Coping mechanisms adopted by women ex-offenders in Nyeri County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Female offenders are distinctly different from male offenders, and present with their own gender-specific needs and issues both in and out of the correctional setting. Most approaches to Coping Mechanisms for female offenders are currently based on research involving males and approaches designed for males. Inquiry regarding the gender-specific needs of female inmates as they pertain to treatment, reentry programs and Coping Mechanisms is necessary so professionals can better understand how to serve this population. This study investigated the Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Women ex-offenders in Nyeri County, Kenya. The study specifically investigated the effects of not addressing the challenges identified for women returning from prison in Nyeri County especially challenges connected to housing, employment, relationships, drug, and substance abuse as well as mental health after incarceration. This was a qualitative study adopting a phenomenological design. The site and respondents were purposively selected with snowballing being used to select the respondents to the point of saturation. This study made use of 41 women ex-convicts, 3 FGDs, and 9 key informants. Data were collected by use of semi-structured interview schedules. Results indicated that currently, prison is negatively viewed by the community; this is primarily because of the isolation of prisoners and whatever happens behind the bars. The government should involve other sectors such as the churches, the media, schools and Non- Governmental Organizations in educating the masses in order to ease re-entry of ex-convicts.

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Introduction

Prisons and jails often overlook issues that are specific to female inmates (McPhail, Falvo, & Burkner, 2012). When women are treated using programs that were designed for men, and traditionally used with men, their gender-specific needs are not being considered. Furthermore, research involving males cannot be generalized to a female population because of the differences in their social, physical, and psychological needs (Bartlett et al., 2015).

The differences between men and women include personality factors, interests, responses to stress, speech patterns, psychopathology (Harrison, Ahn, & Adolphs, 2015; Hyde, 2014), and the types of victimization they experience before engaging in criminal behavior (DeHart & Moran, 2015). Most incarcerated women are mothers (Miller et al., 2014). Nearly 90% of incarcerated men report that their children live with the child's mother, but when women are incarcerated, their children are most likely to live with grandparents (Roxburgh & Fitch, 2014). Less than one third of children will live with their biological father when their mother is incarcerated. Upon release, fewer fathers than mothers will assume primary parenting roles (Mapson, 2013). Upon reentry, mothers are more likely than fathers to have to juggle parenthood with work or training for a marketable skill. Women released from prison tend to be less educated and have less earning potential than men released from prison (Mapson, 2013). Therefore, female offenders may have to be more concerned with making safe choices in dating than their male counterparts (Saxena, Messina, & Grella, 2014). Additionally,

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the factors that contribute to a man's success during reentry may be different than the factors that contribute to a woman's success during reentry (Olson et al., 2016).

Much of the current research and theory is premised on basic assumptions about gender differences, combined with the idea that maleness represents the norm (Miller & Carbone-Lopez, 2015). However, female offenders have very different social, medical, and criminological profiles than their male counterparts (Bartlett et al., 2015). Feminist theory can illuminate the struggles faced by female inmates in the United States, and explain how they are distinctly different from the struggles faced by male inmates. Feminist theory can also illustrate the purpose and benefit of gender specific approaches to treatment of female offenders.

The goal of the correctional system is not only to confine and separate offenders from the public, but also to rehabilitate them so that they can successfully return to their communities, resulting in a reduction in crime (van Ginneken & Hayes, 2017). Reentry to the community will be different for each individual, but the objective remains the same. The reentry process is meant to offer offenders an improved chance at living successfully in their communities while avoiding criminal behavior in the future (Doherty, Forrester, Brazil, & Matheson, 2014). However, not all offenders go through a reentry program when they are released from prison or jail. Some are released directly to the community without supervision and therefore need to establish the coping mechanisms that they adopt which is the gap of this study.

The paper will be based on Feminist theory. Feminist theory highlights women's experiences and perspectives. It draws focus on issues, trends, and problems that may be misunderstood or overlooked by traditional, male-dominated culture. Feminist theory encompasses a wide range of issues including gender differences, gender inequality, gender oppression, and structural oppression (Cole, 2017). This was a qualitative study with a phenomenological design based on the fact that it is common in criminology research (Crow & Semmens, 2007). The study was conducted in Nyeri County, Kenya and respondents drawn from all the sub-counties and cognizant to age and crime-type differentials. Majority of the study respondents had been released from Nyeri women prison which is part of King'ong'o Prison located in Nyeri County.

The research investigated 41 women who had been incarcerated either in a prison or remand prison for a period exceeding three months and had been released within a period between three months and six years prior to the interview. These ex-offenders considered Nyeri County their residence. The narratives were generated by interviewing female women ex-offenders and nine key informants comprising of the prison chaplain, prison officials, government and community leaders. The Key Informant Interviews (KII) was conducted among experts who on regular basis interact with women in prison and exiting prisoners as well as their families. Other narratives were made from three Focused Group Discussion raised from three cohorts namely family members of ex-offenders, prison welfare staff and eight select Christians conveniently picked from each of the sub-counties forming Nyeri County. Snowball sampling or chain referral sampling was adopted in gathering the data. Through working with the local administration and CARITAS Nyeri who had some contacts, the survey sought to reach out to the identified ex-offenders. CARITAS Nyeri, is an initiative of the Catholic Church in Nyeri, which has had a Restorative, Justice and Empowerment programme (RJEP) strategy for both men and women exiting King'ong'o prison regardless of their religious affiliation serving Nyeri and parts of Laikipia Counties. Between 2013 and 2015 the programme focused on rehabilitation of ex-offenders but from 2015 to its closure in December of 2018 the welfare of the victims was also factored through Victim Offender mediation (VOM) initiatives. Snowballing exercise was conducted until saturation was reached.

The research employed qualitative research methods of data collection through In-depth one-on-one interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Qualitative data was processed through content analysis and analyzed thematically.

Literature Review

The purpose of this review of the literature is to grant the reader a scholarly foundation that will validate the necessity for performing a descriptive study of the Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Women ex-offenders and community services that are rendered to assist with their integration into society. This review of literature will provide a historical background that relates to community services and family support, a theoretical framework of reference, and current research developments.

Ex-offenders typically follow a zigzag path. This means their life is usually constituted by periods of criminal activity and intermittency: they may be good for some time, but eventually fall back into the deviant lifestyle, as a result, these individuals typically experience incarceration multiple times throughout their life. Therefore, reentry not only affects ex-offenders themselves, but their families and the community at large (Schlager, 2013). During reentry, issues of public opinion and stigmatization commonly arise and become problematic (Schlager, 2013). It is evident through this that conviction haunts an individual long past they have paid their debt to society. Female and male ex-offenders tend to resemble one another. However, there are specific differences between the two sexes which are evident (Urbina, 2008). Due to the differences between males and females, it is proposed that there are gendered pathways to crime, and therefore also gendered pathways out of crime (Schlager, 2013). Fortunately, many women upon release from prison have hopes and dreams, and they wish to stay out of trouble and become productive members of society. This study seeks to establish Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Women ex-offenders in Nyeri County, Kenya.

Wahidin (2013) opines that women are naturally non-criminals, conformists and passive, physically weaker and that they globally record low crime rates regardless of the crime and age groups compared to men. The author further states that while most mainstream

criminological theories largely have been male dominated, some of them may be explored as being gender neutral, such as Merton's anomie theory or Cohen's subcultural theory. Early studies and theorizing of women offenders viewed women and children not as intelligent as men, stoic to pain, primitive, passive, loyal and submissive by nature.

The uniform crime reports (UCR) and self-report surveys indicate an increase in the number of women entering the penal system, both for violent and property crimes. Women generally engage in property crimes. Forgery, embezzlement, fraud, prostitution, adultery, lesbianism, extramarital and premarital sex, infanticide, abortion, shop lifting, arson, robberies and burglaries, theft, possession of stolen properties, drugs, minor traffic offences, extend the list of crimes for which women are arrested and convicted (Carey, 2014; Durston, 2013; Gunnison, Bernat & Goodstein, 2016). Women who engage in serious crimes such as homicide target relatives or an intimate partner and commit burglary in the company of a male or female accomplice (Gunnison et al., 2016). For Lawston and Lucas (2011) women engage in non-violent crimes mainly because of duress, coercion, or perceived necessity and when arrested for drugs related offences they are usually as sellers or carriers or mules in their skirts, clothing or bodies. In Kenya, for example, the crimes leading to imprisonment of women include theft, handling of stolen goods, drug trafficking, assisting and concealing criminals and local brews. Other crimes include murder of intimate partners such as spouses or children, neglect of children, and assault leading to grievous bodily harm (Kaguta, 2014).

Few empirical researches have been carried out in regard to female offender reentry. This is despite a research done by Kilgore (2015) indicating that there is an increased rate of women getting incarcerated. Majority of these women finally exit prison while 40% recidivate. Criminology and related subjects consider successful ex-offender reentry and reintegration central to their subject matter (Immariogean, 2011). This may explain the reasons as to why women prisoner reentry and re-integration has recently attracted the attention of scholars. The issues addressed include gender in crime and incarceration statistics, why women offend, annual releases, time spending in prison, prison-based release programs, and effective release programs. In Kenya, as of 2012 majority of the female prisoners (84%) were aged above 21 years (KNBS, 2013). This is an indication that most of them had their own families and dependents. The age of female prisoners is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Age of Female prison population in Kenya

Age of Female Prisoners	2012	
	Frequency	%
Under 18	121	2%
18-20	878	14%
21-25	2010	33%
26-50	2849	46%
Above 50	317	5%
TOTAL	6,175	100%

Source: KNBS, 2013

Coping Mechanisms

Upon leaving prisons and faced with myriad of challenges ex-offenders adopt three main challenges. Either they look upon their family networks and non-government agencies such as religious communities for support in getting housing, employment and financial capital (Larner, 2017). The Catholic prison chaplaincies for example in Kenya have been very pivotal in providing informal assistance such as family reconciliations, fare, sewing machines and sanitary requirements to women leaving prison. At times ex-convicts also move, through networks of friends, to far distance places away from home where they are unknown specially to escape the pangs of stigmatization (Harris, 2015).

Practice and Policy for reentry challenges for women prison returnees

The current focus for prison programs are shifting from punitive discipline and tight security to nurturing of the rights and rehabilitation of offenders (Stohr et. al., 2009). According to Innes (2015) an all involving dialogue process is required to address what the future holds for imprisonment. This initiative ought to involve correctional experts, politicians, the media, the convicts, their families, friends, neighbours and communities, the victims and all cadres in the correctional work force. Others who should be involved include the law enforcement agency, the prosecutors, the courts, social service agencies and community organizations amongst others.

This section addresses key initiatives which suggest policies and practices relevant to smooth reentry. To be discouraged however are policies which through retention of criminal records hinder access to secure housing, employment, health care, public assistance, and custody of their children (Henry & Jacobs, 2007). In Kenya for example the demand for certificate of good conduct from the Police for job seekers should be abrogated. Two major approaches are suggested and which include reentry programs and community corrections.

Two major suggestions to the problems hindering smooth reentry of ex-offenders back into the society are made. In the first instance there are remedies inherent or internal to the returnees and secondly others external to them or community corrections.

Internal Remedies

Internal remedies include community involvement, social isolation and stigma, educational and vocational training, personal conditions, parenting and child rearing (Melissa, 2012). Tailor made personal support to the ex-convicts within their communities is important for reentry and reintegration.

Community corrections

For Haley (1997) and Caputo (2004) community corrections, community penalties or non-institutional corrections are seen as a subfield of corrections consisting of offender programs that are implemented outside the confines of jail or prison setting. This definition is further supported by Raynor (2012). For him;

Community penalties are usually not purely punitive, neither are they based on coercive restriction of liberty, like a prison; instead they rely on the cooperation of offenders in accepting the requirements of a court order, and often the capacity of supervisors to negotiate, motivate and persuade (p. 929).

Hale et al (2013) offers three classifications of community sentences. These include self-regulatory penalties which are based on the assumption that detection, arrest or being taken to court is shaming enough for criminal deterrence and reformation. This may be attained through caution, reprimand and warnings by the police. This makes further sanctions unnecessary. Secondly are financial penalties which include fines and compensation. Thirdly are supervisory sentences aimed at rehabilitation, reparation and incapacitation of offenders through support and surveillance.

Community corrections have a rehabilitative and reintegrative emphasis in their orientation especially for non-violent offenders and not punishment. The system includes supervising, controlling offenders and making sure they adhere to the rules of their sentences. Community corrections provide offenders with assistance to resolve personal problems and needs e.g. counseling; establishing stronger ties between offenders and their living environment e.g. employment. To attain their objectives community corrections often seek the services of other agencies in their neighbourhood such as health Centers and the mass media for advocacy and vocational training.

Community corrections programs are considered cost effective and reduce the exorbitant costs of institutional corrections. They also insulate institutional corrections from being overwhelmed with overcrowding; they promote normal social and community relationships, and are sometimes as effective as institution-based corrections (Haley, 1997). Further to these, Hale et al (2013) state that they permit non disruption of offenders family, work and social connections, create opportunities for reparation of harm(s) committed to the community and doesn't lead to stigma connected to imprisonment.

According to Hale et al (2013) and Raynor (2012) specific community penalties include fines, probation, community service orders or punitive unpaid work and electronic monitoring orders. There are however some post-custodial supervision with a resemblance to community penalties. These intermediate sanctions are also referred to as intermediate penalties or intermediate punishments. The sanctions are forms of punishments that lie in the middle between community corrections and incarceration in terms of severity of supervision and control. The major forms of intermediate punishments include day reporting centers, home confinement (with or without electronic monitoring), half way houses, Intensive supervision programs and shock incarceration/boot camps (Caputo, 2004; Haley, 1997).

Monetary Penalties: Fines and Restitution

Financial or monetary penalties are of two types namely; fines and compensation. This is based on the principal as to whom the payment is due.

Fines

Fines refer to monetary sanctions where the offender is required to make money payments to the court as full or partial punishment for committing a crime. Fines exclude court costs and supervision fees. The history of fines for criminal punishment is pre-biblical where it was used for criminal and moral offences. The practice of imposing fines had attained wide use by the 13th and 14th centuries in Europe (Caputo, 2004; Hale et al (2013).

The use of fines is presently used in many countries of the world such as Germany in Europe, China, India and Philippines in Asia and the Pacific region, Australia, Arab Countries, Canada and the United states. Fines are either used singularly for punishment or to supplement other sanctions such as probation for serious and petty offences as an alternative to incarceration e.g. violation of traffic rules, assault, drunkenness in public, shop lifting and burglary. Fines are predominantly used for those offenders who present no major risk to the community and for petty offences. Fines are also an appropriate method of punishment for corporate crimes like those that may be perpetrated by businesses. Crimes involving use of Violence and drugs however may find fines a sole method of punishment inaccessible (Caputo, 2004).

Fines vary depending on whether the offense committed is a misdemeanor or a felony. Felonies are serious crimes which include offences such as murder, manslaughter, rape, and robbery with violence and receive severe penalties. Misdemeanors on the other hand are less serious crimes whose punishment is one year or less or a fine e.g. speeding, brewing of illegal brews and perjury. One of the unfortunate outcomes of basing fines on the offense rather than on the offender is that both the poor and the rich end up receiving the same form of punishment or fine for similar crime. This inequality is however addressed through the day fines system where by the fine is proportional to both the gravity of the crime and financial wellbeing of the offender calculated on the basis of the offender's daily earning. Day Fines are considered to have a retributive benefit, deterrence, fairness, cheap to administer and is source of revenue (Hale et al, 2013; Caputo, 2004).

Restitution or compensation

Restitution is a system of punishment where offenders pay their victim's family or their victims or organizations of victim's choice for the harm(s) resulting from their crimes. The goals of restitution include deterrence, rehabilitation, retribution and restoration. The system of restitution is mainly used in property crimes where victims are financially compensated. Restitution is carried out in combination with other penalties such as probation (Caputo, 2004; Hale et al, 2013).

Probation

Probation refers to a sentencing in which offenders upon pleading guilty or being convicted are allowed to serve their sentences within their communities rather than in imprisonment. They are however required to be under supervision of a probation agency and are required to fulfill certain conditions imposed by the court violation of which may lead to imprisonment (Caputo, 2004; Haley, 1997). According to Raynor (2012) some of these conditions include "unpaid work, specified activities, prohibited activities, curfews, residence in specified places, mental health treatment, drug rehabilitation, alcohol treatment and attendance centres for younger offenders" (p. 930).

Probation is sometimes variedly combined with incarceration such as split sentence i.e. spending a short time in incarceration before probation and interminnet sentencing where offenders are required to spend nights or weekends in jail (Caputo, 2004).

Parole

Parole is a conditional release of inmates mainly by a parole board or other authority before the expiry of their prison sentencing. It is also called community or supervised release. Parole normally involves conditions imposed by the parole board violation of which leads to imprisonment again. Offenders find themselves into parole release through two ways namely; at the discretion of the parole board and through legal based mandatory supervised release upon completion of about 85% of their sentences. The time spent under parole is usually that remaining to the original sentence. Parole supervision is not given to those who have served their full sentence in prison (Caputo, 2004; Haley, 1997).

Community Service or Unpaid work

This involves a requirement that offenders work in the community for a period extending between 60 to 240 hours without pay. This has been considered as a fine due to time (Hale et al., 2013). Community Service dates back to late 1960s in the United States and refers to "compulsory, free, or donated labour performed by an offender as punishment for a crime" (Caputo, 2004, Chapter 8, p. 154) through a community service order and for a defined period. The labour is usually done in not-for-profit organizations and government offices depending on skills and site requirements. The goals of community service include punishment and holding the offender accountable, restoration and reparation, restitution, rehabilitation. Community service came as people failed to raise fines such as sometimes for women with families (Caputo, 2004; Hale et al., 2013).

Community service targets different types of offenders, adults and juveniles, men and women, serious and petty offences, probationers and offenders imprisoned. It is used as a single penalty normally for minor offences and first-time offenders and usually as an alternative to probation or to fines. The time spent in community service is determined by several factors which include the offence characteristics, prior criminal history and extra-legal elements like family or work related responsibilities (Caputo, 2004). He further states that community service is administered and supervised by different Criminal Justice Agencies like the law enforcement officers, the courts, jail and prisons, probation department and private agencies (Caputo, 2004).

Home Confinement, House Arrest and Electronic Monitoring

According to Caputo (2004), Hale et al (2013) and Haley (1997) home confinement is also referred to as home incarceration, home detention and house arrest. It is a court based programme that requires offenders to remain in their homes unless with prior permission. It is commonly used together with electronic monitoring and Intensive Supervision Probation and Parole (ISP). Electronic monitoring has been used since the 1980s and involves the use of computer based technologies to know the where-about of offenders both continually or periodically e.g. through phone lines, radio signals and wearing of a micro-transmitter on the ankles.

House arrest is considered more punitive than intensive supervision. It essentially involves confinement and supervision to ensure the offender stays confined at home. During the period of house arrest offenders' movement outside their homes is restricted to employment, medical visits, religious activities or other sanctions such as community service. Home confinement has three distinct approaches namely; curfew, home detention, and home incarceration (MacKenzie, 2006). My own suggestion is that incarcerating

senior political figures with huge tribal and or political following risks immortalizing them as martyrs. To avoid this, house arrest supported with electronic monitoring such as CCTV cameras would be a cost effective and deterrent intervention for political and socio-economic crimes.

Day reporting centers

Day Reporting Centers (DRC) originated in Great Britain in the 1970s and in the US in 1986. DRC can be administered publicly or privately and predominantly target offenders who otherwise should be imprisoned in jail or prison. While offenders are permitted to live at home they are generally required to physically report to the center on a regular basis to discuss about their supervision and treatment matters with the center staff. This may include, providing a schedule of their routine activities, and participate in designated programs, services, and activities. Sometimes they may be required to report by phone to the center at different times of the day, to expect random phone checks by center staff during the day and at home following curfew. DRC programme mainly focuses on work or employment programs, education or cognitive skill building programs, counseling especially on domestic violence, alcohol detection and suppression methods, testing of drugs and alcohol programs and other community service programs (Caputo, 2004; Haley, 1997).

My thinking is that given the wide resemblance of this system to our day-school and working systems, there would be easy acceptability of the day reporting centers in Kenya. This would afford family re-unions in the evening; reduce stigmatization of offenders as well as allowing them to take their family roles. The centers would be outsourced to non-governmental organizations especially the religious institutions but funded by the county or national governments.

Halfway Houses or Community Correctional Centers

Halfway houses or community correctional centers are community based residential facilities which provide both offenders and inmates after release with housing, treatment services and resources for employment and education (Caputo, 2004). These are public or private administered Community based residential facilities that provide 24-hour supervision of non-violent offenders beginning in the 1800s in the US. These houses sometimes serve non-offenders like the mentally handicapped or drug addicts and may be homo-or heterogenic in composition. They are mainly used for offenders coming out of prisons and moving back into the community. They provide more structured and controlled community correctional programs but are not as secure as prisons or jails. The offenders find themselves in midway condition between jail or prison and the free community. The groups targeted by this programme include parolees, pre-releases, probationers, pre-trial detainees and individuals on furlough from prison. Halfway houses rely on the local community for health care, substance abuse treatment, counseling services, education facilities, job skills training, and employment placements (Haley, 1997). Halfway houses are recommended as a matter of obligation for prisoners who have spent many years in incarceration rather than directly releasing them into communities as is the case in Kenya today.

Temporary Release Programmes

According to (Haley, 1997) these are programs in which jail or prison inmates get permission on a regular or irregular basis to be absent from their facilities for some short periods in order to engage in approved activities in the community. Temporary release programs include work release, self-funded or judicial study release and furloughs and targets prison inmates, jail inmates or those in halfway houses.

There are some very emotive African rituals whose absence may cause irreparable damage to the nuclear family members. These include circumcision rituals, wedding and marriage rituals as well as burial ceremonies. Offenders (within the nuclear family) who are not under capital punishment or life sentence should be temporarily released to allow them attendance to such functions.

Intensive Supervision Probation and Parole (Isp)

Intensive supervision Probation and Intensive supervision parole is an alternative to incarceration but which whoever demands stricter conditions and more treatment services than traditional probation or parole for higher risk offenders. Its goal is to increase control over offenders in the community and thereby reduce risk. It's characterized by elaborate and intensive training of supervision officers who also handle small case-loads. Offenders equally receive very restricted supervision such as through several weekly reporting to officers and random testing for drug use, not taking alcohol, mandatory curfews for offenders, requirement that offenders be employed and or retribute their victims or both, mandatory or voluntary enrollment in treatment programs and sometime that offenders meet the costs of their supervision (Caputo, 2004; Haley, 1997; MacKenzie, 2006).

Shock Incarceration/Boot Camp Programs

According to Caputo (2004) shock Incarceration programs, popularly known as "boot camps," are a form of intermediate sanction programs. Programs vary in size, duration, location, control of entry (whether by judiciary or department of corrections), the level of post-program supervision and in the level of training, education, or treatment programming provided. Changing inmate behaviour through non-punitive methods and avoidance of hard labour is the primary goal of all boot camp programs. Other programme goals include securing employment within a week of release, registration in academic or vocational programme in two weeks' time upon release; submitting oneself to mandatory substance abuse counseling; and attending a community network program.

Caputo (2004) further states that boot Camp programs are usually brief extending from three to four months and target offenders who have not yet served time in a state prison. The programs draw on the model of a military boot camp. Strict discipline, obedience, team work, self-discipline, self-respect, regimentation, drill and ceremony, and physical conditioning, and manual labor characterize this program. Program participants are housed separately from the general prison population but sometimes proximate to the neighbourhood of general population inmates. Monitoring includes random urinalysis tests, curfew checks, and home visits among others.

Implications

This section addresses the findings connected to the third objective and partly the fourth objective of the study which was to evaluate the coping mechanisms adopted by women returnees in Nyeri County and to establish the community's point of view on the challenges, effects and coping mechanisms of female returnees in Nyeri County.

In order to cope with life after prison various ex-convicts adopted various survival tactics. Some relocated to new areas and rented houses. Ex-convicts are known to move, through networks of friends, to far distance places away from home where they are not known especially to escape the pangs of stigmatization (Harris, 2015). Damaris for example stated;

"I came home and got rejected. So I went to stay with my cousin for 5 months. But I managed to rent my own house after some hustling"

Jehosheba had a similar experience on release

"I moved to my mother's place but after two weeks I was called by my madam friend in prison to stay with her. She took me in as her daughter until I got a job and rented my place".

Asked on how ex-convicts cope with the housing challenge KII, 'Nyumba Kumi' elder, responded; "It depends, if not married some go back to their families while others rent houses".

Others went to live with their children while those with their own homes decided to be resilient and stay put despite the fact that the community was not welcoming and always viewed them suspiciously. A few also briefly lived with their friends as they tried to adjust and make some savings to rent their houses too. The returnees sometimes looked up to religious organizations for support as a coping mechanism. According to the community and family focus groups discussion, majority of the ex-convicts were said to

"turn to churches for social, emotional and economic support. Here people are likely to accept them easily because of the religious teachings"

On employment, those who had the intent of getting employment in the formal sector relocated to new areas, concealed their criminal history to their potential and actual employers and were ready to take up any jobs. The fear was that a disclosure connected to the criminal past would jeopardize their chances of employment. According to KII, County Commissioner

"Some of them are forced to do menial jobs and hawking. You can see the largest numbers of hawkers are women and some of them are ex-convicts. Some end up in streets. They normally re-invent themselves after prison life".

This was supported by KII, sub-county probation officer who opined that ex-convicts find it

"difficult to get good jobs other than house helps and casual laborers because of low education level. They are still seen as criminals. If they had been working, they are replaced immediately they are arrested".

On relationships, a number of the ex-convicts separated from their families or spouses, the youthful ones remarried after relocating to new areas. Incidentally, two of the ex-convicts re-married to male ex-convicts whom they claimed to have met during the court processes. However, among those who remarried, they had to conceal their true identity in terms of past criminal history from their new extended family. According to the KII, Regional probation coordinator, the ex-convicts "relocate to other environment where the communities are unfamiliar with them, to start life afresh".

The consequences of having to relocate to places where they are not known have the effect of 'net-widening' the time spent in prison for ex-convicts. The fear of getting uncovered as an ex-convict must be greatly tormenting and impending to birthing of new social capitals. Relocating away from known friends and environments destroys a large part of a person's history and the wealth of it.

Solutions and Policy

The fifth and last objective of the study was to evaluate how the relevant and responsible bodies address the challenges facing women returning from prisons in Nyeri County. These are presented in this section first by identifying the challenge, the corresponding effect and the probable solution(s) according to the research respondents.

Based on the research findings, ex-convicts were said to face numerous challenges some of which lead to recidivism. While the government is largely seen as the main player, for successful re-integration back into the community, ex-convicts themselves and other stake holders had various suggestions and policies that need to be implemented. According to Innes (2015) all stakeholders should be engaged in the process of addressing what the future holds for imprisonment. The process should involve correctional

experts, politicians, the media, the convicts, their families, friends, neighbours and communities, the victims and all cadres in the correctional work force.

Table 2 outlines a summary of suggested solutions to the key challenges and their effects in the eyes of the respondents be they the women ex-convicts themselves, key informants or the focus group discussions.

Table 2: Solutions and policy suggestions

Challenges	Effects / How it affects	Solution
Housing	Upon arrest of female ex-offender who are mainly bread winners leaves their families without a bread winner and a place to stay	Community correction for petty female offenders as majority pose no threat to themselves or others
	Long term detention of female ex-offenders with children make them vulnerable to crime and criminals	Special holding homes for children of ex-offenders below the age of 18 years but not in juvenile homes
	Most of convicts are arrested and taken to court and jail without any time to make arrangement on where to keep their belonging/valuables. This leads to theft and loss of property and increase in debt in form of accrued rent	Under supervision of arresting officers, the offenders should be allowed time to make alternative arrangements for safe keeping of their property. Tamar for example had a nasty experience upon release; “my brother had sold all my items even my cloths”
	For the convicts who have no immediate home/ house to, the challenge could lead them to get re-arrested as they are likely to be arrested for crimes such as loitering / prostitution	Government should provide halfway homes (temporarily) and day reporting centres to enable them plan or establish themselves or the whereabouts of their families
Employment	Denied certificate of good conduct which locks them out of formal and informal employment	There is need to re-look at the policy on criminal records after serving prison sentence. The records should be expunged after 6 months if there is no recidivism;
	Lack of startup capital thus inhibiting their growth or utilization of any training received at prison	There is need to re-look at prisoners earning scheme policy of “20, 15 or 10 cents a day” (unfortunately not operational). Prisoners should be partial beneficiaries of the income they generate for the government when detained to enable them walk out with some capital to sustain their livelihoods immediately after release Government to include the female ex-convicts as beneficiaries of affirmative action fund e.g. Uwezo fund and bursaries
	Some of the trainings offered are outdated and not likely to help the generate income. Further, they do not consider individual prisoner’s interesting or what they were engaged in before leading lack of interest	There should be a focus on modern training to make the training relevant to current market needs. The training should also be relevant to existing skills and interest of the prisoners
Relationships	Family relationships are usually severed due to incarceration and limited contacts – One visit in a month and limited visitors	Encourage more open days where the inmates can spend more time with their family members to allow for conciliatory and bonding moments
	The offender usually has no opportunity to meet with the victims and or their families especially for serious crimes against the person. This generally leads to stigmatization as the community reaction is more influenced in favour of the victim	The correctional system should embrace Victim Offender Mediation (VOM) during and after incarceration
	Although the community is in most of the cases least affected by the crime committed, they majorly contribute to stigmatization and rejection mainly because they have little understanding of the circumstances leading to crime and also what happens at the correctional facilities. They are also influenced by gender stereotyping	There should be awareness campaigns to help the community understand roles played the correctional facilities to be able to re- accept the offenders back in to the community The advocacy role can be influenced through media e.g. Radio, TV, social media as well the religious institutions and the local political and administrative leadership e.g. Members of County Assembly (MCAs), Chief etc.
Mental Health	As a result of incarcerations and related challenges, some convicts suffer from stress and other related conditions like insomnia, anxiety, anger and bitters which complicates their reintegration in to the society	The government should broaden and strengthen the role of probation officers to include follow up and counselling of inmates who may not have had any probation terms on release

Coping mechanisms by women returning home from prisons

The study findings indicate strategies adopted in order to cope with three main challenges namely employment, housing and relationships. The ex-offenders relocated to new areas where they were not known, concealed their criminal history and rented houses. Others lived with relatives or friends temporarily whereas the elderly and widowed ex-offenders went back to their homes. The ex-offenders who relocated to new places in search of a job never let anyone know that they had been into prison and were willing to do any jobs available but mainly as casual workers. In regard to their relationships the overwhelming strategy was to separate from their spouses and live alone, migrate into new places, some got remarried and founded new families and they never wanted their in-laws to discover they had a criminal past. The above findings are supported by Harris (2015) who indicates that ex-convicts relocate to places far away from home upon release to conceal their identity and associated stigma.

Conclusion

The study findings indicate coping mechanisms to the adverse effects born of the challenges include migrating to places where they were not known, concealed their criminal history and rented houses, living with relatives or friends temporarily and willingness to do any menial jobs. Others opted to separate from their spouses while others got remarried and founded new families though they never wanted their in-laws to discover they had a criminal past.

Currently, prison is negatively viewed by the community; this is primarily because of the isolation of prisoners and whatever happens behind the bars. The government should involve other sectors such as the churches, the media, schools and Non- Governmental Organizations in educating the masses in order to ease re-entry of ex-convicts.

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