

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF VIPASSANA ON TIHAR JAIL INMATES

RESEARCH REPORT

ABSTRACT

The effect of Vipassana on Tihar Jail inmates reported here is based on two studies carried out using standardised psychological tests

The first study was carried out on 120 subjects in January 1994. The dimensions studied were well being, hostility, hope, helplessness, personality, psychopathy and in the case of psychiatric disorders, anxiety and depression.

The second study was carried out in April 1994 on 150 subjects. The sample consisted of two groups: one group of 85 subjects who attended a 10 day Vipassana course and the other group of 65 who did not. The dimensions studied were anomie, attitude to law, personality and psychiatric illness.

Immediately after the course, the subjects were found to be less hostile towards their environment and felt less helpless. The psychiatric patients, constituting about 23% of the total sample, reported good improvement in their anxiety and depressive symptoms. Subjects without any psychological symptoms also reported improvement in the form of enhanced well being and a sense of hope for the future. Their sense of alienation from the mainstream life, though unchanged immediately after the course, was found to be lower after three months.

The follow-up evaluations at three and six month intervals revealed further improvement on many of these dimensions, although the initial improvement in hope and hostility was not sustained.

The change process thus initiated can be strengthened by eliminating the factors working against the impact of Vipassana and by encouraging the regularity of practice.

The overall results of these two studies are positive and encouraging, suggesting adoption of Vipassana as a prison reform measure.