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## Will Our Lives Be the Same? A Review of Lives during and after Imprisonment

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### **Abstract:**

*Prisoners were once part of society but are now detached from social realities in the incarceration process. This has been observed to impact how they live their lives after prison and how society accepts them. This paper reviewed materials from other researchers and scholars on the subject matter. The purpose of the review was to determine from an academic standpoint how the lives of prisoners are affected during and after imprisonment. The review led to the conclusion that, indeed, prisoners are changed even after their release. Also, the people in their lives have impacted their lives adversely, and most of them do not get their former selves back.*

**Keywords:** Prison, imprisonment, reformation, society

### **1. Introduction**

All men are not equal. The perception that society is made up of equal men is an idealized perspective of human cohabitation in the sense that there are some people who may never go against the norms of society throughout their lives. There are some who cannot desist from going against the norms of society. Given this reality in any society, it will be challenging to argue that all men are equal in terms of their competence and ability to commit a crime. For this reason, society has developed its own remedial strategy, which is to be used to rectify persons who are deemed as likely to go against the norms of society. In the eventual case of such adverse actions coming into fruition, individuals are to be moved away from normal societal settings into a new environment created for people of the same or, to some degree, similar tendencies to commit a crime. In one way or another, such persons have been taken away from society with the intention of protecting society from further crime through deterrence.

Human beings are creatures of habit. With constant exposure to a particular way of life, regardless of the acceptability and standard, there is a possibility of habits being formed. That is to say that an environment can potentially shape a person. Many authors and scholars have reported prison systems in Ghana, and the impression created is that these detention facilities do not have what it takes to reform the behavior of persons sent there. In other words, the idea of deterrence is understandable only in the fear created by the poor living conditions of prisoners. Anything other than this cannot be regarded as having a positive impact on the lives of prisoners. It is also important to evaluate the behavioral traits of persons who have been sent to prison and released in relation to theories which have been developed in this context as well.

#### *1.1. Objectives of the Paper*

- To review the concept of prison systems.
- To assess the possible implications of imprisonment on the social and psychological makeup of prisoners.
- To recommend ways through which prison systems can be improved to ensure personal development for prisoners.

#### *1.2. Purpose of the Paper*

The paper reviews the findings and theoretical foundations of imprisonment. The aim is to observe from multiple academic sources (both empirical and theoretical) how imprisonment affects the mental state of individuals. This purpose stems from the fact that when individuals are released from prison, their chances of getting a job shrink, and society does not accept them the way they were before. With this, it is assumed that ex-convicts will go through some mental challenges which can impact the way they live their lives. This assessment is the purpose of the paper.

### 1.2.1. Criminal Records and Unemployment

Ex-convicts find themselves in a disadvantaged society after being released from prison. They are considered unfit for society (Ahmed & Ahmed, 2015). In the opinion of Graffam et al. (2004), this is due to the limited level of acceptance expressed by those living within average and high-ranked neighborhoods. The implication is that lower-class neighborhoods are susceptible to crime and the conditions of living are harsh to the degree most likely to plunge an individual back into criminal activities. The social forces in this aspect make it impossible to secure well-paying jobs and deter ex-convicts from engaging in activities that will take them back to prison (Petersilia, 2003; Wallace & Wang, 2020). From the findings of Berg and Heubner (2011), many previous offenders do not have competitive employment records that make it easy for them to get recruited. The record of being an offender alone is enough reason not to secure any meaningful job after release from prison (Uggen, 2000; Atladottir, 2015). In this set of circumstances, it can be observed that the commitment and dedication of the individual after being released from prison is not enough. The social fiber that surrounds them plays a determining role in whether they get employed or not.

### 1.2.2. Mental Implications of Incarceration

According to James and Blaze (2006), the reported state of the mental stability of persons who have been released from prison has been a major problem. Yablonsky (1994) implied that the conditions under which persons are placed when they are sentenced to prison create in them personalities that were not prevalent in their past behaviours, which got them incarcerated in the first place. The suggestion is that it is not the individual that contributes to his own mental degradation but the environments within which they are forced to thrive permit and also favor the creation of new characters. For instance, Nowotny and Kuptsevych-Timmer (2018) argue that overcrowding, limited access to healthcare services, and inhumane attitudes and practices by custodial staff contribute to negative mental and physical health outcomes for incarcerated persons. Based on this, the penal systems, which are supposed to correct the behaviors of individuals, instead serve as detrimental avenues which have dire impacts on the mental state of incarcerated persons (Haney, 2002; Awofeso, 2011). This means that often, prison facilities and the prevalent conditions therein are major contributing factors to the way and manner in which the psychological makeup of incarcerated persons is observed to be.

### 1.2.3. Stakeholders and How They Contribute to Reformation

Counselling is an essential aspect of life (Afari, Osei & Adu-Agyem, 2015). It is one of the keys and necessary components of prison guidance services. Activities in counselling services are aimed at helping inmates to effect change in their behaviour processes, thereby acquiring the ability to enhance their functioning and live a more productive and self-satisfying life (Adana, 2004; Khuda, 2019; Mpofo, Matsebula, & Sebele-Mpofo, 2021). It is believed that many stakeholders come to the aid of prisoners in order to meet the prisoners' counselling needs. The stakeholders include counsellors, NGOs, Police, Prison Governors and Officers, religious groups, and Social Welfare Department.

First and foremost, the counsellor is aware that no two people are alike. No two people understand the same language in the same way; their understanding will always be linked to their personal experience of the world (Loucks, 2002). Therefore, during the counselling process, it is important that the counsellor does not try to fit clients into their idea of what they should be and how they should act.

The role of the counsellor is to enable the client to explore many aspects of their life and feelings by talking openly and freely (Tenibiaje, 2000; Otaru & Fakokunde, 2019). Talking in such a way is rarely possible with family or friends, who are likely to be emotionally involved and have opinions and biases that may be detrimental to the success of the counselling. It is important that the counsellor is not emotionally involved with the client and does not become so during counselling sessions (Taylor & Buku, 2006). The counsellor neither judges nor offers advice. The counsellor gives the client an opportunity to express difficult feelings such as anger, resentment, guilt, and fear in a confidential environment.

The counsellor may encourage the client to examine parts of their lives that they may have found difficult or impossible to face before (Nelson-Jones, 2005). Tenibiaje (2006) also revealed that there may be some exploration of early childhood experiences to shed light on why an individual reacts or responds in certain ways in given situations. This is often followed by considering ways in which the client may change such behaviours.

The counsellor's role is to facilitate the client's work in ways that respect the client's values, personal resources, and capacity for self-determination (BAC, 1986; Ivey, Ivey, & Zalaquett, 2014; Yusop et al., 2020). Counselling is a process in which clients learn how to make decisions and formulate new ways of behaving, feeling, and thinking. Counsellors focus on the goals their clients wish to achieve. Clients explore their present levels of functioning and the changes that must be made to achieve personal objectives. Thus, counselling involves both choice and change, evolving through distinct stages such as exploration, goal setting, and action (Brammer et al., 1993).

According to Brown and Lent (2008), effective counselling reduces confusion, allowing clients to make effective decisions leading to positive changes in their attitude and/or behaviour. Tenibiaje (2010) stressed that effective counselling is not advice-giving and is not acting on someone else's behalf (these are more the roles of a life coach). The ultimate aim of counselling is to enable the client to make their own choices, reach their own decisions, and act upon them accordingly. Counselling should aim at assisting clients in facilitating self-understanding to resolve any obstacle hindering their academic progress and those problems relating to their vocational, educational and socio-personal attainment.

According to Ipaye (2004), counselling is a moulding, reconstruction, and rehabilitation process. He further reported that counselling is a process that involves rehabilitating, reintegrating, and behaviour modification of inmates. By rehabilitation, counsellors assist inmates in securing a job through specific training received and finding a job through direct contact or connection by the rehabilitation counsellors with employers (Bouffard et al., 2000). By rehabilitation, counsellors should provide counselling, psychotherapy training, career counselling, relationship issues, creative training,

planning and practicing employer attitude, job development skills, and counselling in financial management to the inmates (Huffman, 2006).

## 2. Empirical Review

Scott, Spender, Doolan, Jacobs, and Aspland (2001) found that there are a lot of females in prisons for minor offences, while some were being kept for years awaiting trials. Tenibiaje (2000) studied the background characteristics of prison inmates and found that the high crime rate is not peculiar to males but also to females, which has taken crime into a new dimension. There was an enormous surge in the number of women incarcerated in Nigeria, with the number of women almost quadrupling in crime.

Tenibiaje (2006) found that the illiteracy level of inmates is so high that out of 504 inmates that responded to the questionnaire given out, 54.7% could not read the questionnaire, and 16.2% were assisted by the researcher. Only 19.1% had Junior High School Certificates, and 10% had Senior High School and Higher Certificates. It was also revealed that 70.9% of prison inmates could identify, read, interpret, understand and communicate in English Language or read Pidgin English fluently; hence they were assisted by the researcher in Nigerian Prisons.

Perception plays a vital role in prisoners' lives. It plays an essential role in the choices that prisoners make, and it can cause many of them to make wrong choices based on false information. It is a process by which individuals organise and interpret their sensory impressions to give meaning to their environment (Dulebohn & Ferris, 1999). However, what one perceives can be substantially different from objective reality. Dulebohn and Ferris pointed out that the seriousness prisoners would attach to the counselling service depends on the prisoners' perceptions of the service.

A study by O'Looney (2005) revealed that the prisoners' perception of counselling created three clear groups. The study reported that about 17% of the respondents were uncomfortable with female counsellors. Such prisoners felt embarrassed and ashamed about sharing emotions with female counsellors.

The prisoners' perception of counselling created three clear groups (O'Looney, 2005). About half of the respondents reported they had more confidence in an interpersonal relationship and reduced anxiety. These people associated these changes with the skills they learnt during counselling. They stated that they communicated more effectively and utilised positive thinking skills frequently. They claimed to have a better understanding of fellow prisoners and were more tolerant of them.

A significant another group (17%) still relied on drugs to either give them a zest for life or to use as a block to hide their pain and anxieties (O'Looney, 2005). For these people, counselling is not an alternative to dealing with personal problems as it does not provide the relief they see drugs do, and many of them plainly refuse to confront painful memories. The third group (29%) showed ambivalence about the effectiveness of counselling. This group had pre-conceived ideas of counselling and was able to draw on previous experiences.

## 3. Conclusion

It can be concluded from the above reviews made that prison systems do have implications on the behavior and social structure of ex-convicts. Although in the process of imprisonment, this was not the intention of society, the environment in which prisoners find themselves has the capacity to redefine what a person is and how he or she relates to people when they are released from prison. It can be concluded once again that these changes not only affect the mental state of prisoners but also go the extra mile to impact the lives of prisoners' relations.

## 4. Recommendations

### 4.1. Social Engagement for Prisoners

There should be room for prisoners to express their concerns. While in prison, inmates must be provided with psychological evaluations by doctors to genuinely understand their way of thought and how they want to continue living their lives. The relevance of this recommendation is that ex-convicts often return to their criminal ways because regardless of how repented they are, they are never seen in that light. The lack of acceptance must be evaluated, and punishment must end when a person is released from prison. These psychological evaluations must be done to correct and not to ridicule or further worsen the predicaments of prisoners.

### 4.2. Reorientation into Society and Employment

The concept of organizations requesting the criminal records of persons must be shunned. It is a way of classifying individuals. However, this concept also stems from the fact that no proper orientations are provided for inmates to serve as healing opportunities. For that matter, society and corporations must find another way of further reducing any chances of accepting ex-convicts back into their arms, and their means of generating income also get shortened. Apart from no dignifying means of employment being available for ex-convicts, there is also a lack of consideration for their repentance. This, when not corrected, may further degrade their mental state, and the purpose of imprisonment becomes worthless.

### 4.3. Separation of Correctional Institutions from Prisons

Governments in developing countries such as Ghana must make it a point to separate prisons from correctional facilities. In correctional facilities, the intention is to modify and correct a person's adverse ways of life. On the other hand, prison goes a step further to punish inmates through withdrawal and other harsher conditions. Depending on the type of crime committed, steps should be taken to ensure that persons have been corrected when they are to be corrected and those imprisoned have received such punishments accordingly.

Offenses must attract requisite penalties: community service and other less shameful punishments must be introduced into the Ghanaian penal system. As it stands, any crime committed by a Ghanaian has over 90% possibility of leading to jail term when found guilty. However, this cannot be the case. This is simply because all crimes are not the same. Depending on the intensity of the crime and its impact on society, the government must bring about regulations that do not necessarily result in imprisonment but a commitment to social work. This will, first of all, minimize prison intake and also help to reduce recalcitrant behaviours.

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