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**THE EFFECTS OF INSTITUTIONAL REHABILITATION AND  
REINTEGRATION INTERVENTIONS ON RECIDIVISM RATE IN  
RECENTLY RELEASED PRISONERS IN KENYA.**

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**\*Naphtaly Odera Osako, Dr. Yasin Kuso**

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Maseno University, School of Graduate Studies, Development and Strategic Studies, Master's  
in research and public policy.

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**\*Corresponding Author: Naphtaly Odera Osako**

Maseno University, School of Graduate Studies, Development and Strategic Studies, Master's in research and public  
policy.

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**ABSTRACT**

Recidivism is a significant challenge facing the correction system in Kenya, it compromises the security of the people, drains the prison inadequate infrastructure, as well as poses a question over rehabilitation programs success. Being a prison officer, I notice that there are offenders who are taken through the system several times even when there are interventions like vocational training, formal education, counseling and probation supervision. This paper aims to review how correctional institutions rehabilitation and reintegration programs play an integral part in reducing recidivism within Kenya specifically in Vihiga Prison. This paper implements a descriptive type of research that has been informed by the rehabilitation and social reintegration theory and based on the Kenya constitutional guidelines of human dignity, equality and fair treatment as enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya (2010), which focuses on prison officers and ex-offenders. Data collection is done by use of interviews and review of Kenya Prison Service records. The relationship between rehabilitation strategies and the outcome of recidivism is explored using descriptive statistics, as well as simple regression analysis. From the preliminary findings, poor cooperation between correctional institutions, probation department and the community, unemployment, severe stigma from the community and limited after care support has been the major root causes of ineffective rehabilitation. This study recommends enhancing preparation of pre-release, instituting orderly after-care programs, cooperation between correctional institutions, probation department, and active participation of family and community in reintegration process. The findings can be applied to policy that will help turn correctional institutions in Kenya into

places of custody, meaningful places of correction and rehabilitation in accordance with the Prisons Act (Cap. 90) and the Bill of Rights.

**KEYWORDS:** rehabilitation, recidivism, reintegration, correctional system.

## INTRODUCTION

The tendency of a convicted person to reoffend and return to jail or recidivism is something that correctional systems throughout the world are still grappling with. Even with reforms meant to transform the prisons in Kenya into rehabilitation facilities, a significant number of released inmates return within a few years with similar or more serious crimes. This recurrent imprisonment cycle places significant security, social and economic burden for both the affected community and state.

The Prisons Act (Cap. 90, Laws of Kenya) is the law that regulates the management and administration of prisons but the primary law that determines the legal framework in which the criminal conduct and punishment are evaluated is the Penal Code (Cap. 63, Laws of Kenya). The Kenyan Constitution 2010 of Chapter Four, Bill of Rights, requires that all persons, inmates included must be treated with dignity and that the prison system must promote rehabilitation instead of undertaking punitive actions.

Kenya Prisons Service has come up with several programs in this context to rehabilitate convicted offenders within the set framework, including formal education, vocational training such as carpentry, tailoring, welding, masonry, spiritual guidance, and psychosocial support. Nevertheless, according to my experience as a prison officer at Vihiga prisons, most of the prisoners who complete such programs find it hard to reintegrate and some of them quickly get involved with crime. This also raises key issues on whether the existing practices are adequate and effective in addressing the prime factors of crime and assisting the ex-offenders to permanently stay away from crime. It further identifies the lack of coordination between the prisons department, other criminal justice departments and the community in reintegrating individuals into the society after serving their sentence.

This paper represents a reflection on my professional experience and a methodical investigation into this issue of recidivism, based on the studies of institutional effectiveness, like Nyang (2025) and Walter (2025). This paper is no different, as it is targeted at examining the effects of institutional rehabilitation and reintegration approach on recidivism rates of former convicts in the context of Kenyan legal and constitutional practice.

### **Problem statement**

In an ideal scenario, correctional institutions should reduce the chances of an offender committing new offences once they come out of prison. Rehabilitation and reintegration measures, including skills training, counseling, prerelease preparation, are meant to equip offenders with employable skills, good values and social support so that they do not revert to offending. This goes in line with the focus of the Prisons Act on safe custody and rehabilitation of offenders (Prisons Act, Cap. 90). Constitutional principles of human dignity, social justice, and protection of the vulnerable (Constitution of Kenya, 2010, arts. 10, 28, and 51). But the recidivism rate in Kenya is still. Unemployment, peer pressure, substance abuse, family disintegration, stigma, and no post release follow-up are some of the reasons why many ex- convicts are inclined to crime. The programs within the institutions are regularly limited by lack of resources, overpopulation, the scarce professional staff such as psychologists, and lack of individualized case management (Kenya Prisons Service, n.d.). Upon release, there is also no coordination between prisons, probation and community participants or after care.

The fact that ex-convicts have continuously returned to prison, even with exposure to rehabilitation programs, implies that the policy efforts are not matched by actual results, just like the anti-corruption policies in Kenya being on the books but not actually leading to effective prosecutions (Walter, 2025). This necessitates both empirical and reflective look at how the present correction institutional strategy is being carried out and the actual effect they have on recidivism outcome with both statutory requirements and constitutional requirements.

### **Study objective. General Objective**

To examine how effective institutional rehabilitation and reintegration interventions are on recidivism among ex-prisoners in Kenya.

### **Specific Objectives**

- a. To determine the key rehabilitation and reintegration programs used in Vihiga prison.
- b. To understand the perception by prison officers and ex-prisoners regarding the effectiveness of these programs in minimizing reoffending.
- c. To explore the trends in recidivism using KPS documents and to correlate such data with attendance at rehabilitation programs.
- d. To recommend workable solutions to reinforce rehabilitation and reintegration plans to

minimize recidivism in accordance with Constitution of Kenya (2010) and Prisons Act (Cap. 90).

### **Literature and Theoretical Review. Theoretical Framework**

The study is based on rehabilitation and social reintegration theory that is reinforced with strain and social learning theory. Rehabilitation theory considers crime as a behavior that may be altered with specific intervention like education, therapy, and training of skills. The prison is regarded as a chance to work on criminogenic needs instead of only punishing (Cullen and Jonson, 2017). This is in accordance with the Constitution of Kenya (2010) article 51 that states that any person in detention or imprisonment shall enjoy all rights and fundamental freedoms, subject to the constitution, and that the conditions where the person is held must respect human dignity. According to social reintegration theory, long-term crime desistance is determined by the capacity of the offender to develop positive social roles, worker, parent, and community member, which are maintained by prosocial networks and opportunities (Maruna, 2001).

According to strain theory, people become involved in criminal activities when the means of attaining socially accepted ends is unavailable to them (Merton, 1938). The social learning theory states that criminal behavior is acquired by association with deviant individuals and supported by criminal values (Akers and Jennings, 2016).

These theories inform the conceptualization that institutional programs including skills training, counseling, and prerelease preparation, introduced under the statutory template of the Prisons Act (Cap. 90) influence recidivism outcomes including rate of reoffending, time to reoffend, and post release employment and family relations stability.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Following the predictive choices made by Walter (2025) as a form of institutional strategies predicting the outcome of an institution, the current study considers rehabilitation and reintegration strategies as the independent variables that are likely to alter the recidivism outcomes as a dependent variable.

### **Correctional institutions rehabilitation and reintegration strategies (independent variable)**

- a) Education and vocational programs.
- b) Spiritual and psychosocial counselling.
- c) Preparation for release and after care services.

d) Basic case management.

**Recidivism outcome (dependent variable)**

- a) A detailed number of readmission and reoffences as noted in the official records.
- b) Duration taken before reoffending.
- c) Patterns of unsuccessful and successful reintegration

It is assumed that a well implemented and stronger programs is associated with a successful reintegration and lower recidivism rate.

**METHODOLOGY**

The method of descriptive research adopted in this paper is like the institutional effectiveness research conducted by Walter (2025), which is only based on two data collection methods, comprising of interviews and reviewing the documentation records of Kenya Prisons Service.

**Area of study and population**

This study majorly focuses on Vihiga GK Prison in Vihiga County, Kenya. The population target consists of.

- a) Welfare officers and other prison officers who are involved directly in discharge, classification and rehabilitation of convicted offenders.
- b) Ex-convicts who completed their sentences within the last 5 years.

**Data Collection Methods**

Two complementary data collection methods were used.

**a) In-depth semi structured interviews**

- Interviews were conducted with selected correctional service officers who are directly involved in rehabilitation programs, and admission. These officers included welfare officers, documentation officers, chaplains, catechist and the prison imam who oversees all activities that involves inmates who are Muslims.
- A selected samples of ex-convicts accessible through the welfare office department contacts.

**Interviews examine,**

- Attitudes towards quality, significance of rehabilitation programs and availability.
- After release reintegration experience such as family relation, employment, relationship

with peers who are still criminals and stigma.

- Perspectives on causes and factors that increase or decrease recidivism.

**b) Review of Vihiga GK Prisons documentation records.**

Examination of documentation records upon authorization and adhering to ethical procedures, these documents included,

- Discharge and admission books for the selected years.
- Detailed records of convicted offenders taking part in various rehabilitation programs.
- Notations reflecting readmission of previous inmates, to determine tendencies of recidivism.

This document examination indicates objectively the number of offenders who are readmitted, the approximate length of the time between their release and their return, and the extent to which inmates who were enrolled in rehabilitation program reoffend.

No questionnaires or other quantitative survey instruments are used other than record and interview data.

**Data analysis**

The interview data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The transcription, coding and grouping of responses revealed major themes such as perceived benefits of programs, barriers to reintegration, correction institutional constraints and drivers of recidivism.

Vihiga GK Prisons documentation records were studied to identify,

- The rate of re-admission among ex-convicts over a specified time.
- Evidential relationships among readmission rates and participation in rehabilitation programs (including education or vocational training).

By comparing and combining the results of the interviews and reviewing the records, a consistent picture with the relationship between the institutional rehabilitation and reintegration strategies and recidivism outcomes became a possibility.

**Reflections, preliminary results, and discussions.**

My day-to-day experience as a prison officer, firsthand interviews and observation of the documentation records point to several important themes.

- **Effectiveness of the current rehabilitation programs.**

Various inmates participate in vocational training and gain basic skills that may assist them in self-employment upon completion of sentence. During imprisonment, spiritual and psychosocial support will minimize stress and disobedience by providing the inmate with emotional stability and hope. Formal education programs such as adult literacy, primary and secondary schooling generate opportunities to learn more. These elements assist in upholding the constitutional right to observe human dignity even during custody (Constitution of Kenya, 2010, art. 51) and rehabilitative purposes (Cullen & Jonson, 2017).

- **Challenges and gaps causing recidivism.**

The documentation records indicating the frequency by which ex-convicts reoffend, along side interview with ex-convicts and prison officers points out many habitual challenges.

- 1. No after care and follow up.**

According to interviewees, structured communication with the ex-convicts and professional support basically comes to an end once offenders are discharged. Other individuals revert to former practices and criminal circles without mentorship, treatment, and oversight.

- 2. Financial strain because of unemployment.**

Despite the vocational certificates, former offenders note that they struggle to secure employment. Strain theory states that some individuals are pushed back to survival crimes by stigma and lack of resources (Merton, 1938). Most of the common cases of offenses against property in terms of records show recurrence of admissions.

- 3. Community rejection and stigma.**

Most former convicts discuss strained relationships with family and distrust of neighbors. This social isolation strengthens the social learning processes and increases the probability of returning to more tolerant criminal friends (Akers and Jennings, 2016).

- 4. Limited personal monitoring and care.**

Officers note that it is hard to develop tailor-made rehabilitation strategies simply because there are a great number of inmates and too little staff. Due to this, record reviews reveal that only a few or no structured initiatives have been undertaken by some of the high-risk convicts by the time they get out of jail.

## **5. Poor coordination with relevant stakeholders.**

The prison, probation, local administration and non-governmental organization are listed as having weak cooperation, by interviewed officers. This reflects coordination issues that have been highlighted in other institutional reforms in Kenya (Ishikawa, 2019; Walter, 2025).

### **• Legal and theoretical analysis findings**

The existing policies take care of some individual factors, but the social and economic environment ex-offenders go back to is not being transformed adequately in the rehabilitation and reintegration perspective. The strain theory gives a reason of the strain of returning to crime despite a change in attitude due to poverty and unemployment after release (Merton, 1938). The social learning theory explains that recidivism is most probable when the former offenders reunite with criminal acquaintances (Akers and Jennings, 2016).

In law, the Kenyan Constitution (2010), and the Prisons Act (Cap.). 90) also offer a solid normative foundation to rehabilitation and humane treatment of offenders. Nonetheless, the difference between these legal norms and the real experience of ex a prison inmate resembles the larger problem in Kenya where evidence-based institutional designs fail to produce effective results on the ground (Ishikawa, 2019; Walter, 2025).

## **CONCLUSION**

Recidivism among the ex-prisoners in Kenya is one issue that further worries the criminal justice system, the community and policymakers. The interviews and the institutional records coupled with my working experience indicate that there are rehabilitation activities in the prisons, but they are unable to decrease the reoffending due to the poor prerelease planning, lack of aftercare, socioeconomic barriers, stigma, and lack of coordination from the relevant stakeholders.

The correction institutional strategies are thus not effective in the handling of recidivism fully. The difference between the policy and legal vision of reformed and fully reintegrated ex-offenders, The Constitution of Kenya (2010), and the Prisons Act (Cap. 90) spells out, and the reality of repeat offenders is evidently large. This would require not just reinforcing internal prison programs but also drawing solid bridges between the prison, community, and social supportive systems in order to tackle recidivism.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS.**

### **1. Enhance Preparation for pre-release.**

Conduct simple yet organized prerelease trainings on life skills, realistic expectations, basic

planning of accommodation and livelihood right after being released.

**2. Improve record keeping and follow up for ex-convicts.**

Improve record-keeping measures to trace release and recidivism of former inmates, and correlate enrolment in particular programs with recidivism. This will facilitate evidenced based decision making.

**3. Enhance economic support in reintegration.**

Collaborate with external stakeholders to open opportunities to ex-convicts toward vocational placements, apprenticeships or small grants to initiate income earning projects.

**4. Encourage community and family engagement.**

Engage families in prerelease plans and implement community discussions to reduce stigma using pre-existing structures such as chaplaincy, welfare, local administration.

**5. Improve stakeholder coordination.**

Increase coordination systems through regular meetings between the prison, probation, local administration and community-based organizations to assist high risk ex-offenders.

**6. Uphold legal and constitutional mandates in practice.**

Ensure the Prisons Act (Cap. 90) the rehabilitative objectives and the constitutional principle of equality, decency and social justice are enshrined in the everyday prison operation and discharge policy.

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