

## **Momentousness of Prison Menu: The Case of Terengganu Correctional Center, Malaysia**

**Noraida Abd Karim, Sharbana Adnan, Sulaiha Mohd Isa, Zatul Iffah Mohd Fuza, Faliza Mohamed Ali**

Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management  
Universiti Teknologi MARA, Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

*Received: February 26, 2015  
Accepted: April 30, 2015*

---

### **ABSTRACT**

Correctional Center is a main place for imprisonment of drug addicts in Malaysia. However, few studies attempted to explore the experience of incarceration. Hence, it is important to address and further study pertaining to the issues of prison life. This study explores the food served to prisoners' in Malaysia and analyses the extent of the services to fulfil the government rules in accordance to nutrition and health food due to its importance towards prisoner's health and mental growth. Correctional Center Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia had been chosen randomly in the study to achieve the objectives outlined and analyse the issues. The data collected through an observation of 1-week menu, which contains 5-day cyclical menu which produced by the correctional center. The findings reveal that most menus served in correctional center fulfil the government's nutrition requirements. However, some dishes are not quite healthy and few menus are not correctly annotated. Therefore, a review by the responsible department is required in serving healthy food by providing proper nutrition facts that follows the good health model.

**KEYWORDS:** Prison, Diet, Menus, Correctional Center.

---

### **INTRODUCTION**

Prisons are part of the justice system, where individuals are officially convicted of different crimes committed. According to world prison population list in 2007, there were more than 9.25 million prisoners imprisoned [1]. With the growing number of prison populations day by day, prisoners whom are considered as an inoperable segment of society are unvaryingly being neglected [2] and faces various challenges such as food provision. Proper diet and food plays an essential role on prisoners life in custody and creates different impacts on their prison experience [3]. As food relieves the monotony and boredom of a repetitive existence and also a catalyst for aggression, proper food and menu will make them physically and mentally healthy especially for prisoners who have history of drugs habits such as smoking, alcohol consumption and other drugs addiction. In contrast, if the food menu is inadequately designed with improper portion sizes, poorly cooked or lack of varieties, it will leads to serious dissension and complaints [4]. To ensure the prisoners improves their daily activities and tasks given by the prison management, it is essential to provide them with healthy food opportunities including balanced nutrition and portions. Basic measures should be taken into consideration including improving the quality and quantity of food served, hygienic factors and religious needs [5]. Based on the preliminary research completed through literature review, most research on prison food focuses on the issues of nutrient content [6], diet portion [7-8], food menu [9] as well as religious and culture [10-11] and hardly any highlighting the case of Malaysia.

The paper presents the results revealed through literature review, case study and fieldwork data collections. From the previous studies, factors that influence to manage the food for prisoners are such as type of food, portion and nutrition of the food served. A case study was later conducted in Dungun Correctional Center, Terengganu, in which an interview session with several prison officers was completed. The main aim of the paper is to investigate the list of foods served to prisoners in order to build knowledge of prisoners' food in prison custody as well as highlighting the proper way to select proper food for prisoners. The paper is divided into 5 sections. Section 2 presents the related research work and section 3 focuses on Malaysian prison situation in terms of food. Section 4 presents the results and discussion and the last section shows the conclusion of the study.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Food is a vital part of life and the basic raw material for the human body. In the correctional facility, food can pose a variety of problems to the management due to its complexity since it is more than just the caloric intake, substances to survive or nutrition but a source of life and pleasure [12]. Although previous studies discussed more on consumption and possession of food in prisons, the symbolic role of food is actually its religious significance that provides emotional comfort to the inmates. It discussed the failure of correctional administrators to provide religious friendly food that allows prisoners to fulfil their religious

obligations. It also has identified the role of nutrients in food and its effect on reducing aggression, violence and criminal behaviour [13].

Being a momentousness part of religion and spiritual for many religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity, food is part of their religious practice and belief as well as the cultural purposes among the communities and individuals that plays a vital part of people's faith and representation of cultural beliefs. Unfortunately, it came to awareness that 2 main factors as stated in the human right law have been neglected by most prison institution. The understanding of food in terms of cultural and religious practices as well as the nutrition and food is affected by culture or different beliefs within the culture.

As an individual, prisoners in prison also eligible for certain rights that should be preserved. The most basic part of the guaranteed rights of free individuals is the manifestation of human dignity or honour [14]. Such law are presented in international institutions including "Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR)" and the "Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (UIDHR) 1990". With all human rights law focus and emphasize on the food given to prisoners, the prisoners have the right to be detained in a reasonable condition and be given any form of basic needs including food. As mentioned in Quran:

Allah SWT says, "They also feed the objects for the love of food to the poor and the orphan and the captive."  
Surah Al-Insan (76:8).

Since food is the most important need and requirement for human survival, the provisions of quality food to detainees or prisoners and other basic needs should be highlighted and taken into a deep consideration as it is their human rights for survival. Other basic needs and rules should also be observed by the authorities to maintain the prisoners' rights including requirements to provide food in a proper manner, provision of nutritious food, clean water and proper clothing according to seasons. These rules do not only ensure the preservation of the soul or live but also addresses matters related to human basic needs [14].

### **MALAYSIA PRISON DEPARTMENT**

Prison is a non-commercial food institution that adheres to a very strict rules and procedures compared to other non-commercial food institution like health care, elementary and secondary school, college and universities, military, business and industry, or contract and vending. Previously, it poses a significant difference in terms of its appearance; own management staff and number of trained employees for different services to serve detainees, prisoners or juveniles; lack of freedom to move freely in prison; always kept from fences and walls; the management has no powers to release any prisoner from prison; all detainees and prisoners must follow the rules and regulations of prison; and all movements are controlled. However, the new concept of prison by prison affair is introduce rebranding the prison as a place, where the prisoners are controlled and detained to undergo rehabilitation activities until they completed their sentences. In Malaysia, the Malaysian prison department is the last institution to be located at based on the implementation of the Criminal Justice System. It is accountable to the Ministry of Internal Security, a specialized correctional entity. As an institution of detention and rehabilitation, Malaysian Prison Department has massive manpower and machinery to strengthen the quality of its pro-active mission, vision and objectives. Throughout the country, there are approximately 35 prisons with the total inmates of 37,077 [15]. Each prison is headed by the Director of Prisons, and has different prison classification according to the capacity of the prison and the types of crimes, age and gender of the offenders.

One of the institutions under the administration of prisons is Dungun Correctional Center. It was built in 2008 in Dungun district and handed over to the Department of Prisons Malaysia on 15th September 2011. It is located in the district of Jerangau-Bukit Besi and approximately 32 kilometers from the town of Dungun. It officially began its operations in 15th December 2011, it imprisons individuals with repeated drug addiction and trafficking as well as locating foreigners offenders. According to [17], the Correctional Center Dungun has the capacity to place 400 inmates and currently, there are 150 local inmates and 74 foreigner inmates from countries such as Indonesia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Iran, Bangladesh and Vietnam. According to [16], there are several relevant act and rules applied in Malaysia prison. This includes Henry Gurney Act 1949, Dangerous Drug Act 1985, Prison Act 1995, Prison Rules & Regulation 2000, Child Act 2001, Dangerous Drug Rules 2012, Special Offence Security Measure Act 2013 and United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Offenders.

### **DISCUSSION**

Most literatures indicate that prisoners imprisoned have health related problems compared to the general public. This indicates that the food served plays an essential role to ensure consumption of healthy balance diet. Besides that, issues related to foreigner inmates from countries such as Myanmar, Nigeria, Iran, Bangladesh and Vietnam indicates that they have different culture background and religious practices. In the context of food, the major differences between a local and foreigner inmate is the staple food consumed. In [18] reveals that "foreigner's that do not consume rice as their staple food will usually ask to have bread instead. However, prior for the food to be replaced, the inmate is required to get an approval letter from the prison doctor first".

#### **Prison Menu**

All Malaysia prison applies and implements the Prison Act 1995 (Act 357) as a guide to manage the prisoner's food served. In Regulation 13, 60 and 66, a list of daily diet for every prisoner are clearly highlighted as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Diet scale for inmates

S/No	Food Item	Gram
1	Fresh Chicken/ Fish	150g/meals
	or	
2	Meat	130g/meals
3	Rice	300g/meals
4	Rice for porridge	50g/meals
5	Biscuits	42g/meals
6	Papaya/Pineapple/ Watermelon	150g/meals
	or	
7	Banana	90g/meals
	or	
8	Watermelon	200g/meals
9	Fucuk	15g/meals
10	Sugar	25g/meals
11	Brown sugar	5g/meals
12	Anchovies	10g/meals
13	Caramelized coconut pandan spread	10g/meals
14	Green beans / red beans	50g/meals
15	Coffee	6g/meals
16	Cooking oil	15g/meals
17	Bread	50g/meals
18	White bread	75g/meals
19	Vegetable fruit	100g/meals
20	Leaf vegetable	150g/meals
21	Full cream milk powder	20g/meals
22	Tofu	200g/meals
23	Tea	3g/meals
24	Egg	1 biji
25	Salted egg	½ biji
27	Tempe	70g/meals
28	Potato	50g/meals

Table 2: Additional diet for pregnant, breast feeding and HIV/AIDS inmates

S/No	Food Item	Gram
1	Milk powder (pregnant inmates)	30g/meals
2	Milk powder (pregnant inmates)	30g/meals
3	Bread (breast feed baby)	50g/meals
4	Leaf vegetable (breast feed baby)	50g/meals
5	Milk powder (HIV/AIDS)	30g/meals

Table 1 reveals the diet scale for inmates and is given to contacted caterer as a guide in preparing food for prisoners and is applied in all prisons throughout Malaysia. However, there is evidence that the diet scale above is not fully applied by the contracted caterer due to cost constraints. In Table 2, an additional diet scale for inmates that are either pregnant; breast feeding their baby or are diagnosed with HIV/AIDS are prepared as suggested by the Ministry of Health. While Table 3 shows the diet scale for prisoners that are categorized as vegetarians. This includes foreign inmates from Myanmar and Vietnam.

Table 3: Daily diet for vegetarian inmates

S/No	Food Item	Gram
1	Rice	300g/meals
2	Rice for porridge	50g/meals
3	Biscuit	42g/meals
4	Papaya/ Pineapple / Honeydew	150g/meals
	or	
5	Banana	90g/meals
	or	
6	watermelon	200g/meals
7	Fucuk	15 g/meals
8	Sugar	25 g/meals
9	Brown sugar	5 g/meals
10	Caramelized coconut pandan spread	10 g/meals
11	Coffee	6 g/meals
12	Magerine	10 g/meals
13	Meal maker	30 g/meals
14	Cooking oil	15 g/meals
15	Bread	50 g/meals
16	White bread	75 g/meals
17	Vegetable fruit	100 g/meals
18	Leaf vegetable	150 g/meals
19	Full cream milk powder	20 g/meals
20	Tofu	200 g/meals
21	Tea	3 g/meals
22	Egg	1 biji
23	Salted egg	½ biji
24	Tempe	70 g/meals
25	Patota	50 g/meals

In Malaysia prisons, foods are delivered in packs and are served 4 times a day as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Sample scale diet week 2 and 4 (Correctional Dungun Center)

Meals	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Monday
<b>Breakfast</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rice porridge</li> <li>Fried anchovies</li> <li>Coffee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slice of white bread</li> <li>Margarine</li> <li>Milk tea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sweet green bean porridge/ black glutinous rice porridge</li> <li>Tea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slice of white bread</li> <li>Fruit jam</li> <li>Milk tea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rice porridge</li> <li>Fried anchovies</li> <li>Coffee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slice of white bread</li> <li>Scrambled/ boiled egg</li> <li>Milk tea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White slice bread</li> <li>Caramelized coconut pandan spread</li> <li>Milk tea</li> </ul>
<b>Morning Tea</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sweet biscuit</li> <li>Tea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corn biscuit</li> <li>Tea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sweet biscuit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tea</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tea</li> </ul>
<b>Lunch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Fried fish</li> <li>Chicken soup</li> <li>Sliced watermelon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Beef kurma</li> <li>Fried vegetable</li> <li>Sliced watermelon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Fish cooked with chili</li> <li>Vegetable</li> <li>Banana</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Chicken curry</li> <li>Fried spinach</li> <li>Sliced watermelon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Fish cooked in coconut gravy</li> <li>Fried cabbage</li> <li>Banana</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Fried fish cooked with chili</li> <li>Sweet mustard boiled</li> <li>Pineapple</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Chicken with carrot tom yam</li> <li>Papaya</li> </ul>
<b>Dinner</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Fermented soy bean with fried anchovies</li> <li>Long beans cooked in coconut gravy</li> <li>Bread bun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Tamarind fish soup</li> <li>Fried lady fingers</li> <li>Bread bun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Chicken soup</li> <li>Brinjal</li> <li>Bread bun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Boiled egg</li> <li>Long beans curry (dalca)</li> <li>Bread bun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Soy sauce chicken</li> <li>Fried bean sprout with tofu</li> <li>Bread bun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Fish sour spicy</li> <li>With lady fingers</li> <li>Bread bun</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>White rice</li> <li>Fish soy sauce</li> <li>Fried french beans</li> <li>Bread bun</li> </ul>

**Food Budget**

Malaysia’s government has allocated a fraction of RM4.50 per day for prisoners’ meal with RM0.60 allotted for breakfast, RM2.00 for lunch and RM1.90 for dinner. In the efforts to provide nutritious and balanced meals to prisoners, supporting parties of the government suggested that the provision of food for prisoners should be increased to RM10.00 per day. From the standpoint of humanity, the policy is viewed not deemed outrageous as it takes into account the health rights of the prisoners [17].

**CONCLUSION**

The results showed that the prisoners in Malaysia are mostly given a standard, balanced and nutrition food. However, it is not exaggerate to say that the current menu provided to the prisoners in Malaysia does not completely follows the rules and law as

indicated by United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Offenders. Several items are considered unhealthy with high cholesterol. Therefore, there is a need to implement a healthy and nutrition food for prisoners as it will leads to healthy mental conditions and better physical growth. Issues recommended for future research regarding prison food in Malaysia includes detailing and highlighting the barriers behind provision of healthy food to prisoners, the perception and satisfaction of prisoners and the preparation of food served in prison. The research is set to be a starting point for future research in similar area of studies in providing a body of knowledge.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The authors would like to thank Mr. Zairi Ismael Rizman for his guidance and assistance in getting this paper published.

#### **REFERENCES**

1. R. Walmsley, 2003. World prison population list. Home Office.
2. Edwards, J.S., H.J. Hartwell and J. Schafheitle, 2009. Prison Foodservice in England. *Journal of Foodservice*, 20 (4): 157-166.
3. Smith, C., Punishment and Pleasure: Women, Food and the Imprisoned Body. *The Sociological Review*, 50 (2): 197-214, 2002.
4. Blades, M., 2001. Food and Nutrition in the Prison Service. *Prison Service Journal*, 134: 46-47.
5. Kipps, M., J. Thomson and A. Thompson, 1988. Taking the Gruel Out of Porridge: Or a Review of Prison Diet, Nutrition & Food Science, 88 (1): 2-5.
6. Johns, N., J.S. Edwards and H.J. Hartwell, 2013. Hungry in Hospital, Well-Fed in Prison? A Comparative Analysis of Food Service Systems. *Appetite*, 68: 45-50.
7. Liu, B.P.W., 2004. Prisoner's Right to Religious Diet beyond the Free Exercise Clause. *UCLA Law Review*, 51 (4): 1151-1202.
8. Gould, C., B. Tousignant, G. Brian, R. McKay, R. Gibson, K. Bailey and B.J. Venn. 2013. Cross-Sectional Dietary Deficiencies among a Prison Population in Papua New Guinea. *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, 13 (1): 13-21.
9. Edwards, J.S., H.J. Hartwell, W.G. Reeve and J. Schafheitle, 2007. The Diet of Prisoners in England. *British Food Journal*, 109 (3): 216-232.
10. Heckenberg, D. and D. Cody, 2006. Food matters-Issues surrounding food in prison, Occasional paper 3, Technical report, University of Tasmania.
11. Eckersley, R.M., 2007. Culture, Spirituality, Religion and Health: Looking at the Big Picture. *Medical Journal of Australia*, 186 (10): S54-S56.
12. Abbaspour, N., R. Hurrell and R. Kelishadi, 2014. Review on Iron and Its Importance for Human Health. *Journal of Research in Medical Sciences: the official journal of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences*, 19 (2): 164-174.
13. T. Wilson, 2011. Role of Food and the Challenges it Poses for Correctional Management. *Australasian Journal of Correctional Staff Development*, 1-6.
14. Majid, W.R.A. and N.M. Zain, 2015. Isu Dalam Penahanan dan Pemulihan Banduan di Malaysia. 27 (1): 143-168.
15. Brantingham, P.L. and P.J. Brantingham, 2015. Crime prevention strategy. [http://www.ceamos.cl/ceamos/images/stories/actividadesyeventos/crime\\_prevention\\_strategy1.pdf](http://www.ceamos.cl/ceamos/images/stories/actividadesyeventos/crime_prevention_strategy1.pdf).
16. Jalil, N.S.A., 2013. Sampai bila kita menyara banduan asing? Retrieved from <http://www.ikim.gov.my/index.php/ms/artikel/7931-sampai-bila-kita-menyara-banduan-asing>.
17. Suzaidi Parman, Interview on 20th February 2015. Correctional Center Dungun Terengganu, Malaysia.
18. Siti Zuhana Shuib, Interview on 3rd March 2015. Penjara Wanita Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia.