

## **Perceptions of ex-convicts on rehabilitation programmes in preparing for reintegration in Botswana**

### **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 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. The key words; integration, rehabilitation, and incarceration.

### **Introduction**

Rehabilitation is an integral part in the offender's reintegration process. Recent studies conducted by Makki & Boryzcki [1] argue that a period of incarceration has some collateral effects that create a huge 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. It must prepare not only the ex-convict but also the family and community at large to accept and support the transition from prison to life outside. This study was intended to explore the perceptions of ex-convicts on rehabilitation programmes in preparing them for re-integration into the community and to ascertain the involvement of the community in the entire process.

### **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 [2], 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 [3]. 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 [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 [5]. 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 [6]. 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. A study conducted 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 [7]. It is unfortunate that findings revealed that not all offenders get counselling and in most cases counselling is offered to those whom the ruling suggested 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 [8] but 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 states should make greater efforts to use the period of confinement to empower the offenders to lead a crime free lifestyle [7].

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.

#### 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 ksociety after incarceration [9].

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