

## Occupational Engagement In Prisons: an evaluation of time-use in Sri Lankan correctional settings.

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**Abstract:** Sri Lankan prison system has shown marked overcrowding for decades. It is a common issue worldwide which contributes poor care, loss of privacy, limited resources and occupational deprivation. A lack of access to basic human occupations can lead to occupational deprivation. In penal settings, occupational deprivation has been suggested as a contributing factor in prison riots, prison suicides, recidivism, episodic disorientation and psychosis among inmates. Therefore, it is important to observe the current Sri Lankan prison system concerning the occupational deprivation among prison inmates. A cross-sectional descriptive study was carried out in Welikada prison (male section) situated in Colombo 09, aiming to explore the time-use and occupational engagement among sentenced prisoners detained and to suggest suitable actions to be taken to improve the correctional process. A Purposive sample of 30 inmates between 18 and 55 years old was selected for the study. Data collected via an informal semi-structured interview based on Occupational questionnaire (Smith, et al., 1986) and analyzed using qualitative and quantitative methods. An overall time-use in a typical day among participants were evaluated using simple statistical methods under five domains; work, daily living works, recreation, leisure and sleep. Qualitative data summarized under three main themes; occupational choice and autonomy, motivation for occupation and values of occupation. The overall findings suggest that the incarcerated environment promotes occupational imbalance, passivity and negativism, which shows an occupational

deprivation among the prison population. The findings are suggestive of a need for an occupational therapy intervention to the prison institutions at large or individual and group basis.

**Keywords:** penal settings, occupational therapy, engagement, time use, correctional settings

### Introduction:

Occupational engagement has been presented as a core construct in occupational therapy (Kennedy & Davis, 2017). Occupational engagement describes the extent to which a person has a balanced rhythm of activity and rest, a variety and range of meaningful occupations and routines, and the ability to move around in society and interact socially, implying that occupational engagement occurs over time. Moreover, occupational engagement involves interpretation and comprehension emanating from experience (Bejerholm & Eklund, 2006b).

Occupational deprivation is considered external to the individual. Whiteford (2000) defines occupational deprivation as; 'A state of preclusion from engagement in occupations of necessity and/or meaning due to factors that stand outside the immediate control of the individual'.

Incarceration itself limits occupational engagement among prison inmates as they have limited choice for occupations such as leisure and recreation. The limited occupational choices make prison inmates dependent on the detaining authorities in everyday activities (Mukiza, 2014). Helbig

(2003a) found that limited choices and autonomy often led to poor motivation and inactivity over time.

Sri Lankan prison system has shown marked overcrowding for decades. Globally, there are overcrowded prison systems that contribute to poor care, loss of privacy, limited resources and occupational deprivation. There were 8,853 of a daily average of convicted prisoners were detained in Sri Lankan prisons in the year 2016 while the authorized capacity was 6,728. It is 131.6% of the capacity (Department of Prisons, 2017).

In penal setting occupational deprivation has been suggested as a contributing factor in prison riots, prison suicides, recidivism, episodic disorientation and psychosis among inmates (Molineux & Whiteford, 1999). The Welikada prison experienced a recent riot on 09th November 2012, which left 27 people dead and 43 injured (Haviland, 2012).

#### Hypothesis

The inmates who are detained in Sri Lankan prisons experience occupational deprivation which limits their engagement in purposeful and balanced occupations.

#### Aim of the study

This study aimed to study explore the time-use and occupational engagement among convicted male prisoners between 18 and 55 years old at Welikada prison complex, Colombo 09.

#### Methodology:

##### *Participants*

This study was conducted in Welikada prison (male section) situated in Colombo 09. As the sample was to be selected from a limited and restricted population, the purposive sampling method was used. Thirty (30) convicted prisoners aged over 18 years, currently serving a prison sentence and have served for at least 6 months in Welikada prison at the time of recruitment to the study

were selected. All the necessary means were taken to ensure selecting a heterogeneous sample of persons from various work stations. The sections where there is high security were excluded.

##### *Data collection*

Qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used in this study. Three data collection tools were used in this study. Two of them were standardized tools and the demographic information sheet is non-standardized. All three tools were interviewer-administered and had translated into Sinhalese.

Kessler 6 interviewer administered questionnaire [K6]

Occupational Questionnaire [OQ]

Demographic information sheet

##### *Ethical considerations*

Ethical approval for this study was gained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Kelaniya. The whole process of the study from participant selection to publication was designed to protect the confidentiality, autonomy and voluntary participation.

##### **Data analysis:**

##### *Quantitative data*

Data gathered from the OQ were analysed to determine the time distribution among five domains, work, daily living work, recreation, rest and sleep. Time-use was calculated by collecting each half-hour intervals under each domain of each participant. The time-use under each domain of all the participants were collated and mean time-use was calculated to achieve an overall score.

##### *Qualitative data*

The interview data recorded in data collection sheets were categorized into three themes using the principles of thematic analysis methodology. The raw data were coded and developed themes in each

conversation. Then the conversations were reviewed for common grounds and the final themes were determined.

**Results:**

**Quantitative results**

The overall time use according to the occupational domains of the OQ is shown in Fig. 1. This is a simple representation of time-use among the participants. It shows that the participants spent more time for sleep. They spend 475 minutes (32.99%) per day for sleeping. The mean engagement in work-related activities was 425 minutes (29.51%) in a typical day. They spend 291 minutes (20.21%) per day for daily living works, 87 minutes (6.04%) per day for recreation and 162 minutes (11.25%) per day for leisure. (Figure 1)

Table 2: Mean values and standard deviations of each domain of OQ

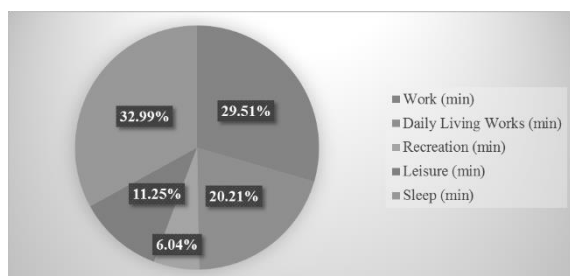


Figure 13: Distribution of time-use according to the Occupational Questionnaire (Smith et al., 1986)

Domain	Mean value (Min)	Standard Deviation (Min)
Work	425	61.57
Daily living works	291	73.54
Recreation	87	81.24
Leisure	162	101.38
Sleep	475	69.17

**Qualitative results**

There were three main themes developed based on the interview. They were occupational choice and autonomy, motivation for occupation and values of occupation.

Occupational choice and autonomy – Participants’ choice and autonomy were believed to be diminished in their context. Majority’s (76.67%) belief was the

workgroups are for punishment and there is no chance for choice and autonomy.

Motivation for occupation – Almost everyone (90%) agreed with the idea that ‘engagement in occupations; work, self-care, recreation and leisure, is helpful to pass time’.

*‘It is useful to forget the feeling about time and it is a relief to spend the imprisonment period. Less time to think about family when working.’*

The value of occupation – They have different values of occupational engagement. Most of them (97%) have a negative value about what they do in workgroups. Almost everyone worries about ‘how the work I do here, can help me for earning in the future’.

**Discussion:**

*Distribution of time use*

The findings of the quantitative part of this study support some findings of the limited number of studies which have carried out in similar settings. In this study sleep is predominant. The result of Farnworth et al. (2004) study on time use in Australian secure units also shows a predominant pattern of passive leisure and sleep. Findings of Stewart & Craik (2007) study conducted in the United Kingdom noted 39% of sleep time among participants as well.

Even though the time spent in workgroups is higher in Welikada prison, the quality of work should be evaluated for a better understanding. In Sri Lankan setting participants use an average time for personal care or daily living activities. It is around 20%.

The findings of this study suggest the recreation and rest time is around 17%, which is lower than average. It is not clear how the participants spent the recreation time in other study settings, but it was shown they have a limited recreational choice such as reading and listening to the radio in the Welikada prison environment.

Therefore, these findings suggest the incarcerated environment promotes occupational imbalance, passivity and negativism, which lead to an occupational deprivation among the prison population.

#### *Occupational choice, autonomy, motivation and value*

The findings of this study suggest a marked deprivation from occupational choice and autonomy among the participants. Almost everyone was allocated into workgroups without their own choice

or interest. In this study, participants' motivation is to occupy is to pass time, which doesn't show a personal meaning or value. These findings indicate features suggestive of occupational deprivation among the participants, which would have been a contributing factor for recidivism, overcrowding and recent prison riot.

#### **Conclusion:**

##### *Summery*

Despite the limitations occurred, the overall findings are 1) there is a marked occupational imbalance found in the prison population studied, 2) there are indications that are suggestive of occupational deprivation among the population studied. As supported by these findings as well as related literature, it is indicated a need for an occupational therapy intervention to the prison institutions at large or individual and group basis.

#### **Limitations:**

The OQ does not differentiate rest and sleep in data form. Stewart & Craik (2007) had incorporated sleep into the assessment based on a validated French version of OQ used by Aubin et al., (1999) (cited in Stewart & Craik, 2007). The same method used in this study as well.

There was limited literature regarding the specific research question worldwide. The participants of available studies also were

diagnosed to have mental illnesses most of the time. Therefore, the researcher was unable to compare the findings with other similar studies which are an important part of the research.

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