be a misnomer, because many prisoners have never been 'habilitated' in society in the first place. One of the key factors in this matter is to direct prisoners to reference books. No one can say that it is not the implied meaning of "Reading makes a full man". Books have the power to create the spiritual development of the people of any country and their physical development.

According to Sussman (2014) of Carbondale Public Library, "Reading reduces recidivism, which means it increases an individual's chance that he will succeed at living outside of prison without resorting to crime". In a New Zealand case study involving Whanganui prison and Whanganui district library, it was mentioned that poor literacy skills correlated with low library use and other negative factors like poor health,

low income, and low community involvement, all of which are characteristics that have a greater tendency of leading to criminal activity and imprisonment (Vaccarino&Comrie, 2010).

The values and missions of the modern practice of criminal justice, in which emphasis has gradually shifted from punishment towards education and rehabilitation, go hand in hand with a view of libraries as important players within the intellectual freedom and social justice agenda. Within this enlightened correctional paradigm, prison libraries serve as a window and a link to the outside world and represent a safe and humane environment that provides support for educational, recreational and rehabilitative programs (Lehmann and Locke, 2005, 4 p).

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The universal rights of all persons, including prisoners, to freedom of expression and freedom of access to information have been repeatedly asserted in a number of high level documents (American Library Association, 2010 and International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 1999, 2002). For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) and the European Convention on Human Rights (Council of Europe, 1953) state that everyone has the universal right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the freedom to seek and receive information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. The United Nations (2009) also promotes every human's basic right to information which includes those who are incarcerated.

The Charter for the reader establishes reading as a universal right and pays special attention to prisons, hospitals, retirement homes and other places where books and reading are not common (International Book Committee / International Publishers Associations, 1994). Furthermore, in one of the earliest documents of this kind, the United Nations' (1955) Standard Minimal Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, it has been recognized that every prison should have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, that it should be adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books and that prisoners should be encouraged to make full use of it (ZrinkaSimunic, SanjicaFaletarTanackovic and Boris Badurina, 2016).

Traditions of fairness, equity, civic engagement, diversity and humanism have long characterized the library and information science profession, and literature focusing on the explicit rendering of the social justice agenda in diverse library environments is emerging (Bush, 2009; Moffatt, 2005; Morrone and Friedman, 2009; Pateman and Vincent, 2012; Vincent, 2012). In the library and information science context, social justice has been defined as giving people access to the information, services and facilities to which they have rights and making sure that they are fully aware of, and know how to take up, their entitlement to these services (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2007).

Libraries as major custodians of information, which have been professionally processed and stored for retrieval should play positive roles in every segment of society. Anafulu (1998) posits that the library is the engine room and power house where information is collected, stored, processed and retrieved for use. A library as a body of collected information brought together for the purpose of knowledge dissemination and utilization should be a central clinic for all (Ibegwam, 2003). Prison as a reformatory institution and inmates being members of the larger community should of right be exposed to information and knowledge for educational and training purposes, person development as well as study kits and do-it-yourself tools.

The first prison library was established by Alexander Macconochie in the early nineteenth Century in Australia (Wilhemus, 1999). The growth of prison libraries continued even up to the present 21st Century. Perception of the prisoners' right to information is contained in the United Nations (Rule 40) Standard Minimal Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners of 1955 (IFLA 2005). This states that every institution shall have sufficiently stocked library for use of all categories of prisoners and the prisoners shall be encouraged to use it. The International Book Committee and UNESCO (1994) in their Charter for the Reader assert that "all including prisoners are entitled to have access to information and libraries to provide this access should be located within the prison premises". The prison library is a substitute for the library at home (Kaiser, 1992), a good reason why it should be developed into one of the best libraries; hence, the development of notable standards to guide its operations.

Stevens (1995) revealed that the prison library plays a significant role in the reform and rehabilitation process. He identified a number of areas in which the work of the prison library can be used by inmates to have important influence. He argued that much of the information held in the prison library can be used by inmates to have a direct and positive influence on their future behavior. Helping the prisoners to have a change of life generally and improve for the better by avoiding crime should be a major part of the prisons' objectives than just punishment. Library and its resources and services will open their minds to diverse opportunities in life.

In his own work, Mayrink da Costa (2003) made it clear that the library plays a positive role in the lives of prisoners. This is by helping in their rehabilitation as advocated in modern civilized societies of today. In fact, Blake (2000) stressed that the prison library is a crucial component in the rehabilitation of incarcerated persons.

Although Lehmann (2000) confirmed that very little research has been published on the nature and extent of development of prison libraries in many parts of the world, especially the developing countries, the mission of prison libraries anywhere remains the same. Lehmann noted that in cooperation with other prison programmes, the prison library plays a critical role in the education and rehabilitation of incarcerated persons. This is fully recognized in the advanced countries of America and Europe. For instance, in the United States of America, over 1000 libraries exist in state and federal government correctional facilities.

Medina (2000) from an inmate's point of view, acknowledged the provision which the prison library can make to satisfy the prisoners' information needs. He pointed out "libraries can have a great influence and importance to incarcerated prisoners by providing ways by which we can engage our curiosity on interesting subjects." Also, Purifoy (2000) clearly admitted that the prison library provides recreational and educational opportunities. Krusden (2000) also clearly stated that as an inmate, he uses the library for many different reasons ranging from educational and recreational purposes to being kept updated on the current events of the outside world. He also admitted that the library used to expand prisoner's creativity and enhance their literary knowledge by reading a large variety of the books provided. He further added that the library allows and assists the inmates in finding alternative means of venting their frustration by saying "my library has helped me find the courage and strength, not only to overcome my incarceration but also to strive for a more honest and productive future". In same vein, London (2000), another inmate, called the prison library a conduit for restoration that offers many diverse opportunities. He stated "He declared "there may be a gap in our lives and therefore the library is often the passage to make a way of continuity we'd like to remain current."

In the past, prison libraries have been closely associated with a rehabilitative function (Fyfe, 1992). For example, in the nineteenth century, the prison library provided positive moral literature and religious texts in order to convert the inmate, both spiritually and behaviorally. As theories of criminal behavior and reformation became less simplistic, the clarity of the rehabilitative role of the prison library dimmed. Although the provision of a library within every prison establishment is now a statutory requirement, its role and purpose in relation to the rehabilitation of the offender is unclear. Often, the prison library tends to be perceived as a "good thing", but with little evidence presented as to why, or indeed how, the library can have any kind of beneficial effect (Koons, 1988, 53 p).

Prisoners have the same fundamental right to reading and access to information which should not be denied. Prisoners, just like free people in the society, have been observed to have various information needs that can be provided for through library and information services. Lehman (2005) stated that an incarcerated person has not relinquished the right to learn and to access information, and the prison library should offer materials and services comparable to community libraries in the free world. He emphasized that restrictions on the access to library materials and information should be imposed only when such access is known to present a danger to prison security. Similarly, every institution should have a library for the use of all categories of prisoners, adequately stocked with both recreational and instructional books, and prisoners should be encouraged to make full use of it.

### **III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The main objective of this study was examine the problems provisions of library and information resources and the identify the strategies that could be used to enhance the provision of library and information resources and services to meet the prisoners' information needs

### **IV. PROBLEM OF THE STUDY**

Libraries not only assist the prisons, to maintain discipline but also provide remedy against the idle mind and make the prisoners friendly and co-operative. Therefore the library is an educational as well recreational agency for the prisoners (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2012; Australian Library and Information Association, 2015; Conrad, 2012). The library services in the prisons are a vital force in the reformation of the prison inmates. It aims at the re-socialization of inmates with an ultimate purpose of preparing them for their return to society with a more wholesome attitude towards living and with a desire to conduct them as good, honest and law abiding citizens. Most of the prisoners have low educational attainment (Dike 2002) and poor employability skills, as revealed by IFLA (2005), so they have need for further education and vocational training programmes and informative materials to help them find useful occupations after release. However, it has been observed that prisoners in Sri Lanka often times do not receive the library and information services they require. In order to overcome this problematic situation in particular, directing new and young criminals to reading books in prison is a more effective procedure; but it has not yet been properly implemented in Sri Lanka. Therefore the study was investigated significance of enhancing library and information resources and services for incarcerated persons in Sri Lanka.

## V. METHODOLOGY

The study employed qualitative research designs to provide in-depth and detailed examination of the topic and descriptive survey method was adopted. 5 Rehabilitation and Library officers and 10 male prisoners were randomly selected as the sample of the study. The study was carried out in the Welikada prison (also known as the Magazine Prison) and it is the maximum security prison and is the largest prison in Sri Lanka. Structure questionnaire (for Library and Rehabilitation officers) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) schedule were the instruments used to generate data for the study. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. This study was carried out at the Welikada Prison.

## VI. RESULTS

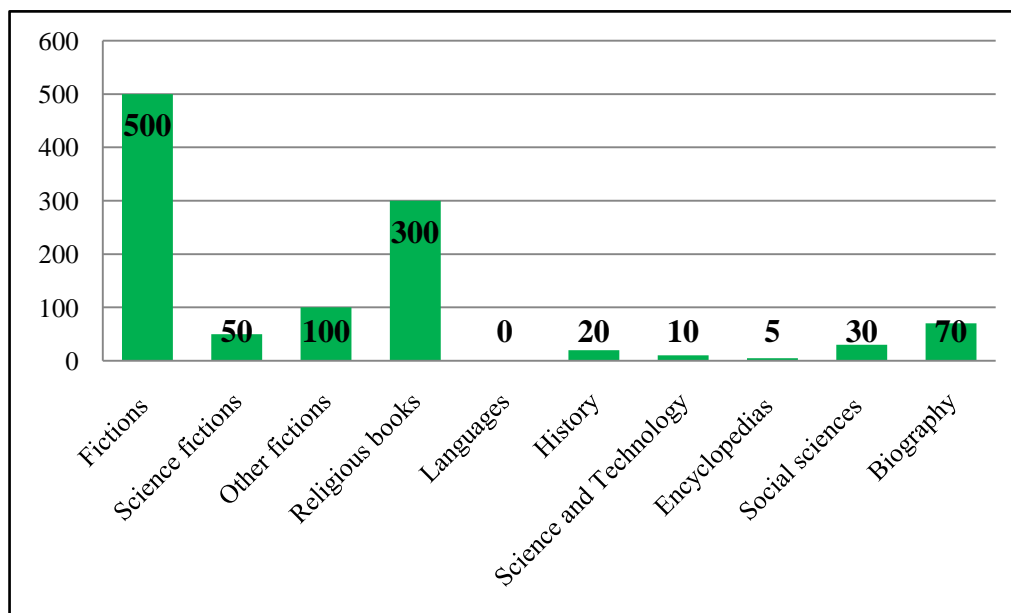
### Library and information resources and services available for prisoners in the prisons libraries

There were no reading tables, chairs or reading space in the Welikada prison. However, none of the prison libraries have adequate accommodation in terms of standard library building, reading space, tables, chairs, shelves and circulation desks. In the prison, the library is usually squeezed inside a small apartment in the welfare section/building.

Resources	Quantity	
1 Accommodation – reading tables/chairs	NA	
2 Qualified library staff/workers	NA	
3 Reading Materials		
	Fictions – story books/novels	1650
	Science fictions	50
	Other fictions	400
4 Non – fiction books like books on subjects like		
	Religion or religious books	1100
	Languages	0
	History	20
	Science and Technology	10
	Reference books like encyclopedias and dictionaries	5
	Social sciences like books on business	30
	Biography and related books	70
	Textbooks written in subjects e.g. Mathematics, Agriculture etc.	0
5 Magazines and Newspapers		
	Science magazines	0
	General weekly/daily magazine and newspapers	0
	Local magazines	0
	Foreign publications	0
	Business magazines or newspapers	0
	Recreational magazines or newspapers like sports	0
6 Materials on law and legal matters	0	
7 Audio recordings	0	
8 Video recordings	0	

**Table 01: Information Resources available in the prison**

The prison also has library collections in different areas and of different type fiction, non-fiction. However it is also evident that they are lacking in their library collections. It could be seen that Welikada prison library has 3335 book titles only (see table 01). The prison does not even have materials on certain subject areas at all. The few available ones are outdated books donated by individuals or public libraries a long time ago. Prison authorities did not acquire newspapers and magazines due to security reasons. The library is manned by welfare officers who know little or nothing of librarianship. The warders who work in the welfare departments as well as overseeing the affairs of the library have no previous library working experience or library qualification. Figure 01 shows the subject coverage of the non-fiction books in the library collections and it could be seen that the library lacked collections in the different subject areas.



**Figure 01: Information Resources available in the prison**

In providing reading materials for the prisoners, the library lends books to the prisoners and allowed to borrow books to their cells. Prisoners indicated that they needed to be borrowing books to read at their convenience. The prison library also gets loan assistance from neighboring libraries. For instance, the Welikada prison used to get such from the public library in Colombo. In the prison library and educational programmes always go together. In Welikada Prison, it was the school and Dhamma school programmes established and run by the prison authority that attracted the emergence and establishment of the library.

**The problems provisions of library and information resources to meet the prisoners’ information needs**

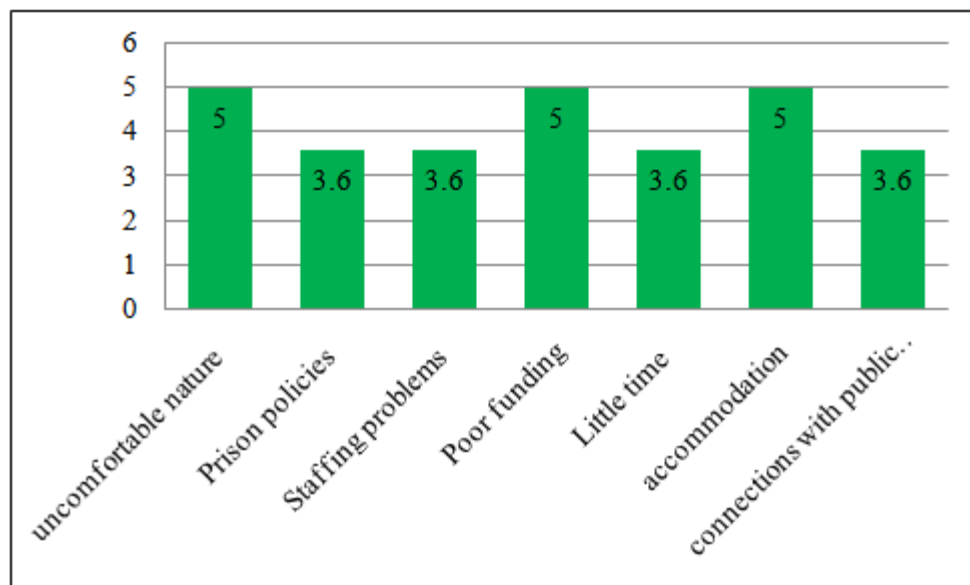
Questionnaire was the main instrument used to get data to answer this research question although during group discussion, the opinions of the prisoners were sought over the visualized problematic factors. The responses of the Rehabilitation and Library officers are presented in table 02 and figure 02 below while the responses of the prisoners follow descriptively.

	N			
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Mode
The uncomfortable nature of the prison	5	0	5	5
Prison policies and laws that restrict certain reading materials	5	0	3.6	3
Staffing problems – inadequate number of qualified library staff to help the prisoners and lack of training for available workers	5	0	3.6	3
Poor funding of the library and the prison as a whole	5	0	5	5
Little time allowed prisoners for interaction with outside information providers	5	0	3.6	3
The building used for library and reading accommodation	5	0	5	5
Poor connections with public libraries and other library professional bodies	5	0	3.6	3

**Table 02: Problems provisions of library and information resources**

It was indicated from the above table that all the items have mean rating of 3.6 - 5.0. The problems of meeting of the prisoners’ information needs to a high extent with uncomfortable nature of the prison, poor funding of the library and prison and inadequate accommodation for the library rating highest (5) being to a very high extent. Prison policies, staffing problems, little time allowed for use of information resources and services and poor connections with public libraries and other library professional bodies all hinder the provision of library and information resources and services to meet the prisoners’ information needs.

Tight schedule in the prison, uncomfortable nature of the prison and inadequate accommodation for the library were cited as common factors that hinder the meeting of their information needs.



**Figure 02: Problems provisions of library and information resources**

**Strategies that could be used to enhance the provision of library and information resources and services to meet the prisoners’ information needs**

The main instrument used to gather data to answer this research question was the questionnaire for the Rehabilitation and Library officers. Their responses were presented in table 03 below. However, the prisoners were also requested- during the demonstration session to suggest likely ways they feel the problems could be tackled so as to meet their information needs. Their responses were taken note of and qualitatively presented.

	N			
	Valid	Missing	Mean	Mode
Connecting with public libraries, NGOs and others like religious bodies and legal practitioners	5	0	3.6	3
Connecting with professional bodies like library associations and stakeholders	5	0	3.4	3
Purchasing of reading materials by the prison authorities	5	0	4.4	3
Allowing more access to library materials	5	0	3.8	4
Mapping out time for the prisoners to use the library and other information resources	5	0	3.6	3
Developing new and using existing guidelines to prison library service accommodation	5	0	3.8	3
Allowing more information flow from other sources like religious groups	5	0	3.6	3

**Table 03: Strategies to enhance the provision of library and information resources**

Data presented in above table shows the mean ratings of the responses of the Rehabilitation and Library officers on the strategies for enhancing the provision of resources and services to meet the prisoners’ information needs. They indicated that purchasing of reading materials by the prison authorities will help enhance such provisions to a very high extent – thus a mean rating of 4.40. Other ways are allowing more access to library materials and developing new and using existing guidelines to prison library service accommodation with mean ratings of 3.8 each.

They indicated that connecting with public libraries, NGOs and others like religious bodies and legal practitioners, allowing more information flow from other sources like religious groups and mapping out time for the prisoners to use the library and other information resources will help enhance such provisions to a high extent – thus a mean rating of 3.6 each.

On the part of the prisoners, their own responses agreed with those of the Rehabilitation and Library officers. They went further to emphasize the need for the government to be sensitized on the information needs of the prisoners so they might provide the needed materials for them. Almost all the groups in the prison remarked that the government should direct more attention to making the prison conditions better than their present pitiable states.

Renovating the prisons to reduce overcrowding and improving on the status of the pre-colonial cells will help in making the prison environment a little more conducive for accessing and utilizing information resources when provided. Also they suggested the need for the authorities to work towards the prisoners' reformation by avoiding censorship, possibly allowing the prisoners to access internet and make use of newspapers, magazines and the like.

## **VII. CONCLUSIONS**

Although the majority of the study respondents believed that books and reading had a positive impact on incarcerated individuals and that library had an important role to play in the inmates' educational and cultural advancement. Prisoners have the same fundamental right to reading and access to information which should not be denied. The prison library is in the best position to provide the library and information resources and services for the prisoners to meet their information needs.

There were two libraries in the Welikada prison. Worn with use, the book in the prisoner's hands is being read for the eighth time. Once a shabby corner with few books on a small shelf, the Welikada Prison Library renovated last July 2017, now has cupboards, tables and chairs with more than 5000 books of different genres.

The Welikada prison library has no separate buildings allotted to them; rather they have used a small room under the welfare department. Although these two prison libraries have bookshelves, they are not enough and all the shelves were small in size and old fashioned. None of the libraries had a conducive reading room in terms of ventilation, quiet and neatness. In most cases, a working table is used as a circulation desk by the rehabilitation officer. Maintained only in religious books and novels, the library has no academic information. Both libraries do not have access to information on health and legal information needs of prisoners. There were no periodicals in the prison library. Internet facility or technological instruments like computers were not available there.

The prison does not even have materials on certain subject areas at all. The few available ones are outdated books donated by individuals or public libraries a long time ago. The Public Library, Colombo is giving 500 titles of books at a time to the Welikada prison library for specific periods. When after finished that time period those books should be returned and can be getting new titles from the public library. The prison library does not have qualified library staff in the library. The library is manned by a rehabilitation officer who knows little or nothing in librarianship.

## **VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Prison library service is a neglected area in Sri Lanka which needs more attention, resources and planned development. Therefore, in the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are being made.

A mechanism should be put in place for the provision of effective library information services for Sri Lankan prisoners. This should be based on a comprehensive information need analysis of prisoners required in the peculiar environment. Prison library infrastructure and equipment has not kept pace with development in Sri Lanka. Lack of accommodation, library building facilities and space are problems in this regard. There is need, therefore, for urgent policy measure to addressing the perennial problem in Sri Lankan prisons for the effective provision of information services.

Prison libraries should accommodate a wide variety of materials to cover all subject interests cutting across the different educational levels and qualifications of prisoners. This may include print and non-print materials, newsletters, directory, encyclopedias, handbooks, subject books and other such information resources already listed in this study. A simulated internet service should be set up in prison libraries for prisoners to get acquainted with the vast current materials which act as tool for information generation.

The services of professional librarians would be needed in this area, which will then source for these resources on behalf of the prisoners. Although, there are numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Sri Lanka, but the NGO has not addressed literacy, vocational education, e-learning, and information and communication technology in the prisons.

The prison authorities should map out time for the prisoners to consult library and information resources and services as part of the prison's daily schedule of activities. Additional prison libraries to boost information services for prisoners need to be established in other prison locations across the country. This would

help to support prisoners with their quick reference information, recreation, legal aid information and enhance their rehabilitation as well as make them better informed citizens.

The extended services of the national library, state and public libraries should be integrated in prison libraries through periodic lending services. This would help the shortage of books in most prison libraries to cater for materials that cannot be readily provided for by prison authorities. A readership promotion must be embarked upon to whip the interest of prisoners in reading. It should be made known to them the advantages of reading in the rehabilitation process. Guidelines to prison library services in Sri Lanka should be developed by the Prison Service in collaboration with National Library, Library Association and stakeholders.

Literacy is indispensable and central to efficient functioning of every individual and the inmates inclusive, it requires adequate reading ability to cope with the demands of everyday living. Functional literacy is highly needed for inmates so as to be empowered and to be successful in life after being released from prisons. The findings showed that there was high percentage of illiterates in Sri Lankan prisons. However, the inmates were interested to be literates. The findings of this study therefore challenge the Non-Governmental Organization (N.G.O) to assist the prisons in this area.

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