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 investigated 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 examined 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 analysed the communicative challenges that 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 the conditions they find themselves in. Evidence from numerous prisons shows that offender reintegration remains a challenge. It seems there are some inadequacies in the strategies being implemented by prisons to curb offender recidivism. Thus, it is possible 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 meager 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 et al., 2008).

The Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service adopted programmes such as counselling, the 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). However, the deployed interventions have not been fully effective, necessitating further interventions to reduce residual recidivism to insignificant levels. This study sought to do just that by designing a communication-centered framework for 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; and
- 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

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

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study's core objective was 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. Media reports, parliamentary debates, and 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 external support, which is vital to their participation in prison programs and successful reintegration preparation (Contreras, 2018). Underscoring the critical nature of interaction, Koschmann and Petersen (2015) emphasize that communication is a crucial process that fosters social cohesion and gives life true meaning.

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 (Mafume, 2021; Zimbabwe Association of Crime and Rehabilitation Organization [ZACRO], 2013). 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 prisoners as attachments to male facilities often leads to female inmates being marginalized, 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 serious crimes than men, which Mafume (2021) often describes as 'crimes of passion'. 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 22, which advocates upholding prisoners' rights to empowerment during imprisonment (Kyazze, 2018; UNODC, 2021).

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, Bierie, 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 & 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 support female inmates' successful reintegration.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is guided by the qualitative paradigm to understand participants' experiences and their interpretations of the issue under investigation (Berg & Lune, 2017; Bilous, Hammersley & Lloyd, 2018; Lelissa, 2018). The paradigm is underpinned by the interpretivist philosophical view, which affords researchers the opportunity to interpret reality through the subjective meanings that participants who experience the phenomenon ascribe to it; hence, researchers comprehend the experiences through the participants' eyes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study also employed an 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 used to study cases at three prisons (Chipinge, Mutare Remand, and Rusape), with each studied in detail. As of 14 July 2023, there were 50 female inmates across the three prisons, with Mutare Remand having 27 and Chipinge and Rusape having 12 and 9, respectively.

Data were generated through interviews, document analysis, and observation (using structured interview and observation guides) to enable the researchers to triangulate results from the various data-generation tools and confirm, cross-validate, and corroborate findings (Green & Thorogood, 2018; Flick, 2018). These are believed to best articulate and provide 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 sufficient to obtain feedback on most or all perceptions in qualitative research. However, among the 50 female inmates in prisons in Manicaland Province, the researchers interviewed them until saturation was reached, when nothing new emerged from the interviewees. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with female inmates. In addition, a longitudinal study followed selected female inmates for more than four months, from their time in prison to post-release, with a follow-up study to explore the effectiveness of their interactions with relatives and families in preparing them for reintegration. The prison officers and human rights experts were key informants with expertise in female inmates' rights and prison policy. They were presumed to possess experiences and meanings about the topic under study (Tomaszewski et al., 2020).

The researchers were aware of the ethical responsibilities and legal constraints associated with the collection and reporting of information to protect the rights and welfare of the study participants (Given, 2019). In this context, ethical considerations were undertaken to protect the rights of the study participants (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 employed prolonged engagement, used multiple methods of inquiry, sought informed consent, maintained anonymity, ensured data safety, and employed member checking with the participants.

Thematic analysis was also employed to make meaning from the generated data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The data were analysed through organising, generating categories and themes, coding, and offering interpretations, whereby the researchers began to interpret what was learned from the data. It brought meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, and categories, developing linkages and a storyline 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 the Rights Group, 2 inmates' relatives, and 1 inmate's husband. In the analysis, Cases 1, 2, and 3 represented the Mutare Remand, Chipinge, and Rusape prisons. The four categories of participants in this study were inmates, prison officers, relatives of inmates, and human rights personnel.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data were 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 in this study were generated through interviews, in-depth and key informant interviews, observation, and document analysis. The data were generated from prison officers, female and male inmates, Rights Groups, inmates' relatives, and inmates' spouses, which provided evidence that data were collected across the communities relevant to the research topic. Female ex-inmates were interviewed while they were still in prison, and a follow-up program was conducted after their release, which took about 5 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		Case 2		Case 3		Total		Grand Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
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 were collected from participants of diverse backgrounds to ensure that the perspectives captured cut across all age groups and provided an in-depth understanding of the topic under study.

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

Participants' Age	18-25		26-33		34 and Above		Total		G. Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
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 evident in its ability to facilitate understanding of the researcher's target group and to allow the analysis of similarities and differences between age groups. It also ensures that the perspectives considered span all age groups to provide an in-depth understanding of the research problem.

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

Participants' Age	Primary education		Secondary education		Tertiary education		Total		G. Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	
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 attainment were important, as respondents offered diverse opinions and information on 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 were collected from various inmates with different prison sentences, resulting in a variety of offenses and prison experiences.

Data collected from diverse groups ensure that the perspectives captured span people across professions and experiences, enhancing the credibility of the research findings. This is in line with Tomaszewski et al.'s (2020) suggestion that generating data from numerous cases enhances the viewing of data from various perspectives and experiences, allowing 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 researchers' understanding of data from different settings to identify the agreements and disagreements that stem from environmental factors, thereby promoting 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 create a conducive environment for inmates to be effectively prepared to live a life free from crime outside prison. The communication involves officer-inmate, officer-inmate's relative, and inmate-relative communication. In prison, officer-inmate communication begins when inmates are in the hands of prison officers, which is crucial to preparing them for life after their release. The information is also needed so that officers, usually under the Rehabilitation and Reintegration Office, can visit inmates' places of residence to speak with relatives and fully assist the inmate, especially immediately after the inmate's admission to prison.

Inmates are interviewed upon admission to prison to provide the administration with information to assist inmates where needed. 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, some interviewees expressed its importance. 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 limited time under the supervision of a prison officer, who should hear every word uttered during the conversation, whereas Family Week involves fewer restrictions. (Female Inmate).

The above narration by one of the female inmates is supported by institutional documents, including 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 with the above document, the researcher observed inmates being visited during 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 how the programme motivated the inmates to live a crime-free life post-release from prison.

The Family Week Program had given us high hopes for reintegration into society and an opportunity to receive updates on family issues… The interaction with people from outside gave us confidence, so that after release we didn't have any 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 help us 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 offenses 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 apologize, 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 partner with organisations and individuals. Here at Rusape Prison, we are in partnership with the Nyaradzo Group of Companies, where inmates and a few officers undertake a Tree-planting and Management Program… (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 candidates is done by the Rehabilitation Office, Security Office, Reception Office, Health Office, and Administration Office.

While the selection procedure for inmates to be placed on rehabilitation programmes is crucial, the actual programmes, such as partnerships, are even more important, as they are interactive and help inmates gain employment and resources, as expressed by the participants in the study.

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

That there were various rehabilitation programmes was also evidenced by the Fulcrum Piggery Production Company, which offered education on piggery production to inmates at 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 on 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 the Piggery Production Program by Fulcrum Piggery Production, observed the graduation, which was held at Rusape Prison on 7 October 2023. Those who graduated included male and female inmates, prison officers, and some community members. Evidence that those who participated in the programme graduated was revealed through the certificates issued by 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 on the complete and successful rehabilitation of inmates to reduce cases of recidivism. Various inmate-oriented, institution-oriented, and prison officer-oriented challenges are experienced in prisons. The challenges were shared by the participants, ranging from how inmates are selected to participate in a program. Sometimes inmates 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 there is a lack of follow-up programmes to monitor progress and ensure that reintegration is a success.

Issues related to staff shortages for follow-up and multitasking are the main challenges, although transport officers sometimes complain about a 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 suspension of Family Week without notice left most of us wondering how we would interact with our family members and relatives (Female Inmate).

The communication challenges encountered have various effects in line with preparing female inmates to lead an independent life 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 accept 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 disconnect between prisons and society, since society is not trained on what it is also expected to do when someone is released from prison (Prison Officer - Rehabilitation).

Both male and female inmates experience challenges related to 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 results 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 have special needs that are sometimes scarce.

The researchers had the opportunity to inspect the Visitors Book, which revealed that, among married female inmates, fewer than 20 percent were visited by their husbands, even before the FW was 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 visit their wives in prison. Male dominance was one of the suggested reasons, although the distance most prisons are located from town was another.

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 and after her release from prison, complained about 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 (a Female Ex-Inmate).

While inmates are imparted with various skills under rehabilitation programmes, sometimes the efforts do not pay off 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 rife with challenges due to economic hardships, so most inmates are not supported by the system or by people outside it, as 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 skills to inmates but then lacking assistance to promote their use 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 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 unconducive to the successful preparation of inmates, despite the fact that various rehabilitation programs are offered to equip them with the necessary 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 the fact that they were fewer in number than male inmates. 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, over time, they began delaying payments until the allowances stopped coming. (Female Inmate).

Delays and non-payment of inmates' allowances affect inmates, officers, the prison system, and beneficiaries of the funds. 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 party may be more dominant than the other.

Most of the organisations that enter into partnership with the ZPCS try to dominate, maybe because of the 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 several strategies that the prison and correctional body may incorporate into its system to ameliorate communication challenges that hinder consolidated reintegration and reduce recidivism.

Introduction of new programmes/modules

The ZPCS has developed several rehabilitation programmes, supported by partnerships with various organisations across 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 anything reputable, which is why it is important to offer inmates programs affiliated with recognised universities and colleges to dispel the doubts that people and potential employers have about 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 interviews with prison and rehabilitation officers attest that follow-ups and visits to inmates' homes are very effective in building confidence among inmates, community members, and relatives.

This is important since, through the rehabilitation officer, inmates and their families also share information and knowledge, including about inmates' transformation, to increase the 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 for offenders and society, to enable people to gain confidence in these programs and to show that reformation is very possible (Prison Officer).

This can also instill confidence in people to employ ex-inmates. Moreover, awareness campaigns can go a long way toward building confidence in products made by both inmates and ex-inmates. In addition, the female inmate involved in quarry stone sales also observed the need for communities to be educated on the importance of supporting 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 programs had become their window for reintegration into society. Before it was suspended, the FW program proved effective in facilitating interaction between inmates and people from outside, which is healthy for maintaining ties and reducing feelings of isolation. It also emerged that communication is central to the recruitment of inmates who wish to pursue an identified rehabilitation training programme, with the selection of inmates carried out by the relevant offices. The findings from this study confirm Koschmann and Petersen's (2015) Constitutive Model of Communication, which suggests that offender reintegration is only possible when a conducive prison environment is created through effective communication. Interaction is the source of effective communication, which is also crucial to social networking, making life real and practical. This is congruent with Contreras' (2018) findings, which show that effective communication and family support during imprisonment are a panacea for 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.

As good as it may seem, prison communication faces countless challenges that hinder successful offender reintegration. Participants raised issues related to partnerships, arguing that partnerships face various challenges, such as determining who gets what. It cannot be denied that in a partnership, one party gets the lion's share while the other gets a small share, depending on the nature of the partnership; hence, most partnerships are short-lived. Inmates get short-changed when partnerships fail, which can also be compared to the suspension of interaction programs such as the FWP. The suspension of the FWP is against the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules (Rule 43), which encourages prisons to facilitate female inmates' visits to ensure their comfort and create opportunities for 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 the challenges faced by female inmates stem from a lack of communication, which constitutes an infringement of their rights as human beings (Coyle & Fair, 2018).

In the same vein, the prison conditions seem to be unconducive for the successful preparation of inmates, despite the fact that various rehabilitation programmes are offered to equip inmates with the required skills. Imparting skills to inmates can be effective, but it can be more effective when combined with start-ups, which seem to be lacking upon release. Denying inmates empowerment is against the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for

the Treatment of Prisoners, Rule 22, which encourages prisons to uphold prisoners' rights to empowerment during imprisonment (UNODC, 2021; Kyazze, 2018). In this regard, the ZPCS mandate seems difficult to achieve. On a positive note, employment of inmates by companies makes them feel 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 when 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 whom would have children in prison, who need additional and special resources such as food and clothing. This aligns with Section 71 of the Prisons and Correctional Service, which requires 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 various other institutions. The dominance that men have as a result of patriarchy sometimes turns into arrogance, which makes them 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 kilometers from Chipinge town, is another factor that deters potential visitors. 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 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 and hence deaths. However, when inmates are released from prison with skills, for instance, they keep 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, well-choreographed strategy for communicating with communities. Effective reintegration can be fully achieved when inmates are assessed to identify the relevant program they can undertake, with support from people outside who can give them the confidence to build a normal life after release from prison. Many interviewed ex-inmates decried the lack of capital and quasi-financial support to help them realize the full capacity of their prison-earned skills. When they are released into the world, they can be compared to a zoo animal released into the wild, with all but its own survival instincts to soldier on. A halfway house system should communicate 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 as there is no smelly-berry; where there is smelly-berry, it will reach the place no matter how far 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 the 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 strengthen the relationship that should exist between prison and the community through effective communication.

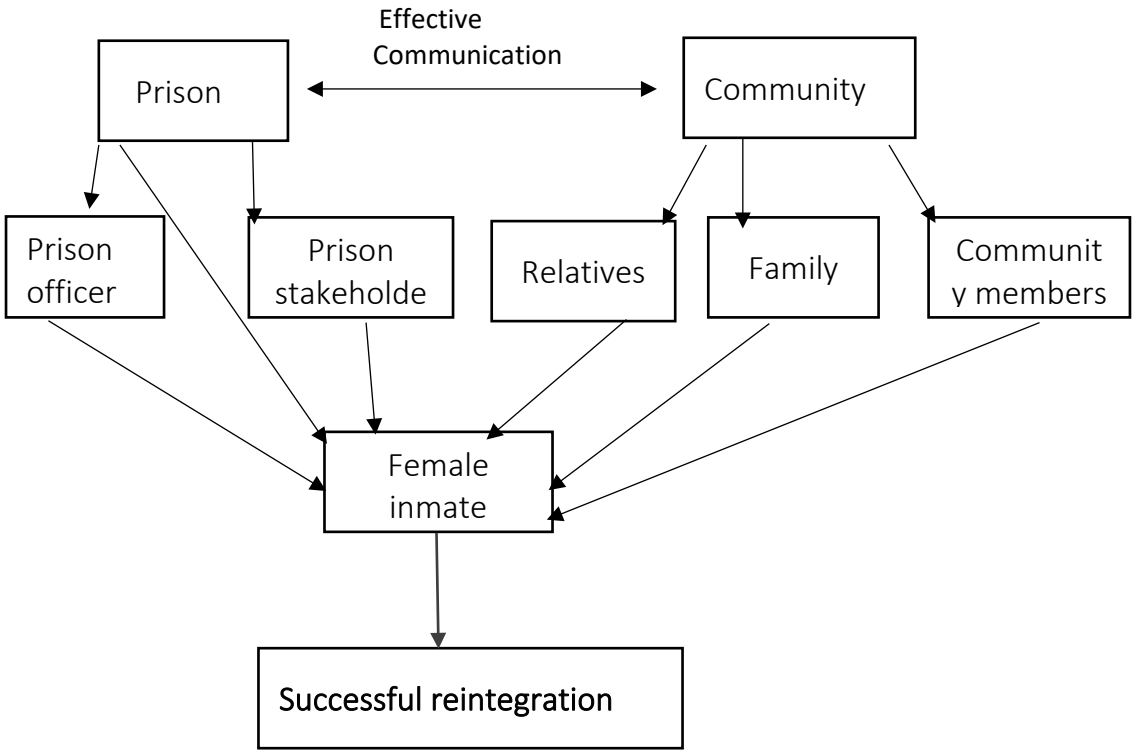


Figure 2: The Prison Communication and Community Relationship Framework (PCCRF)

According to the framework, when an inmate is admitted to prison, communications officers in the Rehabilitation Office should link inmates with their community (including relatives and families). Inmates should be placed in rehabilitation programs based on their background and offenses (involving their communities). The communications officers should assess progress in rehabilitation programmes, and where corrections or interventions are needed, they should be implemented 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 reintegration. Communications officers should also track those who reoffend, examining offenses, ages, and communities of origin to inform 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 the successful preparation of female inmates so that they fit well into society after release from prison. Programmes that promote interaction between inmates and their relatives and families do not seem to be taken seriously, as emphasis is placed on providing rehabilitation programmes.

The findings of this study may be summarised as follows;

- The ZPCS offers various programmes meant to prepare female inmates to be able to live life free of crime after release from prison.
- Female inmates are faced with challenges of a communication 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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