

Gender related challenges in re-integration of female prisoners in Western Kenya

Okello Clifford¹

¹cliff0008okello@gmail.com

¹Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The reintegration of female prisoners into society presents unique challenges that are often overlooked in criminological literature, which has traditionally focused on male offenders. Gender-related issues, including stigmatization, family dynamics, and the lack of gender-responsive rehabilitation programs, significantly impact the reintegration process for women post-incarceration. This study investigates the gender-related challenges faced by female prisoners in Western Kenya during their reintegration. The research was done in Kakamega Women Prison, Bungoma Women Prison and Busia Women Prison and the aim of the research was to look at patterns of recidivism and how effective rehabilitation programmes on women according to their needs are. Based on the gendered pathways theory and relational theory, the study applied the descriptive research design, focusing on 150 women recidivists recruited using the purposive and random sampling technique. These data were collected using questionnaires and key informant interviews, focus group discussions. The quantitative data were analyzed with the help of SPSS, and qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis. The research also showed that poor rehabilitation plans, low levels of education, and enduring social exclusion are also contributing factors to high recidivism rates of female offenders in Western Kenya. Other challenges that many women have to encounter include those of familial rejection and fragmentation of relationships which makes their re-integration in the society a lot harder. The research supports the importance of gender-based rehabilitation programs such as vocational training and psychological support as this is required to meet the physiological needs of female inmates. The research also emphasizes community reception and the options of economic opportunities to help in the elimination of recidivism and successful reintegration. The results indicate that the issue of female recidivism requires integrated policy solutions and more specific rehabilitation programs, in order to minimize its western Kenyan recurrence.

Keywords: Female Recidivism, Family Dynamics, Gender-Based Rehabilitation, Gendered Pathways Theory, Reintegration, Relational Theory, Stigma, Western Kenya, Vocational Training

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past, the topic of female criminality in the context of criminology was not even considered since the phenomenon of crime was reduced solely to the male aspect. The role of females in crime used to be neglected or interpreted by male theories that have nothing in common with female experiences. But, as research has grown, it has become clear that female criminals are different and it cannot be denied that female criminal behaviour is committed because, as research has found, it has different causes and strains to follow (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2004). Specifically, the increase in female recidivism patterns in 1990s has been associated with drug abuse and more stringent policies concerning drugs and provisions that resulted in high rates of female incarcerations on drug and property related crimes (Daly, 1994). Female recidivism (though lower than in men, in general) has been rising with each year. According to the world statistics, in 2017, there were almost 700,000 imprisoned women in the world, both convicted and remanded (Walmsley, 2018). In the U.S., there has been an increase in the rate of female incarceration that has been rising dramatically after the 1980s constituting about 10 percent of the 650,000 released offenders annually (Carson, 2018). Likewise, in the United Kingdom, the rates of women returning to prisons in 2016 were 23.4%, which is lower than the men rates (30.7%) (Ministry of Justice, 2016). Incidence of incarceration of women in African countries is also on the increase with countries resorting to using alternatives to imprisonment as a way of dealing with overcrowding in prisons (Human Rights Watch, 2013).

In Kenya, the female prison population has also been prevailing and the female number of prisoners improved by 3 percent between 2009 and 2016 (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). It is estimated that there can also be between 35,000 and 40,000 female inmates in the country, but that does not mean that prisons have been expanded to provide a sufficient environment (Kenya Prisons Service, 2018). The consequences of which are the rising population of women in prisons, which have both economic and social implications, such as the additional investment of the government in security, the court system, and prison facilities (Kitaria, 2014). Also, the changes that take place in the society as result of women incarceration are broken relationships in the family, unemployment and even a disruption in parental roles which is even more pronounced in the case of women since they take the greater responsibility of the

family role as the main care givers (Agnew, 2011). To deal with these issues, the world has been trying to deal with female recidivism by offering them rehabilitation programs. Most jails do provide vocational training, learning, and skills on how to live their lives after release of offenders (Bloom et al., 2004). Nonetheless, the question of the effectiveness of such programs is raised, and it continues to have high recidivism rates in such countries as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. With the sophisticated rehabilitation approaches, approximately 70 percent of inmates released in the U.S and Canada are rearrested after two to three years whereas the rate of recidivism in the U.K is at about 50 percent (National Institute of Justice, 2014). These figures show that better reintegration strategies should be adopted to decrease female recidivism and reintegration by overcoming the social and psychological obstacles experienced by women after their release (Van Voorhis et al., 2010).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The emerging global female recidivism rate has also expressed serious concern among the policymakers, criminologists, and the correction lists because women were likely to be re-arrested and re-incarcerated (National Institute on Drug Abuse [NIDA], 2018). According to a study done in Kenya, reoffending rate among women is 50 percent and Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2015) indicates that there has been a sharp increase in the average male and female number in prison on a day-to-day basis. Particularly, the rate of women imprisonment rose by 37.2 percent in 2014 as opposed to 4 percent of men. Although this trend seems to exist, the history of the study of recidivism is characterized by the focus on men in most of the studies of the recidivism problem and that is why the gendered analysis of female offenders is necessary (Taxman, 2013). The common rehabilitation programs, which are mostly relying on vocation training and economic enhancement, do not concentrate on the individual aspects that contribute to women committing a crime. According to research findings of Chesney-Lind and Shelden (2004), as well as Daly (1994), trauma, abuse, and familial pressures influence women to commit crime. Nevertheless, studies targeted at gendered mechanisms in female offenders are few and thus in African countries such as Kenya. Pathways paradigm that considers the fact that men and women approach risks of committing crimes differently is proving to have explanatory power and even a practical way in dealing with female criminals. This paper will propose to examine the role of gendered pathways to the crime in rehabilitating and reintegrating female offenders in Kenya.

1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To examine the trends of recidivism in female offenders in Western Kenya with an emphasis of the factors that mediate on the recidivism chances.
- ii. To conceptualize and uncover the gendered lifeways leading towards the occurrence of female criminality and to recognize the effects caused by the gendered lifeways on the process of rehabilitation and reintegration in women.
- iii. To evaluate whether the existing rehabilitation interventions help meet the needs of female offenders specific enough with the specific emphasis on the contribution of vocational training, psychological services, and working on life skills.
- iv. Investigate how gender relations and social perceptions condition the reintegration process of ex-female-offenders, especially as regards family and social stigmatization, and acceptance by the community.
- v. To prescribe recommendations to be made by any correctional program and policies that would work towards the enhancement of the reintegration process of female offenders in Kenya, as they relate to their unique needs and challenge based on the findings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The theoretical approaches contribute to an understanding of the factors that affect criminal behavior because it forms the hypotheses based on which one can conduct the test and either prove it or deny it (Mensah, 2024). The two competing theories used in this study are gendered pathways theory and the relational theory in efforts to show the reason behind female recidivism despite the prison incarceration.

2.1.1 Gendered Pathways Theory

Gendered Pathways Theory developed by Kathleen Daly (1992) helps to provide a vital approach to gaining insight into the different routes that bring women into criminality. Daly discovered five major pathways, as follows; street women; drug-connected women, harmed and harming women; battered women; and economic offenders. These pathways are identifiers of female criminal behavior in the sense that female criminality is influenced by survival mechanisms motivated by abuse, traumas and socio-economic issues (Bloom et al., 2003). Female criminality is emphasized by the theory, particularly based on the criminality of women due to their victimization, and as such, the need to survive in such impoverished, drug and violence, prone environments. It promotes women-specific

rehabilitation programs that cater to the individual experiences and particularities of women. Such programs should take into account the social-economic, psychological, and interpersonal aspects that motivate female offenders because they are parts of their rehabilitation and the effective re-entry into the community.

2.1.2 Relational Theory

Relational Theory also helps to explain female recidivism by setting its attention on the importance of interpersonal relationships in the criminality of women. Covington (1998) opine that female identity development is highly associated with relational relationships e.g. family, intimate partners and social networks. When these relationships are disrupted e.g. through abusive relationships, being a trauma child or being an isolated person, thus criminal behaviour may arise as ill coping behaviour. The idea that women find strength in relationships and that when the relationships are based on toxicity or even in the state of their absence women can end up engaging in criminal activity due to their inability to cope is presented by Jean Baker Miller (1976). It is a very applicable theory to imprisoned women considering that most of them suffer emotional disruptions and the inability to meet their children, which are some of the main causes of their probability of committing the same crime after their release (Koban, 1983; Blustein, 2011). Prison tends to worsen this situation because it further alienates women to their families and their social circles prolonging the process of recovery and strengthening the pattern of criminality.

Collectively, these two theories reflect the mutuality of relations between personal histories of women, victimization, and relationship experiences in their criminal behavior and recidivism. Gendered pathways theory emphasizes the significance of the existence of special socio-economic pathways and psychological pathways that make women enter into crime, whereas relational theory underlines the significance of the dysfunctional relationships as the origin of female crime occurrence. Both the theories support gender-responsive rehabilitation programs which are aimed at restoring relationships, emotional healing, and empowering women to cope with their social and economic problems. Such rehabilitation since they take into consideration the importance of the relationship of women in causing as well as preventing crime is closer to result in a female recidivism (Covington, 1998).

To summarize, through a convergence of these theories, this paper highlights the fact that there is a need to have gender-responsive policies on rehabilitation because the factors that result in women getting and quitting crime differs with men. These frames offer a basis on how to understand the distinct issues concerning the female offenders and inform the process of creating more effective and personalized interventions.

2.2 Empirical Review

This part presents an overview of significant literature on the issues female offenders encounter in reintegration, including the gaps in theories and how the present study intends to fill them.

2.2.1 Challenges Female Offenders Face During Reintegration

Female offenders experience special problems when they are released back into the society which is a major cause of high rates of recidivism. Research has established some factors that influence reintegration such as stigmatization, family relations and lack of customized rehabilitation plans. Although much research has been done on male offenders, little has been conducted on the gender-specific issues that women have to deal with especially in relation to Kenyan prisons. The challenges have been noted with severity by various studies who find that in most cases, criminals become recurrent, especially when no effort is made to take these hurdles into consideration during rehabilitation (Bonta & Andrews, 2007 and Phillips (2009). Harlow (1991) further indicate that our prison systems, especially those not constructed to be accommodative of the women they incarcerate as the systems have a punitive nature and the fact that the systems harden the personality structures of the women prison does not help much with the strategies available to women to cope after prison.

2.2.2 Pains of Imprisonment

The process of incarceration in itself makes reintegration more difficult. Gendered needs are not addressed in punitive policies that tend to define the nature of prison conditions, and in particular the treatment of female offenders. Harlow (1991) explain the kind of pains that immigrants are subjected to, including the psychological and emotional stresses as they can be held in prisons physically but their minds remain in prisons. Female prisoners are also confronted by other challenges including loss of children and stigma thus making reintegration process more difficult. The experiences can create sequential crime following the desire to deal with these traumas and stigmatization (Bloom et al., 2004). Moreover, according to the labeling theory (Becker, 1986: Becker, 1963), criminal labels often constitute a so-called master status to women offenders that tends to overshadow all other attributes of a given identity. This has the potential to result in permanent social exclusion that suppresses access to opportunity and leading to reoffending. Despite numerous works devoted to the investigation of the impact of imprisonment on male offenders, the literature regarding the emotional and social consequences of incarceration on the female offenders is comparatively scarce.

Gender-responsive correctional programs are therefore a necessity to deal with these special experiences (Goffman, 1963).

2.2.3 Gendered Stigmatization

One of the most widespread issues that female offenders must encounter through reintegration is stigmatization. Stigma may cause deep psychological impacts as Frost (2011) argues, leading to feelings of shame, self-doubt and isolation. This stigmatization is even added to by gender-related stereotypes that have made it common to refer to female offenders as dirty mothers or even defective women (Link & Phelan, 2001). After their release, most women cannot easily reconnect with their families and communities because they are stigmatized as criminals. According to a survey conducted by Braman (2002), most of the women in prison have experienced the silencing of their family and they are compelled to conceal their criminal past, thus further putting them out of touch with their support systems. The fact that they cannot freely discuss their experiences adds to their isolation, as well as adds psychological weight to the constraints of reintegration. Moreover, gendered stigma may also contribute to relegating women in other social areas such as the workplace or even family life. The stigmatization reduces the chances of the women securing a job and a stable place to live which further increases the chances of recidivism. The lack of research regarding gendered stigma and its effects on recidivism underscores the necessity of deeper research of these elements that contribute to the improper reintegration of the individual into society and how correctional systems can deal with these problems (Travis, 2002).

2.2.4 Reunification with Children and Family

One of the greatest challenges that women experience on being released is reunification with their incarcerated children. Research shows that more women provide primary care to their children, and failure of family ties in times of imprisonment may continue to affect the mothers and their children all over through their lifetimes (Koban, 1983; Blustein, 2011). The adoption and safe families act (ASFA) in U.S, further enable disruption of parental rights where a child is in foster care 15 months out of 22 which jeopardizes women of permanently losing their child (Downey, 2000). Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA, 1997). Kenya has the same problems, but programs to help prisoners, especially mothers, are few and the ones that do exist tend to not deliver enough resources to help the family be reunited after release (Ogeto, 2009). According to Fernandez (2012), women tend to be the pillars of family establishments and their imprisonment may cause the breakdown of family units thus making it difficult for them to fit back into the community. There exists a gap in conducting research on the exact effects of maternal incarceration and its repercussions in regard to the family reunification process in Kenya.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A descriptive research design was utilized to analyze female recidivism patterns, including frequency and trends. This approach, recommended by Mugenda (2008) and Kothari (2004), facilitated data collection from a large sample through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. It also allowed for inferences about the relationship between gender and recidivism.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Western Kenya, which includes Kakamega, Busia, Bungoma, and Vihiga counties. This region, characterized by a high rate of female recidivism (Oruta, 2014), was suitable for the study. Economic activities in the region include agriculture, dairy farming, fishing, and industrial processing, particularly in sugar and paper production.

3.3 Study Population

The study targeted 240 female recidivists and 18 correctional officers from Kakamega, Busia, and Bungoma women's prisons, totaling 258 respondents.

3.4 Sampling Procedures and Sample Size

Purposive sampling was used to select female recidivists based on prison records, while simple random sampling determined the final sample of 150 recidivists. Proportionate stratified sampling distributed the sample among the prisons. Nine senior prison officers were purposively sampled for key informant interviews.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

Both primary and secondary data were utilized. Primary data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Questionnaires were self-administered with minimal guidance, while

interviews with prison officers provided in-depth insights. Two focus group discussions, each comprising 10 purposively selected female recidivists, were conducted.

3.6 Validity and Reliability

Content validity ensured that questionnaire items reflected research objectives. Reliability was tested using the test-retest method, achieving a correlation coefficient above 0.70, indicating high reliability.

3.7 Data Collection Procedures

Six trained research assistants facilitated data collection in three women's prisons. Data was gathered from recidivists via questionnaires and from prison officers through interviews. Focus group discussions provided additional qualitative insights.

3.8 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, means, frequencies) via SPSS v.20. Qualitative data was analyzed through content analysis, categorizing common themes for interpretation. Results were presented in tables, charts, and graphs.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 To Assess Gender related Challenges of Reintegration of Female Prisoners in Western Kenya Prisons

There are numerous challenges facing women prisons in Kakamega, Bungoma and Busia. Some of the challenges are, Gendered stigmatization, Unemployment, Reunification with the children.

4.1.1 Gendered Stigmatization of the Female Ex-Offenders

The study also looked at how female ex-offenders dealt with stigma from various elements of the community after they were released from jail, and the results are presented in Table 1

Table 1

Shows various Members of Society that Stigmatized the Female Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Spouse	32	21.3	27.4	27.4
	Children	10	3.3	4.3	31.6
	Relatives	45	26.7	34.2	65.8
	Community members	58	26.7	34.1	100.0
	Total	145	78.0	100.0	
Total		145	100.0		

The study in Table 1 revealed that 32 (27.4%) of respondents faced stigmatization from their spouses, 10 (4.3%) from their children, 45 (34.2%) from relatives and 34.1% from community members. The results show that community members and relatives bear the same cultural beliefs with regard to the incarceration of a woman which resulted to recidivism. Respondents revealed that stigmatization made it more difficult to seek for support from relatives and community members.

Stigmatization of female respondents bred to feelings of loneliness, frustration, anger and rejection that drove recidivists to revenge or commit another crime. An interviewee revealed that she was unable to get support from her relatives therefore resorted to selling alcohol in order to feed for herself. Gender stereotypes have an impact on both our views and our actions toward women and men in our society. If we feel that a woman's responsibility is to nurture and care for her children, we may hold an unfavourable opinion of a woman who chooses a different path. Stereotypes also have an impact on how we see those who break the law, and they frequently have a disparate impact on men and women (Phillips, 2009).

A discussant in an FGD revealed that after the female offenders are released from prison it became difficult as her children did not want to see her hence not being able to talk to her children and make them understand why she committed the crime. Reintegration may be hampered by stigmatization, social alienation, and emotions of shame and guilt. Re-establishing relationships and social ties is difficult due to stigma and the loss of certain rights. Support from family and friends is essential for effective reintegration and lowering the risk of recidivism. Women in some nations are unable to return home after being released for fear of being victimized by violence (Van Voorhis & Salisbury, 2014).

Silence is the customary reaction of family members to the stigmas associated with a cherished one's incarceration. According to one of the study's participants,

“Outside of my immediate family, I kept quiet about their relative's incarceration and the difficulties I was having. Indeed, I hesitated to tell my extended family about their jail experiences”

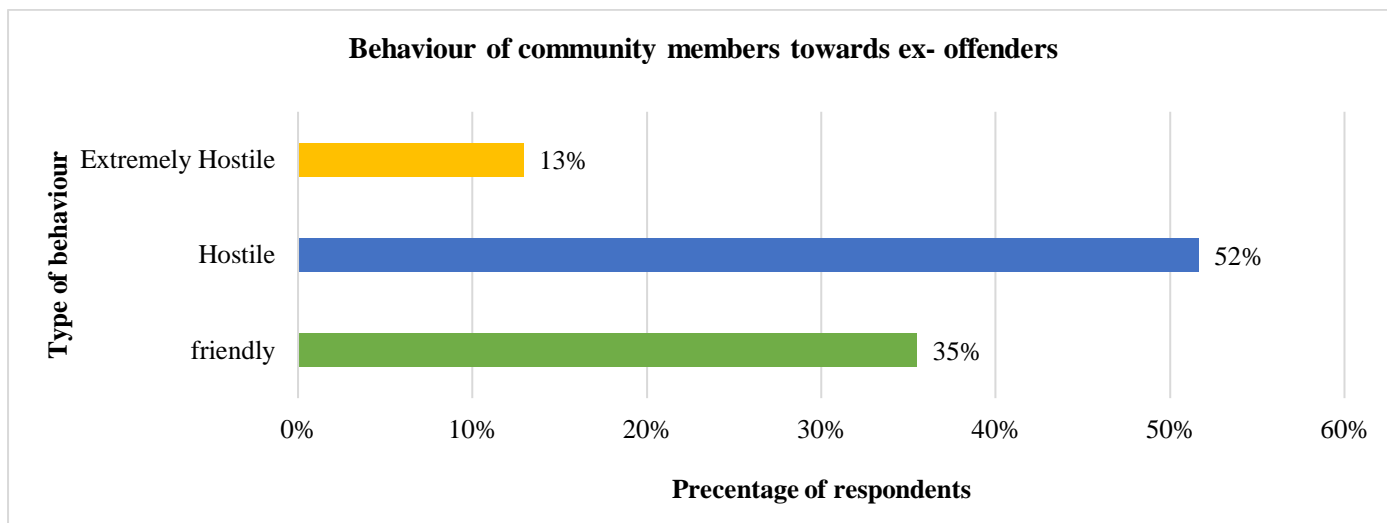


Figure 1
Behaviors of Community Members towards Ex-Offenders

From the results in the figure 1, most of ex-offenders face hostility 75 (52%), friendly were 51 (35%) while extremely hostile were 19 (13%). This shows that majority of ex-offenders are not easily welcome back home with happiness.

People still have negative attitudes and opinions towards the ex-offenders. This was attributed to culture and beliefs of community One respondent commented.

4.2 Securing a Job after First Release from Prison

The goal of the study was to see if the respondents were able to find work after being released from prison for the first time. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2
Did you Secure a Job After Release from Prison

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	60	34.5	34.5
No	95	65.5	65.5
Total	145	100	100.0

According to the data, 60 (34.5 %) of those who responded stated they were able to find work following their release from jail, while 95 (65.5 %) indicated they were unable to find work after their release. 65.5 % of those who were unable to find work after being released from prison did so because they lacked help from family, friends, or the community. Finding and keeping work is a key barrier to readmission. Many businesses are hesitant to recruit someone who have been convicted of a felony, according to Petersilia (2005). Indeed, she stated that many firms prefer to recruit welfare recipients or those with limited experience over offenders (Holzer, 1996) Furthermore, research reveals that 60% of people released from prison do not find work within the first year of their release. (Valentine & Redcross, 2015).

According to the Kenyan Law, a citizen with a history of a criminal record cannot be able to acquire a certificate of good conduct that will help him/her with secure gainful employment despite training, skill set and good conduct while in the prison facility. The Leadership and Integrity Act under Chapter Six of the Kenyan constitution demands that citizens should uphold high levels of integrity and responsibility. In California, for instance, ex-offenders have been banished from getting jobs in the legal, land, pharmaceutical, nursing, non-intrusive treatment and training divisions. In Colorado the employments of dental practitioners, build, nurture, drug specialist, doctor and land operator are shut to ex-offenders (Robert, 2012).

Ex-offenders who found work during the first year after their release were less likely to recidivate, according to interviews. Ex-offenders who were able to find work were less likely to reoffend than those who were unable to find work. The data support Fallahi et al. (2012) hypothesis that joblessness boosts criminal conduct in unemployed

people and increases criminal tendencies compared to when they are employed. Recidivism was influenced by finding and keeping a job after being released from prison.

The table shows ways in which the female ex-convicts secured a job after release from the prison. The results are shown table

Table 3

Ways of Securing A Job after Release from Prison

	Frequency	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Friends	14	9.6	20.3
Family members	16	11.	43.5
Programs assisting offenders	90	62.0	55.1
Personal effort	25	17.2	100.0
Total	145	100.0	

From the findings in the Table 3, 25 (17.2%) of prison female inmates indicated that they managed to secure jobs through personal efforts, 16 (11.0%) secured jobs through family members, and 14 (9.6%) secured jobs through friends while 90(62.0%) secured jobs through programs assisting offenders. The programmes such as an education programme that the female recidivists received while in prison were very useful in their lives and with their families. Providing education programme to female recidivists improve their lives through the experiences of discipline, instilling confidence and stability. Education likely has positive impacts on female recidivists physical and mental wellbeing contribute to their literacy which may improve their employment prospect and enlightens them against recidivism.

An interview with a prison officer in charge of women prison, noted the following observation on the utility of education programme:

The education programmes offered to the inmates improve their employment prospects through impartation of knowledge and confidence to them.

Another interview with the welfare officer in charge of women prison also made the following comment:

Prisoners who successfully complete their educational programmes earn academic certificates which give them opportunity to access legitimate modes of livelihood.

4.3 Acceptance by the Spouse after First Imprisonment

The study sought to investigate if the female ex-offenders are being accepted back by their spouse after first imprisonment. The outcomes are depicted in Figure 2

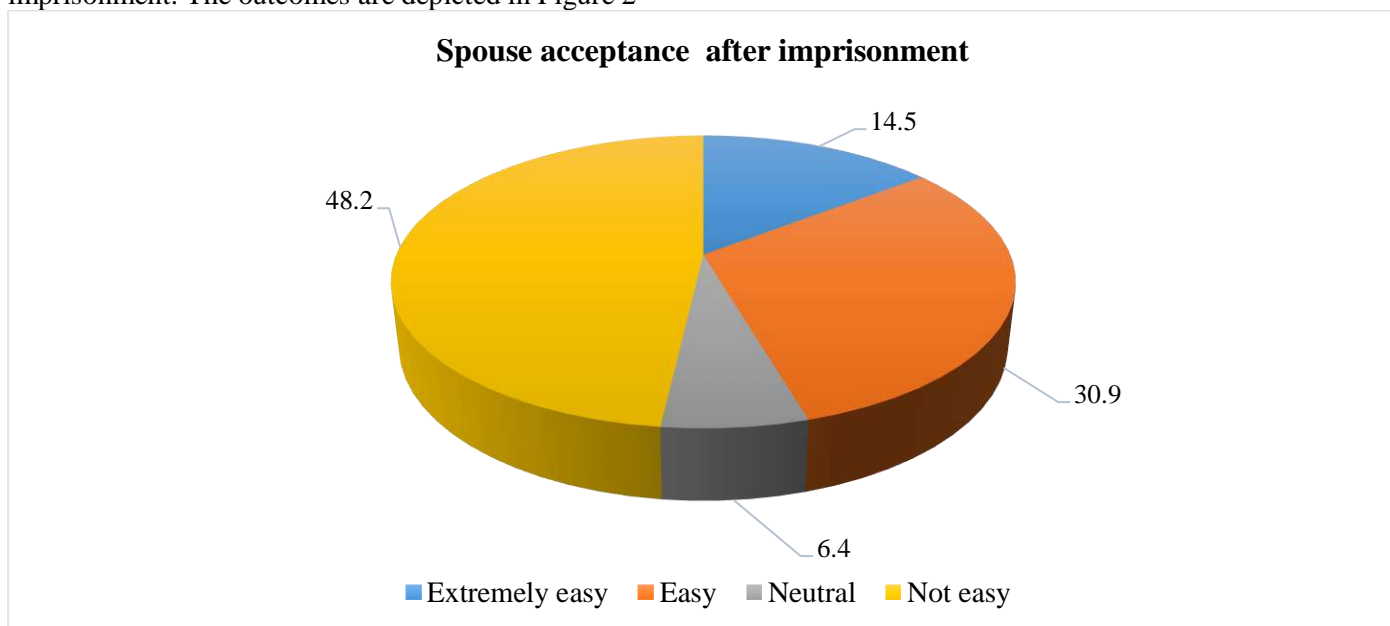


Figure 2
Acceptance by Spouse After First Imprisonment

From the findings in Figure 2, 70 (48.2%) of female ex-offender’s respondents revealed that acceptance from their spouses was not easy, 45 (30.9%) said it was easy, 21 (14.5%) said extremely while 9 (6.4%) were neutral. This can be attributed to stigma, labelling and other factors like culture. A respondent in an interview indicated that,

After my release from prison I was not received well by my spouse as he described me as a bad wife, a bad mother and through this I became stigmatized and I attempted suicide because of this rejection and this resulted to my reimprisonment.

During the focus groups, participants stated that stigmatization, social alienation, and feelings of shame and guilt might all impede reintegration. Re-establishing relationships and social ties is difficult due to stigma and the loss of certain rights. Support from family and friends is essential for effective reintegration and lowering the risk of recidivism.

4.4 Reuniting with your Children and Family After Long Imprisonment

The study sought to investigate whether the ex-offenders find it easier in reuniting with their children after serving a long sentence in prison and how this long imprisonment resulted to these female offenders' recidivism. The outcome of the results is as shown in Figure 3.

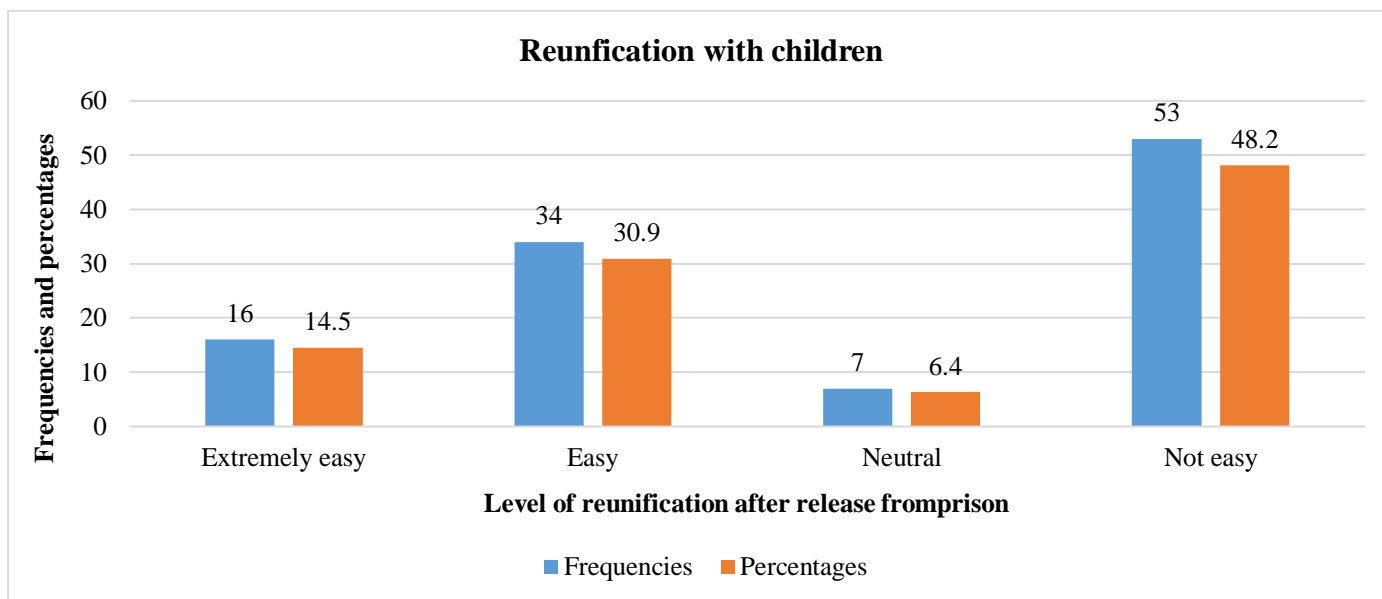


Figure 3
Reunification of Ex-Offenders with their Children After Release

The outcome of the finding of the research in Figure 3 depicted that reunification with children was not easy. It was difficult for 48.2 % of respondents to reunite with their children. The female respondents argued that the long period in prisons resulted to rejection by their children leading to anger thereby some offenders opted for attempted suicide in return. These finding corroborate with Watterson (1996) who argues that, because most states only have a few female institutions, mothers are more likely to be housed far away from their children, making visiting difficult.

Many of these moms feel terrible about being missing from their children's lives and fear losing custody when they are released (Landua, 1993). Visitation barriers, such as the far locations of women's prisons and a lack of transportation, compound the difficulties in maintaining family relationships and reuniting with children.

Female inmates are more likely than male inmates to be the primary caregivers for youngsters, resulting in heightened stress and anxiety while they are separated from their children. Female detainees are more likely to misbehave in the early stages of incarceration because the shock of serving longer durations in prison exacerbates their stress in coping with separation from their children. This makes it more difficult to reestablish social relationships and gain acceptance as parents after serving significant periods of time in prison.

Women's incarceration has a significant influence on their children. Separation from children is seen as one of the most harmful effects of incarceration for mothers (Landua, 1993). The pressures that children of incarcerated parents face are unique to their parent's engagement in the criminal justice system. A lack of contact exacerbates the challenges of separation. Grief, loss, melancholy, estrangement, and hostility are all challenges that children of incarcerated moms face as a result of the loss of a parent. In some circumstances, the forced separation of parent and child leads in the parent-child relationship being permanently terminated (Dallaire & Poehlmann-Tynan, 2021). According to Miller (1976), a woman's fundamental motivation is to develop a sense of connection with others. When women's activities come from, and lead back to, connections with others, particularly her children, they develop a feeling of self and self-worth. For women, the guiding principle of growth is connection rather than separation.

Following their release, women must adhere to probation or parole requirements, attain financial stability, obtain health treatment, find housing, and make attempts to reunite with their families (Bloom et al 2004). The

majority of women in the penitentiary system are mothers, and reuniting with their children is a big concern for them. This adds an additional level of strain, according to Brown et al. (1999), with the children's needs for safe housing, financial support, medical care. Because the children all had their own needs, become the custodial parent can lead to re-entry.

Female detainees found it easier to reunite with their children, with 30.9 % having their children visit them while in prison. By maintaining current mother-child interactions through visiting, social bonding and physical links with children can be maintained, lowering the danger of separation and stigmatization among children. According to the results, 6.4 % and 14.5 % of respondents were neutral and highly easy to locate this youngster. This shows that respondents' children visited the inmates regularly and were less stigmatized as a result. It could also indicate that respondents were not separated from their children, implying that strong social ties existed.

4.5 Learning about Reintegration Programs before Release

The research looked into whether ex-offenders are taught reintegration programs in prison before being released back into society. The results are shown in the Table 4

Table 4

Frequency of Female Recidivists Who Participated in Reintegration Programs Before Release

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	139	95.7
No	6	4.3
Total	145	100.0

The findings on table 4 depicted that the female recidivists that agreed that they learnt reintegration programs were 139 (95.7%) while 6(4.3%) disagreed. The female respondents revealed that some of the programs that they learnt included; Psychological counselling, life skills and vocational training. These results can be attributed to the need for female prisoners to have a good mental health, relationship skills and reliable source of livelihood. The expectation is that the skills will enable them to avoid recidivism and secure employment (Musya, 2013). But released female prisoners may go back to crime to financial constraints, housing and social challenges they face.

The findings of this study support those of Hayward and DePanfilis (2007), who discovered that the label "convicted" influences recidivism, particularly for those who are otherwise less prone to recidivation and may have more to lose by the label. Offender support programs, particularly those involving jails and other non-governmental organizations like RODI, provided financial and material help to a considerable number of respondents, whereas family and community members provided support to a smaller number of respondents. This demonstrates that there are no explicit procedures in place upon a prisoner's release to facilitate a smooth transition back into society in terms of financial and material support.

The majority of those who responded had more than three children. It was also discovered that the majority of respondents had children under the age of 18. When asked who looked after their children while they were in prison, the majority of respondents said their children were in the care of their grandparents or relatives, rather than their fathers. While others claimed that the carers were their children's mothers.

This is clear evidence that the majority of women who are sentenced to prison leave their children with people who are not their fathers. This demonstrates that the majority of convicted women's husbands move on with their life, forgetting the upkeep of the children they fathered with incarcerated women

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This paper has discussed how the reintegration of female offenders back into society involves a problem of gendered reality that involves the problems of stigmatization, lack of jobs, and reunion with their families. The results indicate that female ex-offenders experience severe challenges that hinder their effective integration, which explains why they have a high chance of recidivism. The analysis revealed that gendered stigma is also among the most widespread problems, and a large part of the respondents (68.2) noted their stigmatization by relatives and the society as a whole. The level of stigma which these women carry, particularly out of prison, leads to emotional trauma, social isolation and aggression, and it denies them the ability to go in search of support and expression which they need to rebuild their lives in a resourceful way. Stigmatization was majorly done by community members and relatives which makes the society believe that a woman offender is a "bad person" who does not deserve a chance to be reintegrated into society. In addition, many respondents were worried about unemployment after they had been released. 65.5 percent of the women ex-offenders had failed to get jobs compared to the available opportunities, and this was almost entirely the result of incongruence of family, friends and communal institutions. Individuals who did find employment

were seen to have used reintegration programs and personal initiatives which underlines the need of these resources to present a route towards employment. Nonetheless, unemployment and criminality are still major factors hindering entry into gainful employment. The research also discovered that unification with children is a serious matter. Women had problems reconnecting with their children when they returned after years of imprisonment, 48.2 percent of the respondents reported that it was not an easy task reconnecting with the children. This was made worse by failure to visit due to incarceration and this contributed to the rejection and lack of connectedness with the present children. These challenges are part of the psychological stress and emotional trauma that most female ex-offenders experience, which poses additional obstacles to reintegration and heightens chances of recidivism. There was also provision of reintegration programs including psychological counselling, vocational training and life skills development to a large extent to female prisoners. The study however also noted the lapse in the programs deployment with many women having to struggle to get the benefits of the services after their release because of the social-economic factors.

5.2 Recommendations

There are a number of decisive actions that have to be taken in order to better reintegrate female offenders and decrease recidivism. To begin with, efforts must be put in place to carry out community sensitization programmes to discord the dire and unfavourable assumptions of female ex-warriors. These initiatives would sensitize the community on the need to embrace and empower women after prison to foster a more supportive society. Second, correctional establishments ought to have gender-responsive rehabilitation programs, which include vocational training, psychological counselling, and life-skills training, focusing on the specific needs of the women offenders. This would provide women with the tools they have to come back into the world with and establish normal jobs. Third, the family reunification services must be prioritized, and the needed support services should be intended on restoring mother-children's relations. Frequent visits and counselling would lighten the emotional burden of being separated when one is in prison. Also, re-entry should be focused on job placement and there should be policies supporting the second chance employment of ex inmates. That would allow them to have a much better opportunity to find sound, lawful livelihoods. Finally, the policy packages must be implemented to facilitate employment to ex-offenders, including the modification of the legal criteria, like the certificate of good conduct. The ultimate strategy of female re-entry can be more effective and lasting by taking the issues fully into consideration.

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