

SELECTING AND PROVIDING EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION, TREATMENT AND SUPPORT TO RELEASED INMATES IN NAMIBIA FROM A REHABILITATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Namibian Correctional Service (NCS) as part of its mandate has the responsibility of reintegrating released inmates into society as law abiding citizens. This it strives to achieve under the Division: Community Supervision, which was established in 2016 to monitor, assess, evaluate and supervise released inmates, so as to ensure their successful reintegration into society.

To date, about 10,500 inmates have been admitted and assessed under the Division: Community Supervision to serve the remainder of their sentences in the community. Currently (as on 16 August 2023), there are about 1,566 released offenders serving their sentences under the Supervision of the NCS across Namibia.

This paper will highlight the current situation in terms of the interventions, treatment and support for the reintegration of released offenders in Namibia, as it pertains specifically to the employment needs of released inmates.

II. CURRENT SITUATION IN NAMIBIA

A. Prevalent Risk-Needs and Strengths

The NCS has adopted and implemented the Offender Risk Management Correctional Strategy (ORMCS) in the year 2014, which hinges on the Risk, Needs and Responsivity Model. This model establishes that each offender is different in his/her offending and thus requires an individually tailored approach in addressing risk factors. In Namibia there is a lack of literature on the risk factors of inmates or comprehensive databases synthesizing and capturing this data.

In the initial phases of incarceration, offenders are assessed to identify the risk factors that led to their offending, and a treatment plan is crafted to address these factors during incarceration, as far as practicable. Once offenders are conditionally released, the Division: Community Supervision is charged with the responsibility of assessing if previously identified risk factors were adequately addressed and identifying outstanding risk needs to be addressed while the offenders serve in the community.

Commonly identified goals observed on the case plans of released offenders are: to secure employment or a stable source of income; improve educational or vocational attainment; refrain from former criminal associates; restore familial relationships; address and manage their alcohol and/or drug use; and to address and manage anger and/or impulsiveness.

Despite the aforementioned prevalent risk-needs, it is also observed that most released offenders initially display great enthusiasm and a positive outlook upon release, suggestive of a positive attitude to a new lease on life. It is further observed that familial support is relatively strong in Namibia as there are rare instances that released inmates do not have family members willing to accept, accommodate and support them during their reintegration. Positive attitudes and familial support thus pose as strengths for released inmates in

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B. Challenges in Interventions, Treatment and Support for Reintegration of Offenders

1. Employment

One of the most common needs for offenders in Namibia is to obtain employment. A preliminary internal report on offenders who received vocational training while incarcerated and secured a stable source of income suggested that only about 15 from a total of about 45 released inmates who received some form of skills training while incarcerated were successful in securing a stable source of income after release. A further search through the caseloads of the supervising facilities suggested that less than 10 per cent of the total number of active inmates had some form of employment.

Some of the contributing factors to the high unemployment of offenders is the current socio-economic climate of the country. The Namibia Labour Force Survey 2018 established the country's unemployment rate as 33.4 per cent. This demonstrates that infiltrating the employment market is an extremely competitive endeavour. Furthermore, the financial repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic still linger as world economies are trying to recover in light of current wars, such as the war in Ukraine. This situation is further exacerbated by an observed high number of offenders lacking adequate formal and relevant job-related skills and qualifications.

2. Stakeholder Involvement in the Community

Due to the offenders being conditionally released and serving the remainder of their sentence in the community, a community-based approach is necessary in addressing their outstanding risk factors and strengthening their reintegration. This is, however, a challenge, as there are few non-governmental community-based stakeholders that cooperate with the NCS in terms of supporting the reintegration process of released offenders. These few organizations and individuals are clustered in and around urban towns in Namibia such as Windhoek (the capital city) and the coastal towns of Walvis Bay and Swakopmund. These organizations and individuals do, however, not cater exclusively to released offenders, but primarily to the general public. Additionally, the activity of several of these organizations ceased during the Covid-19 pandemic.

3. Stigma and Discrimination

It is our experience that released offenders report being stigmatized and discriminated against by the general public due to having gone through the correctional system. People generally view and treat released offenders as criminals rather than rehabilitated individuals requiring support to continue their rehabilitation and strengthen their reintegration.

Offenders also report numerous incidents where they lose their employment, mostly informal employment, when their employers discover that they have a history of incarceration. This could be attributed to the over publication of the few offenders that commit new offences after being released.

III. CURRENT PRACTICE OF NCS IN SUPPORTING OFFENDER REINTEGRATION

Under the Division: Community Supervision the NCS provides support for the reintegration of released offenders by providing various support and guidance services to offenders, as it relates to their various risk factors.

Prior to release, contact is made with the relatives of offenders to ensure that offenders have accommodation once released. For offenders with employment or educational attainment needs, the Community Supervision Officers assist them in setting goals, planning and checking in on their progress towards their goal. This is done during supervision sessions and telephonic sessions.

In terms of access to health care, few challenges are experienced in this domain as the public health system in Namibia is relatively good and affordable. The government has made great strides in ensuring access to health care for all persons.

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Community Supervision Officers conduct sensitization campaigns to sensitize offenders and the community on the role and functions of Community Supervision.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

In light of the current challenges in the interventions, treatment and support to address offenders' risk-needs, and considering the financial and human resource limitations, below are a few possible solutions:

- Increased sensitization and presentations to community-based organizations of the needs of released offenders, so as to encourage and expand stakeholder involvement. This would further require that data of offender needs be collected, analysed and synthesized to determine the exact needs of offenders.
- Entrepreneurial skills can be offered to offenders to encourage and motivate them to create their own employment.
- A more practical and interactive approach should be employed, with increased Community Supervision Officer presence in the community to be a more effective link between offenders and stakeholders.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while there are obstacles to the successful reintegration of released inmates in Namibia, such as limited employment opportunities and stakeholder involvement, efforts are being made by the Namibian Correctional Service to support their transition into society. By implementing the recommended solutions and fostering a supportive environment, it is possible to improve the prospects of released offenders, promote their rehabilitation, and contribute to a safer and more inclusive society.