



A study on the influence of urban physical milieu on women's involvement on substances: Case studies of female prisoners in Welikada Prison, In Colombo, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Among those imprisoned for offensive dealings of alcohol and harmful drugs including drug trafficking, a higher proportion was identified within Colombo District. In particular more than 60% of female prisoners in Welikada prison, were imprisoned against alcohol and drug related offenses whereas it was a specific attribute that 70% of those offenders were from the Colombo district. Also noted that repeated imprisonment for same offences as a common feature. The objective of this study is to determine to which degree the slum dwelling has endorsed as an accountable factor of female lawbreakers for transgressions in illicit actions. More specifically to investigate whether there are effects of the physical environment of their living for their criminal behavior. For this investigation 25 female prisoners in Welikada prison those who had been charged for imprisonment more than two terms were selected for the sample.

Information gathered were linked to their living background, geographical zones of their residence, physical environment, conditions of houses and the day to day conduct of the rest of family members. Interviewees were the females currently being imprisoned and it was revealed that they were living in absurd status of slums located in Dematagoda, Sedawatta, Modera, Mattakkuliya and Keselwatta. Decisions can be arrived at based on the findings that the living pattern including the unpleasant physical setting of slums has paved the way for young women to involve in criminal actions including offensive dealings on alcohol and drugs. As a remedial action to curtail the said wrongdoings by espousing concepts such as CPTED (Crime prevention through Environment Design) to minimize tendencies on spreading crimes.

Keywords: CPTED, imprisonment, slum dwelling, substances, urban, women

1. Introduction

There are many different substances to consider-some newly recognized, such as crystal methamphetamine, and some long-established, such as alcohol or benzodiazepines (National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2006). Each substance creates different health and social problems, and calls up different social, medical and advocacy responses, forcing government and others to consider new approaches to controls, health promotion or regulation. Legal drugs, such as tobacco and alcohol, are more widely used and cause more damage, though illegal drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, often get more attention. Behind legal drugs are corporations that profit from people's addiction to their products, and that promote and advertise them aggressively. Illegal drugs depend on criminal activity for distribution, and so evoke enforcement and judicial responses, creating another layer of economic and social issues for individuals and society. Equally complex is the challenge of dealing with the overuse of, and addiction to, prescribed drugs-a significant issue for women, and so also for women's health advocates.

In contrarily to the social advancement processes implementing in Sri Lanka, an increasing trend of imprisonment over criminal actions in particular on alcohol and drug dealings is a notable factor. The offenders have involved in consumption, keeping in possession, trafficking and selling of Cocaine, Marijuana, Heroin and varied types of

alcohol. It can be observed that the said deals produce much higher financial return, hence, the hawking of illegal items became a part and parcel among the slum dwellers also showing as increasing trends. Also disclosed that annual rate of imprisonment on these offenses increases by 60% annually. Consequences of this menace are in different shapes. Troublesome congestion inside prisons, possibilities to develop a culture of criminal action due to the chances to join with arrant criminals, increased maintenance cost against growing number of prisoners and the disability of rehabilitation actions due to repeated imprisonment of criminals already registered under rehabilitation Centers. Also revealed that by imprisonment alone this hazard cannot be controlled. It is vital and important to diagnose the factual reasons affecting this growth of this endangered action.

Such revelation can be treated as a timely action mainly to assess how far the physical atmosphere becomes conducive for these actions. This study is an attempt to diagnose living pattern and actions of gangs those living in slums and shanties and to study how far and in which ways the surrounding factors affect to continue the criminal actions.

2. Research Problem

To which extent the physical atmosphere in and around the slums in the urban setting in Colombo has been supportive to fascinate women to involve in offensive actions in particular on the dealing of alcohol and harmful drugs and also to

diagnose the causes and effects, and the circumstances affecting to repeat the illegal actions by offenders.

3. Literature review

Dayarathne, and Samarawickrama, (2003) ^[3] examined the relationship between environment and urbanization which was consider on empowering communities in the peri- urban areas of Colombo. Patterns of community structure in Colombo, Sri Lanka (Arachchige, 1994), has done a study in the low-income residence in Colombo. He has identified their especial community structure. Four types of urban community structures showed from his study as strategic integration, polarized communities, fragmented structures and individualized community structures. He further says that the distribution of power has to be examined in the context of the micro macro frame work of South Asian countries.

Arvanites (1994) ^[1] found in a survey of approximately 1,600 individuals receiving treatment for drug and/or alcohol addiction that criminal activity was most frequently related to the use/abuse of alcohol in combination with at least one illicit drug. Females were more likely to report using cocaine than males (73% to 65%). United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime revealed that the Studies on the long-term effects of alcohol have shown that women are at greater risk than men of developing liver damage, brain damage and heart disease (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2004, pp. 5–7). Also National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (2006, p. 74) said that “Women of all ages become addicted to prescription and illicit drugs more quickly than men and suffer greater physical, psychological and social consequences.” A study of people in Vancouver using injection drugs found that the rate of HIV infection among women was about 40 per cent higher than the rate among men. (Spittal *et al.*, 2002). Smoking rates for Aboriginal girls (48.5%) are higher than for Aboriginal boys (42.7%). Moreover, a greater proportion of Aboriginal girls than boys begin smoking by age 11 (Johnson *et al.*, 2004).

Pelissier (2004) ^[12] observed gender differences in the predictors of drug treatment entry and completion during incarceration. While women had more problems in employment and depression and were more likely to have a history of physical abuse, they also had higher levels of internal motivation. Women with “average/good” family ties and those who were planning to live with their minor children after release were more likely to enter treatment. Pelissier (2004) ^[12] concluded that as motivation leads to change, for women, “motivational programs and treatment programs will need to clearly emphasize the role of substance abuse treatment in alleviating depression and other psychological distress” (p. 1423). Classification matters for women exiting prison as it has an impact on the services and treatment women have access to during incarceration as well as institutional adjustment (Pogrebin & Dodge, 2001) ^[13]. Institutional adjustment has an impact on “good time” counted toward early release as well as recommendations for parole conditions.

Sevanatha organization (2003) explored slums as one of human settlement in Sri Lanka. They said that slum dwellers have been living since many years. They talked on land tenurship, education, economic patterns as well as problems

which they are facing. They showed that, during the period from early 1980s to early 1990s, Housing and Urban Development has been one of the key target areas of the government’s development agenda.

The world health organization (2004) conducted a study on Asian civil society conference on macroeconomics and health mentioned that there are four areas such as policy, access to service, relief and research to improve the health outcomes of the poor. It is further expected that the presence of government focal persons will facilitate subsequent discussion in country on the role of NGOs reaching the poor with health-related service.

Kumarage (2002) ^[7] experimented on access problems of the urban poor in Sri Lanka. He illustrative two main aspects; first one is the impact that the lack of accessibility has on the poor from securing employment available in urban centers. The second one is the safety related impact of recently concluded road rehabilitation and improvements programs on the poor. In further demonstrated that the poor are the primary victims without recourse, when transport-especially road development is undertaken that does not adequately look after the needs of the poor-especially the need for no motorized transport.

According to a research done by Dr. Subasingha, Vulnerability is most controversial issue in slums community. These are gambling, drinking, beggary, theft and sex offences. The standard or focal culture mostly identified slum residents because of this behaviour. The prevailing attitudes in the area make them vulnerable to domestic violence, imprisonment at their home, inequality in decision making and economic dependence. As a result, women living in the slums suffer from the symptoms of gender inequality from various channels and institutions of the existing society. It is emphasized that the social, economic, and political status of female slum dwellers in Sri Lanka needs to be addressed through increased access to education, economic and awareness initiatives. There were not enough infrastructures facilities. They have short comings on especially sanitary facilities. In addition there were some problems regarding ownership of their land and houses. There is no huge gap between male and female within this society for survival. Men and women have equal conditions for realizing their day to day life activities (Subasingha, 2015).

4. Objectives of the study

- To study the influences of the atmospheric factors of slum dwelling which affects resident women to involve in offensive actions related to substances.
- To study the nature of physical environment of the slums within the urban zones.
- To identify the living styles and sub-cultural perspectives of social groups living in urban slums.
- To determine the backgrounds of women found guilty on substances.
- To study the causes of environmental factors that affect the criminal behaviours and to design a controlling mechanism to address the problem.

5. Research methodology

5.1 Field of study

The focused locations under the study are in two sub-divisions

namely; the cell of the Welikada prison which is the largest prison in Sri Lanka and the; slums located in Dematagoda, Sedawatta, Modera, Mattakkuliya and Keselwatta within the urban zone in Colombo.

5.2 Sample

Selected sample of interviewees is consisted by 25 women prisoners in the cell of Welikada prison those had imprisoned more than twice, for offenses of consumption, selling or trafficking alcohol and harmful drugs.

5.3 Data collection

Data gathering in pertinent to this research is accomplished in two stages. Accordingly, initial fact-finding survey was attended inside the prison of whom those found guilty on alcohol and drug dealings. Across the said findings, further data gathering was proceeded on women within Colombo urban zone who had been imprisoned more than twice.

Under the second data gathering effort, 25 women who had imprisoned more than twice from most congested slum areas of Dematagoda, Sedawatta, Modera, Mattakkuliya and Keselwatta. Firstly, those identified respondents were allowed

to express their case stories related to imprisonment while conducting informal discussions to identify the behavioral patterns in relation to the offense. Under the next step, further discussions were attended with family members and their associates by visiting them in their residential locations via the information received from the 25 women. Besides, higher degree of information could be gathered through observations too following the observatory check list. Data gathering through observation attended on varied scopes such as; nature of the sheds in the slums, relationship between family members living inside the sheds.

5.4 Data analysis

Data analysis attended in a detailed and descriptive manner in which the data gathered via case stories are basically being qualitative data, those were recorded in an analytical order.

6. Results

The below table shows the surrounded factors that affected the respondents to deal in alcohol and drug related offenses and to be ended up as prisoners.

Table 1: Factors affecting the criminal behavior

1) Age structure of the sample		
Age group	Number = 25	Percentage
18 – 24	06	(24)
25 – 35	09	(36)
36 – 45	05	(20)
46 – 55	03	(12)
56 – 65	01	(4)
66 >	01	(4)
2) Level of Education		
Level of Education	Number	Percentage
Between Grades 1-5	16	(64)
Between Grades 6-10	02	(08)
Upto O' Level	01	(04)
Passed O'Level	00	(00)
Upto A' level	00	(00)
Passed A'level	00	(00)
Diploma certificate holders	00	(00)
Degree holders	00	(00)
Not attended schooling	06	(24)
3) Employment at the time of imprisonment		
Employment at the time of imprisonment	Number = 25	Percentage
Labour work	04	(16)
Trade/Businesses	02	(08)
Self-employment	02	(08)
Without a Job	04	(16)
Beggary	01	(04)
Worked as a broker	04	(16)
Other	03	(12)
No regular income No fixed job	05	(20)
4) Monthly Income		
Monthly Income	Number = 25	Percentage
Less than Rs. 5,000	12	(48)
Between Rs. 5,001 – 10,000	11	(44)
Between Rs. 10,001 - 15,000	01	(04)
More than Rs. 15,001	01	(04)

5) Marital Status		
Marital Status	Number = 25	Percentage
Married	05	(20)
Never married	02	(08)
Divorced	06	(24)
Living in separation	03	(12)
Widow	04	(16)
Living together	05	(20)
6) Status of children		
Status of children	Number = 25	Percentage
No children	02	(08)
1 to 3 children	09	(36)
4 to 6 children	13	(52)
More than 7 children	01	(04)
7) Nationality		
Nationality	Number = 25	Percentage
Sinhala	08	(32)
Tamil	09	(36)
Muslim	06	(24)
Bergur	01	(04)
Other	01	(04)
8) Reason for the Imprisonment		
Reason for the Imprisonment	Number = 25	Percentage
Keeping drugs in possession	08	(32)
Keeping alcohol in possession	04	(16)
Trafficking drugs	04	(16)
Sale / Keeping alcohol in possession	02	(08)
Intake drugs	05	(20)
Consuming alcohol	02	(08)
9) Times of imprisonment		
Times of imprisonment	Number = 25	Percentage
Two Terms only	06	(24)
3 to 5 prison terms	16	(64)
6 to 8 prison terms	02	(08)
More than 9 prison terms	01	(04)
10) Duration of sentence		
Duration of sentence	Number = 25	Percentage
Six months	02	(08)
Between 7 – 11 months	17	(28)
Between 1 – 2 years	11	(44)
Exceeding 3 years	05	(20)

7. Discussion

The above information indicates the details of female prisoners, their educational levels, employment details including marital status and the level of offenses involved. Study sample indicates that 60% of women are below 35 years and lowest educational backgrounds, whereas, 24% haven't been to schools and 64% had studied only up to 5th. grade reflecting lowest academic status.

7.1 Case studies No. 01

"..... We didn't have supportive atmosphere to attend education. Father earned marginal income as a 'Natami' (a lord carrier). In the evening he takes drugs. We had 6 children in our family and mother worked as a cooly worker and all earning were only sufficient to manage meals in a substitutive manner. I can managed to write my name. I learnt it after myself became a prisoner.

(women aged 31 and not attended school)

Due to extremely poor educational levels they had failed to find income avenues instead, mixed sources of income

patterns were adhered. Sample indicated that merely 44% could earn monthly income less than Rs. 10,000/= and the majority had involved in rather ad-hoc income earning tasks. Yet, certain explanations revealed that prostitution as well as few other illegal processes were in practice to earn income.

7.2 Case studies No. 02

Will it be possible to earn sufficient income to live? *"I have 3 children. Husband left leaving me alone. Still we too, need to survive. So we are bound to earn money forgetting sin, merit or shame and fear"* - (women in age of 42)

Through the respondents and observations, it could be asserted that the term 'marriage' is not an important fact in the low standard social setting. 24% of divorced cases, 12% women live separately and 20% live together without marriage proves the said norm. When the different identities are concerned it is a common factor that society in urban sector with discrepancies the possibilities towards a mixture of varied religions and ethnic groups is possible. As reflected in the

sample, 36% of prisoners were Tamil, and 24% were Muslims while 32% were Sinhalese

Among those found guilty and became imprisoned due to the possession of substance, trafficking, selling and consumption and the specific feature therein was that each of them had been charged imprisonment more than two terms or even more.

7.3 Case studies No. 03

“For us it is simple to be here and it is a holiday for us. If we are to move out it is a predicament to find means to live. Here it is different. Everything is freely available. We spend enjoyable time with friends. After a while we go to see our

children and used to come back again.”

(a 39 year old women)

The above elaborates how prison life becomes a privilege for women derived from slums, sheds related environments. The study discloses that the volume of hardships and sufferings in prevalence within their living environment direct them to consider imprisonment as a privilege. Hence a comparative assessment is done between the complications prevailing in the living environment and their involvement in substance life styles. The summarized details of houses owned by the respondents and the details of selected area are given below.

Table 2: Status of residential facilities available for the

sample	Nature of the house	Number of Rooms	Members residing	Sanitary facilities available.
Dematagoda				
A	Walls with wood planks	1	(04)	Common sources
B	Hut	0	(06)	Common sources
C	Hutch	1	(03)	Common sources
D	Lines	1	(02)	No specific facility
E	Lines with wood planks	0	(05)	No specific facility
Sedawaththa				
F	Walls with wood planks	1	(06)	No specific facility
G	Hut	1	(04)	Common
H	Hutch	1	(04)	No specific facility
I	Lines	0	(03)	Common
J	Lines with wood planks	0	(02)	Common
Keselwathth				
K	Hut	0	(04)	Common
L	Lines with wood planks	1	(03)	No specific facility
M	Lines	2	(03)	No specific facility
N	Walls with wood planks	1	(03)	No specific facility
O	Hutch	1	(02)	No specific facility
Mattakkuliya				
P	Walls with wood planks	1	(06)	No specific facility
Q	Hut	1	(07)	No specific facility
R	No house /public places	0	(05)	No specific facility
S	Lines with wood planks	0	(05)	No specific facility
T	Lines	1	(01)	No specific facility
Modara				
U	Hut	1	(05)	No specific facility
V	Lines with wood planks	1	(05)	No specific facility
W	Lines	0	(04)	No specific facility
X	Lines with planks	0	(03)	No specific facility
Y	Houses with wood planks	1	(02)	No specific facility

Summary

- Houses with wood planks - 10
- Lined Houses - 06
- Huts - 04
- Hutch/Sheds - 04
- No house – use public places - 01 = 25.

Above description portrays the standard of houses after searching for on the information appeared in the sample. Classification of A – Y depicts each prisoner and the houses referred by them were temporary built structures. Also noted that all the family members were living in these houses/sheds

or lined houses. As per the sanitary facilities some were using public facilities maintained by the municipality whereas, majority of families could not show specific facilities available in their premises.

Table 3: Duration of living in the referred locations

Duration	Number	Percentage
Less than 1 year	01	(04)
Between 1 to 10 years	06	(24)
Between 11 to 20 years	03	(12)
Since Birth	15	(60)

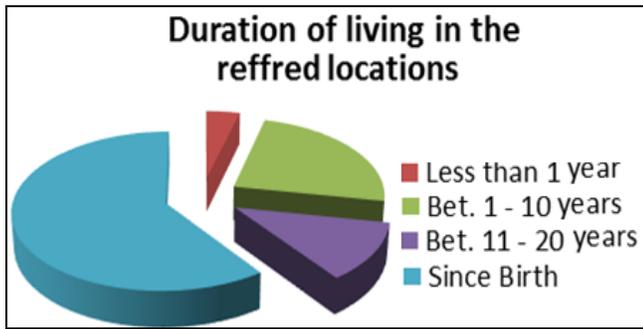


Fig 1

The above data unveiled that 60% of residents are living in the contacted locations since birth, and as a whole 96% of families are living in the referred area duration exceeding one year.

Based on the facts revealed through respondents that due to the social adaptation goes in line with the living in slums, and also due to the inadequacy of formal administration on these slum areas and with overall impact on low education / less income avenues creates supportive environment for these women to involve in substance related sources of income. Geographical limits, nature of residential facilities and the relationship between accused women

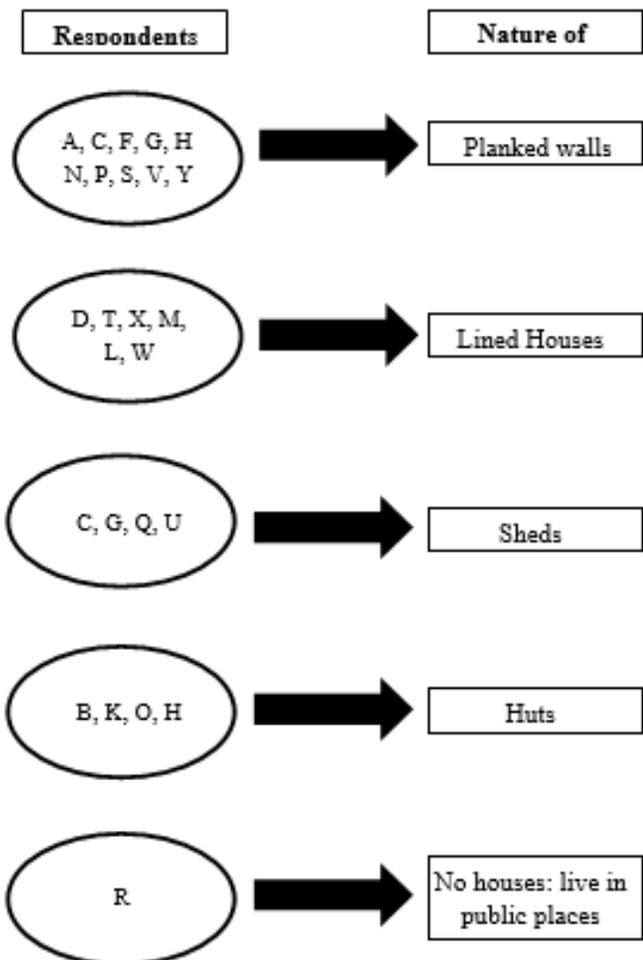


Fig 2: Nature of houses of the respondents

7.1 Case studies No. 04

“.....We live in plank walled huts or in dilapidated lined houses. We all are poor. Even if we are released from the prison there is no way for us to survive. This is the only path we can follow to earn our living. Anyway we live with grief for the reason that our destiny will be accrued by children, too. - (mother of two children, aged 44)

It is notable, that atmosphere of slums, shanties, that emerged within the urban social structure has become as central hubs of the culture of continuing and expanding the deals of substance and alcohol. Despite the fact that prisoners are released from the prison time to time, the women used to return to the usual setting hence, it becomes a normal incidence to repeat the offenses. The favorable atmosphere that prevails in the slum areas turns to be a blessing for the said happenings.

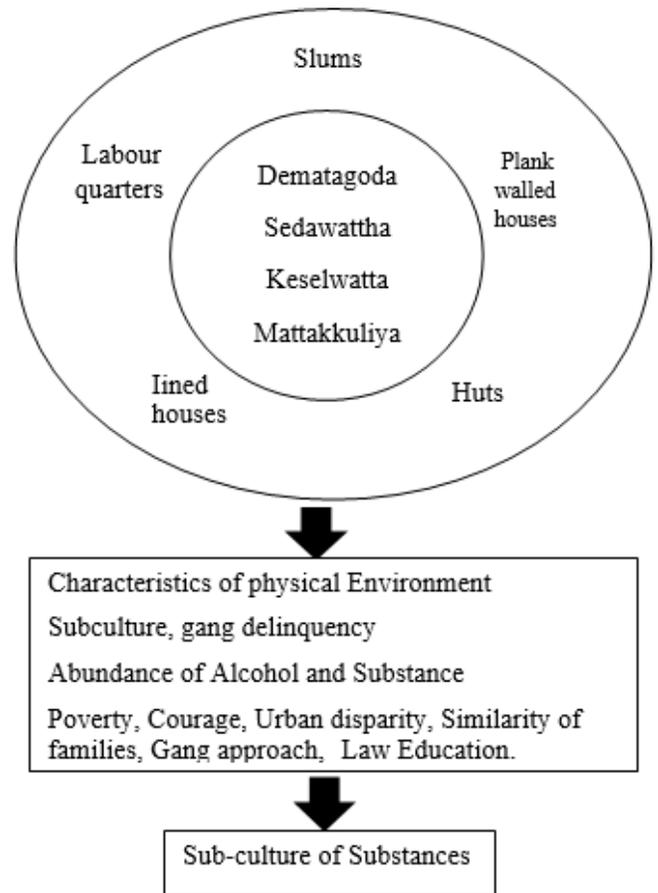


Fig 3: Inter-relationship between substance and the environment

8. Conclusions

The main cause behind prisoners to repeat illegal dealings on substance and alcohol, resulting repeated imprisonment, amidst of the release from prison time to time, is the environment consisted by drastically poor living conditions. There are several supportive factors affecting the continuation of dealing with alcohol and drugs such as; experience gained on surrounding factors after living for a period within slums; following the path of sub-culture in slums; attitude of earning for day to day living aiming at short-term enjoyment; alcohol has easy market; large crowd is addicted for alcohol;

The on-going practice of imprisonment as punishment is considered by so-called prisoners as an enjoyable opportunity for them to relax without struggling to earn money. Hence, more than punishing by imprisonment it would be more meaningful if rehabilitation is given higher priority. Nevertheless, it is clear that poor urban community is not the single force continuing the menace of drugs and alcohol. It is clearly visible that there are other categories of trouble makers those representing upper classes of social structure, too involved in importing, distributing and selling alcohol and drugs in the country. Assuming that, authorities must take prompt action to surrender those actions and the following recommendations are made for the sake of women prisoners and to mitigate the insecure life style of disadvantaged segment of the urban community.

9. Recommendation

- Surmounting the menace of alcohol and drugs through right action is an extraordinary obligation of all the authorized agencies. Undoubtedly, the direct and indirect involvement of urban poor in criminal actions is a powerful barrier to eliminate the drug and alcohol hazards. Since socio-economic setting is a strong factor therein, steady action must be executed to provide houses for safe living while eradicating the life style of slums. Some of the effective concepts Eg: Crime Prevention through Environmental Design / Development (CPTED) be evolved in the said process.
- Shifting residences into new houses be implemented simultaneously with the provision of livelihoods support since, current living atmosphere has strong connection to the living means.
- Facilitating educational aspects of children too, needs emphasis in order to eliminate hazardous sub-cultures from the forthcoming generations as well.

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