



Mindfulness based Emotional Intelligence for Prisoners in India

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ABSTRACT:

Mental condition of prisoners is one of the least discussed topic in India. The study of Mindfulness based emotional Intelligence (MBEI) for prisoners of India is solution based approach to the mental well-being leading to overall improvement of prisoners. As we know that religion and spiritualism are taken as controversial aspects for the overall mental health of inmates in prison. In Indian jails, inmates from different background and level of crime, live together. Correctional programs, running in prison, may be anger management program, drug abuse correction, mindfulness thinking etc. Objective of the study is to establish the significance of MBEI as correctional measure for inmates of prison. Present study tries to decipher how MBEI can be implemented in prisons of India to bring mental health and wellness of inmates over there. Skills of mindfulness, being taught by meditation techniques, can be increased with practice. Mindfulness-meditation based interventions are helpful to get rid of different mental and physical disorders. Mindfulness means to stay in present moment and pay attention to the flow of sensations, thoughts and feelings without being judgmental towards the contents of consciousness. Emotional Intelligence is knowing the emotions of himself and managing them, again it is knowing the emotions of others and managing relationships accordingly. Present study is a review article, based on secondary data provided at several research papers based with MBEI and Indian ancient literature of Vipassana. MBEI and Mindfulness based interventions should be used as correctional measure in prisons.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Emotional Intelligence, Meditation, Prison, India

Introduction

Mindfulness based Emotional Intelligence (MBEI) is not a matter hidden in the pages of books or, scholarly journals. Thanks to the people like Kiran Bedi and the followers of Vipassana, who have helped spreading such an important issue to the people in need of it and in general media as well. MBEI has two aspects, first one is mindfulness and second one is emotional intelligence. Mindfulness is to pay attention in a certain way i.e., for a purpose, while living in present moment, and without becoming judgmental; mindfulness can be defined as a process to bring a certain quality of attention to momentary experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Mindfulness is a metacognitive skill, meaning cognition about one's cognition (Flavell, 1979). It is that capacity which helps us to understand our own feelings and give them priority. After establishing concentration, the person observes the flow of inner thoughts, emotions and bodily sensations without being judgmental about them. This is the inner experience. As far as the question of external stimuli is concerned, he/she notices them as sound, light and touch that make up their momentary experience of mindfulness meditation. In mindfulness meditation, a person sits daily with ease at a particular time and start noticing the body, feeling the breath and mind as it wanders. Let the mind think whatever comes to it. Be kind towards the wandering mind. Take in the immediate surrounding whatever you hear, whatever you feel. The ultimate aim of mindfulness meditation is to develop a non-judgmental attitude and feelings in the original way as they occur, rather changing the content of thoughts (Teasdale, Segal & Williams, 1995).

Vipassana meditation for mindfulness is an ancient practice of Indian culture which is mentioned in Theravada Buddhism. It is a practice which makes a person aware about life experiences. It says to explore and observe the self. It gives thrust on connection between mind and body. This can be felt by completely disciplined attention to the physical sensations. One should understand the reality of life and its true nature in order to know the experience of being alive. He/she should feel the deepest qualities of life and all to be seen by the person himself. It is to see the things as they really exist (Chandiramani, Jena & Verma 1995)

Emotional Intelligence:

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has four basic components as awareness of self, management of self, awareness about society and management of relationships. Emotional Intelligence means knowing the emotion of our self in order to keep us happy and at the same time knowing/managing the emotions of others or, handling them in such a way which is better for everyone. Emotional intelligence is the capacity to process emotional information in accurate and efficient way, that information should be relevant to the recognition, construction and regulation of emotion in oneself and others (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Emotional Quotient measures EI and is concerned with understanding oneself and others (Bar-On, 1997).



Goleman gave a functional view of EI as it is that quality of a person which drives him/her and provide assistance in controlling impulse and helps in regulating mood. The model of Emotional Intelligence proposed by Goleman contains four Emotional Intelligence constructs viz. *self-awareness*- as the capacity to understand one's emotions and their impact, *self-management*- this is to control one's emotions and impulses, *social awareness* – it is to predict the emotions of others, *relationship management*- this is that to influence and inspire others (Goleman, 2005). EI is considered significant because it says about the emotional states that influence social functioning. EI is known to reduce the aggressive and offensive behaviour.

Mindfulness based Emotional Intelligence (MBEI)

As we know mindfulness helps us to develop self-awareness, which is the first and foremost content of EI. Mindfulness helps us to tolerate and stay with difficult emotions so that they don't hold you hostage of them. Mindfulness practice can make us ready to recognize the distressing emotions. Mindfulness is highly associated with Emotional intelligence (Goleman & Lippincott, 2017). Mindfulness helps individuals by lowering down act of dwelling on negative or stressful situations, which may increase stress ultimately (Morrison & O'Connor, 2005).

Biological connections of MBEI-

The biological connections of EI depict that if someone has to become more emotionally intelligent the communication between prefrontal cortex (i.e. the area of brain responsible for logical thinking) and Amygdala within limbic system (i.e. the area of brain responsible for emotional thinking) must be very effective. Mindfulness promotes emotional regulation by increasing the interval between stimulus and response. Mindfulness upgrades the internal operating system by helping to convert unconscious into conscious. Mindfulness works on our internal brain/mind by increasing EI. So, IQ means formal intellect and EQ is internal and interpersonal skills. Although, some people are born with high EI, it can also be increased by means of practice and training.

Prisoners

Prison means any jail or place used permanently or temporarily under the general or special orders of a State Government for the detention of prisoners, and includes all lands and buildings appurtenant thereto (Section 3(1) in the Prisons Act, 1894).

“Prisoner” is a person who is kept under custody in jail or prison because of violation of law of that area. In detail a prisoner is any prisoner duly committed to custody under the writ, warrant or order of any court or authority exercising criminal jurisdiction, by order of a Court-martial, “Convicted criminal prisoner” means any criminal prisoner under sentence of a court or court-martial, and includes a person detained in prison under the provision of Chapter VIII of the 6 Code of Criminal Procedure, 1882 (10 of 1882) or under the 7 Prisoners Act, 1871 (5 of 1871) Again the Civil prisoner means any prisoner who is not a criminal prisoner. The prisoner or inmate is deprived of liberty against his or her will. Though prisoners also have their basic right viz. food, life, right to have an attorney, protection against unlawful behavior etc.

Even the Occupancy rate of inmates show the condition of Jails in India. There are 1339 Prisons in India. The total capacity of the Prisons is 396223 and the total population of it is 466084. So, that the occupancy rate of prisons is 117.6 %, which is more than capacity of the jails. UN charter says that there must not be any discrimination made, on the basis of race, sex, colour, language, religion of the prisoners. Prisoners are also the human beings and they must be treated with inherent dignity. Supreme Court of India says that the life of prisoners is not like animals, they also are human beings and must be provided with human rights.

MBEI in Prisons

It started with TM (Transcendental meditation) which consisted of reciting a mantra silently to one self. It was suggested to be the treatment of alcohol and drug addiction. In 1994 two Vipassana students from Israel Ayelet Menahami and Eilona Ariel made a documentary movie named "Doing time, Doing Vipassana". This movie depicts that Vipassana (a mindfulness technique) proved to be a very useful technique, which proved to be very beneficial for prisoners (Vipassana Research Institute, India).

The, then, Inspector general of prison Kiran Bedi established Vipassana centre at Tihar jail and two courses a month is conducted over there regularly since then. After that many jails of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka etc. adopted the same. There are several examples that criminals changed their mind by doing Vipassana and many offered their rest of the life for serving as Vipassana trainers in prisons (Kishore, Jena & Hemraj 1995).

Mindfulness is the skill which can be developed with practice. Mindfulness based interventions rely on meditation techniques in order to teach skills for mindfulness. (Bishop, Lau, Shapiro, Carlson, Anderson, Carmody, Segal, Abbey, Speca, Velting & Devins, 2004). Mindfulness-meditation based interventions are helpful to get rid of different mental and physical



disorders (Keng, Smoski and Robins, 2011), and substance abuse disorder (Chiesa and Seretti, 2014). Mindfulness means to stay in present moment and pay attention to sensations, thoughts and feelings. In addition to this the person should not become judgmental for the contents of consciousness. (Bishop et al, 2014). If someone is in prison, he/she own a lot of time to think about themselves. Qualitative interviews conducted on prisoners reveal that most of the prisoners continued to practice yoga even after their release from prison and accepted that yoga/mindfulness practices had the capacity to bring permanent changes to their lives (Silva & Hartney, 2012)

Emotional Quotient Inventory (Bar-On, 1997) is a measure of Emotional Intelligence in which the subject reports himself/herself and the experimenter records the responses on the basis of five-point Likert rating scale. The reliability and validity of EQ is high. It has been adapted in many languages and has revealed good psychometric characteristics as different cultures are concerned. An empirical study done by applying this scale, it is found that criminal behavior has been reduced by improving some of EI components as anger management, social problem solving and facial expression recognition (Megreya, 2015). By means of Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS), the tendency of subject to be mindful towards moment to moment experience is measured. This scale shows the different aspects of well-being and the effectiveness of dealing stressful life events by them (Brown & Ryan, 2003)

The fact that Yoga and Meditation programmes are very much effective in prisoner's settings have been reinforced by several studies in varied cultures viz. U.K., U.S., Taiwan and of-course India. It has also proved helpful in substance abuse offenders (Perelman et al.,2012). Study shows that yoga and meditation can bring psychological well-being and behavioral functioning of prisoners and quality of life as well (Auty, Cope & Liebling, 2015).

Issues and Challenges of Adopting MBEI in Prisons

The role of religion and spirituality in prison life is often controversial but their importance is acknowledged (Goodwin, 2001). In Indian context, inmates of prison may be from different socio demographic background, different criminal background and/or different level of crime. Inmates are in prison for different crimes ranging from small fights up to murdering someone. Correctional facilities vary in accordance with the level of crime. Correctional programs range from anger management, mindfulness thinking, correction for drug abuse etc. Meditation can be difficult and rewarding both in very hard conditions of prison. (Maull, 2005).

It is potentially difficult to implement mindfulness meditation in prison environment which is full of chaos and where participating residential inmates are not kept separate from non-meditators. Prison is a very much inhumane place, which distracts the process of meditation and makes it more difficult.

Solutions and Recommendations

It is found that offenders have lower EI. The enhancement programmes of EI in prison help inmates better understand their emotions (Sharma, Prakash, Sengar, Chaudhury & Singh, 2015).

Fleet Maull was a Jain Buddhist practitioner. He spent 14 years in prison and he is popularly known as founder of Prison Dharma Network. Meditation programs are based on acceptance of good and bad as well, These are based on silence and continuity (Hick and Furlotte, 2009).

The training of mindfulness can be a method to raise conscious mindfulness based interventions and triggers brain activity and change in brain structure to get associated with continuous meditation practice. The interpretations of these phenomena indicate that meditation increases the capability of conscious regulation of emotional states and perception of pain by means of reduction of negative emotional state (Chiesa, Serretti and Jakobson, 2013).

MBEI has its root in MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) and it was first of all proposed for the patients of chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Since 1970 meditation programs have been the subject of research. It has been adopted in order to reduce the aggressive behavior of inmates/prisoners. Adoption of mindfulness meditation in prison setting for lowering down the substance abuse was the first use of it. That after just because of the efforts of some Jain practitioners, Israely people, Kiran Bedi etc, MBEI spread in the jails of India from Tihar to Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. After learning mindfulness meditation and its implications, several prisoners offered their whole life in giving trainings to inmates. Even after their duration of imprisonment they regularly came to the jails and offered training to prisoners for the benefit of them. Study conducted on 198 inmates of Mumbai, Pune & Delhi, in which all these prisoners attended the spiritual programs of Brahmakumaris and Art of living. Most of the matriculate younger inmates showed sense of peace, well-being and happiness. It shows that spiritual interventions changed the lives of prisoners in positive direction.



Discussion

As far as the question of MBEI for Indian prisoners is concerned, Indian has faith in meditation, philosophy, deities and all these since ancient times. If such practices are brought through any means in prisons, they are accepted by heart. And it is obvious that any work being done with complete faith may result in success. Meditation is not a new idea in Indian culture. Vipassana is mere a different shade of meditation meant for mindfulness in order to increase Emotional Intelligence for the better handling of emotions of self and others as well (Kishore, Verma, Agarwal & Yadav, 1995) .

What other ways, possible for raising Emotional Intelligence, especially in prison settings in India? In prison setting inmates are in huge number, they have different backgrounds, different capacities, education and all. Segregating them in order to provide them right treatment for a particular problem is such a Herculean task. Whenever Vipassana practitioners are interviewed with their problems they face while they impart training to prisoners, they say that to train the inmates of the prison is just like training different organisms for a single race in single stance.

There is a need of reformation; punishment can never be the solution of any crime. There are several other options as we are human beings and Homo-Sapiens. Avoidance of those circumstances which provoke the criminal act and moulding those emotions or impulses which are responsible for the aggressive behavior of the criminal, is the factor which should be taken into consideration in order to reduce crime. MBEI gives the opportunity to an inmate to move forward in his or her life, according to their demand of emotions.

Future Research Directions

There are several possibilities for future research as very less amount of work has been carried out in Indian setting for the benefit of prisoners. If someone is in prison, it is thought that he/she is a man/woman must not be contacted again. We have segregated the society in good and bad. We think that good people should be the part of our society and bad one must be sent behind the bars. No-one is even ready to think about the reform process which may take place inside the prison. So, this Indian type of mental setting doesn't allow people, so called social people, even to enter the premises of jail. Oh! What a taboo.

There is a lot of possibilities of different type of researches to be carried out in prison setting in India and abroad. People living there are also human beings as UN chartered says that they must not be discriminated on the basis of colour of skin, basic rights of being human etc.

Conclusion

MBEI has proved a lot of benefits not even in Indian prisons but also in abroad. Though the concept of mindfulness in realm of Vipassana is a matter of Indian sub-continent, this way of treatment of inmates has been adopted and spread in foreign countries. In modern India, after media revolution the taboo of imprisonment has reduced and acceptance of them has increased in our society. So, that the possibilities of reform has increased nowadays.

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