

2. IMPRISONMENT AND RIGHTS: EFFECTS OF FEMALE INMATES' COMMUNICATIVE CHALLENGES ON REINTEGRATION IN ZIMBABWE

Oswin Manhivi & Victor Mugari

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of communication challenges on female inmates' successful reintegration into society post-imprisonment in Zimbabwe. Through qualitative research, including in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, the study examines the extent to which the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service (ZPCS) facilitates effective communication between female inmates and their families. Findings reveal that despite constitutional mandates, the ZPCS's failure to support effective communication undermines inmate preparation for reintegration. Challenges such as limited visits, ill-treatment, and resource scarcity hinder female inmates' ability to maintain family ties and acquire necessary skills for successful reintegration. The study calls for comprehensive interventions to address these challenges and empower female inmates for a smoother transition back into society.

Keywords: Communication, recidivism, ZPCS, rehabilitation, female inmates, reintegration

Introduction

This study analyses the communicative challenges female inmates face to achieve reintegration post release from prison. Prison inmates are among the vulnerable groups of people who face countless challenges due to conditions they find themselves in. Evidence from numerous prisons shows that offender reintegration remains a challenge. It seems there are some inadequacies on the strategies being implemented by prisons to curb offender recidivism. Thus, it is a possibility that increases in reoffending are a result of increased challenges faced by the female inmates during their time in prison. Therefore, failure to minimise the challenges faced by female inmates is the main reason behind the increase in offender recidivism, which is the recipe for increased prison population (Bell, 2019).

This study argues that communication is central to inmate rehabilitation and concurs with scholars who opine that inmates should benefit from communication through interacting with relatives and family members outside (Chivandikwa et al., 2020). Inmates need both material and moral support from relatives and family members to augment the meagre resources found in most prisons in Zimbabwe due to the country's harsh economic situation. Due to their gender, female inmates seem to be faced with harsher challenges than male inmates since the former may have children, accompanying them in prison, outside prison or both (Cecil, McHale, Strozier & Pietsch, 2008).

The Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service adopted programmes such as counselling, female open prison system and programmes aimed at promoting interaction between female inmates and the outside world to ameliorate challenges associated with recidivism (Kanhukamwe, 2015; Mavhembu, 2016). It should, however, be noted that the deployed interventions have not been

completely effective, triggering the need for further interventions to lower the residual recidivism to insignificant proportions. This study seeks to do just that by designing a communication-centred framework to be used by the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service- ZPCS to successfully prepare female inmates for reintegration.

Research Objectives

The research objectives were:

To analyse the effectiveness of communication between female inmates and relatives and families in preparing the inmates for reintegration after release from prison.

To examine the extent to which communicative challenges faced by the female inmates affect their reintegration after release from prison.

To design strategies to be used by prisons to improve communication between female inmates and their relatives and family to achieve reintegration.

Research Questions

The main research question for this study is: *How do communicative challenges faced by female inmates in Manicaland hinder their successful reintegration?*

The specific research questions for this study are:

How effective is prison communication between female inmates and relatives and families in preparing the inmates for reintegration?

To what extent are communicative challenges faced by the female inmates affecting their reintegration after release from prison?

Which strategies can be designed to improve communication between female inmates and their relatives and family to achieve effective reintegration?

Significance of the Study

The study is an explanatory study to generate data useful for prisons, the stakeholders and interested policy planners and policy implementers to try and find out the extent to which prisons promote female inmates' rights through effective communication. The study is insightful to the prison officers and inmates by making the prison management and government mindful to best practices in terms of prison communication to promote the rights of female inmates.

Literature Review

This study's core objective is to explore how communication challenges negatively affect female inmates' reintegration after prison release. While previous studies have examined prison life through the lens of health, sexuality, psychological, and socio-economic issues (Cunha, 2023; Gonçalves, 2016), they often overlook the fundamental role of communication as an underlying factor impacting prison life and hindering reintegration. Reports in the media, parliamentary debates, and the researchers' personal experiences in prison underscore the critical importance of communication, prompting this investigation into the specific communicative barriers female inmates face, despite communication being a universal human right, even for inmates.

The right to communication is well-documented, with Mcleod (2018) citing Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms everyone's freedom to receive and impart information without restriction. Mcleod (2018) further asserts that upholding this right unlocks access to other human rights. Consequently, inmates, facing difficult and frustrating circumstances, desperately need access to communication, especially for external support vital to their participation in prison programs and successful reintegration preparation (Contreras, 2018). Underscoring the critical nature of interaction, Koschmann and Petersen (2015) emphasise that communication is a crucial process that

fosters social cohesion, giving true meaning to life.

Beyond challenges interacting with outside relatives, female inmates may also have children accompanying them in prison, adding to their burden. They grapple with the distress of not knowing how their children and family members are coping outside, including their schooling, food security, and general well-being, particularly given Zimbabwe's socio-economic environment. Despite these pressing concerns, prison regulations often limit female inmates' right to communicate with their families (Commissioner Standing Order, 2014; Mafume, 2021), restricting their roles as mothers, wives, and women. A Zimbabwean study by Mafume (2021) also reveals that female inmates, despite experiencing greater psychological challenges in seclusion, receive fewer visits than their male counterparts, possibly due to relatives' circumstances or insufficient ZPCS awareness regarding visits.

Statistics indicate that over 40% of female prisoners receive no family visits, with 46% reporting no spousal visits during incarceration. This disparity is significant, given that female inmates constitute only 2.5% of the global prison population. In Manicaland Province (Chipinge, Mutare Remand, and Rusape Prisons), approximately 50 female inmates out of 2,000 total inmates also represent about 2.5% of the provincial prison population. Research points to long distances and resentment over crimes as primary reasons for infrequent visits (Zimbabwe Association of Crime and Rehabilitation Organization- ZACRO, 2013; Mafume, 2021). Furthermore, Mavhembu's (2016) findings in Zimbabwe suggest that female inmates are perceived as problematic due to their gender-specific needs. The common practice of housing female prisons as attachments to male facilities often leads to female inmates being marginalised, although economic challenges also contribute to their predicament.

Institutional factors further exacerbate the challenges faced by female inmates. For instance, the Prison Act (Part IX-58) mandates the separation of a weaned child (around two years old) from their mother in prison, a deeply distressing experience for female inmates, especially if they have no one outside to care for their children. Many children removed from prison end up in the custody of the Social Welfare Department, even when relatives exist. This maternal separation can lead to trauma for both mother and child, negatively impacting the offender's reintegration. Additionally, Giordano (2019) highlights that committing crimes against family members can create enduring estrangement, further isolating inmates from crucial support networks.

The Ministry of Justice's 2019 report indicates that women commit fewer and less dangerous crimes than men, often described as 'crimes of passion' by Mafume (2021). However, crime rates among females have risen alarmingly in other regions; for example, from 1980-2010, the USA saw a 646% increase in female crime compared to 419% for men (The Sentencing Project, 2012). Similarly, England and Wales experienced a 27% rise in female inmate population by August 2012 (Prison Reform Trust, 2012). While various factors contribute to this, committing crimes against family members can sever vital relationships needed for successful reintegration. Maintaining strong family ties, however, can significantly aid an inmate's rehabilitation by ensuring their children are cared for during imprisonment. Ultimately, successful reintegration hinges on prisons offering rehabilitation processes that foster effective communication between offenders and their families.

Despite the necessity of rehabilitation for female inmates, they face countless challenges, as further evidenced by Part VII of the Prisons and Correctional Service Act (2023), which prohibits them from working outside prison precincts. The ZPCS Rehabilitation Policy Document (2005) outlines gendered programs for female inmates, such as gardening and hairdressing, which are less lucrative than those available to male inmates who are permitted to work outside and be employed by external organisations. This disparity is compounded by the fact that 99% of female inmate rehabilitation activities occur at Chikurubi Female Prison, with other prisons contributing only 1% (ZPCS Rehabilitation Statistics, 2005-2014). This situation exacerbates the already stressful conditions for

female inmates, who often face abandonment by family, including children and husbands. Husbands frequently engage in extramarital affairs during their wives' incarceration, leading to significant emotional and mental health challenges for female inmates (Abertus, 2010; Kanhukamwe, 2015).

Archer et al. (2010) acknowledge that female prisoners are more susceptible to distressing situations and thus more responsive to trauma than their male counterparts. This aligns with Teplin's (2002) findings, which show that over 74% of incarcerated females globally exhibit signs of psychiatric issues. Similarly, Todrys and Amon in Zambia, and Mafume (2021) in Zimbabwe, highlight the added burden on female inmates whose children accompany them in prison, often lacking adequate food and clothing. This directly contradicts the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners' Rule number 22, which advocates for upholding prisoners' rights to empowerment during imprisonment (UNODC, 2021; Kyazze, 2018).

Kanhukamwe's (2015) research in Zimbabwe indicates that volunteer counsellors can help incarcerated mothers mitigate trauma. However, such counselling often faces difficulties due to the intense and multifaceted challenges female inmates experience, including personal issues, child-related concerns, and problems involving outside relatives. The adverse effects of prison challenges on children are well-documented; Rocque, Bieri, and MacKenzie (2020) emphasise that children with incarcerated parents are over three times more likely to exhibit behavioural problems than their peers without imprisoned parents, often suffering from learning disabilities and developmental delays. This dual impact on mother and child underscores the need for gender balance across all spheres of life, including prison life, as mandated by Section 17 of the Zimbabwean Constitution (2013). To address visit-related challenges and improve family contact, Mavhembu (2016) recommended establishing female open prisons in Zimbabwe, leading to the ZPCS's 2021 opening of a Female Open Prison in Marondera (Rupapa, 2021). While this development offers relief, it introduces its own set of challenges. Prior studies have identified numerous challenges faced by female inmates, many of which infringe upon their communication rights as human beings (Coyle and Fair, 2018). However, there remains a significant gap in research regarding the specific communicative challenges female inmates face during reintegration. This study aims to bridge this gap by advocating for female inmates' human rights through an exploration of these communicative challenges and by proposing a practical framework for the ZPCS to prepare female inmates for successful reintegration.

Research Methodology

This paper is guided by the qualitative paradigm in understanding participants' experience and their interpretation of the issue under investigation (Berg & Lune, 2017; Bilous, Hammersley & Lloyd, 2018; Lelissa, 2018). The paradigm is underpinned by the interpretivist philosophical view to accord the researchers the opportunity to interpret reality through the subjective meanings that participants who experience the phenomenon give hence the researchers comprehend the experiences through the eyes of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study also employs explanatory study design to answer the, 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions to obtain detailed information about the female inmates' experiences (Virta & Lowe, 2017). The multiple-case approach was employed to study cases at three prisons (Chipinge, Mutare Remand and Rusape) with each, being studied in detail. As at 14 July 2023, there was a total of 50 female inmates at the three prisons, with Mutare Remand having 27 while Chipinge and Rusape had 12 and 9 respectively.

Data generation was conducted through interviews, document analysis and observation (using structured interview and observation guides) to allow the researchers to triangulate the results from the various data generation tools to confirm, cross validate and corroborate findings (Green & Thorogood, 2018; Flick, 2018). These are believed to be able to best articulate and give a holistic description of the issue under investigation. This, therefore, called for a purposive inclusion of female inmates, prison officers, female inmates' spouses and relatives and human rights experts. In addition,

dung rolling was used to identify family members and relatives for interviews since they were not easy to find, hence the researchers were referred by those with information about their whereabouts. Regarding sampling, Morse (1994) argues that 30 to 50 participants are large enough to obtain feedback for most or all perceptions in qualitative research. However, among the 50 female inmates in prisons in Manicaland Province, the researchers interviewed them until a point of saturation was reached when nothing new came out of the interviewees. In-depth interviews were conducted with female inmates. In addition, a study with a longitudinal element was conducted whereby selected female inmates were studied for more than four months, from the time they were in prison to post-release whereby a follow-up study was done to explore the effectiveness of their interaction with relatives and families in preparing the inmates for reintegration. The prison officers and human rights experts were key informants with expert knowledge in terms of female inmates' rights and prison policy. They were presumed to possess experiences and meanings about the topic under study (Tomaszewski, Zarestky & Gonzalez, 2020).

The researchers were aware of the ethical responsibilities and legal constraints that accompanied the gathering and reporting of information to protect the rights and welfare of the participants involved in the research study (Given, 2019). In this context, ethical issues were considered to protect the rights of the participants of the study (Gonzalez & Forister, 2020). To increase the degree of the research's credibility and acceptability, the researchers employed trustworthiness (Berg & Lune, 2017) which Dhingra and Dhingra in Madenga (2017) view as crucial in assessing the degree to which the selected research instruments allow the researchers to 'hit the bull's eye'. To achieve this, the researchers employ prolonged engagement, use of multiple methods of inquiry, seeking informed consent, maintaining anonymity, data safety and member checking with the participants.

Thematic analysis was also employed to make meaning from the generated data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The data was analysed through organising, generating categories and themes, coding and offering interpretations whereby the researchers began to interpret what was learnt from the data. It brought meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, categories, developing linkages and a story line that made sense (Chiparange, 2016).

From a total of 15 participants, a sample of 6 participants (female inmates) was reached after a point of saturation was reached. The remaining 9 included 3 officers, 2 male inmates, 1 member from Rights Group, 2 inmates' relatives and 1 inmates' husband. In the analysis, Cases 1, 2 and 3 represented Mutare Remand, Chipinge and Rusape prisons. Four categories of participants who participated in this study included: inmates. Prisons officers, relatives of inmates and human rights personnel.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data was generated to determine the influence of communication in creating an environment that enhances preparation of female inmates for reformation after release from prison. Perceptions and experiences of the participants of this study were generated through interviews, involving in-depth and key informant interview guides, observation and document analysis. The data was generated from prison officers, female and male inmates, Rights Groups, inmates' relatives and inmates' spouses, which was evidence that data was collected across the communities relevant to the research topic. Female ex-inmates were interviewed when they were still in prison and a follow-up programme was done to interview them after release, which took about five months. This section presents an analysis of findings under three major themes. The themes involve the influence of communication in preparing female inmates for life post-release, communicative challenges' effects on female inmates' preparations for reintegration and strategies to improve communication in prisons to benefit inmates.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the research participants (n= 15)

Participants' Characteristics	Case 1 M F	Case 2 M F	Case 3 M F	Total M F	Grand Total
Inmates	01 03	01 02	00 01	02 06	08
Officers	01 00	01 00	00 01	02 01	03
Inmates' relatives	01 01	00 00	00 00	01 01	02
Rights officer	01 00	00 00	00 00	01 00	01
Inmates' spouses	01 00	00 00	00 00	01 00	01
Total	05 03	02 02	01 02	07 08	15

Data was generated from various participants of different backgrounds to ensure that the perspectives viewed cuts across all age groups for in-depth understanding of the topic under study.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of participants according to age (n= 15)

Participants' Age	18-25 M F	26-33 M F	34 and Above M F	Total M F	G. Total
Inmates	01 01	01 03	00 02	02 06	08
Officers	00 00	02 00	00 01	02 01	03
Inmates relatives	00 00	00 00	01 01	01 01	02
Rights officer	00 00	00 00	01 00	01 00	01
Inmates spouses	00 00	00 00	01 00	01 00	01
Total	01 01	03 03	03 04	07 08	15

The importance of age in research is evidenced by its ability to facilitate understanding of the researcher's target group and allows the analysis of the similarities and differences between age groups. It also ensures that the perspectives viewed cut across all age groups for in-depth understanding of the research problem.

Table 3. Demographic characteristics of participants according to educational status (n= 15)

Participants' Age	Primary education M F	Secondary education M F	Tertiary education M F	Total M F	G. Total
Inmates	01 01	03 02	01 00	02 06	08
Officers	00 00	01 01	00 01	02 01	03
Inmates' relatives	00 01	00 01	00 00	01 01	02
Rights officer	00 00	00 00	00 01	01 00	01
Inmates' spouses	00 00	01 00	00 00	01 00	01
Total	01 02	05 04	01 02	07 08	15

Differences in educational attainments was important in that respondents gave diverse opinions and information pertaining to the topic under study.

Table 4. Demographic characteristics of the research participants according to inmates' periods in prison (n=8)

Participants' sentences	1-6 months	7-12 months	12 months and above	Total
Female inmates	01	04	01	06

Male inmates	00	00	02	02
Total	01	04	03	08

Data was generated from various inmates with different prison sentences hence a variety of offences and prison experiences.

Data collected from varying groups of people ensures that the perspectives viewed cut across people of various professions and experiences for credibility of research findings. This is in line with Tomaszewski, Zarestky & Gonzalez's (2020) suggestion that generating data from numerous cases enhances the viewing of data from various perspectives and experiences allows the researchers to verify the data generated and to come out with a broad picture of the phenomenon as well as constructing a more accurate reality of the study. It also enhances the researchers' understanding of data from different settings to find out the agreements and disagreements that emanate from environmental factors which promote the achievement of the research's transferability (Sileyew, 2020).

Communication's influence in preparing female inmates for life post-release

Most of the data generated showed that effective communication can promote a conducive situation for inmates to be effectively prepared so that they live a life free from crime outside prison. The communication involves officer-inmate, officer-inmate's relative and inmate-relative communication. In prison, the officer-inmate communication starts as the inmate is in the hands of prison officers, which is crucial in preparing inmates for life after their release from prison. The information is also needed so that officers, usually under the Rehabilitation and Reintegration Office can visit inmates' places of residence to speak to the relatives in order to be able to fully assist the inmate, especially just after the inmate's admission into prison.

Inmates are interviewed upon admission in prison to provide the administration with information to assist the inmates where there is need. Information on next of kin is recorded in order to contact the relative in case of illness, death and dissemination of any important information (Prison Officer).

In addition to visiting inmates' homes, programmes such as the Family Week (FW) Programme proved to be useful for the interaction between inmates and the outside world, although it was suspended during the time of interviews. However, its importance was expressed by some of the interviewees. The interviewees revealed that the programme afforded them more time with their relatives and family members.

During normal visits, inmates are seen by friends and family members for a restricted time under the supervision of a prison officer who should hear every word uttered during the conversation while the Family Week involves fewer restrictions. (Female Inmate).

The above narration by one of the female inmates is supported by institutional documents; the Prisons and Correctional Service Act (Section 89) which states that inmates' visits are crucial in promoting and maintaining relationships between inmates and their relatives and family members for successful reintegration into society. In line the above document, the researcher could observe inmates visited during the time of data collection.

That communication influences the preparation of female inmates for life after their release from prison was also illustrated by the interviewees, who clarified the way the programme was motivational to the inmates to live a crime-free life post-release from prison.

The Family week Programme had given us high hopes for reintegration into the society and an

opportunity to get updates on family issues The interaction with people from outside gave us confidence so that after release we couldn't have challenges joining others in the community (Female Inmate).

That the FW programme was crucial to inmates was also evidenced by various interviewees giving testimony of how they were benefitting from the programme which allowed them to plan for life outside through the confidence people outside had with the inmates through the interactions.

Through the Family Week Programme, we could share joys and sorrows with those from outside.... You get updates on things outside which helps us to develop a plan for life outside prison (Female Inmate).

The importance of interaction programmes was articulated as having the potential to mend relationships between inmates and their family members given that some inmates are incarcerated for committing offences on their relatives or family members.

Through interactive programmes where inmates and family members meet and talk directly, there are high chances that issues are resolved because of the relatively free environment which can give the offenders the chance to apologise hence rebuilding trust (Human Rights Officer).

In addition to programmes that bring together inmates and their families and relatives, partnership programmes between the ZPCS and organisations or individuals were playing a pivotal role in preparing inmates for life post-release.

Some of our prisons are into partnership with organisations and individuals. Here at Rusape Prison, we are into partnership with Nyaradzo Group of Companies where inmates and a few officers undertake a Tree planting and Management Programme (Prison Officer).

Inmates who undergo rehabilitation programmes including partnership programmes go through a selection process meant to select the best candidates for a particular programme. The selection of the candidates is done by the Rehabilitation office, Security office, Reception office, Health office and the Administration office.

While the selection procedure for inmates to be placed on rehabilitation programmes is crucial, the actual rehabilitation programmes such as partnerships are even more important since it is an interactive programme for inmates, gaining employment and resources as was expressed by the participants of the study.

In addition to availing resources to look after one's family whilst in prison, inmates in partnerships, compounded with good behaviour have higher chances of getting employed after serving their sentences because they are known by employers. (Prison Officer).

That there were various programmes under rehabilitation was also evidenced by the Fulcrum Piggery Production Company which offered education on piggery production to inmates at the prisons in Manicaland Province. Figure 1 below shows a pamphlet for the programme and a certification ceremony for inmates.



Figure 1: Inmates' graduation in Piggery Production at Rusape Prison

One of the interviewees took time to expound how the ZPCS enters into partnerships with organisations and individuals.

The ZPCS usually enters into a partnership with an organisation or individual through signing an MOU Most of the partnerships allow inmates to interact with people outside prison (Officer-in-Charge).

The researcher who was part of the inmates' graduation in Piggery Production Programme by Fulcrum Piggery Production, observed the graduation which was held at Rusape Prison on 7 October 2023. Those who graduated involved male inmates, female inmates, prison officers and some people from the community. Evidence that those who participated in the programme graduated was revealed through the certificates that were issued by the Fulcrum Piggery Production.

Communicative challenges' effects on female inmates' preparations for reintegration

The data generated exposed a myriad of communicative challenges that female inmates face in and out of prison. Such challenges have varying effects to the complete and successful rehabilitation of inmates to reduce cases of recidivism. Various factors that involve inmate-oriented, institution-oriented and prison officer-oriented are experienced in prisons. The challenges were shared by the participants, which starts from the way the inmates are selected to participate in a programme. Sometimes inmates who are not interested in some rehabilitation programmes. Some inmates just partake in programmes as a pastime.

It also emerged during data gathering that inmates can be offered rehabilitation programmes, but lack of follow-up programmes to monitor progress and ensure that reintegration is a success.

Issues to do with shortage of staff to follow up and multitasking are the main challenges although sometimes the transport officers complain about shortage of fuel (Rehabilitation Officer).

The documents inspected during data gathering revealed that the ZPCS had procured many vehicles, hence transport should not be a challenge pertaining to follow-up programmes to check on ex-inmates' progress.

The importance of issues to do with inmates interacting with their relatives and family members was also pointed out as among the challenges hindering the inmates' preparation for life post incarceration.

The way the Family Week was suspended without any notice, left most of us wondering how we were going to interact with our family members and relatives (Female Inmate).

The communication challenges encountered have various effects in line with preparing female inmates to lead life independent of crime post-release from prison.

Although we were imparted with skills in prison, it is difficult for me to cope with life outside. Our society does not accepted people who have been in prison, they treat you like an outcast (Ex-inmate).

In line with the above challenge faced by ex-inmates after they are released from prison, one of the interview participants retorted that;

There seems to be a disjoint between prisons and society since society is not trained on what they are also expected to do when one is released from prison (Prison Officer- Rehabilitation).

Both male and female inmates experience challenges in line with communication. However, female inmates seem to experience more challenges as compared to their male counterparts, with one of the interviewees expounding some of the reasons.

Female inmates have more challenges because when they are arrested, people seem not to care, which result in them receiving less or no assistance when they are in prison. This is where the challenges faced by women after release from prison stem from (Inmate's relative).

While the female inmates receive less assistance when they are in prison, those married can also have challenges with their husbands, who usually do not visit their wives in prison as compared to male inmates.

Most of the female inmates do not receive visitors during their time in prison, even when the Family Week Programme was still in place. Some men even marry when their wives are incarcerated, further plunging the female inmates into more challenges (Female Inmate).

The challenges can be worsened when a female inmate is accompanied by a child in prison.

Some female inmates at this station have children, who also need special and additional needs which are sometimes scarce.

The researchers had the opportunity to inspect the Visitors Book which revealed that out of the total number of female inmates that were married, less than 20 percent were visited by their husbands, even when the FW was not yet suspended. On another note, the researchers observed that some female inmates had children accompanying them.

Participants of this study revealed that there are various reasons for husbands' failure to visits their wives in prison. Male dominance was one of the suggested reasons although distances most prisons are located from town was among the reasons as well.

In our society, men are usually arrogant so they can view visiting their wives in prison as a sign of weakness, hence they avoid visiting them.

Lack of support during imprisonment can have negative consequences on the female inmates after release from prison. One of the female inmates, once interviewed whilst in prison, who was also interviewed after her release from prison, complained over people's attitude towards her products, simply because she was once in prison.

I decided to venture into selling quarry stones since many people are building houses in this new high-density suburb. I observed that potential buyers are shunning my product because I was once incarcerated (Female Ex-inmate).

While inmates are imparted with various skills under rehabilitation programmes, sometimes the efforts do not pay since the acquired knowledge and skills are not valued, especially in communities.

Currently people do not have confidence in the qualifications attained when one is incarcerated and the products made by ex-inmates (Human Rights Officer).

In addition to the challenges faced by inmates and ex-inmates, the economic situation in the country worsens the burden.

The current prison system is replete with challenges due to economic hardships so most inmates are not being supported by the system and people from outside because most of them are affected by the economy as well (Inmate's spouse).

The importance of offender rehabilitation programmes in the ZPCS was observed by the interviewees. It was however noted that imparting inmates with skills but at the end lack assistance to promote the use of those skills was a challenge.

Imparting skills to inmates can be effective when accompanied by action. However, inmates are just given skills without start-ups, which negatively affects the inmates, ..., hence they reoffend. (Female Inmate).

Due to the prevailing challenges encountered in the Zimbabwe's prison system, it appeared that the rehabilitation system was not a success due to the countless challenges faced by the system to successfully prepare inmates for life outside prison.

The prison conditions seem to be uncondusive for successful preparation of inmates, despite that various rehabilitation programmes are offered to impart the inmates with the skills (Male Inmate).

The above sentiments by the Female Inmate were supported by the Recidivist Register, which when inspected, confirmed that the female inmates were reoffending, despite that they were fewer than male inmates in number. Furthermore, the Rehabilitation Book revealed that a number of rehabilitation programmes were being offered at the stations.

Inmates are sometimes involved in partnership programmes, such as being employed for a stipend, making it easier for an inmate to take care of his/her family whilst in prison. However, failure to pay the inmates their stipends has various effects.

Initially, the company did not have challenges in paying our allowances. However, with time they started to delay the payments until the allowances were no longer coming. (Female Inmate).

Delays and non-payment of inmates' allowances have effects on the inmate, officers, the prison system and beneficiaries of the money received. This was supported by one of the prison officers who emphasised the effects of non-payment of the allowances on prison security. When inmates are not paid, they become demoralised.

It also seems that partnerships do not succeed because the two parties are not equal, since one part may be more dominant than the other.

Most of the organisations that enter into partnership with the ZPCS try to dominate, may be because of belief that inmates are a source of cheap labour. This is why some partnerships do not last. (Rehabilitation Officer).

Strategies to improve communication in prisons to benefit inmates

This study proposes a bunch of strategies that the prison and correctional body may incorporate into its system to ameliorate communication challenges that hinder consolidated reintegration and reduced recidivism.

Introduction of new programmes/modules

The ZPCS has managed to craft quite several rehabilitation programmes supported by partnership with various organisations in the country. While those privy to internal information may be satisfied with most of the programmes on offer, people and potential employers do not have confidence in the programmes since they are conducted in prison.

There are people outside, who still view prison as a place that cannot produce something reputable, which is why it is important to offer inmates programmes that are affiliated with recognised universities and colleges to dispel the doubt people and potential employers have over the certificates acquired in prison (Prison Officer- Rehabilitation).

The assertion by the Rehabilitation Officer was also supported by an interviewee with the view of revising the Zimbabwe Prisons' education system;

In addition, prisons should also introduce programmes in entrepreneurship since income-generating projects alone are falling short (Prison Officer).

Effective Follow up Programme

Data from interviewing prison and rehabilitation officers attest to the fact that the follow-ups and visits of inmates' homes are very effective in building confidence between the inmates and community members and relatives.

This is important since, through the rehabilitation officer, the inmates and families also share information and knowledge, even about inmates' transformation to increase chances of reintegration and acceptance (Prison Officer).

The above is supported by institutional documents such as, Section 4 of the Prisons and Correctional Service Act (2023) which advocates for inmates to actively participate in rehabilitation Programmes designed to promote their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Counselling and the parole system

The value of counselling and the parole system was highlighted by the interviewees who realised the programmes' potential to reform offenders.

ZPCS should intensify counselling to minimise the psycho-social effects associated with challenges faced by the female inmates, such as being rejected by their partners once they are in prison (Prison Officer).

The importance of the programmes was also noted by the interviewee who observed that offenders reform more when they interact with people from outside.

Zimbabwe should implement the parole system so that those who qualify spend more time with those who enhance their reformation to minimise reoffending (Prison Officer).

Amplified awareness campaigns

Amplifying awareness campaigns was viewed as a crucial aspect to minimise communicative challenges to the reformation of female inmates.

The ZPCS should conduct wide and amplified awareness campaigns on offender rehabilitation programmes, including their effectiveness to the offenders and society to enable people to gain confidence in their programmes so that society knows that reformation is very possible (Prison Officer).

This can also instil confidence in people to employ ex-inmates. Moreover, the awareness campaigns can go a long way in making people have confidence in the products made by both inmates and ex-inmates. In addition, the female inmate, who was into quarry stone selling also observed the need for communities to be educated on how it is important to support ex-inmates to promote reintegration.

Discussion of Findings

Communication's influence in preparing female inmates for life post-release

Various rehabilitation programmes, such as education programmes, interaction programmes such as the FW programme and partnership programmes were on offer at the prisons under study with the purpose to prepare inmates to live a crime-free life after release from prison. To the inmates, the programmes, had become their window for reintegration into the society. Before it was suspended, the FW programme proved to be effective in terms of interaction between inmates and people from outside, which is healthy in maintaining ties hence reducing feeling of isolation. It also emerged that communication is central in the recruitment process of inmates who would want to pursue an identified rehabilitation training programme, with the selection of the inmates done by specific offices relevant with the selection process. The findings from this study confirms Koschmann and Petersen's (2015) Constitutive Model of Communication which suggests that offender reintegration is only possible when there is a conducive environment in prison created through effective communication. The interaction is the source of effective communication which is also crucial in bringing about social networking which makes life real and practical. This is congruent with Contreras' (2018) findings which show that effective communication and family support during imprisonment is panacea to anxiety, depression and decline in mental health associated with inmates who lack interaction with family members and relatives.

Communicative challenges' effects on female inmates' preparations for reintegration

Good as it may seem, prison communication is confronted with countless challenges, which hinder successful offender reintegration. Issues to do with partnerships were raised by participants who argued that the partnerships faced various challenges such as establishing who gets what in a partnership. It cannot be dismissed that in a partnership, one party gets a lion's share while the other gets a small share depending on the nature of the partnership, hence most of them are short-lived. The inmates get short-changed when the partnerships fail, which can also be compared to the suspension of interaction programmes such as the FWP. The suspension of the FWP is against the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules (Rule 43) which encourages prisons to implement female inmates' visits to ensure their comfort hence creating chances of their reintegration.

Data from interviews also reveal that female inmates experience a rough reality when they leave prison because of a mismatch between the prison system and the world they are released into. For example, while many female ex-inmates attest to receiving rehabilitation skills, the world out there is not receptive to them. There is a gap between prison and reintegration since there is no grooming of society on dealing with ex-offenders or at least some advocacy on their behalf so that communities understand that they could give these ex-convicts another chance. When the ex-inmates are not accepted by society, their chances of reoffending are very high. The general argument is that challenges faced by female inmates emanate from lack of communication, which is an infringement of their rights as human beings (Coyle & Fair, 2018).

In the same vein, the prison conditions seem to be unconducive for successful preparation of inmates, despite that various rehabilitation programmes are offered to impart the inmates with the required

skills. Imparting skills to inmates can be effective, but it can be more effective when compounded with start-ups, which seem to be lacking upon release of inmates. Denying the inmates empowerment is against the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the treatment of Prisoners' Rule number 22 which encourages prisons to uphold the prisoners' rights to empowerment during imprisonment (UNODC, 2021; Kyazze, 2018). In this regard, it seems the ZPCS mandate is difficult to achieve. On a positive note, employment of inmates by companies makes the inmates feel that their lives are destined to change for the better. However, when employed, the inmates cannot undertake other programmes since most of their time will be spent at work. It emerged that, the companies fail to pay the inmates, they kill all the hope the inmates would have gathered. What further kills the hope of female inmates is that some husbands run away especially when their female partners are imprisoned. This adds more challenges to the inmates, some of who would have children in prison, who need additional and special resources such as food and clothing. This is in line with Section 71 of the Prisons and Correctional Service, which advocates for the ZPCS to provide children accompanying their mothers in prison with food, clothing and other necessities.

In addition to challenges posed by being accompanied by children in prison, female inmates may not be visited, even by their husbands due to various reasons. It cannot be dismissed that some men may want to visit their wives in prison but advice by relatives, parents or friends may cause them to take such negative decisions. In a patriarchal society, men are regarded as leaders in families and other various institutions. The dominance which men have as a result of patriarchy sometimes turn into arrogance which makes them to regard women as unimportant people.

This seems to be among the reasons why men find it hard to visit their wives when they are in prison. However, the location of some prisons, such as Chipinge prison, situated about 15 kilometres from Chipinge town is among the factors that deter potential visitors from visiting. Lack of visits by female inmates is one of the sources of despair among inmates and ex-inmates. Societies used to believe that inmates were fed with poison in prison simply because many inmates used to die after release. This can make one believe that inmates used to die because of lack of hope, which can lead to chronic illnesses hence deaths. However, when inmates are released from prison with skills for instance, they keep one hoping that one day they can get a job or start an income- generating project.

Strategies to improve communication in prisons to benefit inmates

There is a need for a clear and well-choreographed strategy to communicate with communities. Effective reintegration can be fully achieved when there is assessment of inmates to find out the relevant programme an inmate can undertake with the support of people from outside who can give the inmate the confidence that leads a normal life after release from prison, which is possible. Many interviewed ex-inmates decried the lack of capital and quasi-financial support that could be extended to them to realise the full capacity of their prison-earned skills.

When they are released into the world, they can be compared to a zoo animal that gets released into the wild, with all but its own self and survival instincts to soldier on. There should be a halfway house system responsible for communicating the newly skilled being to the community for reintegration and acceptance. Through awareness campaigns in communities, female inmates' husbands can be encouraged to visit their loved ones in prison despite the distance, in line with the Shona adage which says, '*kure kwegava ndokusina mutsubvu, kune mutsubvu rinofa rasvika*' (Translated thus: 'a fox can only see a distance as long when there is no smelly-berry, where there is smelly-berry, it will reach the place no matter how further the distance is'). When there is love, there should be no limits to what one should do for their loved ones.

Framework for Successful Reintegration of Female Inmates

This research was motivated by lack of evaluation experienced in the ZPCS which has resulted in the

system failing to have a guide when it comes to preparing female inmates for reintegration. The researchers, after analysing all the responses by the participants of the study and the literature gathered, propose a framework for female inmates. Against this background, the Prison Communication and Community Relationship Framework (PCCRF) is designed to coagulate the solid relationship that should exist between prison and the community bound by effective communication.

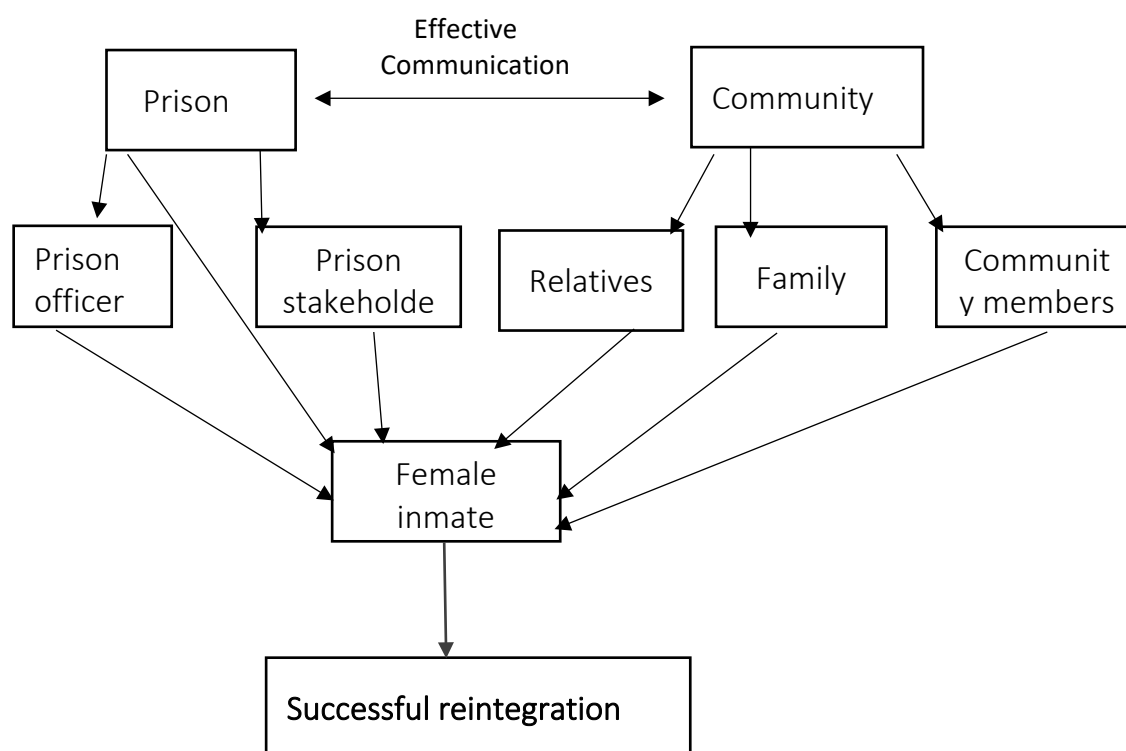


Figure 2: The Prison Communication and Community Relationship Framework (PCCRF)

According to the framework, when an inmate is admitted into prison, there should be the Communications officers under the Rehabilitation office who should be responsible for linking inmates with their community (including relatives and families). The inmates should be placed under rehabilitation programmes based on their background and offences (involving their communities). The communications officers should be assessing progress on rehabilitation programmes and where there is need for corrections or interventions, it should be done early. After release, the officers should do follow-ups to evaluate the implementation of the skills acquired during imprisonment and the extent to which they can impact on reintegration. The communications officers should also keep track of those reoffending, looking at the offences, ages and community of origin for guidance for further intervention.

Conclusion

This study concluded that although the ZPCS introduced rehabilitation programmes meant to prepare inmates to successfully get back into society and live without going back to prison, a variety of challenges hinder the success of the effort. Although rehabilitation programmes are offered, they lose sight of communication as an important factor in successful preparation of the female inmates so that they fit well into society after release from prison. Programmes that promote the interaction of inmates with their relatives and families seem not to be taken seriously since emphasis is targeted on

availing rehabilitation programmes.

The findings of this study may be summarised as follows;

The ZPCS offers various programmes meant to prepare female inmates for them to be able to live life free of crime after release from prison.

Female inmates are faced with challenges of communication in nature, which hinder their preparation for reintegration.

It also emerged that upon release, female ex-offenders encounter challenges that militate against their ability to stay outside.

Various strategies were suggested to improve communication to create a good environment for preparing female inmates for reintegration.

The Prison Communication and Community Relationship Framework (PCCRF) was proposed.

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