

PRISON AS A WHITE WASHED CEMETERY- STUDY OF SUICIDES TAMILNADU PRISONS

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ABSTRACT

Prison Administration is constantly concerned when a prisoner dies by suicide. Most of the time, the prison serves as a whitewashed cemetery, with prisoners committing themselves. According to the Prison Statistics of India-2015 (NCRB), there were 77 suicides in Indian jails, proving that prisons do not serve the purpose of correctional philosophy. This study focuses on Tamil Nadu prisons since the lone suspect in the tragic murder of an Infosys techie in 2016 allegedly committed himself inside the Puzhal central prison by “pulling and biting into live electric wire”—raising concerns about prison safety and security in the state. Despite the fact that Tamil Nadu was the first state to hire psychologists in its jails, suicides remain widespread. The study’s primary purpose is to determine what causes prison suicides and how safe these institutions are for inmates. This study takes a case study approach, and the data will reveal the reasons for suicide, the method of death employed, and how prison officials assess a prisoner’s suicide.

Keywords- Suicide, Death, Prisons, Prison Authorities.

I. INTRODUCTION:

Suicide is a complex phenomena that philosophers, theologians, medics, and sociologists have long studied. Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, conducted a suicide study in 1897 that remains relevant in today’s culture. It demands attention as a severe public health hazard, yet prevention and control are difficult tasks.

II. TYPES OF SUICIDE:

There are four sorts of suicide, according to Durkheim. They have

- Egoistic Suicide
- Altruistic Suicide
- Anomic Suicide
- Fatalistic Suicide

Egoistic Suicide- describes a person who is alone or an outsider, and hence perceives themselves to be alone in the world. This individual has limited social interaction with others.

Altruistic suicide- happens when a person’s devotion to a social group is extremely intense, such as a sacrifice for a cult or religion. Consider a suicide bomber.

Anomic Suicide- refers to a lack of regulation, and this sort of suicide occurs during a period of extreme stress and frustration. A relevant example would be a major financial loss or when the financial market that person controls fails, causing catastrophic consequences for a large number of individuals.

Fatalistic Suicide- happens when individuals are tightly controlled, such as in Korea. When a person or group of people is subjected to excessive restrictions or increased demands, they develop a sensation of not having a self or individuality.

In a prison setting, there is a high risk of egoistic and anomic suicide.

III. SUICIDE IN THE CORRECTIONAL SETTINGS:

Suicide is frequently the single leading cause of death in correctional facilities. Correctional settings differ with regard to inmate populations and local variables such as sentencing methods, overcrowding, time spent in lockup, cleanliness, general socio-cultural conditions, HIV/AIDS prevalence, level of stress, and access to basic health or mental health treatments. Each of these characteristics may have a unique impact on suicide rates.

IV. PRISON AS A WHITE WASHED CEMETERY:

Suicide is recognized as a critical problem within the jail environment, because the atmosphere in the prison is depressing and stress generating that induce the prisoner to commit suicide. Prison is considered as white washed cemetery, because the prison suicide rate is greater than general suicide rate in India. The NHRC's 2014 study on prison suicides found that while the general suicide rate in 2011 was 11.2, the prison suicide rate was 18.23. This suggests that there is a higher risk of suicide in prison than in the general population, resembling a whitewashed cemetery.

V. SUICIDES IN TAMIL NADU PRISONS:

Tamil Nadu prison department has 9 central jails and 3 special prison for women, which houses 14,127 prison inmates, which is third highest in the nation. Tamil Nadu has the highest capacity of women inmates (1,569) in the country (PSI-2015, NCRB). Tamil Nadu was the first state to appoint psychologist and counselors in the prison in the year 2014. At present each central jail has 1 psychologist and 2 counselors, to stop the mitigating risk of suicide, but then too suicides are prevalent in Tamil Nadu Prisons. The suicide of the murder accused of the Infosys techie in the year 2016, by pulling and biting the live electric wire, shocked the whole Tamil Nadu and the state human rights commission took suo motto cognizance of this case, which was the rationale behind the study to know the magnitude of suicide in Tamil Nadu Prisons. Most of the suicides are committed by the life convicts, because for the past 10 years, there is no general amnesty premature release in Tamil Nadu. According to the Tamil Nadu Jail Manual, they are not allowed to use dhotis or lungi, but the prison department allows them to use it, based on humanitarian grounds which becomes an easy tool for them to hang in the trees, fan or bathroom.

VI. MAGNITUDE OF SUICIDE IN TAMIL NADU PRISON:

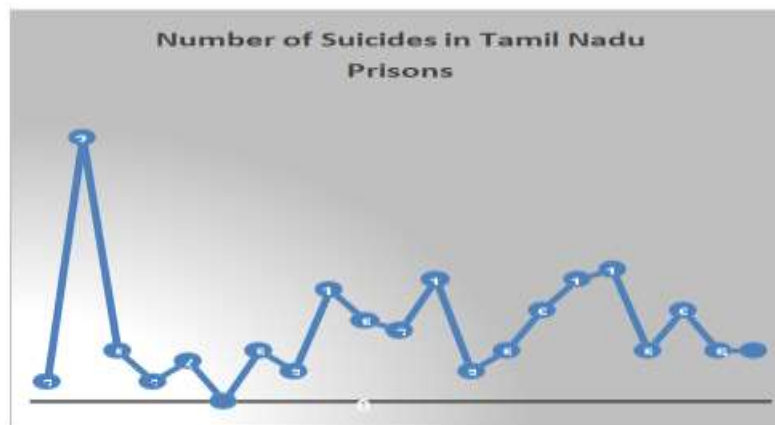


Fig 1.1

This figure represents the number of suicides that happened in Tamil Nadu prisons from 1995 to 2015. The Prison Statistics of India began to be released in 1995, hence the data was collected that year.

VII. SUICIDE PREVENTION TOOL USED BY THE PSYCHOLOGIST IN TAMIL NADUPRISONS:

Prisoner's Mental Health			
Psychiatric Treatment / Hospitalisation (if any)	Details :		
Mental Status Examination			
General Appearance :			
Behaviour :			
Attitude :	Level of Consciousness :		
Orientation :	Speech / Talk : Relevant / Irrelevant		
Mood : Normal / Blunted / Affected	Affect : Normal / Blunted / Heightened		
Thought Process :	Thought Content :		
Insight & Judgement :	Level of Anxiety : Mild / Moderate / Extreme		
Deliberate self harm :	Past : Present / Absent Detail :		
	Current : Present / Absent Details :		
Suicide Attempt - History : (if any)	Present / Absent Reason for ideation / intention : Severity of ideation : Mild / Moderate / Extreme		
Suicidal ideation / Intention If present Details			
Note / suggestion :			
COUNSELLOR Central Prison	PSYCHOLOGIST Central Prison	DOCTOR Central Prison	JAILOR Central Prison

Fig 1.2

This figure denotes the suicide assessment tool used by the psychologist in Tamil Nadu, which assesses their previous suicide history, medical and psychological problems, in addition, they also

maintain a form called form 90. Which assesses their complete details- like personality characteristics, bondage with family, details of substance abuse, etc. But the capability of psychologists and counselors are not sufficient to deal with the prison population. Prison Suicides in Tamil Nadu.

VIII. CASE STUDIES ON PRISON SUICIDE

Case 1: Special Prison for Women, Vellore, 2014

A woman prisoner who was just convicted of murdering a child apparently committed suicide in the bathroom of Vellore special jail for women. Adhilakshmi (42), of Villupuram district on Friday, was on trial for approximately two years. She is accused of strangling herself after tying one end of her saree to the toilet water piping. According to prison officials, Adhilakshmi was convicted of the crime roughly 25 days ago. Only once in the last two years had her family members paid her a visit. The Bagayam police have opened an investigation.

A. Case 2: Central Prison –I (Convict Prison) Puzhal, 2015

After being denied parole, an assault convict allegedly committed suicide inside Chennai's Puzhal Central Prison on Tuesday. According to authorities, the convict, Jayakumar, hung himself from the prison cell bars using a towel. Jayakumar was given parole on February 22, according to the police. He evaded parole, however. When he was on the loose, a retired police officer in J J Nagar sought police protection because he posed a threat. P Sukumar, a retired inspector, informed police that Jayakumar meant to kill him because he had arrested him in connection with a handful of cases. A guard armed with an AK-47 rifle was then assigned to the retiring officer. On March 26; police apprehended Jayakumar from his city hiding and imprisoned him once more. He met with jail superintendent R Anbalagan on Tuesday morning and asked parole because his family was in debt. However, the superintendent denied his plea, noting the prisoner's recent parole evasion. According to police, Jayakumar then committed suicide. The body was taken to Stanley Medical College Hospital for examination. The Puzhal police department opened an investigation.

B. Case 3: Central Prison Cuddalore, 2017

A life prisoner is said to have committed suicide in Cuddalore's Central Prison. On Friday, P. Rajamanickam (57), of Kilkuppam near Kallakurichi in the Villupuram district, was discovered hanging from the ceiling while wearing a dhoti. A trial court found him guilty of murder and sentenced him to life in prison in 2015. Other convicts spotted him hanging from the ceiling and alerted jail authorities, according to Prison Department sources. The body was transported to the Cuddalore Government Hospital for a post-mortem examination. Cuddalore New Town police have opened an investigation under Section 176 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The police stated that the cause of death would not be known until a magisterial investigation was completed.

C. Case 4: Central Prison Trichy, 2017

A 32-year-old remand prisoner hanged himself in his cell at Trichy Central Prison early Monday morning. According to prison officials, he had psychological concerns and was jailed last month for pelting stones at a TNSTC bus. R Palanisamy from Narasingapuram, near Samayapuram in the district, has been identified as the deceased. Prisoners discovered him hanging from the window at 5:30 a.m. and called the cops. The incident occurred on the first floor of Block 1 of the prison. He was brought to Trichy's government hospital and pronounced dead upon arrival. Police diagnosed Palanisamy with depression after his repeated bail pleas were denied. He worked in a motel near Manachanallur. On January 29, Palanisamy got into a fight with a

TNSTC bus driver and conductor when they refused to halt near his residence. After a heated disagreement, he got off the bus and flung stones at the windshield. He was apprehended and imprisoned by Manachanallur police under the 1992 Prevention of Damage and Loss Act. Meanwhile, the revenue divisional officer has been charged with investigating the cause of death. A case has been filed at the KK Nagar Police Station in this regard.

D. Case 5: Central Prison Salem, 2016

On Saturday afternoon, a 23-year-old convict committed suicide in Salem. He took the extreme step after being imprisoned under the Goondas Act the day before. M Ajithkumar, 23, of Komarapalayam in Namakkal district, has been named as the culprit. On October 24, Tiruchengode police detained him in connection with a robbery case and lodged him in Salem Central Prison under judicial custody. On Friday, he was arrested under the Goondas Act, and the order copy was served to him that evening. According to reports, Ajithkumar was unhappy after being held under the Goondas Act. On Saturday about 2.15 p.m., he committed himself by hanging himself from the window grill with his dhoti.

E. Case 6: Central Prison –ii (Under Trial Prison) Puzhal, 2016

P Ramkumar, the sole accused in the killing of Infosys engineer S Swathi, allegedly committed suicide at the Puzhal Central Prison here on Sunday. According to reports, Ramkumar committed suicide within the prison by chewing a livewire in a junction box. Ramkumar was confined in the high security block and allegedly committed himself at 4.35 p.m. in the dispensary block, where he had been transferred for a routine medical checkup. He exited the building and bit the livewire. He was flown to Royapettah Government Hospital and proclaimed dead.

F. Case 7: Central Prison Palayamcottai, 2013

A life inmate allegedly committed suicide in his cell at the Palayamkottai Central Prison on Sunday. M. Chelladurai (32) of Rajavallipuram close here, according to police, was sentenced to life in prison. In 2006 for murdering his wife the previous year. He was being held in the prison's 5th block. Other prisoners tried to save him after he was seen hanging himself from the ventilator with his dhoti. However, he apparently died on the scene. Chelladurai had tried suicide twice before, according to prison officials. "When he recently sent a letter to his children and wanted to see them, the girls refused to meet him in prison, which may have pushed the life convict to resort to extreme measures." a prison official said.

G. Case 8: Central Prison Madurai, 2013

Deivam (48), of Bungalowmedu in Theni district, was arrested two months ago and imprisoned in Madurai prison under the Goondas Act on October 31, 2012. On Sunday night, he apparently committed suicide in a lavatory of the prison's medical center. The event was only discovered in the morning when the prison wardens noticed him hanging in the washroom in his dhoti. Deivam was a known narcotics trader who had multiple charges pending against him in the police stations of Palanichettipatti, Theni, and Usilampatti. Deivam had a fall a few days ago and damaged his head. He was treated in the medical center on the jail grounds. According to the Superintendent of the Prison, Deivam may have committed suicide due to family troubles.

H. Case 9: Central Prison Coimbatore, 2017

According to prison officials, a 45-year-old man on trial killed himself in the early hours of Saturday at the Coimbatore Central Prison. The deceased, D Ganapathy of Perundurai, was charged with two-wheeler theft

and was only remanded on December 26. Ganapathy suffered convulsions on the court grounds when he was remanded on Tuesday, according to a prison officer. He was immediately admitted to Coimbatore Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and was released on Thursday. Ganapathy was transported to the jail hospital for treatment after experiencing breathing problems in prison. Ganapathy, on the other hand, committed suicide less than two days after arriving at the prison, hanging himself with his lungis from a tree near the prison hospital. There were no unusual behavioral changes observed. No suicide note was found. According to officials, Ganapathy may have committed suicide out of frustration and depression. At the Kunnathur police station, he was accused with two charges of theft under IPC Section 379. He was being imprisoned in the penitentiary for the first time

I. Case 10: District Jail Chengalpattu, 2017

Durai (47) of Gandhi Nagar in Kovilambakkam committed suicide on Saturday at Chengalpattu District Prison after being accused of sexually abusing a juvenile girl. According to investigations, Durai was apprehended by the Madipakkam All Women Police Station on April 4 on charges of attempting to sexually assault a little girl living in Gandhi Nagar, Kovilambakkam. He was imprisoned in the Chengalpattu District Jail. On Saturday, he was discovered hanging from a ceiling fan in a room near the kitchen and sent to Chengalpattu Medical College Hospital. When he got at the hospital, his death was confirmed.

IX. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

- Mostly the life convicts are highly prone to commit suicides.
- The Goondas Act has an impact on suicide among undertrial prisoners.
- The denial of leave/parole is also a contributing factor to suicide.
- The impact of general amnesty /premature release in Tamil Nadu
- Jail fever(fear) for the first time offender
- The majority of suicides in Tamil Nadu prisons involve hanging from their dhotis.
- Suicides are most common in the evenings because people conceal and hang themselves in trees before locking up.

X. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The strength of psychologist, counselors and doctors and other medical staff, should be increased in the Tamil Nadu Prison Department.
- The strength of prison personnel and officials should be increased.
- The installation of CCTV Cameras in all the barracks of the prison.
- Proper premature release for life convicts
- Granting leave/parole in good intervals
- Monthly interview with their family members.
- Dhotis should be outlawed.

XI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

According to NHRC guidelines, all occurrences of custodial death in jail must be reported to the organization within 24 hours. (Letter No. 66/SG/NHRC/93 dated December 14, 1993, followed by F. No. 40/3/95-LD dated June 21, 1995). The NCRB, on the other hand, collects statistics on jail prisoners and fatalities in prisons from the states and releases an annual report titled 'Prison Statistics of India'. However, there is a data difference

between the number of deaths reported to the NHRC and the NCRB while in prison/judicial custody.

XII. CONCLUSION:

The prison department never considers the suicidal death of a prisoner very seriously, they perceive it like death of a crow due to electrocution, and feel happily that the number has reduced the prison population and go back to their routine work. As Gandhi said-“Crime is an outcome of a diseased mind, hence prison should have the environment of a hospital for its cure”. Thus the prison department should take it seriously and make meaningful analysis to understand the pattern of suicides occurring in the Tamil Nadu prisons.

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