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Examining Perceptions and Attitudes of Prison Visitation on Behavior Change and Recidivism in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of prison visitation on perceptions, attitudes, behavior change, and recidivism rates among incarcerated individuals. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, data was gathered through surveys, interviews, and official records from a sample of incarcerated individuals and their visitors. The analysis focused on understanding the role of visitation in shaping attitudes towards rehabilitation and family support and its influence on post-release behavior.

Findings reveal a significant correlation between the frequency and quality of visitation and positive behavioral changes among inmates. Inmates who received regular visits reported higher levels of motivation for rehabilitation, improved mental health, and increased feelings of connection with their families and communities. Moreover, visitation played a pivotal role in strengthening family bonds and social support networks, which are crucial factors in successful reintegration post-release.

Furthermore, the study explored the perceptions and experiences of both inmates and visitors regarding the visitation process, including logistical challenges, emotional dynamics, and barriers to maintaining contact. Understanding these perspectives is essential for enhancing visitation programs and addressing systemic issues that hinder family engagement in the correctional system.

The study also examined recidivism rates among participants and found a notable decrease among those who received frequent and meaningful visitation compared to those who did not. These findings underscore the significance of visitation programs in reducing recidivism and promoting successful reentry into society.

In conclusion, this research highlights the importance of fostering supportive relationships through visitation programs to facilitate positive behavior change and reduce recidivism rates among incarcerated individuals. Implementing policies that prioritize and improve access to visitation can contribute to more effective rehabilitation efforts and ultimately lead to safer communities.

Keywords: *Prison visitation, attitudes, perceptions, behavior change, recidivism, rehabilitation, family support, reintegration, incarcerated individuals, social support*

1. Introduction

Recidivism, the return to crime by convicts after punishment, is a pressing concern in criminology, affecting the effectiveness of punishment, rehabilitation efforts, and societal safety. Despite numerous interventions, high recidivism rates persist, often attributed to the absence of robust social support systems upon release. Family contact, particularly through visitation, is crucial for inmate well-being and successful reintegration into society.

Existing literature highlights the importance of social ties in reducing offending behavior, especially during critical transitions like imprisonment and release (Glaser, 1964; Visher et al., 2004; Maruna & Toch, 2005). However, empirical studies on the impact of in-prison visitation on recidivism remain limited. Understanding the implications of visitation programs is critical for refining theories and policies aimed at reducing re-offending.

In Kenya, research on the effects of in-prison visitation on recidivism is scarce yet relevant for understanding differential effects among inmate populations. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the influence of visitation on recidivism outcomes using data from the Kenya Department of Corrections.

This study focused on examining the perceptions and attitudes of prison visitation on behavior change and recidivism among inmates in Kenya. Specifically, it sought to explore the relationship between visitation variables (such as frequency, type of visitor, and recency) and recidivism rates, considering inmate demographics and criminal history.

By elucidating the role of visitation in behavior change and recidivism, this research aimed to contribute valuable insights to criminological theory and inform policy and practice in the Kenyan correctional system.

1.1. Study Objective

The primary objective of the study was to examine the perceptions and attitudes of prison visitation on behavior change and recidivism among inmates in Kenya. Specifically, it seeks to explore the relationship between visitation variables

(such as frequency, type of visitor, and recency) and recidivism rates, considering inmate demographics and criminal history.

1.2. Research Questions

- What is the relationship between prison visitation variables (frequency, type of visitor, recency) and recidivism rates among inmates in Kenya, considering demographic factors and criminal history?
- How effective are the training programs within both the private and public security sectors in reducing recidivism rates?

1.3. Statement of the Problem

The existing research on criminal recidivism in Kenya lacks a thorough investigation into the role of prison visitation in reducing recidivism rates among inmates. Despite the significant impact of post-prison adjustment and reintegration on relapse into criminal activity, there is a notable gap in understanding how visitation, including its frequency, type, and recency, influences behavior change and recidivism. Therefore, this study aims to retrospectively examine the perceptions and attitudes of prison visitation on behavior change and recidivism among inmates in Kenya. Specifically, it seeks to explore the relationship between visitation variables (such as frequency, type of visitor, and recency) and recidivism rates, considering inmate demographics and criminal history. By addressing this gap, the study aims to contribute new knowledge to the existing literature on criminal recidivism, benefiting policy-makers, criminal justice system agencies, criminologists, and researchers.

1.4. Significance of the Research

This study holds significant implications for policy and practice within the Kenyan correctional system and broader understandings of criminal recidivism and reintegration processes worldwide. By investigating the role of prison visitation in reducing recidivism rates, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights crucial for policy-makers to make informed decisions. These insights can guide the development of targeted interventions to reduce recidivism and foster successful reintegration of offenders into society. Additionally, understanding how visitation influences behavior change and recidivism can lead to improvements in correctional practices, including optimizing visitation policies and enhancing support systems for inmates during and after visitation. By emphasizing the importance of post-prison adjustment and reintegration, the study highlights the need for comprehensive rehabilitation efforts that extend beyond incarceration, potentially refining existing programs and developing new strategies. Furthermore, contributing to the academic literature on criminal recidivism fills a notable gap in research and enriches theoretical understanding, laying the groundwork for future inquiries. Ultimately, by facilitating successful reintegration and reducing the cycle of incarceration, the study aims to contribute to safer communities, alleviate strain on correctional resources, and enhance social well-being in Kenya and potentially beyond.

2. Literature Review

Prison visitation is a cornerstone of many correctional systems worldwide, aiming to sustain connections and social support for incarcerated individuals while also serving as a mechanism to reduce recidivism. In-person visits, including conjugal visits, are integral components of visitation policies, offering opportunities for face-to-face interactions and private time with family and friends. These visits are recognized for their potential to preserve family bonds, incentivize compliance with prison regulations, and contribute to the successful reintegration of inmates into society (Boudin et al., 2013). However, the structure and implementation of visitation policies vary across correctional facilities and jurisdictions, presenting both opportunities and challenges in realizing their intended benefits.

One common feature across visitation policies is institutional authority over visitation, with written policies dictating the parameters and procedures for visitation. These policies often outline eligibility criteria for inmates and visitors and rules regarding the number and duration of visits allowed. In some cases, visitation privileges may be tied to inmates' behavior within the prison, with rewards for good behavior and sanctions for disciplinary violations (Boudin et al., 2013). Additionally, visitation policies typically include measures to ensure security and prevent the introduction of contraband, such as searches of visitors and restrictions on the items allowed during visits.

Research indicates that maintaining social ties through visitation is crucial for reducing recidivism rates among inmates. Visits from family and friends provide inmates with emotional support, encouragement, and a sense of belonging, all of which are essential for successful reentry into society (La Vigne et al., 2005). Moreover, visitation can help alleviate the strain of isolation and loss of social ties associated with imprisonment, thus reducing feelings of hopelessness and frustration among inmates (Agnew, 2006). By sustaining and strengthening inmates' social bonds, visitation serves as a protective factor against recidivism, providing a buffer against the criminogenic effects of incarceration (Maruna & Toch, 2005).

However, despite the potential benefits of visitation, several challenges exist that may hinder its effectiveness in reducing recidivism. Geographical distance between prisons and urban areas poses a significant barrier to visitation, particularly for families with limited financial resources (Austin & Hardyman, 2004). Additionally, administrative barriers imposed by prisons, such as background checks and limited visitation hours, can further restrict access to visitation for inmates and their families (Boudin et al., 2013). Moreover, the uncomfortable and often inhospitable settings of visitation programs may deter families from visiting inmates regularly, diminishing the impact of visitation on behavior change and recidivism (Sturges, 2002).

Despite these challenges, efforts to improve and expand visitation programs are underway in many jurisdictions. States like New York have implemented more welcoming visitation policies, allowing for extended visitation hours and overnight visits to strengthen family bonds (Boudin et al., 2013). Similarly, the use of virtual visitation technologies has emerged as a promising alternative to traditional in-person visits, offering greater convenience and accessibility for inmates and their families (Boudin et al., 2013). By addressing barriers to visitation and enhancing its accessibility, correctional systems can maximize the potential of visitation to reduce recidivism and promote successful reentry into society.

In conclusion, prison visitation plays a crucial role in behavior change and recidivism reduction by maintaining social ties, providing social support, and facilitating successful reintegration into society. However, challenges such as geographical distance, administrative barriers, and discomforts associated with visitation programs pose significant obstacles to its effectiveness. Efforts to address these challenges and improve visitation policies are essential to realizing the full potential of visitation in promoting positive outcomes for incarcerated individuals and their communities.

2.1. Theoretical Frameworks: Guiding Examining Perceptions and Attitudes of Prison Visitation on Behavior Change and Recidivism

Both social control theory and labeling theory offer valuable insights into the objective of examining perceptions and attitudes of prison visitation on behavior change and recidivism. However, considering the specific focus on how prison visitation influences behavior change and recidivism, the theory that best aligns with this objective is the Social Control Theory.

Social control theory emphasizes the importance of social bonds and the influence of internal and external controls on an individual's behavior (Agnew, 2002). In this context, prison visitation can be seen as a mechanism for strengthening social bonds between inmates and their families or significant others. The theory suggests that the presence and strength of these social bonds can explain changes in offending behavior.

By maintaining attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief through regular visitation, inmates may be less likely to re-offend due to the support and social ties they maintain with their families and communities (Hirschi, 1969). The theory also highlights the role of social support in preventing recidivism, which aligns with the objective of examining how perceptions and attitudes toward prison visitation influence behavior change and recidivism.

Therefore, the Social Control Theory is the most suitable theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of prison visitation and its impact on behavior change and recidivism.

3. Methodology

The research was conducted at Langata Women's GK Prison and Nairobi Remand and Allocation Maximum Security Prison in Nairobi County. These prisons were chosen due to their representation of offenders from across the country, aiding in a comprehensive study on reintegration deficits. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design, allowing for the collection of personal characteristics and opinions of respondents, focusing on recidivist offenders. Purposive sampling was used to select key informants, namely prison officers.

The target population comprised recidivist offenders serving determinate sentences in maximum prison facilities in Nairobi County. A census was conducted, surveying 103 recidivists serving determinate sentences in the two chosen prisons. Primary data was collected from recidivist inmates and prison officers, while secondary data was obtained from prison records and relevant publications.

Data was gathered using questionnaires and interviews, capturing both qualitative and quantitative aspects. Questionnaires included open and closed-ended questions administered to inmates, while interviews were conducted with prison officers using interview schedules. Quantitative data was edited, coded, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive statistics like percentages and frequency distributions (Rubin & Babbie, 2008; Olsen & Marie, 2004). Qualitative data underwent content analysis. Both types of data were analyzed by the researcher to present research findings.

4. Research Findings

The study findings are presented in this section.

4.1. Response Rate

The response rate of this study was 85 percent, which is an acceptable rate. At the Nairobi remand and allocation, a maximum prison response rate of 82.5 percent was realized because 66 inmates out of the 80 marked for the census were available at that time. At Langata, in women's prison, the response rate was 90.24 percent because 37 out of the 41 inmates marked for the census were present at the time of the study. According to Mugenda and Gitau (2009), a sample that is 70% or higher of the target sample is sufficient for generalizing the results to the population from which the sample was taken.

4.2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents.

The study covered the main demographic variables: gender, age, level of education, and marital status, as shown in table 1 below.

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender n=103	Male	66	64
	Female	37	36
Age n=103	20 - 29	45	43.7
	30 - 39	30	29.1
	40 - 49	22	21.4
	50 - 59	4	3.9
	60 +	2	1.9
Educational Level n=103	Primary	56	54.4
	Secondary	29	28.2
	Tertiary	14	13.6
	University	4	3.8
Marital Status n=103	Single	46	44.7
	Married	19	18.4
	Divorced	2	1.9
	Widowed	3	2.9
	Separated	33	32.1

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study reveals key demographic insights about the respondents. Most of the respondents, 43.7%, are aged between 20 and 29 years, and this age group also has the highest recidivism rate. In contrast, older respondents show much lower recidivism rates, with only 3.9% and 1.9% of the total population. Education levels vary, with the majority having primary education (54.4%), followed by secondary education (28.2%), tertiary education (13.6%), and university education (3.8%). Most respondents are single (44.7%), while 18.4% are married. Additionally, 32.1% are separated, 2.9% are widowed, and 1.9% are divorced.

4.3. Prison Visitation and Recidivism

4.3.1. Inmates Visitation

The study established that 60.6% of male respondents received visitors, whereas 73% of female respondents received visitors in prison at the time of the study. On the other hand, 39.4% of the male respondents did not receive visitors while in prison, while 27% of the female respondents did not receive visitors. It is evident that more women receive visitors in prison, 73%, as compared to men, 60.6%. This is because women receive more visits from friends and mothers and less from spouses than men, whose most frequent visitors were their spouses and siblings.

Visitation Status	Nairobi Male		Langata Female	
	M	%	F	%
Visited	40	60.6	27	73
Not Visited	26	39.4	10	27
Total	66	100	37	100

Table 2: Statistics Showing Inmate Visitation

4.4. Impact of Prison Visitation on Recidivism

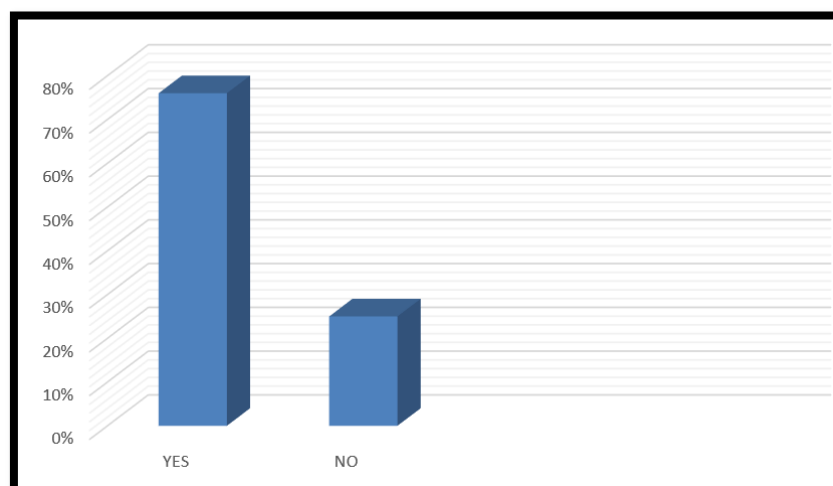


Figure 1: Respondents' Thoughts on the Impact of Visitation on Recidivism

Based on the findings in figure 1, the researcher determined that 75% of the 103 respondents agree that visitation while in prison significantly helps reduce recidivism rates among offenders. Conversely, 25% of the respondents who did not receive any visitors do not perceive any relationship between visitation and recidivism.

The Greatest Challenge	f(n = 103)	Percentage
Visitation Deters		
Nairobi (Male)	40	59.7
Langata(Female)	27	40.3
Total	67	100
Visitation Does Not Deter		
Nairobi (Male)	26	72.2
Langata (Female)	10	27.8
Total	36	100

Table 3: Respondents' Perspectives on the Deterrent Factor of Visitation

5. Findings

5.1. Examine the Influence of Prison Visitation on Offender Behavior and Recidivism

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of prison visitation on offender recidivism (Boudin et al., 2013). Respondents indicated that prison visitation significantly impacts inmates' attitudes and behaviors toward criminality (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2001). Inmates who received visitors showed marked improvements in demeanor and were more at ease, less depressed, and less likely to harbor suicidal thoughts compared to those without visitors (Cochran et al., 2017). These inmates also engaged less in rule-breaking activities and had a lower risk of re-offending, attributed to the strong social bonds formed with family and friends (La Vigne et al., 2005).

The study found that the duration of visits is crucial, as most respondents felt that the allocated time was insufficient, hindering the therapeutic benefits of visitation (Visher et al., 2004). The relationship between the visitor and the inmate also mattered significantly. Visits from parents, siblings, spouses, and children had a more substantial impact on behavior change, providing inmates with hope and a reason to turn their lives around (Babbie, 2011).

These inmates had a higher chance of successful reintegration into the community, benefiting from better job placement, acceptance, and social interactions, which helped reduce recidivism. Overall, visitation helped delay and reduce recidivism (Boudin et al., 2013). Seventy-five percent of respondents agreed that prison visitation plays a significant role in reducing recidivism, while 25% saw no association between visitations.

6. Conclusions

The conclusion from the findings is that prison visitation significantly reduces recidivism rates among inmates. Visits from family and friends improve inmates' mental health, behavior and compliance with prison rules (Clark, 2001; La Vigne et al., 2005). Strong social bonds formed through visitation are crucial for successful reintegration into the community. However, the effectiveness of visitation is hindered by insufficient allocated time, which needs addressing to maximize its benefits. Despite some dissenting views, the majority consensus supports the positive impact of prison visitation on reducing recidivism (Hirschi, 1969). The findings show that prison visitation significantly reduces recidivism rates among inmates. Visits from family and friends improve inmates' mental health, behavior, and compliance with prison rules. Strong social bonds formed through visitation are crucial for successful reintegration into the community. However, the effectiveness of visitation is hindered by insufficient allocated time, which needs addressing to maximize its benefits. Despite some dissenting views, the majority consensus supports the positive impact of prison visitation on reducing recidivism.

7. Recommendations

Increase the allocated time for prison visits and actively promote visits from close family members, as these measures significantly enhance inmates' mental health, behavior, and compliance with prison rules (Visher et al., 2004). Longer and more frequent visits allow inmates to discuss issues thoroughly and maintain strong social bonds, which are crucial for their successful reintegration into the community. Additionally, providing resources and support for visitors can further strengthen these bonds (Boudin et al., 2013). By implementing these changes, the therapeutic benefits of visitation are maximized, ultimately reducing recidivism rates and aiding in the overall rehabilitation process of inmates. Regularly monitor and evaluate the impact of these measures to ensure their effectiveness.

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