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## TREATMENT AND REHABILITATION OFFENDERS: OPTIONS FOR SOCIAL WORKERS IN ZIMBABWE

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### ABSTRACT

*Treatment and rehabilitation of prisoners has evolved to be a critical cause of concern when dealing with offenders within correctional institutions. Despite the good intentions of prison rehabilitation services, studies have shown that there is a high rate of recidivism among offenders in Zimbabwe. This paper sought to examine the challenges faced by social workers and to investigate the gaps that exist within the rehabilitation framework. The research was qualitative in nature making use of in-depth interviews and key informant interviews as data collection methods. The study found out that social workers had correctional, rehabilitative and reintegration roles in prisons even though there were no clear cut demarcation of roles among social scientist, resulting in rehabilitative roles and behavioural roles of social workers not being considered in most prisons as social workers concentrated on other prison duties that are more authoritarian in nature. The study therefore recommends the development of a standard offender based manual for rehabilitation for all prisons in Zimbabwe and the need for forensic social work training to all rehabilitation officers working in a prisons.*

**KEY TERMS:** *Social workers, rehabilitation, social work treatment, offenders, rehabilitative role, correctional role and integrative role*

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## INTRODUCTION

The field of social work practice is eclectic and forensic social work is one of the major areas of social work practice worldwide. In most third world countries like Zimbabwe the field of forensic social work has not yet been as fully developed as in most developed countries. This has resulted in the treatment options not being very clear in most prisons, the situation has also been worsened by the fact that forensic social work is not a core course in most Universities, ironically when students finish their degree programme they do not have the option of choosing the type of social work that they would like to venture into due to the high unemployment levels in most third world countries like Zimbabwe. This paper therefore looks at forensic social work in Zimbabwe, exposing the challenges that social workers are facing in Zimbabwe and identifying the gaps that exist in forensic social work.

Forensic social work concentrates on the law and educates law professionals about social welfare issues social workers included. This field involves juvenile justice, adult corrections and law enforcement (Roberts and Brwnell, 1999 cited in Kusada 2014). Zimbabwe has a total prison population of 18 857 and a prison population rate of 145/1000 (United Nations, 2015), from the 46 correctional institutions nationwide. Zimbabwe Prison service (ZPS) was established in terms of section 99 (2) of the constitution of Zimbabwe of 1980 and amended to become the Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services (ZPCS) in terms of Chapter 11 (227) of the Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013. Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Service is a paramilitary organisation under the ministry of Justice and Legal Affairs that operates in accordance with the Prison Act Chapter 7: 11 of 2002 and other statutory instruments. The main function of (ZPCS) is to protect the society from criminals through incarceration and rehabilitation of convicted persons and others who are lawfully required to be detained and their reintegration back into the society. (Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment No 20 Chapter 11 (227) of 2013).

Social work as a humanitarian profession plays a very important role in the rehabilitation of prisoners. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are central to social work practice. These are underpinned by the programmes of rehabilitation offered to offenders, which include life skills, spiritual, psychosocial, therapeutic programmes, and agricultural, educational, recreational and vocational skills. However according to Kusada, (2014) the main programmes provided by the Zimbabwe Prison Services are agriculture and those that are vocational in nature. Consequently, there is a gap in the rehabilitation of offenders in Zimbabwe because most the programmes have not yet been implemented to empower and change the behaviour of the offenders (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).

There has been a shift in social work practice from punishment to rehabilitation in the criminal justice system of Zimbabwe. The shift moves away from emphasising on corrections, leading to very few studies being conducted on the role of social workers in correctional institutions while taking a rehabilitative role. It has however been known that social workers provide supportive roles and link people to resources among other roles. (International Federation of Social Workers, 2014).

Studies have further postulated that social workers greatest assert in the integration of prisoners was access to the outside world, where the community plays an important role in the process of building networks and partnerships to promote and improve community safety and participation before and after incarceration, to address recidivism in a holistic manner. However it has been noted that there is a gap in the provision of social work roles within and outside the prison set up. This is evident by the high number of cases of recidivism among offenders. This in itself reveals the inadequacy of social work intervention programs in this field and the need to reconsider social work approaches when dealing with offenders. Scholars like Sishuba, (2000) further note that this is exacerbated by the fact that in most third world countries there is no clear policy guideline on rehabilitation services worse more a model for social work intervention. Hence for most social workers it is not clear if the approaches they taking are addressing the problem at hand. This is also exacerbated by the fact that forensic social work is taught at masters level in most schools of social work and in some schools it is a major, where a student either choses to take or not. This situation is not ideal for most third world countries were unemployment is a major challenge forcing social workers to work in areas that they would not have majored in at the schools of social work (Chigunwe, 2014).

Roberts, (1997) also brings out a social dilemma in coming out of social work roles, where social workers are regarded as agents of social control, implying that they function in authoritative and arguably coercive roles in corrections services rather than rehabilitative roles. This notion in itself moves away from social work, as well as its rehabilitative objectives. The Canadian Association of social Workers, (2015) posits that Social work positions within corrections and rehabilitation institutions encompass a wide range of skills and specialised services that require training.

Individuals learn values, attitudes, techniques for criminal behaviour which are the principles of social learning and operant conditioning. It can thus be concluded that under such lines of thinking criminal behaviour is learned in both social and non-social situations through direct reinforcement, vicarious reinforcement, explicit instruction and observation in both the developed and the developing countries (Bandura, 1977). A lot of studies have been of the view that offenders were exposed to anti- social values, attitudes and techniques of criminal behaviour in their life and such values and attitudes are reinforced in individuals making them habitual offenders. Learning

such values and attitudes can be done directly or indirectly by observation, but all learned values lead to the same problem of anti-social behaviour. Omboto, (2010) further notes that the frequency and intensity of interaction of the learned behaviour, best explains the criminal behaviour. The more the individual is exposed to anti-social values and attitudes the more the behaviour is installed. This also means that anti-social values and attitudes that are exposed at a high intensity and frequency are more likely to lead individuals into recidivism as they also need a high intensity and frequency to be relearned.

It can thus be noted that there are gaps in the provision of services by social workers as most studies on forensic social work are Eurocentric and therefore not suitable for application in most third world countries, Zimbabwe included. This is mainly because of the known differences in economic and social backgrounds of the first world countries and the third world countries. Most developed countries for example can afford to have a wide range of rehabilitation options and services for offenders as compared to developing countries like Zimbabwe which are facing a lot of economic challenges affecting a lot of social welfare services (Omboto, 2010). This paper will thus try to address the gap of insufficient information on whether correctional programmes are reducing reoffending by coming out with the expected roles of rehabilitation that social workers, working in a prison set up can make use of while conducting their duties.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in all the 46 correctional institutions in Zimbabwe, the research targeted all the correctional institutions as each correctional institution has its own unique characteristics. The research made use of a qualitative research approach making use of in-depth interviews and key informant interviews as data collection methods. Data for in-depth interviews was collected from social workers who are currently working with offenders in Zimbabwe making use of an in-depth interview guide as a data collection tool. To ensure that the research was equally distributed and to get a fair understanding of the area under study quota sampling technique was used to identify a sample of ninety two (92) social workers in all the prisons in Zimbabwe. A total of ten (10) key informants were purposively sampled and were interviewed making use of a key informant interview guide. Secondary data was also used in trying to come up with the roles of a social worker. Data was analysed using thematic analysis.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was sought from the Zimbabwe Rehabilitation Service (ZPS). Permission was also sought from the heads of each correctional services of each prison in Zimbabwe. Each participant who participated in the study filled in a detailed consent form which explained to the respondent before participating in the study on the objectives, risks and benefits of the study. The researcher also observed strict confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation during the entire data collection process.

## FINDINGS

The main theme that came out of the study was that despite the presence of the Prisons Act Chapter 7: 11, the policy misses a more detailed guideline that could be used to deduce social work roles, save for guidelines to use when addressing issues and challenges pertaining to recidivism and prison mission delivery in the country. This policy framework was reported to provide guidelines to social workers, psychologist and sociologist. The study further noted that the policy framework made employees to adhere to the principle of respect, dignity and worth of inmates; provide an opportunity for every inmate to learn life skills; vocational training, visit homes of inmates to ensure family reintegration and to link inmates with resources to facilitate a smooth rehabilitation process. It can thus be noted that the policy is not social work specific even though it acknowledges the role that social scientist play in the rehabilitation process. This was well noted by one respondent who reported that:

*...around this place we make use of one instrument and normally our duties are almost the same and have a military approach which makes it difficult for social workers to have their own position in this regard...*

What was reported to be a cause of concern were the similar roles being conducted by all the social scientist instead of having complementary roles, that brings out their areas of speciality. This in itself showed that all these social scientist were not clear on how exactly they should offer their rehabilitation services to the offenders leading them to have almost the same roles in their service provision. One respondent noted that:

*...as social scientist we almost do the same roles and sometimes one is not clear and it becomes difficult to realise which profession is rendering which service.*

Of interest was the notion that most social workers felt that it became prudent for social workers to be actively involved in the alignment of prison laws with rehabilitation objectives, so that what social workers do will be in accordance with the law and in line with the mandate of (ZPCS). One respondent highlighted the fact:

*The social work code of ethics should be aligned to the Prisons Act Chapter 7: 11 so that social workers can have something to guide them be it in the teaching of rehabilitation of prisoners or the implementation of the profession.*

Social workers should also be actively involved in the coordination of the judicial system like police systems, law enforcement agencies, amongst others to be sensitive on the rights and welfare of prisoners. This can be done through formulation of policies and programs for the correction of offenders in the context of national development. One key informant reported that:

*...the social workers should be actively involved in issues that affect them as they know their profession better.*

The study therefore came out with seven main roles that social workers can make use of, when protecting the society from anti-social behaviour. These were reported to be integrative roles, provide moral support, and provide technical skills for correctional services, behavioural change roles, welfare, rehabilitative roles and counselling.

When working with inmates and their relatives social workers should conduct the integrative roles as shown above, this included specific roles like equipping family members on legal issues surrounding the offence that the offender would have committed and their implications; preparing the family members on what to anticipate in the absence of the offender and also mapping a strategic plan of how to address their fears; mediate between inmates and relatives to ensure forgiveness; facilitating for the reintegration process of offenders back into the family and society; facilitate special visits between inmates and their relatives especially offenders who have almost completed their imprisonment; conduct home visits and facilitate inmates to visit their sick relatives or attend special events like funerals of their close family members.

On new inmates social workers also have a big role to play as they were reported to offer pre-incarceration counselling, were they prepare the offender of the new prison environment, making them adapt to the new environment. In the pre-incarceration counselling the social workers should also address fears being faced by the offender so that they adapt very well to the new environment; empower the offender with survival techniques and preview the offender of prison life especially the norms and values of the organisation so that they will not be found on the wrong side of the law; Telling the inmates success stories of former inmates who have reformed, this can be done by making use of former prisoners who would have managed to survive prison life and would have successfully reintegrated back into the community; conduct awareness campaigns and educational information on the effects of incarceration, educate communities on crime prevention and crimes that attract imprisonment and to offer a developmental approach which is more preventative than reactive where they offer life skills to community members to avoid incarceration especially target groups that are at a risk of learning anti- social behaviour. The social workers should also facilitate group work to ensure that new inmates are well received by old inmates; finally social workers should be involved in planning so as to be actively involved in categorising rehabilitation programs for convicts. This can be done by categorising the offenders according to sex offender programs, violent offender rehabilitation programs, and anger management programs. Categories can be further divided into domestic violence, women offender programs, and drug and alcohol abuse programs amongst others.

When providing moral support social workers should ensuring that each offender is actively involved and encourage offenders to be involved in sport, music arts and spiritual support. This can be done by making use of group work in recreational activities like choral music, traditional dance, contemporary dance, chess, drama, and football and volley ball. Social workers have the role to ensure that the required resources for recreation are available. Social workers were also reported to encourage inmates to participate in recreational activities; this can be done by presenting to them the advantages of participating and also incentivising those that actively participate. Finally they should be able to lobby on behalf of prisoners, so that enough time is allocated for leisure so as to create an opportunity to channel and vent out negative feelings of tension and anxiety.

In offering technical skills for correctional services to offenders social workers should expose offenders to different technical fields so that they have a wide range of choices, they could also provide an education and skills training program for new offenders. Social workers should also actively aligning skills to suit the current socio-economic situation of a given country, which includes having market assessments so that the skills offered in prison are on demand with the skills needed by the market. The study also noted that social workers should expose inmates to markets through exposing them to national competitions and facilitating for their participation. One of the main roles of a social worker was reported to be in a position to assist inmates with more courses of vocational training like motor mechanics, building, arts and craft, plumbing and welding amongst others. In support of this cause social workers should be in a position to make use of available resources and to mobilise external resources

for the vocational programs. Finally they should be able to have strategies that will improve and encourage programme acceptance amongst offenders to increase participation. The inmates themselves are a resource that can be used to come up with innovative ways to improve marketing strategies, capital injection and other programs that can be of benefit to them.

In order to provide behavioural change roles social workers can make use of community work as a method of social work by working closely with other groups in communities in the provision of social support networks. This can be done by installing religious good morals through the chaplain in prison and out of prison, providing role models of offenders who have made it back in the community to the offenders in prison, so that offenders can learn from them. Social workers can also provide behavioural change roles by guiding offenders through problem solving skills particularly when inmates are interacting with other inmates. This is beneficial as inmates are taught to increase rational thinking that will assist better pro-social interactions and better social behaviours. Social workers can also make use of social learning techniques like role playing and modelling.

Social workers can also be involved in monitoring the general welfare of inmates by offering psycho-social assessments to ensure the wellbeing of inmates. They can also advocate for institutional changes in meeting treatment and psycho-social needs of inmates which include, advocating for better living conditions for inmates, linking inmates to prison hospitals and ensuring compliance of drugs to sick inmates; Provide counselling to inmates experiencing different social challenges and for those who will be sick they should provide a supportive environment in prison.

Social workers can also be involved in facilitating rehabilitation programs by offering programs that are socially and economically viable and of benefit to offenders after release. This can be done by making use of case work, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of offenders so that they can best assist offenders in the correct rehabilitation program they choose. This can also be improved by educating inmates on the importance of the programs being offered and the provision of relevant facilities for the programs like advocating for resources from donors.

Social workers working in a prison set up should also be able to offer the following counselling sessions, pre-incarceration counselling; individual counselling, group and family counselling sessions, discharge plan counselling sessions and post incarceration counselling.

It can thus be noted that social workers roles can be divided into correctional, rehabilitative and reintegration roles. In all these roles there is also need for standardisation of rehabilitation frame works that will equip social workers with the relevant skills needed for them to implement their duties in the prison. This will ensure that they have the capacity to develop a wide range of programs for inmates, so that they cater for the needs of all the inmates from different socio-economic backgrounds.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Studies have shown that rehabilitation is a social science area and a field of social work that requires trained professionals. Rehabilitation of offenders in and outside prisons is given in the form of restorative measures that includes diversion programmes that are put in place to restore the offender to good or better behaviour and prevent re-offending in future. Miceli, (2012) defines rehabilitation as a lifelong process in which prisoners acknowledge their antisocial behaviour and display a considerable level of commitment to reconstructing, asserting and redeveloping themselves to becoming reintegrated into the society after undergoing a psycho-educational programme. Ironically in Zimbabwe despite having a good rehabilitation model on paper, a lot has to be addressed in terms of the implementation of the program, as evident by the high rates of recidivism.

In countries like South Africa studies have shown that rehabilitation of offenders is known for restorative justice, which is broader and focuses on offenders of all age groups. It is therefore broader than the diversion program which aims to repair injuries between the victim and perpetrator. On the other hand in Zimbabwe attention is mainly given to the offender and not much is done for the victim or family members of the offenders. In trying to address these gaps in the implementation of rehabilitation programs, there is need for a developmental social work approach to crime and prevention. The Zimbabwean government should borrow a leaf from countries like South Africa in terms of rehabilitation so that rehabilitation services are also offered outside the prison set up.

Furthermore for rehabilitation of offenders to be effective they need for social workers to combat a need based approach which identifies the needs, provides education and psychological needs of offenders in prison. The needs analysis will improve and change the behaviour of offenders. Miceli, (2012) note that if qualified social workers, psychologists and correctional officers execute their therapeutic services, as suggested by Rogerian's person-centeredness approach, recidivism may be reduced. Discrimination of ex-convicts by community members will decrease. In countries like Zimbabwe, the roles of social workers, psychologists and correctional officers are not well defined. Hence the need for the Government of Zimbabwe, to ensure that all key players, in the provision of rehabilitation programs receives relevant training.



Moreover social workers can provide psychological services to offenders by helping them deal with trauma and other challenges that offenders will be facing. Therefore providing counselling to offenders and their family members to assist all family members to understand offender's better, leading to their acceptance in societies. The above is supported by Chigunwe, (2014) who asserts that if offenders are returning to their neighbourhoods they are not provided with access to services that will enable them to re-integrate well in the society. They are less likely to succeed in their post-release transition and more likely to recidivate. This is the current scenario in Zimbabwe where much attention of the rehabilitation programs is in the prison and not much is done outside the prison leading to the high numbers of recidivism in the country.

The study also showed that there is need for Zimbabwe Prison Service to provide better medical care to all the offenders. In addition there is need for better cooperation between social workers and other professionals in prison to better understand the importance of relationships and non-judgemental attitude of social workers. This will assist the different professionals to offer their services well to offenders.

The ZPS should employ social workers in prison who have the knowledge on forensic social work who would have majored in the area, to best assist offenders. There is need for training all prison staff on rehabilitation to ensure that rehabilitation programmes are obligatory to all offenders. Kusada, (2014) found out that the reason for recidivism was largely due to rehabilitation programmes which are not compulsory in most prisons. In this way prisoners may be assertive as opposed to being shameful, will take full responsibility of their lives, acknowledge their wrong-doings, and develop a healthy mature personality which purports that the mature adult subscribes to a unifying philosophy of life, commitment, extension of the self and to others which is the aim of rehabilitation (Miceli, 2012).

It can also be concluded that there is need for constant monitoring and evaluation of programmes offered to offenders, to see the effectiveness and relevancy of programs being offered to offenders. This can be done by making sure social workers and other prison staff visits communities to check on their clients after they have been released from prison which is post incarceration counselling.

Implementation of rehabilitation includes family integration, family group conferencing, life skills, sex offender programmes, and community service pre-trial to mention a few. Mupedziswa, (2005) defines developmental approach to social work as the practical and appropriate application of knowledge, skills and values to enhance the well-being of individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities in their social context. Hence utilising the developmental approach in the criminal justice system infers a paradigm shift from retributive justice system while focusing on restorative justice and reconciliation. This will habituate the behaviour of offenders and empower them to take full responsibility to the harm they would have caused to others. More so the Ubuntu philosophy should be utilized in the rehabilitation of the offenders in prison. Mupedziswa, (2003) asserts that the core social work professional values are in line with the African philosophy of *ubuntu*, which is described as encompassing issues of human dignity and respect with the understanding that an individual's humanity is wrapped up in the dignity and humanity of others. Hence, *ubuntu* promotes human worth and dignity for all the members of the community, which has been felt by the victims and offenders alike as missing in the retributive criminal justice systematic. Utilizing the *ubuntu* philosophy will help in the rehabilitation of the offenders in terms of changing their criminal behaviours, there by understanding that offenders are just human beings like others although they behaved in an unlawful act they still deserve to be treated like others and they can change if they are assisted by professionals.

The research also found out that the structure or manner in which rehabilitation services were being administered was based on an ability and willingness basis rather than evaluating the best program for inmate.

Social workers should also continuously be involved in research so that social workers are up to date with the current trends of crimes being committed by inmates. This will be beneficial as it will assist social workers to further clarify their roles better.

All these shortcomings in the rehabilitation programmes have implications to the social work profession as it uninstalls the values and principles that social workers would have been trained at the schools of social work. Continuous exposure of social workers in such environments which are more authoritarian will also make them learn such behaviours which will make it difficult if they are to work in a different environment.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

It can thus be concluded that the main reasons behind the high rate of recidivism in Zimbabwe, can be attributed to the implementation strategies that are being employed in prisons as the rehabilitation model is good on paper but has flaws when being implemented. This has resulted in the problem at hand and has negative implications to the field of social work. The social work practitioner will not be in position to render the client the best social work service which more rehabilitative and to adhere to the principles of social work. On the other hand this also worsens the exposure of the field of social work which is a relatively young profession in Africa as their clientele will not be able to differentiate them from their fellow social scientist thereby not making it clear when and the type of issues that they may discuss with the social workers.

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