CHAPTER - V

DISCUSSION
The process of social support is reiterative and cumulative, changing over time in accordance with environmental demands and circumstances. It is generally more difficult to obtain indigenous support for non-normative events. Incarceration being one of them, is likely to produce uncertainty and change peoples' identities and associated self conceptions.

In viewing stress and coping processes solely as characteristics of stressor events and the coping of the individual, imprisonment involves a process of thinning out of the number of members in the social structure surrounding the individual, a diminishing of interactions with these members, and a restructuring of the goals of the system.

**Social Support, Environmental Perception and Attitude Towards Life**

Spatial restriction is an important component of crowding in prison and one has to share the existing resources with other prisoners. Control in prison environment depends upon the interaction and co-ordination of activities with fellow inmates and prison personnel rather than social ties with the outside world. Quality of one’s social relationship can be a good predictor of how a person will deal with environmental stress in normative events but not after the committal to the penal institution.

Inconsistent with the findings of Nayyar and Sinha (1993) on people in general, social support did not influence environmental perception of the subjects in prison. Contrary to the prediction of the present study, prisoners with social support did not perceive less crowding and more control over prison environment than subjects without support.

It has been found that presence of social support to inmates resulted in a less negative attitude towards life than those who neither received nor perceived social support. Due to total withdrawal of support and the break up of a steady association with family and friends, inmates were left with no hope of returning to an earlier pattern of life. This would have led to negative feelings, insecurity, unrealistic and distorted attitudes toward life and the outside world. ...
Supportive relations provided to the inmates during incarceration helped them to develop a sense of acceptance and a favourable look towards their existence. Consistent with the findings of Latha, Philomena and Shripathy (1996), social support permits rebuilding of hope and re-establishment of healthy ties in future. Support conveyed a sense of caring and restored faith in the possibility of a satisfying future after release among prisoners.

The social support to the imprisoned individuals is usually maintained by extended visits from children, spouse and significant others. These contact programmes form an important component at preventing family breakdown and post release family problems (Liyod, 1993). However, factors such as distance, time, access to transportation, length of sentence, family history and resources influenced the frequency with which families visited (Schafer, 1994).

The results support the view that perceived availability of affect, affirmation and aid functions help in coping with the stressor events. Social support exerted a longitudinal buffer effect, being more effective at moderating a decline in positive well-being, that at off-setting an increase in negative well-being (Gulick, 1994; Schwazer, Jerusalem, & Hahn, 1994).

**Type of Prisoner. Environmental Perception and Attitude Towards Life**

The undertrial prisoners significantly experienced more crowding and low perceived control than convicts. The findings are congruent with those of Brookes (1994), stating substantial differences in the reactions to prison life between the convicted and unconvicted prisoners. After the induction course the undertrials evaluated prison environment more negatively, i.e., felt more enclosed, too many people, noisy, uncomfortable, unorganized etc. This can be explained in terms of the fact that undertrials are arrested on a suspicion; serving time in prison without being declared as guilty, resulted in more unfavourable perception of prison environment.

After imprisonment restriction of freedom is an important source of stress. The total environment of the prison erases the normal structure of life. When other prisoners become a part of the individual's environment one has to co-ordinate need for resources, activities, level of interpersonal interaction and spatial location with others. Beliefs about control over the prison environment which are totally adaptive were prevalent among convicts as compared to undertrials. This can be attributed to the fact that the convicted prisoners were committed to the prison after being tried in a law court. The goal sentence was a punishment and on account of this were serving time in prison.
The assessment about the attitude towards life among undertrials and convicts revealed that those facing trial had a more negative life attitude as compared to those declared as convicts. Contrary to the initial expectations, undertrials did not possess a favourable outlook towards life though presumed innocent by the law unlike convicts.

The results are in line with the study of Dang and Sharma (1995) who reported that undertrials suffer from marginality symptoms, being half way between non-criminals and convicts. They live under constant pressure of uncertainty which make them emotionally vulnerable, whereas convicted prisoners, serving a determinate time in prison experience less negative feelings and possess a less negative outlook towards life. The extreme turmoil in undertrials reflect a state of mind characterized by loneliness, hopelessness and disappointment in life.

Age Group, Environmental Perception and Attitude Towards Life

In the present study, environmental perception has been significantly influenced by the age group of the inmates. Elderly inmates perceived more crowding and lack of control over the surroundings as compared to young inmates.

The perceived loss of control is often reported by the aged and their ability to sustain a sense of control may be greatly influenced by societal factors and social partners (Parasuram, 1996). In terms of adjustment, old people are reported to have more problems in home, health, social and emotional adjustment as compared to young people (Singh et al., 1997).

In prison, women of all ages and crimes are put together, perhaps elderly inmates are less able to lead a life with diverse social partners and thereby experience greater crowding. For the elderly inmates, the adjustive resources are severely taxed due to high environmental demands and biological declines, whereas young inmates perceived that they can exercise control and deal with the fellow prisoners more effectively.

The elderly inmates did not hold a favourable attitude towards life like young fellow prisoners. The old inmates disavow the idea of peaceful living after release. During last decades of life, the wish is most likely to be a peaceful death in familiar surroundings, supported by family members, feeling that this might not happen, causes concern and fear among aged inmates (Aday, 1994b). Imprisonment during
last decades of life put women in triple jeopardy - that of being old, being female and being incarcerated.

The contingencies of declining health, widowhood and dependency along with disheartening loss of respect caused dejection, meaninglessness and despondency in elderly inmates. Physical decrements are often not reported by those falling in young age group. In addition, the probability for living many more years is greater than those in advanced age. Hence, the young inmates had a futuristic outlook toward their lives.

**Interaction Effects**

The results of the present study highlighted that social support in interaction with type of prisoner did not produce significant effect on environmental perception of the inmates. However, significant joint effects of these two variables was obtained on attitude towards life amongst female prisoners. The undertrial prisoners without social support perceived their lives most negatively followed by undertrial prisoners having social support, convicted prisoners without social support and convicted prisoners having an access to social support. The simple effects of social support also depicted significant effects for undertrial and convicted subjects.

It has been found that inmates undergoing trial need more adequate and indigenous support to cope up with the life of prison and post release outcome. Having virtually no outside contacts and perceived lack of support conveyed a greater sense of rejection and uncertainty in their lives. These feelings led to loss of meaning and purpose in life.

The type of prisoner and age jointly influenced environmental perception of the subjects. The aged undertrial subjects experienced as being most crowded in the prison followed by young undertrial prisoners, elderly inmates declared as convicts and young convicted prisoners. The analysis of simple effects of interaction showed a significant effect of age on perception of crowding among convicted and undertrial inmates.

The results of perceived control among inmates over prison environment reflected a significant joint effect of type of prisoner and age. The young subjects declared as convicts had greatest perception of control followed by young subjects undergoing trial, aged convicts and aged undertrial inmates. The test on simple
effects of type of prisoner revealed a significant effects on young and elderly prisoners' perception of control.

The elderly, as usual, suffer from some or the other medical illness because of aging. As compared to younger inmates they have more health impairments, more functional limitations and a greater number of performance difficulties in activities of prison life and instrumental activities of daily living. In an enclosed round of life elderly undertrial prisoners require greater efforts to meet the demands of prison life. Diminished feelings of control and interpersonal relations led to more unfavourable perception of prison environment.

Social support and age jointly effected life attitude of the prisoners. Young subjects having social support perceived their lives least negatively followed by young prisoners without support, elderly prisoners with support and elderly prisoners without social support. The simple effects of social support has been found significant for young and elderly subjects' life attitude.

Dependency is a normal and expected aspect of old age unlike young age. Due to escalation in chronological age, many of the elderly become either partially or totally dependent upon their younger family members. During old age dependence proneness has significant negative correlation with health and overall adjustment (Hussain & Narain, 1997).

Imprisonment in old age increases dependency and thus constant social and emotional support are required to survive against all odds and to maintain a sense of psychological equilibrium. The variation among the elderly and young inmates in their physical health and degree of impairment alongwith non-availability of help resulted in a more negative attitude towards life among elderly inmates. The findings are similar to those of Koenig et al. (1995) reporting that impaired social support and poor physical health in older inmates lead to depression and anxiety.

It has been found that in absence of social support the elderly undertrial prisoners viewed their existence most negatively followed by elderly undertrials with social support, convicted elderly without social support, convicted elderly with support, young undertrials without support, young undertrials with support, young convicts without support and young convicts with support. Rubinstein, Luber and Mintzer (1994) maintain that support is more important for the health and well-being of elderly subjects facing social isolation and environmental hardships. Prakash (1997)
consider physical and psychological complaints in this population as a way of expressing their helplessness at events and situations that surround them and are beyond their control.

The sub-issues that emerged from the interview data are discussed in this section.

i. Fear of Dying in Prison

The elderly inmates live in fear about the prospects of death, simply, because the probability of living for many years diminishes. For those facing trial, it is impossible to picture an ending to their lives behind the bars. Some of the sample statements are being quoted:

"I am scared of dying in prison",
"I don’t want to die here",
"I think I’ll die here only without seeing my family members".

Death is not a prime issue of every aged. The elderly people living in a stable environment approach death as if they had made peace with many issues, including death. There is a difference in the amount of anxiety about death among persons living in unstable settings. They view the approach of death more anxiously (Dhillon, 1996).

The older people generally desire a peaceful and pain free death in familiar surroundings, surrounded by those who are nearest and dearest. Aday (1994a) reported that elderly inmates are engulfed with depression due to fear of dying in prison.

ii. Preference for Death over Imprisonment

Once imprisoned, females are seen to have transgressed not only social norms but gender norms too. Heidensohn (1994) considers female prisoners to be in a state of double deviance, double jeopardy and stigma. Even if undertrials are declared innocent, they would be looked down upon in the society. Distraught with grief there is a feeling that what has happened cannot be true. Inmates harboured many regrets for inactions than actions. Frustration of being incarcerated on suspicion added with a sense of stigmatization propelled a wish to die.
Due to inordinate delay in trials, the inmates have to suffer long years in detention. Constant nagging thoughts of suicide were reported due to physical and mental ailments. To relieve the subjects from the prolonged suffering existence, they awaited death. To quote:

"It's better to die, than living in jail",
"God better give me death and make me free",
"Death is the only solution now for my problems, I want to die".

iii Preference for Solitary Confinement

The inmates (young and elderly) did not prefer solitary confinement or living in total isolation. Solitary confinement or "Tanhai" was given by the prison authorities to those who create disturbances. The inmates considered it to be cruel and unusual punishment and did best possible efforts to avoid this form of confinement. A few verbatim expressions were:

"Tanhai its a punishment, not privacy",
"We'll not to be sent to Tanhai, unless and until we do some disturbances",
"Living all alone, makes me feel depression, seeing people around makes me feel secure".

As separated from the outside world, the presence of other inmates conveyed a sense of belongingness; members of a homogeneous group with identical problems (victims of fate). Talking to fellow inmates provided little relief and helped to pass days in detention.

iv. Perception of Health Status

However, the health status may vary from one individual to another, poor health is repeatedly cited by the aged as one of their most serious problems. As compared to the young inmates, the elderly living in prison face more functional limitations, and a greater number of performance difficulties. Specifically the cough, cold, fever and abdominal problems are common illnesses reported, besides, visual impairments. The inmates considered these as the deleterious effects of imprisonment and ineffective medical services in the prison. As reported:

"I was not like this before, my body started paining more after coming here",
"My health is getting down day by day, the medicine is not affective", 

"I am unable to walk and see properly in night hours and chest pain is also increasing".

Females generally put greater demands on prison health services (Maden, Swinton & Gunn, 1994a) and reflect higher rates of morbidity. Gerontological studies suggest functional, comparative and self-perception of health as significant predictors of aging (Goldsteen, Coute & Goldsteen, 1995). Observing illnesses and ailments of fellow prisoners reduced inmates' sense of control over their health status. Their deteriorated health status was not attributed to age per se but to caged existence.

v. Religiosity as a Coping Mechanism

"Who else can save us than God",
"Fast keeping would help me probably",
"He knows what is right and wrong and my innocence", the given extracts from the verbatim reports of the subjects suggest that the inmates considered the Almighty as their utmost supporter. The faith in an almighty satisfies a need in an otherwise incomplete and unsatisfied being. When confronted with uncontrollable life events, tragedies and conflicts only religion evolve ways of dealing with, among inmates (Koenig, 1995). A person often becomes more religious during crisis periods of their lives, crisis situations are better faced by those with some religious convictions (Siegrist, 1996).

The inmates had strong religious convictions, kept fast and offered prayers. Religious beliefs, prayers and faith in God, all helped to overcome some problems of old age and momentary relief to loneliness, grief and unhappiness. Waldram (1993) found that spiritualty programmes help offenders to resolve identity conflicts and render symbolic healing in correctional institutes.

vi. Reports of Fights and Assaults

Violence among female prisoners was not very frequently reported. This can be attributed to the fear of getting their release delayed, spoil their cases, or result in the cancellation of remission. Disciplinary infractions are low due to closer surveillance and inmates are afraid as they would be put on report and sent to Tanhai. Some of the excerpts from the interview reports are:

"I don't fight, but one or two do",
"What is the use of quarrelling- we have to live together here",
"We might be put on report for that",
"No, we don't, never".

The use of bad language and squabbling offers outlets to the women for aggression which accumulates due to frustrations caused by the prison environment and stresses and strains put forth by fellow inmates.

vii. Perception of Jail Amenities

Unlike convicts, the undertrials viewed jail supplies to be inadequate. Firstly, they felt that the treatment being given to them is meant for criminals and not to those who are non-criminals; secondly, jail clothing is not provided to undertrials as convicts were. Most of the inmates had no visitations and complete withdrawal of support from the family members. Some of the expressions were:

"we are not criminals, but we are treated like that",
"I have no more clothes, this is the one, I was wearing at the time of arrest".

Hence, basic necessities were left unmet in this population.

viii. Social Skills

The undertrials were not engaged in some or other activities of the community and they were not performing roles depending on their capacities and capabilities. The inmates were always idle and hence had a feeling of dissatisfaction and closure of life.

The convicts on the other hand underwent through various training programmes. These programmes were designed to help the prisoners become self-reliant, to cope with stresses and strains put forth by the family members and society at large after release. Skill development is considered essential for them as they have to face challenges within and outside jail.

Vocational training programmes can prepare inmates for productive roles in society, act as a means to keep the inmates safely occupied, reduce manpower in managing the inmates in prison and given them marketable skills when released (Craig & Rogers, 1993).
ix. Factors Aiding Respondents’ Adjustment

The main means of survival and coping with imprisonment were the formation of relationships with other prisoners. This is primarily seen as a response to loneliness and the deprivations of prison life, and fulfills support, economic, socialization and protective purposes. Thus, the recreated ‘family’ permits a sense of belonging, relieves loneliness and tension, provides sense of security and emotional support, teaches the rules and roles of being an inmate, protects women from violence and promotes sharing of goods and services.

x. Anticipated Future Problems

The most cited concern among the prisoners was the stigma associated with deviance and imprisonment. Incarceration for females is seen as a transgression of gender norms too. With female prisoners their children are also enclosed simply because they require the care of a mother, even being in prison. As spouse and other family members become indifferent, inmates anticipated greater difficulties in family relations. Unmarried inmates expected problems in getting married, whereas the elderly inmates perceived greater dependency.

In sum, women’s prisons increase women’s dependency, stress women’s domestic role, aggravate women’s emotional and physical isolation, can destroy family and other relationships, engender a sense of insecurity and may indirectly intensify the pains of imprisonment.