

# THE PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF EX-PRISONERS AND THE MITIGATING STRATEGIES AS THEY INTEGRATE INTO THE COMMUNITY: A STUDY OF IRINGA MUNICIPALITY, TANZANIA

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**Abstract:** This study is an attempt to assess the psychosocial effects of ex-prisoners and the mitigating strategies as they integrate into the community. Specifically, to examine psychosocial support that ex-prisoners receive when re-integrating in their community; to determine challenges that ex-prisoners experience in integrating themselves in their community; and to identify the mitigating mechanisms provided to support ex-prisoners to effective integration in their community. A descriptive design was applied where study included a sample of 70 ex-prisoners of 2020-2021 from Iringa Municipality, community members, legal officers, prison officers and psychologists. The data were analysed using descriptive statistical and content analysis. From the findings, it was revealed that there is a lack of rehabilitation programs in the prison which prepare expected ex-prisoners to re-integrate with the community. Furthermore, there is lack of aftercare support from community members to ex-prisoners. Still there is isolation among ex-prisoners from community members. In addition, there is lack of housing to ex-prisoners, lack of employment opportunities as well as lack of finance to ex-prisoners when re-integrating in the community as the majority of the respondents agreed to the statements. Besides, there is lack of social support and criminal justice support provided to ex-prisoners as mitigating mechanisms for effective ex-prisoners integrating into the community. It is concluded that lack of rehabilitation programs to ex-prisoners when they re-integrate into the community discourages ex-prisoners to face the community. The study recommends that rehabilitation programs in the prisons should be conducted with the aim of preparing ex-prisoners to integrate into the community. Moreover, the government should amend its criminal regulations and offer employment opportunities to ex-prisoners to access sources of incomes. In addition, more education should be provided to the ex-prisoners and community members with the aim of letting them socialise and work together hence minimising the rate of re-offending among ex-prisoners and isolation among community members.

**Keywords:** Desistance process, Inmate, Incarceration, Ex-prisoners, Reintegration, Rehabilitation, Recidivism/Reoffending.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Offending and re-offending is a worldwide problem. Currently, the world has witnessed more than 10,000,000 people spending their lives in prisons (Walmsley, 2016). Over 600,000 individuals are released from prison annually and three-quarters of them are rearrested within five years of their release (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2015). Considering the continuous increase in the numbers of prisoners, scholars argue that the conservative ideology, which relies on inflicting pain to prisoners through punishment, does not help (Cullen, et al., 2017). It fails to address the original causes of the problem; instead, this approach hardens prisoners and increases reoffending behaviour (Cullen et al., 2017).

It is important to transform the current criminal justice system to shift the focus from reincarceration to successful re-entry into their communities. It has also been observed that released prisoners have difficulty securing and maintaining peace in the community after re-entry since individuals are reluctant to engage with people having criminal records (Urban Institute, 2018). Offenders also experience obstacles in public and private job sectors since they are unable to obtain professional and technical licences (Holzer, et al., 2019). When limited legal employment opportunities and resources are available, individuals who are re-entering their communities are more likely to reoffend.

Studies show that the first month after release is a vulnerable period during which the risk of becoming homeless and/or recidivism is high (Cortes & Rogers, 2018). In fact, the lack of stable housing can increase the possibility of being rearrested (Cortes & Rogers, 2018). Providing access to affordable housing options and lenient policies can help support an individual's transition back into their respective communities and is an important factor in recidivism prevention.

Welfare assistance is an essential transitional resource for those who face economic hardships after release from prison (O'Brien, 2019). Returning individuals also face barriers in accessing public assistance. Re-entering individuals are ineligible even if they have completed their sentence, overcome their addiction or earned a certificate of rehabilitation (Legal Action Centre, 2018). Denying re-entering individuals from public assistance, causes difficulties for them to support themselves as they leave the criminal justice system and re-enter society. This would increase the likelihood that they will return to criminal activities and other unacceptable social behaviour.

Evidence shows that the outcomes of corrections are not cost-effective and do not justify the costs to communities, families and individuals (Datchi, et al., 2019). There is a necessity for effective strategies, which address the barriers that prevent previously incarcerated individuals from successfully reintegrating into their communities. Most of released prisoners in Tanzania are disadvantaged educationally, economically, and socially, which further perpetuates inequality (Vishner and Travis, 2019).

An approach to reducing recidivism and assisting previously incarcerated re-enter society successfully is prison education and re-entry programming. Many prisons in Tanzania have responded by offering an adult education, adult postsecondary education, career and technical education, and special education (Taliaferro, et al., 2020). A focus on pre-release programs, which prepares individuals to be productive members of their communities, is essential. Providing incarcerated individuals with job and life skills, education programming, mental health counselling, and addiction treatment will help overcome some of the challenges they face upon re-entering their communities.

Individuals are burdened with a criminal record, no matter how minor the offence and face significant challenges reintegrating into communities. Different efforts can be initiated by policymakers to reduce barriers and improve re-entry of returning individuals. It is important that re-entry preparation begins on the first day of incarceration and continues without disruption into the community (APA, 2017). Local governments should support the re-entering population by allocating funds to expand the programs that assist with the process of re-entry (Bilger, 2016) and provision of medication-assisted treatment (APA, 2017). This study therefore intended to cover a practical gap by assessing the psychosocial effects of ex-prisoners and the mitigating strategies as they integrate into the community in Iringa Municipality.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Leaving prison and reintegrating in the community is not simple as walking out of the door and returning to the life you had before. Many jobs have been lost, relationships have been harmed and living situations have changed. A person may not have a social network or financial support, may not find a home nor meet with a therapist, and he or she may not reconnect with the community.

Therefore, former inmates face numerous psychological challenges after their release from prisons such as stigmatization, discrimination, isolation and instability. These may lead to a devastating outcome like failed relationships, homelessness, substance abuse, suicide and recidivism. Individuals who end up in prison may be regarded as the most vulnerable and or traumatized members of the society and the experience of prison itself is traumatic on top of that. For that regard the entire family is incarcerated or at the very least deeply affected. If there will not be mitigating strategies a country will continue to witness people being imprisoned and soon after their release they reoffend.

The lack of psychologists within our law enforcement organs to perform psychological assessment and mental evaluation contributes to the increase of recidivism because most of the suspected criminals have a mental disorder that pushes them to commit crimes. Hence this study intends to cover a practical gap by assessing the psychosocial effects of ex-prisoners and the mitigating strategies as they integrate into the community in Iringa Municipality

### Specific Objective

To determine challenges ex-prisoners experience in integration in their community.

### Research Question

What are the challenges that ex-prisoners experience when integrating in their community?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Literature Review

Theories form an important ground for explaining the rationale of the phenomenon under investigation in research. This study was guided by Life Course and Cognitive Transformation Theories.

#### Life Course Theory

According to life course theory, desistance depends on both subjective factors and social influences. Subjective factors are internal characteristics such as attitudes, self-esteem, identity, and motivation. Social influences include employment, marriage, parenthood, friends, and treatment interventions. Social networks provide structure and opportunities for law abiding behaviour and enable offenders to 'knife off' or insulate themselves from the deviant environment and develop new scripts for their future (Maruna and LeBel, 2010). A key element of the life course perspective is a focus on change and maintenance over time rather than on the initial change in behaviour. Laub and Sampson (2017) suggested that change is most likely when offenders have the desire to change, view change as possible, and have social support for change. Creating bonds with family members and friends can also help individuals desist from crime.

Some scholars emphasise subjective influences and maintain that change will not occur unless offenders have an internal motivation to change (Gideon, 2018). Others focus on the social context and argue that motivation to change will have little influence unless the social circumstances of offenders support their desistance (Laub and Sampson, 2017).

#### Cognitive Transformation Theory

According to the cognitive transformation theory of Giordano et al. in 2002, there are four key elements in the desistance process. First, they hypothesised that individuals develop openness to change in which they begin to conceive of personal change as a possibility. Some offenders like their life as it is and do not wish to change; others say they would like to change and are willing to attempt to change their behaviour. In a study of 73 offenders, Healy and O'Donnell (2018) found that 95 percent desired to change and 85 percent said they were capable of changing. Similarly, in the Oxford Recidivism Study, Burnett (2016) reported that 80 percent said they wanted to go straight although only 25 percent thought they would be able to go straight.

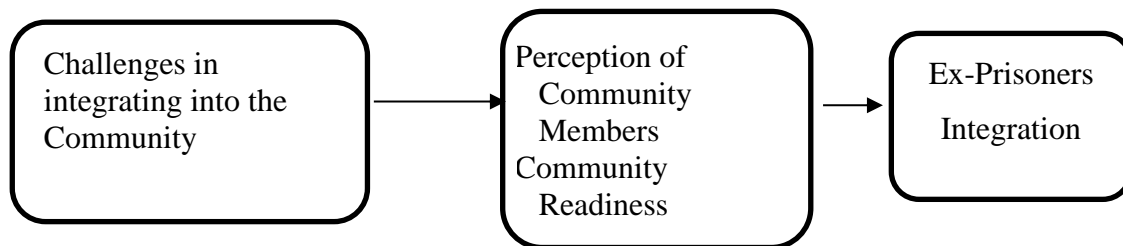
Second, individuals are exposed to circumstances or 'hooks' that may help them move toward change. Hooks for change include social characteristics such as obtaining a good job or attending a treatment program (Giordano et al., 2015). Laub and Sampson (2017) emphasised the importance of social institutions, especially marriage and work, as forces that influence the desistance process. Maruna (2017) observed that drug treatment and employment stability were important steps in the desistance process.

The third element in their desistance theory is the development of a conventional replacement self. Offenders begin to see themselves in a different light and attempt to change their identity. For example, Shapland and Bottoms (2016) reported that offenders who wanted to change often saw themselves as different people now who no longer wanted to be involved in crime. Forth, there is a reinterpretation of previous illegal behaviour. Those previously involved in illegal activities begin to view it as something that hurts people and that they want to avoid. In the Sheffield Desistance Study, Shapland and Bottoms (2016) observed former offenders who saw themselves as different people now. Similarly, Burnett (2016) reported that some offenders defined their previous crime as an anomaly that was not reflective of their real selves.

These theories relate with this study as they help to explain psychosocial support that ex-prisoners receive, challenges that they experience and mitigating mechanisms to support ex-prisoners to effectively integrate in their community.

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework displays the diagrammatic presentation of the relationship existing between variables that used in this study (Fig. 1). The framework focuses on the psychosocial effects of ex-prisoners and the mitigating strategies as they integrate into the community.



**Knowledge Gap**

Some previous researchers have tried to address the issue of ex prisoners’ reintegration into the community and revealed challenges such as economic stagnation, isolation tendency and labelling tendency, but they failed to look for the factors that facilitate a person to engage in criminal behaviour. The reality is that behaviour could not be viewed by a single factor and prove that or whether a person is a real criminal, most of the criminals have psychological problems that pushes them to commit crimes. Therefore, for the sake of helping our community it is the opinion of the researcher to have psychologists and counsellors within our law enforcement organs who will conduct mental assessment and mental evaluation before a person is taken to prison.

**3. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Challenges that Ex-Prisoners Experience in Integration in their Community**

Travis (2016) studied “Challenges Facing the Prisoner Re-entry in Washington DC.” The study used cross-section design and applied convenience sampling techniques to obtain a sample size of 60 respondents. Data analysis was done qualitatively through content analysis. The findings of this study reveal that reintegration is better conceptualised as a maintenance process, which relies on reciprocal interactions between the ex-prisoner and the wider community. An ex-prisoner may be accepted within community at one point in time and rejected at another (e.g. an ex-prisoner may be faced with community suspicions following an increase in crime in a neighbourhood several years after his or her release from prison).

Van-Ness (2019) studied “Normalisation, Reintegration and Restorative Justice from Ex-Prisoners Integration in Haifa, Israel.” The study used survey design and applied purposive sampling technique to obtain sample size of 65 respondents. Data analysis was done quantitatively through descriptive analysis. The study revealed that reintegration means re-entry into community life as whole, contributing, productive persons. This means more than being tolerant of the person’s presence; it means acceptance of the person as a member. It requires action on the community’s part, but also on the part of the offender and/or the victim involved.

Frederick and Roy (2019) studied on “Challenges facing Ex-prisoners when Integrating in Tanzanian Communities”. The study employed a cross-sectional design and primary data was collected from 150 respondents. Data analysis was done qualitatively and quantitatively through content and descriptive analysis. The study found that the majority of prisoners had been poorly educated and were previously unemployed. These circumstances (low level of education and unemployment) have been among the primary sources of recidivism. When prisoners return to their original offending environment they are subjected to the same offending conditions, for instance, being jobless; consequently, they are more likely to end up reoffending. Therefore, it is argued here that the socioeconomic environment has a significant influence on prisoners’ reoffending behaviour,

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this work, the researcher used a mixed approach. Involving collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, this study employed a descriptive design to explore insights in the psychosocial effects of ex-prisoners and the mitigating strategies as they integrate into the community. The researcher used description as a tool to organise data into patterns that emerge during analysis. Those patterns aid the mind in comprehending a qualitative study and its implications. To this study, a sample of 70 observations was included. According to Kothari, (2014) the expected sample size was obtained from the following formula;

$$\text{Sample size } n = \frac{N}{1 + N * E^2}$$

$$n = \frac{235}{1 + 235 * 0.1^2} = 70$$

Where N=Population n= Sample size E=Standard error (10%).

In this study purposive sampling technique and snowball sampling technique were also employed. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the community members, legal officer, prison officers and psychologists as key informants while snowball sampling technique was used to select ex-prisoners of 2020-2021 from Iringa Municipality.

In this study the questionnaire was distributed to the ex-prisoners to fill up and return them. A questionnaire consisted of several questions printed in a definite number of orders on a form or a set of forms. This study used this method because of the ease of the administration of the instrument and can collect data in a very short time. The research used this method because questionnaires are also not biased and there was uniform questions presentation and no middleman bias.

Semi-structured interview was also used in this study. Semi-structured interview is a qualitative research method that combines a predetermined set of open questions with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore themes or responses further. Their characteristics include the engagement of interviewer and interviewee in a formal interview, the presence of a list of open-ended questions and topics that need to be covered during the conversation.

The open-ended nature of the question defines the topic under investigation but provides opportunities for both interviewer and interviewee to discuss the topic in detail (Kakilla, 2017).

In this study semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative information from community members, legal officers, prison officers and psychologists as key informants. A list of open-ended questions was developed by the researcher and with its aid to the psychosocial effects of ex-prisoners and the mitigating strategies as they integrate into the community in Iringa Municipality was explored from key informants.

Quantitative data was analysed using a descriptive statistical analysis whereby frequencies and percentages were generated to determine the relative importance of the quality dimensions as viewed by respondents. Quantitative data was generated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS v.20) to get the findings of the study. In addition, content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

To ensure research validity, pilot testing was conducted whereby a sample of questions was tested before going to the field directly to collect the data required. Validity determines whether the research truly measures what it is intended to measure or how truthful the research results are (Kothari, 2014).

According to Kothari (2014), the reliability of measurement is established by examining the stability and consistency of the data. Consistency indicates how well the items (variables) measuring a concept can group together as a set. Subsequently, the result achieved was compared with the rules of thumb shown in Cronbach's alpha and that was interpreted as the coefficient alpha values. Therefore, the reliability test providing Cronbach's alpha that is less than 0.50 was considered as poor reliability

**Table 1: Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items
.752	.767	12

Source: Research Findings, (2022)

In the reliability test, the researcher used Cronbach’s alpha test for reliability of data. Based on the results in Table 1 shows that the data were consistent, this is because the independent variables as psychosocial support in re-integrating, challenges in integrating into the community members and mitigating mechanisms for effective integrating and dependent variable as ex-prisoners’ integration recorded an acceptable reliability with Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.767. According to Lee Cronbach’s, the Cronbach’s alpha test is a measure of the internal consistency of a test or scale; it is expressed as a number between 0 and 1 and the rule of thumb for the reliability test is that 0.7 or higher suggests a good reliability.

According to Crano and Berdie, (2015), ethics are norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationships with others. Sullivan (2016) argued that social researchers are bound to ethical considerations in their studies. High degree of freedom to respondents was provided, meaning that respondents were free to share or not to share anything. Respondents were also free to withdraw themselves from the research study if they wished to do so. To comply with the anonymity of the respondents, the researcher was not including the identity of the respondents in the data collection instruments. Kombo and Tromp (2016) insist that the researcher has to make it clear that the participants' names are not used for any other purposes, nor should information be shared that reveal their identity. Moreover, the researcher seeks research permit from the university.

## 5. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Data

The findings in this section give a general picture of the research population distribution and description. The findings represented in forms of tables showing frequencies and percentages.

#### Sex of Respondents

The result on respondents’ sex is shown in Table 2. It shows that 90% of the respondents are male while 10% of the respondents are female. This means that male ex-prisoners are more than female ex-prisoners which implies that male ex-prisoners were more ready to engage in this study on the psychosocial effects of ex-prisoners and the mitigating strategies as they integrate into the community; compare to female ex-prisoners.

**Table 2: Sex of Respondents**

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	63	90.0
Female	7	10.0
Total	70	100.0

**Source:** Field data (2022)

#### Age of Respondents

The results on respondents’ age shown on Table 3 shows that 31-50 were 50%, 18-30 were 44.3% while above 50 were 5.7%. This implies that the majority of the respondents involved in this study their ages ranged from 31-50 possibly because most prisoners their ages ranged from this age group and were more ready to be involved in this study compared to other age groups.

**Table: 3 Age of Respondents**

Age	Frequency	Percent
18-30	31	44.3
31-50	35	50.0
50+	4	5.7
Total	70	100.0

**Source:** Field data (2022)

**Findings Based On the Specific Objectives**

The study was about assessing the psychosocial effects of ex-prisoners and the mitigating strategies as they integrate into the community in Iringa Municipality. To answer these research questions, three specific objectives were developed. For the purpose of this article a single objective is selected. Its findings are presented and discussed as follows:-

**Challenges that Ex-Prisoners Experience in Integration in their Community**

The study determined challenges that ex-prisoners experience in integration in their community. To know this the researcher listed some of the basic statements and the respondents were supposed to pinpoint their views by rounding their right choices against the right answers if they agree or disagree. The results were as shown on Table 4.

**Table 4: Challenges Ex-Prisoners Experience in Integration in their Community**

Statement	SD		D		N		A		SA		Total F
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
There is lack of housing to ex-prisoners when re-integrating in my community	6	9.0	2	3.0	4	6.0	32	47.8	23	34.2	67
There is lack of employment opportunities to ex-prisoners when re-integrating in my community	3	4.5	2	3.0	1	1.5	33	49.3	28	41.7	67
There is lack of finance to ex-prisoners when re-integrating in my community	2	3.0	2	3.0			34	50.7	29	43.3	67

**Key: SD- Strongly Disagree; D-Disagree; N-Neutral; A-Agree; SA-Strongly Agree; F-Frequency**

**Source:** Field data (2022)

Table 4 shows that of 67 respondents, statement 1, 82% of the respondent agreed that there is lack of housing to ex-prisoners when re-integrating in my community, 12% of respondents disagreed while 6% of the respondent remained neutral to the statement. Statement 2, 91% of respondents agreed with the statement that there is a lack of employment opportunities for ex-prisoners when re-integrating in my community, 7.5% of respondents disagreed while 1.5% of the respondent remained neutral to the statement. Statement 3, 94% of respondents agreed with the statement that there is a lack of finance to ex-prisoners when re-integrating in my community, while 6% disagreed with the statement.

During the interview a question was asked, what are the challenges that ex-prisoners experience when integrating in their community?

One said:

*Total isolation among ex-prisoners is the biggest challenge, the term criminal will never end, unnecessary arrest, and lack of permanent accommodation as well as psychological suffering are also among the challenges experienced by ex-prisoners when integrating in their community (Prison Officer).*

The other said:

*Stigmatisation, labelling attitude and psychological problems are among challenges experienced by ex-prisoners when they integrate into the community and hinder rehabilitation programs to be active. Moreover, lack of financial support and segregation are also among major challenges experienced by ex-prisoners when they integrate into the community (Community Member).*

The other said:

*I have managed to accomplish my custodial sentence and I am ready to serve my community and nation at large. Am not much sure whether I can manage because community members even the government do not trust individuals from jail despite the fact that I have gone through many rehabilitation programmes in the prison on how to become an active member of society (Ex-prisoner)*

Under this objective, the researcher was interested in determining challenges that ex-prisoners experience in integration in their community. The findings revealed that there is lack of housing to ex-prisoners, lack of employment opportunities as well as lack of finance to ex-prisoners when re-integrating in my community as majority of the respondents agreed to the statements. This implies that ex-prisoners had time when it comes to re-integrate into their community. These challenges affect them psychologically, even getting a hard time to engage in economic activities with the community members. Some community members have the mindset that ex-prisoners are still criminals and they can harm them or conduct a criminal activity again, that is why they segment themselves from ex-prisoners.

This is in line with the study conducted by Bouffard (2019) and revealed that reintegration may occur to varying degrees in different domains. An ex-prisoner may feel reintegrated within their family immediately following their return home, yet they may feel disintegrated from their peers and the wider community. Another may be rejected from every job and rental application because of their criminal record, but accepted into their local church group.

In addition, the results are supported by Travis (2016) who revealed that reintegration is better conceptualised as a maintenance process, which relies on reciprocal interactions between the ex-prisoner and the wider community. An ex-prisoner may be accepted within community at one point in time and rejected at another (e.g., an ex-prisoner may be faced with community suspicions following an increase in crime in a neighbourhood several years after his or her release from prison).

Generally, the researcher observed that when prisoners return to their original offending environment they are subjected to the same offending conditions, for instance, being jobless; consequently, they are more likely to end up reoffending. Therefore, it is argued here that the socioeconomic environment has a significant influence on prisoners' reoffending behaviour.

## **6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Summary**

The study attempted to assess the psychosocial effects of ex-prisoners and the mitigating strategies as they integrate into the community in Iringa Municipality. The study included ex-prisoners' perception on how they are affected within the institution. The major research findings were based on specific objectives of the study:

From the findings, it was observed that there was a lack of rehabilitation programs in prisons that prepared expected ex-prisoners to re-integrate with their community. In addition, there was lack of aftercare support from community members to ex-prisoners in the community. Ex-prisoners felt isolated from community members.

From the findings it was also observed that there was lack of housing, employment opportunities, as well as a lack of finance among ex-prisoners as they re-integrated in their community. These challenges affect ex-prisoners psychologically when engaging in economic activities. Some community members have the mindset that ex-prisoners are still criminals who can harm them or conduct criminal activities again; hence they distance themselves from ex-prisoners.

Overall, it was observed from the study that there was a lack of social support provided to ex-prisoners as they integrated into their communities. This affected them psychologically as they felt isolated among community members.

### **Conclusion**

Lack of rehabilitation programs to ex-prisoners when they re-integrate into the community discourages ex-prisoners to face the community while the community abandons aftercare support which affects ex-prisoners psychologically. In addition, it is concluded that ensuring rehabilitation programmes, social support and criminal justice support provided to ex-prisoners as a mitigating mechanism for effective ex-prisoners integrating into the community will help ex-prisoners to re-integrate effectively while community members be comfortable working together with ex-prisoners in social activities. The physical and psychological health hinders ex-prisoners to integrate into the community effectively as community members do not trust them well. Indeed, if ex-prisoners are given a chance to participate in community issues, they will engage and participate effectively as active members within their communities.



**Recommendation for Action**

As a result of these findings, the researcher made some recommendations for action. The study recommends that rehabilitation programs in prisons should be conducted with the aim of preparing ex-prisoners to integrate into the community. This will lower the worries on how to engage with their families and community members. On the other hand, aftercare and psychological health support from community members to ex-prisoners in the community should be provided as a way of accepting ex-prisoners when they integrate with community members.

Moreover, the findings indicate that there is lack of housing, employment opportunities, and finance to ex-prisoners when re-integrating in their communities, hence the government should amend its criminal regulations. Ex-prisoners should be offered employment opportunities to access sources of incomes and be able to fulfil their needs. This will help ex-prisoners be acceptable into the community as active members in the community.

As far as the lack of social and criminal justice support the study recommends that more education should be provided to the ex-prisoners and community members with the aim of letting them socialise and working together for the purpose of economic growth hence minimising the rate of re-offending among ex-prisoners and isolation among community members.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

More studies should be done to examine the extent that rehabilitation and after care programs reduce psychosocial effects of ex-prisoners and the mitigating strategies as they integrate into the community. In addition, more studies should be done using other analysis to identify effective programs that will increase the rate of effective integration among ex-prisoners and reduce reoffending status among ex-prisoners.

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