

## **Prison as a Platform for Metamorphosis or Enlightenment: A Qualitative Study on the Experiences of Prisoners Charged with Murder in Adel Abad Prison of Shiraz**

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### **Extended Abstract**

#### **1. Introduction**

The prison is a particular experience for a prisoner. This perception or experience could influence the prisoner's behavior and attitude with respect to their interaction with both the internal and external environments. Moreover, it could also affect the behavior of prisoners relative to one another. In addition, the types of charges can also play a role. It appears that murder is the worst possible charge among prisoners. The perception and experiences of murders in the prison can pave the way for prison managers and policymakers. Given the lack of knowledge in this area, the purpose of the present study involves discovering and analyzing the perception and experiences of individuals charged with murder in Adel Abad prison of Shiraz.

#### **2. Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework**

Theoretically, it can be expressed that according to Foucault's theory on surveillance and criminal methods of modern prisons, physical surveillance has been replaced with mental surveillance; this, to some extent, was confirmed in this study. The constructed metamorphosis in this study indicates that whether in physical terms or in institutional terms and their governing principles, prisons strive for a type of subtle, mental punishment. The prisoners examined in this study are, at any rate, restricted physically and placed under permanent surveillance. In fact, it is the application of a power-related microphysics on the minds of the prisoners that leads to their metamorphosis.

Nevertheless, different behavioral and living experience within prisons differ greatly from Foucault's idea. The present study showed that if individuals are willing, they can step into the path of enlightenment even inside the prison. On the

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other hand, it can be stated as a precarious environment, prison is different from the notion of prison as the all-seeing system. Because in the murder ward, prisoners experienced perpetual danger that implied failure on the part of prison guards; otherwise, delinquent micro-cultures would not have persisted in the prison. The study showed that the prison could paradoxically become a place for spiritual, mental, and social improvement which is not observed in Foucault's theory. On the other hand, the subject of social stigma was considerably highlighted among the participants. It appears that social stigma is still one of the most complex phenomena that labels individuals in the society and marginalizes them within the social system. This part of findings is in line with Gaufman's theory.

### **3. Method**

The present study is a thematic analysis conducted on 21 individuals charged with murder in Adel Abad prison of Shiraz in 2015. Data were gathered via conducting semi-structured interviews with the prisoners. Ultimately, data were analyzed using Brown and Clark's method of thematic analysis.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

Results showed that life in the murder ward is significantly difficult and exhaustive. In such an environment, the prisoner loses their sense of gravitation to their surrounding environment. Initially, all prisoners have experienced a type of distortion within the prison environment. The daily life filled with repeated actions causes a sense of unawareness relative to time and place. Inside the prison, these individuals become separated from their human identity and experience a non-human form of life; the type of life that might happen in sleep or daily behaviors. This had led to a type of transformation for the prisoners. The second common experience involved the danger the prison environment imposed on the prisoners. The existence of power relations among prisoners and the use of violent actions to create obedience along with the formation of criminal gangs were a part of said dangers. Other issues were related to health risks, concerns over smoking cigarettes, drug use, and possibility of suffering from contagious infections among the prisoners. These circumstances have created an environment filled with persistent fear. Another issue expressed by the participants revolved around losing opportunity inside the prison; the majority of them felt that they have spent most of their youth inside. Social stigma was also a concern for the prisoners. Murderers have experienced the worst form of social stigma, resulting in a decline in their integrity and confidence. They felt that due to such stigma, their families are also under constant social pressure; subsequently, murderers who though they would be released from the prison discussed the possibility of leaving this environment and

migrating to an unknown location. This showed that the stigma of murder has been the worst experience of the prisoners.

Nevertheless, those participants who were hoping for eventual freedom have been able to make positive changes in themselves; they have been involved in cultural activities inside the prison to improve themselves against their past. This group has managed to achieve significant success. One of the most important achievements of these murderers involved learning new social and occupational skills along with improving positive thinking. This showed that the suppressing structure of the prison environment that naturally weakens the capabilities of prisoners could not hinder the success of these individuals. The power of representation among the participants was a level that enabled them to make significant changes. Not only did they remove the murderer identity within them, but they also managed to learn a myriad of positive social skills.

## **5. Conclusion**

The results of the study confirm the findings of many inquiries on prisons. However, the prominence of the present study involves considering prison as a means for metamorphosis and placing emphasis on the notion of stigma in the prison. Though a part of Foucault's theory can be explained based upon the results, his all-seeing system in the prison was not dominant on the case studies here. The presence of central agency and power relations among prisoners have resulted in the formation of fears and anxiety within them. Considering the results, it is recommended to update the mental pressure imposed on the prisoners using control and surveillance tools, particularly for newcomers; subsequently, those charged with manslaughter can be separated from prisoners charged with murder, they can be referred to constant consultation classes, and the monitoring over the prison can certainly improve. Introducing successful individuals as role models for the prisoners, even those who are charged with murder, can be recommended as well.

**Keywords:** Murderer, Prison Experience, Danger Zone, Metamorphosis

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