

NEWSLETTER

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**COMMITTEE
FOR THE
WELFARE OF
PRISONERS**



LEGAL AID OFFICE

This includes the suspension of contact with friends, families, legal representatives, and reduced transportation to courts for trials. Since that time, CWP-LAO has been working closely with the authorities to determine the best way possible to continue furthering its mission to decongest prisons and serve the most vulnerable prisoners in Sindh—a mission made all the more important at a time where prisoners stand to suffer the most. However, due to legitimate security measures, CWP-LAO's ability to take on new cases, file bail applications, and dispose of existing cases has been affected.

UPHOLDING PRISONER RIGHTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by Jawziya F. Zaman

The global challenges faced by governments during the COVID-19 pandemic are exacerbated and intensified in the prison context, where prisoners are particularly susceptible to

contracting the infection due to the risk of lower immunity systems, poor hygiene, and pre-existing health conditions. Adult male prisoners are particularly at risk because of overcrowded and cramped living quarters. Containment measures inside prisons have caused unrest, frustration, and anger amongst incarcerated populations globally.

The Sindh Prisons Department, in an attempt to stem the tide of infection among inmates, took a number of important steps in March 2020 which continue to be in effect.

In June 2020, CWP-LAO drafted Standard Operating Procedures which were endorsed by the Inspector General, Prisons, to guide all advocates and prison staff in ensuring smooth case processing during this challenging period. The SOPs strike a balance between the legitimate use of security measures and respect for the fundamental human rights of prisoners, which include the right to representation and legal aid. The SOPs contain essential guidelines for necessary protective equipment, and for how CWP-LAO advocates should collect vakalatnamas for new cases, keep prisoners informed about their cases without physical interactions, and work with prison staff to maintain the flow of legal aid and representation. The cooperation of the prison authorities and prison staff has been invaluable in this process, and CWP-LAO is continuing its work to decongest prisons as much as possible in these trying times.





prisons and in this regard we are aiming to supply rapid testing kits to prison authorities by end of June 2020. We feel it is important to utilize these kits

in accordance with a technically sound testing strategy that we are also developing. To ensure sustainability of this initiative along with the necessary strategic planning.

As a follow up to this, CWP-LAO advertised for a Certified Pharmaceutical to provide PPE items along the rapid testing strategies services. After completing the procurement process, Nawan Laborites was selected to provide these services. This donation exercise will be implemented in all for 24 Prisons in Sindh in July 2020.

PROGRESS ON PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE) PROCUREMENT

by Asif Ali, Admin Manager

CWP-LAO in collaboration with its sister organization Legal Aid Society (LAS) is undertaking immediate measures for provision of essential personal safety equipment in prisons such as

masks, hand sanitizers, gloves, soaps ; to ensure the most vulnerable segments of society are specifically protected along with prison officials. We wish to continue provision of PPE to

LITIGATION SUCCESS

Despite the suspension of regular work across Courts since 22nd March, 2020, our team of dedicated lawyers achieved the following:

242 prisoners represented and provided with legal assistance in courts

49 Criminal cases were disposed of



28 Acquittals on merit

200 Prisoners released on bail



quarantined for two weeks. The positive staff members have undergone PCR testing after 15 days of isolation, and by the grace of almighty all staff members have recovered. Hopefully, with the help and cooperation of the team, the CWP-LAO shall cope with the difficult times and continue providing free legal aid to the vulnerable and needy.

MINI CAMP ACTIVITY FOR RAPID TESTING OF CWP-LAO'S STAFF

by Yashaullah Soomro, HR Manager

Since the third week of March, the CWP-LAO shut its offices across the province. The offices then reopened with adequate safety measures in place mandating masks and social distancing. The staff has been divided into clusters to minimize the traffic in the office.

Secondly, the procurement department burnt the midnight oil to procure COVID-19 precautionary materials i.e. Masks, Hand Sanitizers, disinfectant sprays etc, that were scarce during those days. The offices were; on a daily basis, sprayed with the

disinfectants, visitors were disallowed to enter the offices only after their temperatures were checked, masks were made mandatory in the office and dispensers of sanitizer were affixed at the multiple places in the offices.

On the 15th & 16th of June 2020, the management of CWP-LAO arranged free of cost COVID-19 screening test camps. The tests were conducted by the NAVAN laboratories. 69 rapid tests were conducted. 6 of the staff members tested positive and were then instructed to remain



SUCCESS STORIES

Hania, entered prison at the age of 23. She spent 5 years incarcerated in the women's prison in Karachi on a false charge of murder for which she was handed down with a 25-year life sentence. She said she had little hope in herself or any sort of future. She belonged to a poor family and her aunt falsely implicated her and her mother for the murder of her son. She had hired a private advocate but her case was not followed through properly. She reached out to the CWP-LAO for legal assistance before she filed her appeal before the Sindh High Court against her life sentence. Mr. Habib Jiskani, Senior Advocate of CWP-LAO represented her and successfully won the appeal. Hania and her mother are now back home with a chance to start over.

Arif, aged 23, spent two months in Landhi Prison under a false charge of possessing an unlicensed weapon. He belongs to a very poor family which survived on the basis of his meager daily labour wages. When he was arrested his family did not have the resources to hire a private advocate. When the case came to the knowledge of CWP-LAO's team they knew they had to intervene and offer legal representation. Advocates from the CWP-LAO filed a bail application for Arif which was granted with a hefty sum for surety which he could not pull together. CWP-LAO proceeded to provide financial assistance and submitted the surety amount with the court in order to secure Arif's release. Arif has been united with his family and continues to attend hearings to vindicate his name.



able to escape but left Shela behind who was arrested by the police and charged with the offence. She couldn't afford legal assistance, and was languishing in a critical medical condition in the prison in Karachi when she engaged CWP-LAO's lawyer, Ms. Noor ul Sabah Hussain. Shela's bail application was swiftly argued and allowed in the month of April, 2019. After this Shela continued to regularly appear before the court for her hearings as she wanted her name to be vindicated. Ms. Sabah pursued her case with full diligence resulting in her acquittal.



Shela, is a thirty five year old female prisoner who was falsely implicated in a murder case. She says she didn't commit the crime and when she entered the prison for the first time she was medically unfit and suffered from the last stages of hepatitis C. Shela comes from a very poor family background. She worked as a teacher and earned a meagre 3000/- rupees a month. Her husband and his friend killed one of their friends due to a dispute over some money. The real culprits (her husband and his friend) were

MENTAL HEALTH

HOW TO STAY CALM AND PROTECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH IN THE COVID CRISIS

by Dr. Mahrukh Iftikhar, Clinical Psychologist



COVID-19 started from the Wuhan city of China in December 2019 and so far it has spread over the entire world affecting around ten million people socially, economically, and perhaps most importantly; psychologically. The number of infected people may be on the decline now however the threat continues to daunt until a vaccine emerges. Never in the past have mental health issues surfaced as vigorously as with this pandemic. The current challenges brought about by COVID-19 for people all around the globe are unparalleled and of course fear, anxiety, and uncertainty spike for many of us.

We are all going through this together and we need to understand that we are not alone in what we are feeling right now and there are practical and healthy ways to cope with the surge of emotions engulfing us. The first and foremost thing is to accept that there are events that are not in our control. Instead of feeling helpless at this moment, we need to take **practical steps** to lessen the anxiety, reduce the risk, and ease the burden. We cannot do anything about it but that does not mean that we cannot prevent it with this disease.

Let's see how we can do it at a personal level:

Physical hygiene

- Wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Wear a mask while going outside.
- Cough or sneeze on your bent elbow- not your hands!
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

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Many of us are worried about our health, our loved ones, and our livelihood. This uncertainty has taken people far beyond general sadness to a most serious depressive state of the mind.

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Social factors

- Maintain social distancing.
- Limit social gatherings and time spent in crowded places.
- Limit media exposure.
- Do not post or share COVID-19 news on social media
- Despite social distancing connect family and friends via zoom meetings, skype, video and audio chats

Warning Signs And Symptoms Of Depression

- Feeling sad (frequent crying spells for no obvious reasons)
- Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and worthlessness
- Loss of interest in daily activities
- Significant weight loss or weight gain
- Disturbances in sleep pattern
- Anger outbursts or Irritability
- Fatigue and loss of energy
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide
- Loss of concentration and attention
- Physical aches and pains

How to Win the Battle against Depression?

You can follow some of the strategies listed below to save yourself from clinical depression:

1. Replace negative thoughts with the positive ones.
2. Talk to a person whom you trust.
3. Find yourself a hobby: something that can keep you busy and is a source of distraction from the negative thoughts. (like listening to Music, reading, cooking, baking, gardening, painting, etc)
4. Make a daily schedule for yourself and include relaxation exercise or a walk as a mandatory action to ward off depressive mood.
5. Learn deep breathing exercises, progressive muscle relaxation, and the likes to enable you to relief your stress and anxiety.
6. Maintain a balanced diet.
7. Try to get at least 8 hours of sleep or get adequate sleep that can refresh your mind and body.

What to do in case of clinical depression?

If family and friends' support and positive lifestyle changes are not enough, then it's time to seek professional help from a mental health expert. Effective treatment of depression often includes consulting a psychologist for therapy or if things are getting worsen towards violence or suicidal ideations than a psychotropic medication from a psychiatrist will be beneficial.

While dealing with depression might be challenging initially, but the road ahead is far less daunting when you take charge at the right time. It is essential that we as family caregivers and society in general understand the fears and pain of people suffering from any psychological problem. Not only during this pandemic time but otherwise as well we need to be more empathetic and compassionate towards these people. Remember, having a psychological disorder is not a crime neither a punishment; it is an illness just like any other physical ailment and can be treated with therapy, medicines and most importantly your care.



AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. KAZI NAZEER AHMED INSPECTOR GENERAL OF SINDH PRISONS

by Sana Sharif, Program Manager

Q: Please give us an insight into the journey of your service?

A: After passing the commission exam in March 1997, I started my services as the deputy superintendent in Sindh prison. I would like to share some pinnacles of my service. One of the greatest successes of my service in the Prisons Department is that I started systematically running the District Prison Shikarpur from the very beginning. At that time, the appointed officers from outside had minimum knowledge and no training and they also wanted to run the correctional facilities by force. At that time, the Prisons were suffering from many problems due to a lack of discipline. Shikarpur prison was newly established at that time. I knew what strategy I had to adopt to make this Prison a role model prison. This prison was known as the most organized prison in Sindh at that time. I believe that Prison rehabilitation programs can only be implemented as long as there is a balance between discipline and the attitudes of inmates and police staff. I was building the trust of my superiors. From 1997 to 2010, the conditions of discipline in Central Jail Sukkur were dismal. For several days, prisoners were unwilling to go to the barracks. It was a crucial period for the Department and a real challenge to impose the law inside C.P Sukkur. We conducted an operation during my tenure in this prison and my strategy was to ensure that no casualties occurred in this operation and that this operation would be carried out when the prisons are completely closed.

Q: Please describe the current policies and measures adopted by the Prison Department to curb the spread of COVID 19 in prisons?

A: I think we have to reduce the prison population if we want to make the prisons safer. The ratio of under trial prisoners in Sindh Prisons is 71%. In these circumstances, our judges have to be lenient and should maximize the granting of bail. The role of the police also needs to be clarified so that the perpetrators of petty crimes are not caught and imprisoned. In this regard, the executive director of the US-based Justice Foundation said, "*Sending someone to prison for petty crimes at this time is tantamount to the death penalty.*" Therefore, even after the implementation of all standard operating procedures, there is always a risk of virus transmission among prisoners. In the context of primary precautions, we assess and screen all new inmates. If it is deemed necessary for testing, prisoners are sent for PCR testing and then these new prisoners are quarantined in separate barracks for 14 days. In Sindh, prisons have a high recovery rate for people infected with the virus. The prison department is ensuring the supply of supplements and fruits to all the inmates so that their immunity can be boosted against this virus as well. But all will fail unless we can reduce the population in our prisons.

Q: Please describe the value of the Committee for the Welfare of Prisons in light of development and legal aid work in recent times?

A: In 2002, I was posted as Deputy Superintendent in Central Prison Karachi. At that time Prison reforms and welfare work was less visible. Many NGOs have tried to work for the betterment of prisons, but no one else has been able to provide it in a systematic and sustained way in which the CWP-LAO, as a public-private partnership has managed. The committee's unique awareness programs have increased inmates' knowledge of prison laws and their basic rights. In the presence of CWP-LAO (committee) the Prisons have to open towards the society and be more accountable and transparent. CWP-LAO has continued with assisting us in the drafting of reform, rehabilitation and welfare-related chapters of the Prison Rules. We believe that the prisons department has started its original welfare objective under the chairmanship of Justice Nasir Aslam Zahid and we appreciate the work being done.

Q: What is your vision for the future work of the CWP in Prisons?

A: I think the committee needs to expand its scope of work. Many prisoners are also involved in serious crimes and need free legal representation. Also, prioritize cases that are at the appeal stage. After the establishment of the Model Court, the rate of UTP prisoners decreased and the rate of convicted prisoners increased. With this global epidemic of Corona, where we now have to change our lifestyle, we have to check the SOPs set up in our prisons. As the population of prisoners decreases, we will be able to run their welfare activities with a new strategy. In the past, the Criminal Justice Coordination Committee was set up under the chairmanship of District Sessions Judges, in which all the stakeholders of Criminal Justice were called and the problems in the jails and judicial system were brought to the fore. These committees are no longer functional. I suggest that through the committee, a request be made to the Chief Justice of Pakistan to reactivate these committees and come up with suggestions so that the number of inmates in Sindh jails can be reduced in some way.