



Perceptions of Ex-convicts on Rehabilitation Programmes in Preparation for Reintegration in Botswana

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The re-integration of ex-convicts is a concern globally and nationally yet a forgotten phenomenon. It is assumed that families are prepared for the release from custody of their incarcerated member. While the family may be longing to see ex-convict, it may be traumatised by his or her release from prison. The thinking about the known and anticipated behaviour of the ex-convict may affect the acceptance and supported needed by the ex-convict. This may complicate relationship problems and may perpetuate the negative labelling which affects positive integration. The unpreparedness of families and community may be hostile than being in prison leaving the ex-convict with no choice but to re-offend and be reconvicted and at most, a recidivist. As a result of this background, it was necessary to explore the process of re-integration of ex-convicts in Botswana and identify the challenges it poses for the ex-convicts. The researcher adopted a qualitative approach and interviewed 26 participants which comprised of ex-convicts, community leaders, professionals, and community members. The study was informed by the differential Association theory, the labelling theory, and within the ecological perspective. The findings revealed that the ex-convicts after

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release face an enormous mountain which is difficult to climb without adequate assistance. It was further established that preparation for release and integration process are inadequate. Furthermore, communities do not have interventions to receive, integrate, and support ex-convicts. Therefore, this paper argues that families and communities must be involved in the rehabilitation processes of prisons and in their release.

Keywords: Re-integration; rehabilitation; community; ex-convicts; differential association; incarceration.

1. INTRODUCTION

Rehabilitation is an integral part in the offender's reintegration process. Recent studies conducted by Makki & Boryzcki [1] argues that a period of incarceration has some collateral effects that create a gap between the ex-convicts' home and prison. That is, masking the real distance the ex-convicts must travel from incarceration to reintegration into society. The journey might appear simple by perception but a serious challenge for the ex-convict and the family. By the time of release, the society would have undergone, economic, social, technological transformation which poses a new world for the ex-convict. Therefore, ex-convict re-integration is a complex process requiring the intervention of prison officials, the social workers, and in general, counsellors. Re-integration process must prepare not only the ex-convict but also the family and community at large to accept and support the transition from prison to community life. Therefore, the researcher conducted a qualitative study of 26 participants consisting of ex-convicts and key informants to ascertain their perception on rehabilitation and integration processes. This study was intended to explore the perceptions of ex-convicts on Prison rehabilitation programmes in preparing them for re-integration into the community and to assess the involvement of the community in the entire rehabilitation process.

2. METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

Research methodology is a systematic way to solve a problem [2]. Kothari [3] explains that research methodology consist of various steps adopted by a researcher. Rajasekar [2] defines research methods as various procedures, schemes and algorithms used in research. They help the researcher to collect samples, data and finds solutions to a problem [3]. This was a qualitatively study that conveniently sampled 26 participants which included ex-convicts, community leaders, professionals, and

community members to understand their perceptions about offender rehabilitation and re-integration in Botswana.

3. REHABILITATION AND THE INMATES

Rehabilitation is word that has so many different meanings that requires a great level of understanding in order to develop and implement ways in which offenders may be assisted while incarcerated. Many a times the expectation is that prison should be a place to offer restoration, reformation. Furthermore, Ugwuoke [3], made an observation in his studies that prison institutions speak of reformation and rehabilitation but in actual fact advocates for retributive punishment. This puts so much uncertainty surrounding community adjustment of offenders after release. Consequently, rehabilitation emphasises provision of needed services to avoid future criminal behaviour. Given the public safety issues associated with re-entry, developing comprehensive policies to design rehabilitation programmes should centre on a full diagnostic and assessment of offenders. That is, substantive aftercare has proven ineffective but linkages must be established between institutional programming and community based interventions to ensure continuity after release [4]. Furthermore, rehabilitation with the exclusion of the family and society may seem as an incomplete process as family and community involvement are central to successful reintegration. A study was conducted looking at the different rehabilitation programmes being offered in correctional institutions but have not been subjected to controlled evaluations and successful approaches remain to be identified and articulated [5].

4. EX-CONVICTS PERCEPTIONS ON REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES

Ex-convicts gave somewhat different views about rehabilitation programmes. However, their views are not so different from those from previous

studies. To date, a study has not been conducted to actually address the extent at which rehabilitation programmes affect reintegration of ex-convicts in Botswana. Despite the existence of rehabilitation programmes, based on the evidence by different researchers most of the ex-offenders leave prison institutions with little to say about rehabilitations programmes. It might be so because some leave prison with psychological problems that is why it has been alluded to, that effective rehabilitation can mitigate the offenders' feelings of hostility and the effects of potential psychological problems [6]. Botswana Prison Service outline the sole purpose of rehabilitation is training and rehabilitation of all offenders and social behaviour to effect change in their social resettlement [7]. Moreover, it has programmes such as upholstery, carpentry, gardening, tailoring and education to mitigate chances of relapse.

The government has used its wealth to advance these programmes with the sole intention of re-shaping someone from a pattern of behaviour that is unacceptable to both society and the law. The study revealed that there are more of the negative views about rehabilitation programmes than the positives. Those who utilised the services received some form of small-scale management training of which is now a means of survival and others joined Christian fellowship programmes of which they got revived, gained their self-esteem and were released before their actual sentence. Others mentioned that, rehabilitation programmes may seem as good initiatives, however, not all of the offenders get to participate in these programmes. There are limited facilities including workshops to accommodate a large group of inmates. As such, many remain idle and unable to acquire skills that would be appropriate for life outside prison. Moreover, there is shortage of skilled personnel to facilitate offender development and reintegration. Furthermore, most of African countries have no, or shortage of professional staff such as social workers, psychologists [8]. It is unfortunate that findings revealed that not all offenders get counselling and in most cases, counselling is offered to those whom the court ruling instructed so.

Furthermore, much focus is on vocational training, education and spiritual development rather than on psychosocial and behavioural aspects of rehabilitation. However, with all this said, one may question the efficacy of

rehabilitation programmes. On the other hand, the ex-convicts alluded to the fact that rehabilitation efforts are inevitable since the environment is not conducive and reported cases of overcrowding. Consequently, successful rehabilitation of offenders cannot be ensured with issues of overcrowding. Locking prisoners up is to give an ultimate and measured demonstration of society's disapproval of what is deemed to be a criminal act [9] and punishment surpasses rehabilitation. However, the Ouagadougou Declaration on accelerating Penal and Prison reform in Africa, made some deliberate and specific references to rehabilitation in African prisons. The declaration recommended promotion of reintegration and that countries should make greater efforts to use the period of confinement to empower the offenders to lead a crime free lifestyle [8].

Making reflections on reintegration of ex-convicts one may argue that prison-based programs lack theoretical practicalities in order to create effective rehabilitation programmes. Integrating a strengths-based approach during a period of confinement may come in handy. The perspective main assumption is that each individual possesses the inherent ability and resources required to overcome any challenges. However, during a period of confinement, offenders may present feelings of hopelessness but it is believed that with great support and effective programmes much can be achieved. The strength-based approach emphasises individual empowerment to re-gain control over their environment and their lives. A prisoner who is empowered may succeed in having the ability to acknowledge their crime and work enthusiastically to change such negative behaviours. Furthermore, their untapped potential may be discovered as they possess a myriad of inherent strengths.

5. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ex-convicts in Botswana face multi-faceted challenges just like those in other parts of the world. Ex-convicts experience hardships that tend to impede a crime free lifestyle. Their reintegration remains a major social concern affecting families and communities. It has emerged that in Botswana ex-convicts remain largely unemployed, stigmatized, and discriminated against. Both the literature and the findings show that, if these challenges are not addressed, the plight of ex-convict will continue to complicate the gap between prison and the

community [7]. The ecological perspective illustrates that, challenges in the social environment must be addressed using cost effective strategies and interventions involving all stakeholders (ex-convicts, professionals, policy makers, and prison staff). Therefore, the community must encourage ex-convicts self-development and discard all the negative labels and associations and give them a chance to become law abiding citizens.

However, the ex-convicts are of the view that rehabilitation programmes are limited including the workshops where the skill transfer to inmates are provided. They believe that their time in prison could be productively spent to prepare for the world outside prison [4]. They argue that rehabilitation programmes must be for all prisoners and that the society must prepare to support them during transition to a new lifestyle. The ecological perspective emphasises that the families and communities must shape these individuals and provide them with a platform to contribute meaningfully to reinforce positivity.

It emerged that the community is not involved in the re-integration process and does not trust the ex-convicts. Since a period of confinement has negative effects on the prisoner, community's involvement in the integration process is fundamental to build lost relationships, restore family ties, and repair damages [6]. The differential association theory shows that ex-convicts will learn acceptable behaviour when tied to positive reference groups, hence reduced chances of re-offending. It is here where the social worker plays a critical role to engage all necessary players to ensure that risks are reduced and needs are addressed accordingly [9]. It also emerged that social work intervention must be provided immediately the offender enters prison and continues until released from prison. There should be assessment of individual's unique needs and the designing of appropriate programmes of interventions.

Intervention strategies are essential for the positive re-integration of the ex-convict [10]. A supportive social environment and inclusive policies will enable the success of healthy reintegration process by minimizing the barriers. A coordinated approach is highly recommended to ensure that intervention strategies are closely monitored and evaluated [5,9]. Practitioners will

then know which interventions yield the desired reintegration results.

6. CONCLUSION

Rehabilitation is an important aspect in reintegration of offenders into societies. However, much effort and resources must be directed to rehabilitation programmes. It is recommended that there be further research in order have successful outcomes. The exit plans of action should be client centred and individualized to predict the best outcomes for the individual re-entering society after incarceration.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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