



PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING ADJUSTMENT TO LIFE AMONG FEMALE INMATES AT ELDORET GOVERNMENT OF KENYA PRISON

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ABSTRACT

Many psychosocial factors are known to affect the adjustment of prisoners. In particular, many psychosocial factors tend to influence the adjustment female prisoners. The study sought to establish the influence of psychosocial factors influencing adjustment of female prisoners. The objective of the study was to determine the influence of prison visits on prison adjustment among women prisoners at GK prison in Eldoret. The study was guided by the deprivation and importation theories. The study was based on a descriptive survey design. The study targeted 150 female inmates at GK prison in Eldoret. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select 134 female inmates as the study participants. The sample size was computed using Nassiuma's formula for determining the sample size. Data was collected using structured questionnaires. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze quantitative data. The results showed that prison visits impacted on the adjustment to prison life among female inmates in Eldoret GK prison. Prison visits helped female inmates to feel connected with family thus reducing depressive symptoms and loneliness in prison. Thus there was a positive relationship between prison visits and adjustment to prison life with 30.9% of the variance in adjustment to prison life was influenced by prison visits.

Key Words: prison visits, psychosocial factors, prison adjustment, female inmate

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Prison adjustment has been defined differently but most studies have focused on psychological adaptation (Trulson, 2013). Penologists have come up with a series of theoretical explanations for prisoners' adjustment to prison life. Originally, inmates' adjustment was explained as a reaction to the prison situation like prison population size, security, programs and supervision (Gonçalves, 2014). Later, psychological perspectives were developed to emphasize the relations among the inmates and prison environment and the psychosocial factors that can lead to more problems in adjustment (Zamble & Porporino, 2018). Psychosocial factors may be related to institutional adjustment. This means that inmates that receive a lot of social support while in prison, for example, in terms of visits by their family members and friends may quickly adjust to prison life (Cochran, 2012). Moreover, psychosocial factors are important in facilitating stress reactions to adjustment problems particularly for female inmates.

As the rate of imprisoned women rises in rectification facilities across the world, interest in examining how they adapt to this environment has increasingly become important to the

agencies concerned in providing supervision and care to female prisoners. The existing studies point to important factors influencing different adjustment patterns for incarcerated populations (Lindquist & Lindquist, 1997). MacKenzie and Goodstein (2011) observe that prisoners who are new and who expected to serve longer sentences inhibit poor adjustment. In contrast, new prisoners serving short-term reported better adjustment compared to new inmates on long sentence. Zamble (1992) established that a history of crime, age, antisocial attitude and manners were the main dominant predictors of prison adjustment. According to research findings, incarceration is related to various emotional reactions such as shock, anxiety and fear that tend to produce strong emotional reactions in female inmates (Schnittker, 2009). MacKenzie (2009) examined the patterns of adjustment of female inmates according to the duration of sentence and present time served. The study revealed that the new inmates reported less alleged problems with their surroundings but were more worried about safety issues. Koban (2014) documented various ways in which female inmates had a lot of trouble adjusting to family separation. According to Walmsley (2006) being imprisoned far away from homes also makes prisoners to receive few visits or no visits from family members and as a result they end up being lonely, leading to emotional and psychological distress.

Globally, women prisoners frequently suffer adjustment problems which lead to depression, traumatic stress disorder and self-harming. For instance, the prevalence rate of adjustment problems among female prisoners in Honduras is 43.7% (Acevedo & Bakken, 2016). In Brazil, the prevalence rate is higher, particularly among women. In Ethiopia, overcrowding, lack of privacy, violence, insecurity, isolation as well as insufficient health services are common adjustment problems in prisons (Vetten, 2014). In Ghana, 70% of female inmates and 63% in Zambia experience psychological anguish and adjustment problems (Agozino, 2015). With the patriarchal life of Africans, women face unfair treatment in prison (Sarkin, 2016). Irrespective of the nature of their crimes, a significant proportion of women offenders suffer from adjustment issues and their predicament is made worse by the unreasonable distressing conditions in the prisons. This includes susceptibility to abuse within prison, mental disorders, threats and sexual exploitation by law enforcement officers (Sarkin, 2016; (Onyango, 2013).

In Kenya, female prisoners contribute 18% of the total number of prisoners and number continuous to increase over the years (Olivia, 2013). Upon admission female prisoners complain of psychological, emotional and health associated problems (Onyango, 2013). The situation is no different at Eldoret GK prison. However, getting in touch with the family can help alleviate adjustment and assist women to better accept their confinement. Based on previous studies, adequate attention has never been directed to the unique psychosocial issues women prisoners face. It is appreciative that efforts have been made to lessen the adjustment problems by allowing visitation and open days where family members and relatives come to visit them. However, it is not clear whether this influences prison adjustment particularly in the case of female prisoners. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to establish the influence of prison visits as a psychosocial factor influencing adjustment to life among female inmates at Eldoret GK prison.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Prison visits and Prison Adjustment

Adjustment involves quick adjustment to the cruel prison subculture. Tongeren and Klebe (2010) suggested that adjustment is a multidimensional concept which is unique and dynamic to the person depending on a mixture of occurrences before imprisonment as well as characteristics and connections inside prison setting. Tongeren and Klebe (2010) admit that prison adjustment is a difficult and different aspect in notion and best adjustment is characterized by the capability to obtain essential requirements inside prison, temporarily absorb into the society in prison, take an active task in rehabilitation, and abandon crime thoughts. Earlier studies have associated well adjustment to prison environment to getting more involved in prison programs and using time positively as well as having high self-esteem (Tongeren&Klebe, 2010). Studies have also established that when family connections and social support is maintained adjustment is enhanced (Aday&Krabill 2011). Missing social relationships and depression has been used to characterize poor adjustment (Asberg&Renk, 2014). Preliminary studies show that women usually get extra disciplinary write-ups for minor defiance and these are often harshly punished. Zamble and Porporino (2012) investigated how prisoners deal with the prison situation and observed that the relationships with the prison staff, having friends, job inside prison, emotions as well as missing the freedom of the world outside were the main determinants of prison adjustment. Dhimi (2013) concurred that the quality of life pre-imprisonment had some considerable outcome on the feelings of present happiness inside prison environment.

There are few studies that have been done to determine the influence of prison visitation on prison adjustment (Poehlmann, 2015). These studies have been done in countries where family visits, including conjugal relations are allowed to provide exceptional accommodation whereby children and partners can stay for weekend visit. The outcome of family visits on the welfare of a prisoner and future conduct is significant in the development of prison policies. These major relationships permit inmates to keep their social characteristics and give a feeling of being well, security and a guarantee of significance (Hairston, 2018). The continuations of these associations lead to faster adjustment and better mental health following discharge from prison. Ryan and Yang (2015) observed that visitation lowers the distress level and improves child-parent bond for both female and male inmates. Segrin and Flora (2010) established that having a fulfilling matrimony lowered aloneness for the duration of imprisonment while matrimonial visits raised the belief about closeness. With no contact to families, inmates lose anticipation that they would be able to do more in their lives, and to further develop impairments socially and become emotionally drained. Crewe (2017) established that women unequally go through adjustment troubles associated with contact loss with family. Further, in a study by Dye and Adayin(2013) established that suicide ideations and attempts were significant concerns for women who were serving a life sentence. Poehlmann (2005) contends that prisoners who receive fewer visits can easily become depressed and lack confidence. Relying on the results of this study requires caution because of the conflicting evidence suggesting that the effect of prison visits on stress is an important area for clarification.

The study sought to determine whether there was any relationship between prison visit and adjustment to prison life.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the deprivation and importation theories. Deprivation theory suggests that prison setting naturally denies a prisoner essential needs, leading to stress. The emphasis of deprivation theory is on analyzing the kind of correctional facilities, duration of stay, overcrowding, inmate views, separation from children as well as prison policies for social support. Deprivation theory moves focus to prison setting and disregards individual-level care or needs. Hence, deprivation model directs its interest on the influence of specific prison variables. Evidence in support of the theory postulates that prisoners form a social structure which serves to reduce conflict among them while providing goods and services deprived by the management and protect them from the harsh prison environment. The theory further asserts that when inmates are incarcerated the prison environment limits them from fulfilling particular needs (Sykes, 2020). The importance of deprivation theory lies in its attempt to explain how environmental deprivations could be lessened by the prisoner's rights movement which advocate for a more open systems allowing prison visits.

The study was also based on the importation theory which proposes that a prisoner's demographics and past history establish his or her psychological way of adjusting to prison. Individual factors form prisoners' impression and their response to the environment. The demographic characteristics considered in this theory consist of personal and family history and previous mental health. Importation theory suggests that the convict's social organization is a sign of a bigger unlawful subculture which isn't exceptional to prisons and the prisoner's chances of victimization are mainly controlled by their earlier character, experiences and faith all of which could influence prison adjustment. Importation concept in its unique form can be looked at as a cultural deviance model. Irwin and Cressey (1962) suggested that prisoners normally absorb to one of the three subcultures: convict, thief and legitimate. Prisoners who take part in the thief subculture hold poorer group worth like autonomy, roughness and elegance. Prisoners taking part in convict subculture use exploitation to get positions inside prison. The legitimate enables the prisoners to adapt to the use of lawful ways to adjust to prison life. Importation theory was adopted because the inmates' character was potential in determining adjustment and therefore helped to investigate the link between inmate characteristics and adjustment to prison life.

3.0 METHODS AND MATERIALS

The study was based on a descriptive design. The descriptive survey design allowed the researcher to collect data through interview or questionnaire administration to a sample of persons about their opinions pertaining social issues. The descriptive survey design made it easy to capture both quantitative and qualitative data and to provide in-depth information about the influence of psychosocial factors on female inmates' adjustment to life. Eldoret GK prison was chosen as the study area because it is one of the state correctional facilities accommodating female prisoners in Kenya. The target population consisted of 150 female inmates and 20 prison officers at Eldoret G.K prison. Purposive sampling was used to select the sample size. To obtain the sample size from the female inmates, Nassiuma's (2000) formula for estimating a sample size n from a known population, N was used. The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{NC^2}{C^2 + (N-1)e^2}$$

Where n = Sample size

N = Population, 150 in this case

C = co-efficient of variation assumed to be 30% for survey research

e = standard error, assumed to be 0.02 in this case

Substituting these values in the equation, the estimated sample size was:

$$n = \frac{150 \times 0.3^2}{0.3^2 + (150-1) 0.02^2} = 90$$

This resulted into 90 as the study respondents. Simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the study participants. This ensured that every element in the target population had an equal opportunity to take part in the study, hence reducing chances of sampling biasness. Questionnaires and interview schedule were employed in collecting information. The questionnaire was adopted because it was efficient and easy to administer. The questionnaire also provided anonymity to the respondents. Data was organized for analysis by validating it to ensure the collection procedure was in agreement with the laid-out standards. Descriptive statistics were employed to compute percentages, mean and standard deviation. Correlation and regression analysis was adopted to determine

the extent to which the selected psychosocial factors influencing adjustment to prison life among female inmates.

4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Prison visits and Adjustment to prison life

The researcher computed the means and standard deviations of the responses to explore the respondents' perceptions regarding prison visits. The findings are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' Views on Prison visits

Statements	N	Min.	Maxi.	Mean	Std. Dev
Visits by family members helps to feel connected with family	85	1.00	5.00	3.6027	1.40178
I am always visited by my friends which enables me to utilize prison time well	85	1.00	5.00	3.3562	1.30565
Regular visits help to improve my self-esteem while in prison	85	1.00	5.00	3.3151	1.12887
Increased number of visits helps to reduce depressive symptoms	85	1.00	5.00	3.2466	1.17593
Prison visits enables prisoners to accept incarcerated status	85	2.00	5.00	3.4110	1.21147
There is arrangement for prisoners to communicate and contact the outside world	85	2.00	5.00	3.8082	1.10123
There is a special room whereby children and partners stay for weekend visits	85	1.00	5.00	4.2192	1.03085
Family visits enhances ones' psychological well-being while in prison	85	1.00	5.00	3.4110	1.18832
Prison visits promotes a sense belonging even when in prison	85	1.00	5.00	3.0548	1.06576
Maintaining interconnection with home reduces loneliness in prison	85	1.00	5.00	3.6164	1.08820

From the findings presented in table 1 the researcher established that the respondents agreed that visits by family members helped to feel connected with family ($M=3.60$; $SD=1.40$). This concurs with Hairston (2018) who revealed that prisons recommended that with no contact to their families, inmates lose anticipation that they would be able to do more in their lives, they further developed impairments socially and become emotionally drained. Crewe (2017) established that women unequally went through adjustment troubles associated with contact loss with family, power, control and independence, mental health concern as well as issues of trust, intimacy and privacy. Further, Dye and Aday (2013) study established that suicide ideations and attempts were significant concerns for the women who are serving a life sentence. The intention of the study was to look at how

suicide thoughts can be imported to prison, made worse by a stay in prison, or primarily induced by experiences in prison. On the other hand majority of the respondents also agreed that they were always visited by their friends which enabled them to utilize prison time well ($M=3.356$; $SD=1.305$), regular visits helped to improve their self-esteem while in prison ($M=3.151$; $SD=1.12$) and increased number of visits helped to reduce depressive symptoms ($M=3.245$; $SD=1.17$). These results suggest that there are open door policies in prisons which allow for prisoners to interact with members of the community so that it may lessen the effects of prisonization. In addition, the respondents agreed that prison visits enabled prisoners to accept their incarcerated status ($M=3.41$; $SD=1.21$) and that there was arrangement for prisoners to communicate and contact the outside world ($M=3.81$; $SD=1.10$). From the interview with prison officers on prison visits, the respondents revealed that communicating with the outside world has helped the prisoners to become connected with the family as revealed in the following excerpts: Further analysis of the responses revealed that prison officers viewed prison visits to be effective in helping female prisoners avoid feeling tensed at the prison. This corroborates the view of Poehlmann (2010) who found that visits were associated with positive outcomes when visits occurred as part of an intervention, but negative outcomes when the visits were not part of an intervention, thus highlighting the need for well-structured and supported visits. Also high responses were established in regard to whether there were special rooms whereby children and partners stayed for weekend visits ($M=4.21$; $SD=1.03$). On the other hand, the respondents agreed that family visits enhanced ones' psychological well-being while in prison ($M=3.41$; $SD=1.19$). It is also evident that prison visits promoted a sense belonging even when in prison ($M=3.05$; $SD=1.07$) while maintaining interconnection with home reduced loneliness in prison ($M=3.62$; $SD=1.009$). These findings concur with Hairston (2018) who observed that prison visits increased family bonds. This is further supported by Ryan and Yang (2015) who noted that prisoners who were visited had low offending rates compared to those who were not. This was also ascertained by Poehlmann (2015) who seemed to suggest that telephone calls could be adopted in cases where it is difficult to visit the prison. However, the prospect of telephone calls is not allowed in the Kenyan context.

4.2 Adjustment to prison life in Eldoret GK prison

The researcher sought to establish the respondents' perceptions regarding adjustment to prison life. The findings in terms of means and standard deviations are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Adjustment to prison life

Statements	N	Mini.	Maxi.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Being separated from my family makes adjustment difficult	85	1.00	5.00	3.4795	1.10852
It is hard to deal with loss of freedom	85	1.00	5.00	3.5205	1.02888
I feel I miss my friends and outside social life	85	2.00	5.00	3.4384	1.09285
I am worried I may get sick here	85	1.00	5.00	3.5616	1.06701
I feel out of touch with the world	85	2.00	5.00	3.8904	1.00777
I feel my family members have forgotten about me	85	2.00	5.00	3.8597	1.08048
The staff here do not listen to my grievances	85	1.00	5.00	3.7534	1.01079
I feel comfortable in prison quarters	85	1.00	5.00	3.6712	1.17916
It is difficult to fit in with other inmates	85	1.00	5.00	3.63052	1.07309
It is not easy to abide by prison rules and policies	85	1.00	5.00	3.7034	1.01031

The findings demonstrated that the respondents concurred that being separated from the family made adjustment difficult ($M=3.48$; $SD=1.017$), that it was hard to deal with loss of freedom ($M=3.52$; $SD=1.03$) and that the inmates felt they missed friends and outside social life, ($M=3.44$; $SD=1.109$). Tongeren and Klebe (2010) concur that prison adjustment is difficult and the best adjustment is characterized by the capability to obtain essential requirements inside prison. This is supported by Tongeren and Klebe (2010) who averred that when family connections and social support were maintained adjustment was enhanced. Zamble and Porporino (2012) concurred that relationships with the prison staff, having friends and job inside the prison were the main determinants of prison adjustment. The respondents further agreed that they were worried they may get sick in prison ($M=3.56$; $SD=1.067$), be out of touch with the world ($M=3.89$; $SD=1.001$) and felt their family members had forgotten about them ($M=3.74$; $SD=1.08$). The respondents further agreed that they felt comfortable in prison quarters as revealed by a mean response of 3.37 with a standard deviation of 1.01. It is also evident that the respondents seemed to agree that the staff listened to their grievances as revealed by a mean response of 3.67 with a standard deviation of 1.17. This suggests that there were some improvements in the prisons where prisoners have been supplied with vocational training and improved accommodation. Consequently, opportunities exist for prisoners to transform themselves since the prisons are moving away from being containment and retributive centres to being rehabilitative institutions. Moreover, the respondents agreed that it was difficult to fit in

with other inmates as revealed by a mean response of 3.22 with a standard deviation of 1.099. Finally, it is evident that the respondents agreed that it was not easy to abide by prison rules and policies as revealed by a mean response of 4.01 with a standard deviation of 1.112.

Considering all the factors it can be observed that adjustment to prison life was influenced by the extent to which inmates maintained connections with the outside world. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the degree of relationship between prison visits and adjustment to prison life among female inmates. The results revealed a positive relationship ($r=0.309$, $p=0.001$) between prison visits and adjustment to prison life. Moreover, the relationship was statistically significant at $p<0.05$ level of significance. Therefore, the researcher observed that prison visits significantly influenced the adjustment to prison life among female inmates in Eldoret GK prison. Hence, the first hypothesis H_{01} which stated that there was no statistically significant relationship between prison visits and adjustment to prison life among female inmates in Eldoret GK prison was rejected, thus accepting that prison visits significantly influenced the adjustment to prison life in Eldoret GK prison. It was also evident that the B value of 0.309 supported by a probability value of 0.001 indicated that 30.9% of the variance in adjustment to prison life was explained by prison visits.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the psychosocial factors influencing adjustment to prison life among female inmates in Eldoret GK prison. Based on the study findings, it is concluded that prisons visits helped the inmates to feel connected with family thus reducing depressive symptoms and loneliness in prison thus promoting adjustment to prison life. This suggests that strong interpersonal relationships with friends or family increased the likelihood of adjusting to prison life. Thus there was a positive relationship between prison visits and adjustment to prison life as 30.9% of the variance in adjustment to prison life was influenced by prison visits. Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, it is recommended that the governmental and prison management should support prisoners receiving family visits. The prison management should create an enabling environment that allows families of incarcerated people to be visited by their family.

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