

A Psychosocial Profile of Habitual Offenders: An Empirical Study on North Karnataka

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Abstract

This empirical study examines the psychosocial profile of habitual offenders in North Karnataka, with a focus on a sample size of 284 habitual inmates from North Karnataka central prisons. The research seeks to uncover the psychosocial factors contributing to repeated criminal behaviour. examined the socioeconomic status, peers, and education on criminal behaviour and psychological problems of habitual offenders. The study found that psychological factors encompass processes that take place at the individual level and the meanings that one attributes to a particular situation, and also focused on the psychological problems of habitual offenders which in turn affects one's mental state and their treatment at the North Karnataka Central Prisons. The study also highlighted that many offenders were from rural areas, had low socio-economic status, had lower levels of education, and were experiencing family and marital discord. The study concludes that low education and income levels are significant predictors of habitual criminal behaviour. And most of them are facing psychological problems inside the prison and outside prison. It highlights the need for targeted interventions such as medical treatment, new therapy, counselling, vocational training, improved educational access, and robust social welfare programs. Addressing these socio-economic and psychological deficiencies can help reduce recidivism and support the rehabilitation of habitual offenders, promoting a more stable and equitable society in North Karnataka.

Key Words: *Habitual Offenders, Psychosocial, Repetition of crime*

Introduction:

Ever since the development of man as a social animal and further development of the formation of society criminal Behaviour of man is associated with social inception, more due to rift and disenchantment in fulfilling his basic urges. Bharat as an ancient civilization also embracing modernity has now become the first and most populated country in the world and has its own diversified complexities in its largest populated society. Unfortunately, crime is a social phenomenon that exists due to the negative and positive thought processes of people in society. The criminal activities have a major role in breaking social norms, ethics, rules, and regulations. It is not easy to prevent or control this kind of activity. Criminality has always been a bane of every society's structure and culture, especially when avoiding and prohibiting crime.

Socio-Economic Factors

The socioeconomic factors are mainly dependent on various elements such as population density, public opinion, religion, family circumstances, education system, employment opportunities, alcoholism, economic and political conditions, public administration, justice and police, and other legislative, civil and penal institutions. It is believed that criminal behaviour, whether it is committed by a mentally deviated or a mentally normal individual, is influenced by social conditioning. The repetition of crime is greatly attributed to social factors. These factors play a crucial role in the modification, formation, and reshaping of an individual's personality traits.(J.P.S. Sirohi, 1992)

Psychological Factors

In the eyes of Sutherland, the chronic criminal is more likely to possess such things as mental defectiveness, emotional instability problems, and abnormal mental states. Organized offenders who have a high frequency of recidivism explain that these Behaviours are a product of conflicted psychopathy, which characterizes antisocial Behaviour and a failure to form loyalty. Reward and punishments are not normally effective with a psychopath since they have a wrongful perspective with reference to the consequences of their actions. (Schmideberg, 1947). But, when diagnosed, these people can be changed. Basic psychological tendencies related to criminality may become a person's habits. Psychological signs and symptoms that are associated with habitual offenders are antisocial personality disorder, inadequate impulse control, lack of empathy and manipulative Behaviour. They

might also present themselves as being continuously angry, aggressive and prone to risk. Further, these people could have other problems such as alcoholism or extreme mental illness that cause their continued criminal Behaviour.

Habitual Offenders:

A habitual offender is someone who repeatedly breaks the law despite past convictions and punishments. This global issue stems from a mix of socioeconomic, environmental, and systemic factors, with high rates of repeat Offences pointing to the challenges of rehabilitating and reintegrating former criminals. Poverty, lack of education, and unemployment often drive individuals back into crime, as they struggle to find other means of survival.

As per the Karnataka Habitual Offenders Act 1961 “habitual offender” means “a person who, during any continuous period of five years, whether before or after the commencement of this Act or partly before and partly after such commencement, has been sentenced on conviction on not less than three occasions, since he attained the age of eighteen years, to a substantive term of imprisonment, for any one or more of the scheduled offences, committed on different occasions and not so connected as to form part of the same transaction, such sentence not having been reversed in appeal or on revision”.

Review of literature:

A literature review provides a comprehensive overview of existing research on a specific topic. Its purpose is to acquaint the reader with established knowledge and ideas related to the topic, while also highlighting any theoretical or methodological contributions that have been made. The review typically includes scholarly articles, books, and other relevant sources from national and international studies. The focus of this study is to examine the research conducted on the socio-economic status of habitual offenders in North Karnataka and its potential influence on their tendency to commit repeated crimes

Hermann Fallada study conducted on A Brief Note on Criminal BehaviourThe study of criminal behaviours known as criminological psychology, riminalological psychology studies the motives and actions behind unlawful behavior, closely linked to criminal anthropology. It examines why individuals commit crimes and how they respond afterward. Psychologists and psychiatrists often contribute to legal cases by explaining offenders'

mindsets. Since legal norms vary across societies and time periods, defining criminal behavior can be complex.(Hermann Fallada, 2021)

Jennifer Bronson in his special report “Indicators of Mental Health Problems Reported by Prisoners and Jail Inmates, 2011-12” This report provides two estimates of mental health problems among state and federal prisoners as well as local jail inmates. The two estimates are based on whether the individual met the threshold for SPD or was told by a mental health professional that they have a mental disorder. The Kessler 6 (K6) scale was used to assess SPD among the prisoners and inmates, with the past 30 days serving as the timeframe for the survey. It is important to note that the estimates are based on self-reported data and should not be taken as a clinical diagnosis of a mental disorder. (Please see the Measurement of Mental Health Indicators text box for more information.) For this report, current mental health problems are defined as SPD within the past 30 days, while a history of mental health problems is defined as having ever been told by a mental health professional that they have a mental disorder.(Bronson, 2017, pp. 2011–2012).

Ellen Kjelsberg in his article on Mental health consultations in a prison population: a descriptive study has shown that the prevalence of mental health disorders is significantly higher among incarcerated individuals than the general population. Despite this, there is limited information about the types of non-medication treatments that are available to prisoners. The determination of this study is to offer a detailed overview of all non-pharmacological interventions offered by psychiatric healthcare providers to a select group of inmates in prison.(Kjelsberg et al., 2006)

Dr. Aditi Didwal conducted a study on habitual criminal behavior in India, analyzing the factors responsible for it. The study focused on understanding why some individuals repeatedly engage in criminal behavior and become habitual offenders. It recognized that criminal behavior is influenced by the offender's personality, social environment, and past experiences. The study highlighted the complex relationship between an individual and their environment, suggesting that preventing crime may require intervention on both sides. While imprisonment aims to protect society and rehabilitate offenders, the study emphasized that relying solely on punishment is not enough to prevent crime. Overall, the study explores the factors contributing to habitual criminal behavior and how it becomes a way of life for offenders..(Didwal, 2005)

Significance of the study:

This study holds profound socio-psychological significance as it explores how both external socio-economic conditions and internal psychological vulnerabilities contribute to habitual offending in North Karnataka. Offenders often come from marginalized backgrounds marked by poverty, lack of education, unemployment, trauma, and emotional neglect. These circumstances foster low self-esteem, poor impulse control, and a lack of moral development, creating a cycle of criminal behavior reinforced by both social disadvantage and psychological distress. By highlighting the interplay between social conditions and mental health, the study calls for holistic rehabilitation strategies that address both dimensions. It supports the integration of mental health services such as counselling, addiction treatment, and cognitive-behavioral therapy within correctional facilities. Simultaneously, it advocates for policy reforms that tackle root socio-economic causes. This dual approach is essential for reducing recidivism, enabling effective reintegration, and promoting social justice. The findings offer valuable insights for academia, policymakers, and NGOs striving for systemic and sustainable criminal reform.

Objectives:

1. To examine the social factors that contribute to the persistence of criminal behaviour.
2. To analyze the psychological problems of habitual offenders in North Karnataka.

Methodology:

Research Design:

The present study adopts a descriptive research design, which seeks to provide a detailed and systematic understanding of the psychosocial profile of habitual offenders. This approach is suitable for obtaining insights into the psychological problems and social status within the target population.

Data Collection Tool:

Data was collected using an interview schedule, a structured instrument commonly used in qualitative research. The schedule was carefully developed to include relevant topics, specific questions, and follow-up prompts. This ensured that the data gathered comprehensively addressed all aspects intended for investigation.

Sampling Technique:

The study employed a non-probability sampling method, specifically using purposive sampling. This approach was chosen to intentionally select individuals who fit the criteria of habitual offenders, thereby ensuring relevance and depth in the data collected.

Sample Size and Population:

The total population for this study consists of 476 habitual offenders housed across five central prisons in North Karnataka. From this population, a sample size constituting 60% of inmates from each prison was selected, resulting in a total sample of 284 respondents.

Study Area:

The geographical focus of the study is the Northern Range of Karnataka, which includes five major central prisons located in: Belagavi, Vijayapura, Dharwad, Ballari, and Kalaburagi.

Result and Discussion**1. Educational Qualification of Habitual Offenders.**

The schooling level of habitual offenders has a significant impact on their behaviour and likelihood of rehabilitation. Access to education can contribute to positive transformation, while lower levels of schooling and dropout are often linked to higher rates of repeat Offenders. The following table explains the educational qualifications of habitual offenders.

Table 1. Educational Qualification of Habitual Offenders.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
A. Yes	200	(70.42%)
A.1 Primary School	53	(18.32%)
A.2 High School	80	(28.16%)
A.3 PUC	41	(14.43%)
A.4 Bachelors' degree	20	(07.04%)
A.5 Master's degree	06	(02.11%)
B. No	84	(29.58%)
Total	284	(100.0%)

Source: Field Survey

The data clearly shows a strong link between education and habitual offending. A significant 70.42% of habitual offenders have some level of education, with the highest concentrations at the high school (28.16%) and primary school (18.32%) levels. Only a small portion have completed higher education—just 7.04% hold a bachelor's degree and 2.11% a master's. Notably, 29.58% of offenders are uneducated, highlighting that lack of education correlates with repeated criminal behavior. Those with little to no education often face limited job

opportunities and economic hardship, pushing them toward crime as a means of survival. In contrast, individuals with higher education are more likely to secure stable employment, lowering the risk of re-offending. This underscores the importance of promoting education as a preventive strategy against crime. Addressing school dropout rates and improving access to education can help reduce recidivism and support long-term social reintegration.

1.1 Reasons for illiteracy;

Literacy is the first key to open the doors of education, education is a key factor in the personal development of individuals. Out of 84 responses from habitual offenders regarding their education qualifications and reasons for not getting education, 10 respondents mentioned getting married early, 25 respondents faced financial constraints, 12 respondents cited lack of interest in attending school, 20 respondents mentioned their parents' lack of interest in their education, and 17 respondents mentioned having responsibilities to assist their parents and work. These are the major reasons for illiteracy among habitual offenders.

2. Employment Status of Habitual Offenders Before Conviction:

Employment is essential for every individual to support their family and is a major factor in maintaining a good quality of life. Lack of employment can lead to a repetition of crime in society. The following table illustrates the employment status of habitual offenders.

Table 2. Employment Status of Habitual Offenders Before Conviction

Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage
A. Employed	237	(83.45%)
A.1. Self Employed	82	(28.8%)
A.2.Casual wage Labourers	137	(48.2%)
A.3 Regular salaried employment	18	(06.45%)
B. Unemployed	47	(16.55%)
Total	284	(100%)

Source: Field Survey

The above table and chart show that a significant majority of habitual offenders are employed (83.45%), and among the employed, casual wage labourers make up the largest percentage (48.2%), followed by self-employed individuals (28.8%). This suggests that the quality and stability of employment may be influential factors. Casual Labouré and self-employment often involve economic instability, which could contribute to the reputation of crime. The type of employment seems to be a key factor. Casual wage labourers and self-employed individuals often experience irregular incomes and job uncertainty, which may lead to financial stress and, consequently, a higher likelihood of returning to crime. Only a few habitual offenders are in regular salaried employment (06.45%). Unemployed offenders constitute (16.55%) of habitual offenders. This percentage is significant but smaller compared to the employed group, indicating that while unemployment is a factor, a significant number of habitual offenders are employed.

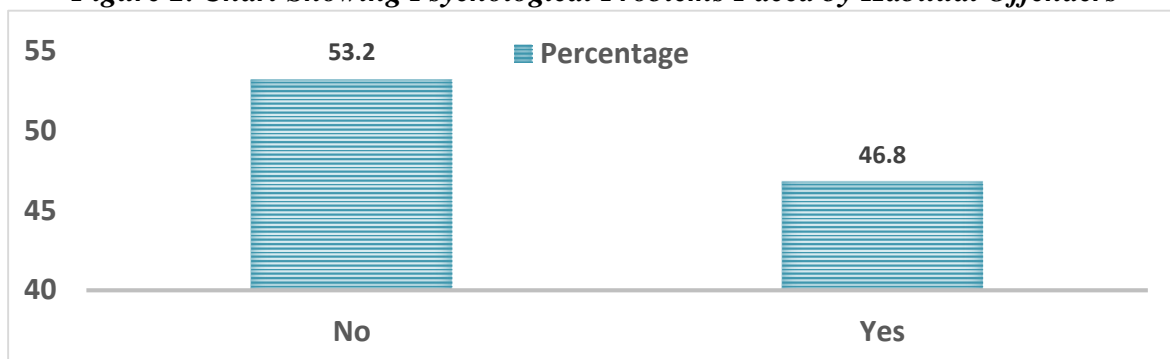
3. Psychological Problems Faced by Habitual Offenders:

Every man is a psychic being, how he encounters situations leads to either positive or negative developments. However, grappling with psychological problems can significantly influence their behavior, leading to a repetition of the crime. Common issues include anxiety, substance abuse, depression, personality disorders etc. These mental health challenges can stem from a variety of factors such as trauma, socio-economic conditions, and chronic stress. the following table shows the psychological problems faced by habitual offenders.

Table 3. Psychological Problems Faced by Habitual Offenders

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
No	151	(53.2%)
Yes	133	(46.8%)
Total	284	(100%)

Source: Field Survey

Figure 2. Chart Showing Psychological Problems Faced by Habitual Offenders

The above data illustrates the psychological problems faced by habitual offenders at the prison. Through this result, a significant number of habitual offenders in prison struggle with psychological issues. Out of 284 surveyed respondents, 133 habitual offenders (46.8%) have faced psychological problems, while 151 habitual offenders (53.2%) never faced any kind of psychological problems. This evenly split highlights that almost half of the habitual offender population is dealing with mental health challenges. The high percentage of offenders with mental health issues underscores the essential for a healthy environment and effective mental health interventions and support within the prison system to address and manage these concerns.

2. Table No 2. Types of Psychological Problems Faced by Habitual Offenders Before Imprisonment.

Psychological Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Fluctuation in Mood	30	(22.56%)
Homeless mentally ill	11	(08.27%)
Personality disturbance	10	(07.52%)
Pre-existing vulnerabilities	15	(11.28%)
Psychosis	04	(03.00%)
Substance abuse	63	(47.37%)
Total	133	(100.00%)

Source: Field Survey

The table above illustrates the types of psychological problems faced by habitual offenders before entering prison. According to the data, out of 284 habitual offenders 133 faced psychological problems, in that (47.37%) of respondents faced substance abuse problems, (22.56%) faced mood fluctuations, and (11.28%) had pre-existing vulnerabilities. Moreover, (08.27%) of the respondents faced problems related to being homeless and mentally ill, (07.52%) faced personality disturbances, and (03.0%) dealt with psychosis. This data highlights that the majority of habitual offenders face substance abuse-related problems, which can motivate them to commit crimes. Overall, the data suggests that these psychological problems may contribute to the repetition of criminal behaviour.

3. Types of Psychological Problems Faced by Habitual Offenders at Prison.

In prison, there are many restrictions and the treatment by the prison administration, environment, family remembrance, and lack of freedom can lead to behavioral changes and related psychological problems.

Table 3. Types of Psychological Problems Faced by Habitual Offenders at Prison.

Psychological Problems	Responses	Percentage
Depression	133	(100.00%)
Fear & Anxiety	132	(99.24%)
Fluctuations in Mood	118	(88.72%)
Sleep Disturbance	53	(39.84%)
Substance withdrawal-related complications	40	(30.07%)
Self-harm attempts and suicide	27	(20.30%)
Addiction	07	(05.26%)
Somatic Symptoms	07	(05.26%)
Drug default may cause a relapse or exacerbation of symptoms	06	(04.51%)
Psychotic Symptoms	06	(04.51%)
Adjustment and stress-related disorders	05	(03.75%)

Source: Field Survey

The above table illustrates the psychological problems faced by habitual offenders at the prison. According to the responses, out of 284 habitual offenders, 133 faced psychological problems. Out of 133 habitual offenders (100.00%) faced depression, while fear and anxiety (99.24%), which are the most common problems, affected the habitual offenders near to maximum. Mood fluctuations impact (88.72%) of individuals, showing high emotional instability. Sleep disturbances (39.84%) and substance withdrawal-related complications (30.07%) are also prevalent. Self-harm and suicide attempts (20.30%) indicate serious safety concerns. Less common issues include addiction and somatic symptoms (05.26% each), psychotic symptoms and relapse due to drug default (04.51% each), and adjustment disorders (03.75%). These findings stress the urgent need for comprehensive mental health support in prisons. Prisons need to enhance their mental health screening and assessment procedures to identify issues early and offer timely interventions. It is crucial to increase mental health services by hiring more professionals and providing training for staff. Specialized treatment programs for depression, anxiety, and substance withdrawal are necessary. Improving support systems through peer programs and connections with external services ensures continued care. Providing psychoeducation and coping skills training helps inmates better manage their mental health. Effective reintegration programs can reduce relapse and recidivism, supporting overall rehabilitation and well-being.

4. Types of Psychological Problems Faced by Habitual Offenders after Release from Prison.

After being released from prison, it is crucial for habitual offenders to receive acceptance from society and be given a chance to reintegrate. If society is unable to accept them, they may face psychological issues. The following table shows the types of psychological problems faced by habitual offenders after release from prison.

Table 4. Types of Psychological Problems Faced by Habitual Offenders after Release from Prison.

Psychological Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Adjustment and Stress-Related Issues	21	(15.79%)
Anxiety and Mood Disturbance	55	(41.35%)
Mental Health Problems Lead to Relapse	01	(0.75%)
Self-Harm Attempts	27	(20.30%)
Somatic Symptoms	14	(10.53%)
Substance withdrawal-Related Complications	15	(11.28%)
Total	133	(100.00%)

Source: Field Survey

The table above illustrates the types of psychological problems faced by habitual offenders after release from prison. According to the data, (41.35%) of respondents faced Anxiety and mood disturbance problems, (20.30%) Self-harm attempts, and (15.79%) had Adjustment and stress-related Issues. Furthermore, (10.53%) of the respondents faced problems related to Somatic Symptoms, (11.28%) faced Substance withdrawal-related complications and (0.75%) faced Mental health problems that led to relapse. This data highlights that the majority of habitual offenders face anxiety and mood disturbance, which can motivate them to commit crimes. Overall, the data suggests that these psychological problems may contribute to the repetition of criminal behavior.

5.Type of Treatment Taken for the Psychological Problems of Habitual Offenders

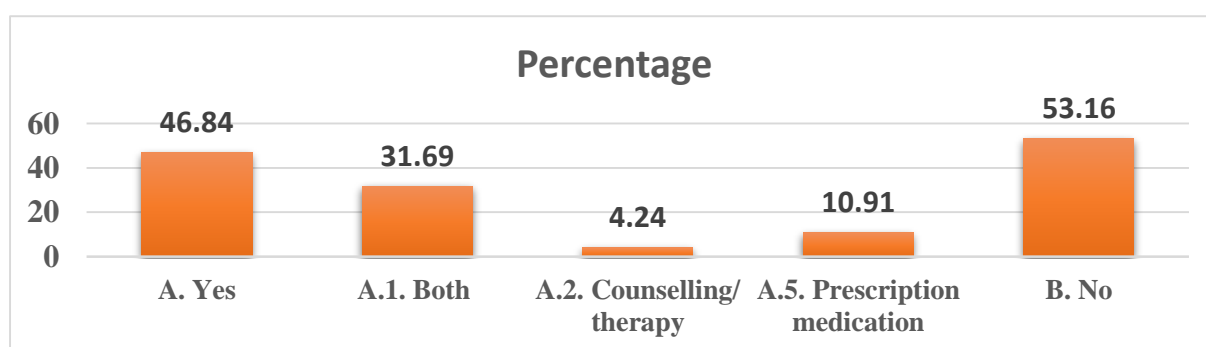
If any person has a psychological issue, they can create an unhealthy environment in the prison. They need immediate isolation and treatment for the specific problem. The following table shows the treatments provided in prison for psychological problems.

Table 5. Type of Treatment Taken for the Psychological Problems of Habitual Offenders

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
A. Yes	133	(46.84%)
A.1. Both	90	(31.69%)
A.2. Counselling/ therapy	12	(04.24%)
A.5. Prescription medication	31	(10.91%)
B. No	151	(53.16%)
Total	284	(100%)

Source: Field Survey

Figure 5 Chart Showing the Type of Treatment Taken for the Psychological Problems of Habitual Offenders



The above table shows that (46.86%) of habitual offenders have received treatment for psychological complications, which means that they are mentally disturbed persons and need precious treatment to overcome the issue; that (31.69%) of habitual offenders have taken treatment for both counselling/therapy and prescription of medication it shows the combined approach; small group (04.24%) taken only counselling/ therapy, whereas

(10.91%) were treated with only prescription medication; (53.16%) of the habitual offenders never taken any treatment of the psychological problems.

Major Findings

1. (70.42%) of the habitual offenders are educated. Among the educated habitual offenders, (18.32%) have completed primary education, (28.16%) have completed high school, and (14.43%) have completed PUC, with most of them not pursuing higher education. Whereas, (29.58%) of them have not taken an education.
2. The majority of habitual offenders are employed (83.45%), predominantly in casual wage labour (48.2%) and self-employment (28.8%). Only (06.45%) of habitual offenders have regular salaried jobs, while (16.55%) are unemployed. This suggests that the quality and stability of employment are influential factors. The majority of the employees are involved in the repetition of crime.
3. The majority (65.82%) of habitual offenders have a monthly income below 10,000, to 50,000 rupees and with (27.42%) earning below 10,000 rupees, indicating that low income may be a significant factor contributing to repetition of the crime. Only a small fraction earn higher salaries, with (3.40%) earning between 50,000 and 1 lakh rupees, and (3.36%) earning above 1 lakhs rupees.
4. Nearly half of habitual offenders (46.8%) face psychological problems, highlighting significant mental health challenges within this population.
5. Substance abuse is the most prevalent psychological issue among habitual offenders before entering prison, affecting (47.37%), followed by mood swings (22.56%) and pre-existing vulnerabilities (11.28%).
6. The majority of inmates in prison exhibit severe psychological issues, with depression (100%), fear and anxiety (99.24%), and mood swings (88.72%) being the most common among 133 habitual offenders.
7. (41.35%) of habitual offenders experience anxiety and mood disturbances, which is the most common psychological issue after release from prison, followed by (20.30%) reporting self-harm attempts.

8. Less than half of habitual offenders (46.84%) have received treatment for psychological problems, with a combined approach of counselling and medication being the most common (31.69%). However, over half (53.16%) have not received any treatment, indicating a significant gap in mental health care within this population.

Suggestions :

Educational Programs and Library Facilities

Many habitual offenders lack both academic and moral education, which contributes to repeated criminal behaviour. To address this, prisons should collaborate with educational institutions like IGNOU, KSOU, NIOS, and state boards to provide structured academic and moral education. Universities should conduct exams inside prisons, offer counselling, and create dedicated study spaces and libraries. Online classes, supported by NGOs, can help educate even elderly inmates. Additionally, digital libraries should be introduced in all North Karnataka prisons, offering access to educational materials, newspapers, magazines, and moral content in multiple languages.

Health Care and Sanitation:

Healthcare in prisons should be improved by organizing regular health check-ups, ensuring the availability of medicines, recruiting trained medical and mental health staff, and introducing telemedicine services. Sanitation must be upgraded with clean toilets, pure drinking water through RO/UV systems, and proper bathing facilities. Routine sanitation practices, pest control, and access to hygiene products like soap and sanitary pads are essential. Special attention is needed in Kalaburagi and Ballari prisons due to ongoing water issues.

Psychological Counselling and Mental Health Services:

Regular counselling sessions should be provided to help inmates manage issues such as anger, trauma, and addiction. Specialized programs for substance abuse rehabilitation, including detox, therapy, and aftercare, are crucial for recovery and reintegration.

Counselling and Therapy:

Inmates with psychological disorders need professional counselling using methods like Individual Therapy, Group Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT). These should be conducted by qualified psychologists and social workers using modern tools.

Yoga and Meditation:

Yoga and meditation programs should be implemented in all prisons, supported by NGOs such as ISHA, Art of Living, and Vipassana. Each prison should appoint permanent instructors to conduct regular sessions, as such practices have shown positive outcomes in other correctional institutions.

Vocational Training Programs:

Vocational training is vital for behavioural reform and financial empowerment. Existing programs like carpentry and tailoring need to be upgraded, and new skills such as solar panel installation, coding, digital marketing, 3D printing, and hospitality management should be introduced. Collaborations with private companies and NGOs can ensure that inmates receive modern, market-relevant training, improving their chances of employment and successful reintegration post-release.

Conclusion

The research on the psychosocial profile of habitual offenders in North Karnataka highlights a strong link between psychosocial conditions and habitual criminal behavior. The majority of habitual offenders come from lower-income brackets, and their limited educational attainment worsens their economic struggles, leading them towards criminal activities for survival. Psychological problems also lead them to commit a repetition of crime. The study emphasises the need for targeted interventions such as vocational training, improved educational access, job opportunities, and treatment for psychological problems like counselling, therapies medications and etc. Addressing these psychosocial issues and challenges can help reduce recidivism rates and support the rehabilitation of habitual offenders. In order to promote socioeconomic stability and prevent criminal behaviour, comprehensive policies focusing on economic support, high care of mental illness and psychological treatment are very required, early intervention and community support systems are necessary. In conclusion, implementing tailored and multifaceted strategies to improve the socio-economic and psychological conditions of at-risk populations is essential for reducing habitual offending and creating a fairer and more stable society in North Karnataka.

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