

DETERMINE THE INDIVIDUAL SKILLS GAINED ON PRISON AND HOW THEY INFLUENCE RE-ENTRY OF OFFENDERS AMONG INMATES IN KINGONGO PRISON

CAREN AWUOR AWILLY, OCTERIAN GAKURU & NAOMI MUTUNGA

University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya

ABSTRACT

This article examines the influence of individual skills learned in prison and on re-entry of the offenders in kingongo prison in Nyeri where a survey descriptive research design was adopted with a target total population of 1927. Stratified random sampling was used to select the inmates and purposive sampling for the key informants who were warders. A sample size of 90 was selected with a response rate of 75% where 60% of the key informants noted that the skills gained are adequate to provide the ex-convicts adequate resources to keep them out of prison while 40% of the key informants noted that the skills gained are not adequate to keep the ex-convicts out of prison. The convicts asserted that the skills gained were adequate though they needed start-up capital for business and an entry home to help in reducing stigma from the community.

KEYWORDS: Individual Skills, Offenders, Re-Entry, Rehabilitation, Prison

INTRODUCTION

The Influence of Individual Skills Gained While in Prison and Recidivism

Many, if not most, offenders have significant deficits in what to do and how to act in a socially responsible manner. In fact, most offenders see little value in socially responsible behavior, either because it is not supported within their peer culture or it doesn't provide the immediate gratification and excitement of crime. Often, offender thinking patterns are so entrenched that they cannot break free without a considerable period of de-conditioning followed by reconditioning. Old patterns of behavior are extinguished and new behaviors reinforced by the process of appropriate application of punishment and rewards. Ultimately, offenders learn to practice self-regulation and self-management skills (Mauer, 2005).

The elements that support the environment in which social learning can take place are structure and accountability. Structure organizes the behavior of members toward a common goal of "right living." Staff, operating as a rational authority, provides an organized structure of values, rules, roles, and responsibilities. The necessary information is provided to increase awareness and knowledge of behavioral, attitudinal and/or emotional consequences. Accountability teaches respect for structure and moves the offender from an observer stance (strong denial and resistance), to a participant stance (willing to comply, but attitudinally still in criminal thinking mode), to a member stance (a willing participant who shares the new values of right living). The environment provides the opportunity for practice and success. This process continually reinforces gains and builds self-efficacy (Freeman, 1999).

Dedicating funds for educational programs and positive tools for reentry makes the offender less of a burden to society in the future. Education provides the basis for employment, which is crucial since it allows offenders to become

self-sufficient and avoid involvement in criminal activity. Petersilia explains that employment is important to an offender's feelings of self-confidence, which is important in preventing recidivism, "Employment helps ex-prisoners be productive, take care of their families, develop valuable life skills, and strengthen their self-esteem and social connectedness" (Petersilia, 2003).

Education gives individuals basic skills to enter the labor market. It also develops a sense of self efficacy and accomplishment for released inmates. These effects of education make it a fundamental tool for ensuring that convicts live a crime free life upon release. With their modest requirements for implementation, educational programs are among the basic rehabilitative programs that a prison can offer. Most prisons have educational programs ranging from coursework to vocational training. In Kenya, every prison has free primary and secondary education and in some cases vocational training as well (Mauer, 2005).

Popular programs among correctional facilities are faith-based programs. Usually, all prisons have at least one prison chaplain who is available to meet and talk with inmates. These programs are important and beneficial in reducing recidivism because of the connections they create with the community. The credibility of these programs help inmates reintegrate into the community and makes residing citizens feel protected. One program called the Interchange Faith Initiative in Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, and Texas addresses recidivism by Christian worship, offering up to 16 hours of religious worship a day, seven days a week. There is also educational instruction with daily prayer and Bible study. The communities are also able to participate in this program as members of local churches become mentors. The program alone has produced reductions in recidivism of about sixty percent (Baldry & Maple stone, 2003).

Faith based programs are widespread in prisons. All prisons have at least a prison chaplain available to meet with the inmates. Other programs are more encompassing and involve intensive bible-based rehabilitation as well as an entire prisons run by faith based organizations. The administrative office of faith based and community initiatives under the current administration is charged with involving faith based programs in efforts to address social issues. One important advantage of faith based approaches is their existing tie to the community in which the prisoners resides and the credibility that these organizations generally have within the community. These strong based community faith based organizations help inmates in prison and also upon release on how to successfully reintegrate themselves while protecting the local community (Freeman 1999).

Time in prison is time away from the workforce, where valuable skills and experience can be obtained. Many prisoners do not have access to work opportunities while in prison; of prisoners obtain skills and connect with employers. There is an enormous gap between the need for stable employment that pays self-sufficiency wages and the availability of such jobs to released inmate. Studies have shown that having been to prison reduces the wages of released prisoners by 10 to 15 percent. Former offenders not only face lower wages but also an array of other barriers such as the stigma associated with a criminal record, employer attitudes and legal barriers. Irrespective of all these challenges, convicts benefit a lot from the employment rehabilitates programs that take place while they are in prison (Mauer, 2003).

Among the various types of programming available to prisoners, postsecondary education serves a particularly important role. Research consistently demonstrates that participation in educational programs while incarcerated reduces recidivism rates by increasing an individual's ability to successfully rejoin mainstream society upon release from prison (Chappell 2004). Offering higher education to prisoners, very few of whom have had the opportunity to attend college prior to incarceration, may be especially valuable in a society where postsecondary credentials are increasingly necessary

to gain access to living-wage jobs. Formerly incarcerated people often experience difficulties in gaining employment after release from prison, both because they lack marketable skills and because they may face discrimination due to their criminal records (Travis, Solomon, & Waul 2004). Without jobs that pay a living wage, ex-offenders often return to criminal activity. Postsecondary correctional education programs can overcome these difficulties by offering formerly incarcerated men and women the opportunity to gain access to the many benefit that higher education offers in American society.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey design. Thus, data was collected from a section of the population under study as a representation of the total. The study was conducted in Nyeri prison Kingongo which houses the main, medium and the women prisons. The main is a closed prison with convicts serving jail term of five years, life imprisonment and condemned prisoner. It houses remandees awaiting trials. Women prison houses women convicts with lighter offenses as well as convicts who are on transit to Langat a prison. The study used 5% percent of the population from the main, medium prison and women prison, to arrive at a sample of 90 respondents .The key informants included 3 counselors, 2 officers in charge and 2 deputy officer in charge of main, and women prison, 2 chaplains, kadhi, 2welfare officers, 3 medical staff and 6 training officers. The research instruments used to collect data were a questionnaire which was given to the convicts and an interview guide for the key informants. Data was collected in 2 days with the help from a research assistant who was trained on how to collect data and guide the convicts on answering the questionnaires since some of them were illiterate and could not read and write, where others had a problem with comprehending the questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The objective was to find out the level of education for the inmates which is basically fundamental in securing a job.

Table 1: Highest Level of Education

	Frequency	Percentage
No schooling	8	11.77
Primary education	45	66.18
Secondary education	13	19.12
Post-secondary education	2	2.94
Tertiary education	none	
Total	68	100

An examination of the educational attainment of prison inmates demonstrates that prisoners are much less educated as illustrated in Table 1 which indicates that 11.77% of the inmates have no formal schooling background with a majority of 66.18% who indicated that they have only a primary education though most of them are drop outs from Std 4, 5,6, and 7. Only 2.94% had a post-secondary education and their level of crime was also more advanced as compared to the others. This therefore showed that crime increases with the low level of education. This examination of prison convicts demonstrated that lack of basic education forced most inmates engage in petty and unskilled kind of jobs and they later on engaged with crime in crime as illustrated in table 2.

Table 2: The Influence of Level of Education on Crime

	No Schooling	Prim Educ	Sec Educ	Post Sec Educ	Total
Drugs	2	3	4	0	9
Forgery	0	0	0	2	2
Defilement	4	21	4	0	29
Assault	1	11	5	0	17
Theft	1	10	0	0	11
Total	8	45	13	2	68

From research, it is clear that forgery required some sort of skills and education. Out of the 2 inmates who were convicted by these crimes, both of them had a post-secondary education. One who was a woman had been sentenced for 8 years and she was employed where this act took place. On defilement cases, 29 respondents who were a majority with 72.41% had dropped out of primary school and hence they did not have any formal employment. Respondent 51 who was amatatu conductor said

“At times in our place of work we see so many women, and from their body size you cannot tell whether they are underage. So once you go out with them that are when you realize the ladies are either primary or secondary school girls”.

This ignorance on wanting to get an intimate without further enquiry of the person has seen so many of them committing this crime. Assault and theft had equally a lot of respondents who were primary school drop outs with 64.07% and 90.09 % respectively where most of the respondents on assault said the act was based on anger and they would have opted for negotiation with the victim rather than serve as entence of up to 10 years. Theft was basically on the grounds that this was their means of getting money to survive since with their education back ground they could not get any source of income.

The researcher extended the previous question to find out if lack of basic education forced the inmates to commit crime. Thus the respondents were requested to fill if lack of education forced them to resort to crime as an alternative. Research reveals that a minority of 13.24% of inmates had an option thus their level of education did not influence their decisions to resort to crime. However, a majority of 86.76% indicated that their lack of basic education influenced their decision to resort to crime. With some indicating that they had to start working at an early age of 13 years in order to fend for their family.

Training Programmes and Re-Entry

The respondents were expected to answer whether the trainings they are offered while in prison are sufficient and adequate to enable them to integrate back to the community.

Table 3: Adequacy of Training Programs

	Frequency	Percentage
Adequate training	60	88.24
Not adequate	8	11.76
Total	68	100

The aim of finding the adequacy of the training programs in Table 4 reveals that inmates are getting enough training from the prison and the trainings are adequate. They get to understand and are capable to apply the skills learned once given an opportunity. 60 (88.24%) stated that the training offered were adequate and at least they get an opportunity

to learn a new skill that they can use once released. A couple of respondents affirmed that training while in prison is good. However, they are not adequate to finding a job or how they can apply to get income upon release. Participant number twenty four (main) said,

“It does not help to attend the programmes on the inside, because you cannot apply it outside. Outside its ways are different and you focus on other things, i.e. need to feed family, house, employment”.

This sentiment was also shared by participant number thirty six, who remarked,

“Outside it is different; here you have people that support you, outside it is not always like that you have to struggle in order to use your skills”.

The majority of the respondents felt that the programmes do address the needs of offenders and that it depends upon the individual to apply what he/she has learned.

Training Programs Undertaken by the Convicts While In Prison

The respondents were required to indicate the trainings they have undertaken while in prison once in prison, inmates are expected to enroll to one training programme and move on to another upon completion of the first training. Thus, an inmate can take up to three or four programmes but not simultaneously. The inmates, who have served more years, tend to have enrolled in more than two trainings and thus have skills not only in one area but in different sections.

Table 4: Training Programs Undertaken by Inmates While in Prison

	Carpentry		Tailoring		Knitting		Farming		Masonry		Welding	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
YES	38	55.88	28	41.18	14	20.59	23	3.82	9	13.24	7	10.29
NO	30	44.12	39	57.35	54	79.41	45	66.18	59	76.82	61	89.71
Total	68	100										

The researcher deduced that very few inmates opt to learn primary and secondary education though it is very fundamental as presented in table 5. This has caused the respondents not to be able to understand English or even write basic things in English. This was also observed where the researcher together with the assistants had to read and write on behalf of the respondents. Majority of the inmates 38 (55.88%) and 28 (41.18) opted to be trained in carpentry and tailoring respectively. They felt like these skills will help them once released to start up their own venture. Farming is a responsibility that is given to few inmates who tend on the food they eat such as vegetables, maize and others, however 23 (33.82%) indicated that they have learnt lesson on farming that can help them once they go back to the society.

Table 5: The Extent of Attitude Change from other Programs While in Prison

	Church		Counseling		Aftercare Services	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Strongly agree	10	14.76	2	2.94	4	5.88
Agree	37	54.41	13	19.11	20	29.41
Neutral	8	11.76	40	58.82	6	8.82
Disagree	13	19.11	11	16.18	20	29.41
Strongly disagree	0	0	2	2.94	18	26.41
Total	68	100	68	100	68	100

Other programs offered while in prison include faith based programs, counseling sessions and after care services.

The researcher sought to find out how these services influence the attitude change to the respondents. Once in prison, most inmates affirm that acceptance is critical to survive in the new environment and even adapt to its surroundings, without acceptance, psychological torture is the worse imprisonment that one can endure. Thus out of the 68 respondents 55 (80.88%) affirmed that counseling offered while in prison has really helped them to change their attitude towards life and even learn on how to cope with life while in prison. Even though there was a consensus agreement that life in prison is very difficult, they also agreed that it will be more difficult if you do not change their mind set to be better. Church programs of faith based programs also play a crucial role where most inmates indicated that when all hope is lost, they tend to turn to God. 10 (14.71%) of the inmates indicated that faith based programs are very helpful to a great extent where some have even opted to get born again based on the lessons learnt in these programs. After care services received the least ratings where majority of the inmates indicated that they were not aware of these services and their relevance once they are free with 48 (70.59%).

Response on Training Programmes

A consensus of all the 20 key informants affirmed that this is the best approach since the inmates can be able to do what they feel will change and impact their lives positively. For instances the trainer who was also part of the key informant said that,

“While in prison, these programmes assist the inmates to interact, share experiences and keeps them occupied. Even though most of the inmates are drop outs at primary level, very few opt to undertake K.C.P.E and K.C.S.E exams with claims that their age cannot allow them. Also from the researcher observations, it was noted that most of the respondents required assistance in reading the questions and writing as most of them were drop outs and cannot manage to read Basic English, comprehend and write. It was also noted that some did not attend school at all and they do not see the value of basic education at their age.”

Upon completion of the sentence term, 70% of the key respondents affirmed that the trainings by inmates while in prison can assist and help them in gaining self-employment, appreciate others in the community, be more responsible, and be socially responsible. However, all the key informants affirmed that they do not do a follow up program to find out the welfare of the convicts once released. The head of the prison said

“Our key responsibility is to rehabilitate the prisoners while they are in prison, after their term; we are not really concerned with how they lead their lives”.

The welfare warden for women prisoners also responded in regards to the trainings being offered while in prison and said

“I believe that these trainings are very important to the inmates, however, if not taken positively, these training can be a waste of time to our inmates. Some of the prisoners are forced to undertake the trainings and some do not see the value of the trainings”.

Petersilia (2003) contends that dedicating funds for educational programs are positive tools for reentry into the society which makes the offender less burden to the society in the future. In addition, education provides the basis for employment, which is crucial since it allows offenders to become self-sufficient and avoid involvement in the crime activity. In Kenya, every prison has free primary and secondary education as well as vocational and faith based programs. These programs have helped shape the attitude and the mental growth of most convicts. Findings from the key informants

revealed that the trainings offered at Kingongo prison include; academic, vocational, counseling, professional studies and faith based programs. Specifically, the trainings curriculum for these programmes include academic, entrepreneurship skills, plumbing, carpentry, tailoring, metal work, self-awareness, counseling, spiritual programs. Out of 10 respondents, 9 affirmed that these trainings give the inmates a chance to be busy and avoid idleness, assist in life out of prison. These programmes are not forced on inmates; rather they choose what they want to take.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings indicate that convicts are encouraged to enroll and gain individual skills which include knitting, embroidery, improved farming techniques, carpentry, welding, building and construction. This helps them develop a hobby, keep them busy and have a working schedule. Through these skills convicts get income from the items sold. On release they are able to use the income for transport and settling back to the community. The key informants noted that these individual skills gained by convicts can only adequately enable them settle back to the community if they are provided with startup capital to assist them start a business and settle.

RECOMMENDATION

There is need to train the prison warders on basic legal issues because they provide legal advice to convicts as soon as they are convicted especially on appeal issues. There should also be legal rules and considerations on 1st time offenders on cases like traffic offence, drug abusers and mothers who abandon their children. In most cases the drug abusers and mothers who abandoned their children need counselling and psychological support and confining them makes them become recidivists. Although the skills gained while in prison are good and relevant, there is need for after care homes, affiliate groups and follow up services to know the status of the convicts after release. This will help them in dealing with stigma as they will know there are people who have made hence reduce re-entry.

REFERENCES

1. Baldry, E., & Maple stone, P. (2003) "Prisoners' post-release homelessness and lack of social integration." *Current Issues in Criminology* **15**(2): 155-169.
2. Freeman, R. (1999). "Economics of Crime." *The Handbook of Labor Economics*, Orley Ashenfelter and David Card, eds. Amsterdam, Netherlands: North Holland Publishers. Irish James F. (1989) *Probation Recidivism: A study of probation adjustment and its relationship to post probation outcome for Adult criminal offenders*. Mincola, NY Nassau county probation department
3. Mauer, M. (2005). Thinking about prison and its impact in the twenty-first century. *Ohio State Journal of Criminal Law* **2**:607-618.
4. Petersilia, J. (2003). *When Prisoners Come Home*. New York: Oxford University Press.
5. Travis J, Solomon A L, Waul M., (2001) *From Prison to home. The dimension and consequences of prisoner re-entry*, Washington D. C. Urban Institute

