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**Influence of Socioeconomic Factors on Recidivism in
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Nakuru County, Kenya**



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Influence of Socioeconomic Factors on Recidivism in Kenya: A Case of Naivasha Maximum Security Prison in Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to invest the influence of socioeconomic factors on recidivism at Naivasha Maximum Security Prison in Nakuru county, Kenya. The study also sought to identify and recommend appropriate interventions to mitigate these factors and promote the successful reintegration of ex-offenders into society.

Methodology: Guided by the strain theory first introduced by Robert K. Merton, the study employed a descriptive research design using a mixed methods approach to target 2,000 current inmates, 1,200 former inmates, and 350 prison staff. Using stratified random sampling technique, a sample of 355 participants was considered for the study. Additionally, key informants were selected purposively to include the Officer commanding the station, four Chaplains for all denominations (Catholic, SDA, Islam and protestant churches), five Prison administrators who are the section heads for tailoring section, carpentry section, mechanics section, formal education section and health/hospital facility section. Data was collected using two data collection tools; questionnaires for prison staff and inmates; interviews guide for key informants. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected and analyzed.

Findings: Findings revealed that strengthening family relationships and providing community support systems including mentorship programs and faith-based groups enhance successful reintegration and significantly reduces the likelihood of re-offending. Social stigma and limited access to employment post-release was found to be key drivers of recidivism. Lack of structured job placement programs for former inmates was found to lead to high unemployment rates, pushing some back into crime. Vocational training programs were found to be essential but require expansion, improvement and certification. The study supports strain theory and labeling theory, showing that economic hardship and social stigmatization are responsible for shaping post-release behavior among offenders.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The government should implement structured family reunification programs to strengthen inmate-family bonds and community-based reintegration programs should be expanded to support former inmates and reduce social stigma. Prisons should collaborate with accredited vocational institutions to ensure inmates receive high-quality training. Certification of vocational training programs should be standardized to enhance inmates' job competitiveness. Income-generating activities within the prison, such as carpentry and tailoring, should be expanded and inmates be allowed to save a portion of the income generated, which can act as seed capital upon their release. The government can provide seed capital or startup grants to rehabilitated inmates for small business ventures.

Keywords: *Recidivism, Socioeconomic Factors, Rehabilitation, Naivasha Maximum Security Prison, Kenya.*

1.1 Introduction

Recidivism poses a serious challenge to criminal justice systems globally, undermining efforts to rehabilitate offenders and enhance public safety. Research shows that economic and social factors significantly contribute to reoffending rates (Gendreau et al., 2016). Studies across different jurisdictions indicate that stable employment, strong family ties, and effective rehabilitation programs play a crucial role in reducing recidivism (Visher et al., 2005; Tripodi et al., 2010). A study by Muntingh and Ballard (2012) on recidivism in South Africa highlighted the critical role of post-release employment in reducing re-offending. The research found that ex-offenders who secured stable employment upon release were significantly less likely to return to criminal activities. However, high unemployment rates and limited job opportunities, particularly for those with criminal records, posed substantial barriers to successful reintegration. Similarly, Ajayi and colleagues (2015) in Nigeria examined “the impact of vocational training programs on recidivism rates among inmates”. Their study revealed that inmates who took part in vocational training have high chances to secure employment post-release and hence reduced probability to re-offend. This finding underscores the importance of equipping inmates with practical skills that enhance their employability.

Adjorlolo et al. (2016) conducted a study in Ghana focusing on the psychological and social factors influencing recidivism. The research revealed that social stigma and discrimination against ex-offenders significantly hindered their reintegration into society. Ex-offenders faced substantial challenges in accessing housing, education, and employment, which increased their risk of re-offending. The study called for societal change to reduce stigma and support the successful reintegration of ex-offenders.

In Kenya, despite various rehabilitation initiatives, the recidivism rate remains high (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2020). Naivasha Maximum Security Prison, one of Kenya’s largest correctional facilities, houses a diverse population of offenders. This study seeks to analyze the influence of socioeconomic factors on recidivism in this facility, providing insights into the challenges faced by former inmates upon reintegration into society.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Globally, recidivism has been increasing at an alarming rate, posing significant challenges to criminal justice systems worldwide. Studies have shown that despite extensive efforts to rehabilitate inmates, including the allocation of substantial resources to correctional facilities and rehabilitation programs, the rates of re-offending remain persistently high. Governments across the world, both in developed and developing countries, have committed considerable resources to inmate rehabilitation, recognizing its importance in reducing recidivism and enhancing public safety. However, despite these concerted efforts, recidivism continues to escalate, particularly in developing countries where resources are not adequate to cater for the needs in prison and even out of prison.

At the local level, the Kenyan government has demonstrated a strong commitment to the rehabilitation of inmates. Kenya is a signatory to both international and regional protocols, conventions, and agreements that emphasize the importance of inmate rehabilitation to curb recidivism. Furthermore, the Constitution of Kenya 2010 advocates for equal rights for all citizens, including those who are incarcerated, ensuring that they are provided with the necessary support and opportunities for successful reintegration into society. Despite these initiatives and Kenya's adherence to global standards, the recidivism persists thus the need for this study that aimed at investigating the influence of socioeconomic factors on recidivism at Naivasha Maximum Security Prison in Nakuru County, Kenya.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the influence of social factors on recidivism in Naivasha Maximum Security Prison.
2. To analyze the impact of economic factors on recidivism.
3. To identify measures that can be implemented to address socioeconomic factors and reduce recidivism.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the influence of social factors on recidivism in Naivasha Maximum Security Prison?
2. What is the influence of economic factors on to recidivism?
3. What measures can be implemented to address socioeconomic drivers of recidivism?

1.5 Literature Review

Recidivism, as used in the judicial system, is a term used to describe a person's return to criminal activity following a prior offense conviction, sentencing, and likely correction (Maltz, 1981). Recidivism is described by Verbrugge et al. (2002) as being brought back into detention for any cause, including technical violations. The term "recidivism" is technical and, if used too narrowly, bypasses the important problem it represents, the problem of persistency in criminal behavior. This review looks at the discussions on social and economic factors affecting recidivism, and measures that can be utilized to mitigate them.

1.5.1 Theoretical Framework: Strain Theory

Guiding this study is the Strain Theory by Robert K. Merton, first introduced in 1938. This theory posits that society sets culturally approved goals, such as financial success and social status, which all members are encouraged to achieve. However, the means to achieve these goals, such as education and employment opportunities, are not equally accessible to everyone. When individuals are unable to achieve societal goals through legitimate means due to structural barriers, they experience strain and frustration. This state of normlessness, or anomie, leads some individuals to

engage in deviant behaviour, including criminal activities, as alternative ways to achieve these goals.

Merton outlines five ways individuals adapt to strain: Conformity, where people follow societal goals and accepted methods; Innovation, where individuals pursue societal goals but use unconventional or illegitimate methods; Ritualism, where people abandon societal goals but strictly adhere to accepted methods; Retreatism, where both societal goals and methods are rejected, often leading to withdrawal from society; and Rebellion, where individuals reject both current societal goals and methods, advocating for new ones.

Strain Theory is highly relevant in understanding the socioeconomic factors influencing recidivism. Many inmates come from backgrounds where legitimate means to achieve societal goals are limited due to economic deprivation, lack of educational opportunities, and inadequate social support. These structural barriers create strain, propelling individuals towards criminal activities as another means to achieve success or alleviate their frustration. In application to the study, Merton's theory helps explain how unemployment, low income, and financial instability drive former inmates to reoffend. Without viable economic opportunities, individuals may resort to crime as an innovative way to meet societal expectations. The theory also elucidates the impact of weakened social bonds and community support. Inmates who lack strong family ties and community support are highly probable to experience anomie and strain, increasing their risk of recidivism. This theory is used by the study to uncover the underlying socioeconomic pressures that causes recidivism and to propose measures to alleviate these strains.

1.5.2 Influence of Social Factors on Recidivism

Family support has been shown to play a key role in post-incarceration reintegration. Bales and Mears (2008) conducted a study in the United States, finding that inmates who communicated regularly with their families were less likely to re-offend. The study reiterated the significance of support from family members in reducing recidivism, as families often provide emotional support, housing, and financial assistance during the reintegration process. Strong familial bonds have been associated with reduced recidivism, hence the importance of maintaining family connections during and after incarceration (Visher & Travis, 2003).

Another social factor is peer influence. Research shows that individuals who associate with delinquent peers have higher recidivism rates (Warr, 2002). Kenyan studies suggest that the lack of structured social support networks exacerbates the risk of reoffending (Mwenje, 2016). In his paper, Martin Ngunyi (2015) noted that social stigma and discrimination against ex-offenders in Kenyan communities pose significant challenges to their reintegration. He continued that the stigma manifests in various forms, including negative public perception and societal rejection which could see even landlords not willing to rent houses to ex-offenders and they may be excluded from certain public assistance programs

1.5.3 Influence of Economic Factors on Recidivism

Economic instability is closely linked to higher rates of recidivism world over. Studies indicate that individuals released from prison face significant economic challenges that contribute to their likelihood of reoffending. These challenges include unemployment, lack of access to social services, and insufficient financial support (Visher & Travis, 2003). Unemployment is a key predictor of recidivism. Former inmates face significant barriers in securing employment due to employer bias and limited job opportunities (Pager, 2003).

Another significant factor is the quality of post-release programs. In countries with well-funded and comprehensive reentry programs, recidivism rates tend to be lower. Programs that offer vocational training, job placement services, and financial assistance have been shown to remarkably reduce the tendency of relapse into crime (Mears & Cochran, 2015). For example, in Sweden, a robust welfare state and comprehensive rehabilitation programs contribute to lower recidivism rates compared to countries with less supportive systems (Andersson, 2016).

In Africa, high unemployment rates, widespread poverty, and inadequate social services are prevalent across its many countries, contributing to higher recidivism rates. For instance, in South Africa, studies have shown that economic hardships and lack of employment opportunities are significant predictors of recidivism (Muntingh, 2005). African countries often lack comprehensive rehabilitation programs that address the economic needs of ex-offenders. Many prisons are under-resourced, and reintegration programs are either non-existent or insufficiently funded (Sarkin, 2008). This lack of support exacerbates the economic vulnerabilities of ex-offenders, increasing their likelihood of returning to misdemeanor as a means of survival.

In Kenya, economic hardships and lack of vocational skills increase the likelihood of reoffending (Agutu, 2020). A study conducted at Naivasha Maximum Security Prison highlighted that economic support and employment are crucial for reducing recidivism rates. The research suggested that providing ex-offenders with skills training and job opportunities significantly lowers their chances of reoffending (Nyaga, 2019).

1.5.4 Measures to Address Socioeconomic Factors

Various social and economic factors affect recidivism at different degrees and if left unchecked, can be a thorn in the flesh to the goals of correctional facilities, one of which is to curb re-arrest. These factors may be addressed by strengthening family and community support; enhancing employment programs; improving rehabilitation programs; and addressing economic inequalities

Reinforcing the support systems of family and community is essential for reducing recidivism. Programs that facilitate family visits and community engagement during incarceration can enhance social support for inmates. Research by Bales and Mears (2008) suggests that family-oriented interventions can significantly reduce re-offending rates. In Kenya, initiatives aimed at improving family relationships and community integration show promise in reducing recidivism (Ngunyi, 2015).

According to Visher and Travis (2011), employment programs that provide job readiness training and placement services are effective in reducing recidivism. In Kenya, enhancing vocational

training programs within prisons can improve the employability of ex-offenders. Inmates who obtain vocational training have low probability of returning to prison after their release and their probability to secure employment increases in contrast to those who do not receive vocational training. (Prinsloo, 2017).

Research by Gaes (2008) highlights the importance of comprehensive rehabilitation services in reducing re-offending rates. His study found that effective rehabilitation programs should address multiple aspects of an offender's life. In Kenya, addressing the resource constraints that limit the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs is crucial. Rehabilitation programs should be tailored to take care of distinct needs of inmates. (Rutgers, 2016). Ruteere advocated for integrating educational and vocational training, mental health and services, and substance abuse treatment. The research underscored that successful rehabilitation requires comprehensive support and ongoing evaluation to ensure the programs are effective in helping inmates reintegrate into society and avoid reoffending hence solving the issue of overcrowding in prisons.

Studies shows that addressing the underlying economic inequalities that contribute to crime and recidivism is essential for creating a more equitable society. That policies aimed at reducing unemployment, improving access to education, and providing social services can help mitigate the socioeconomic factors that drive recidivism. According to Mitullah (2014), addressing economic deprivation through targeted interventions can reduce crime rates and improve social stability in urban areas. (Kanyinga, 2013) argues that there is need for inclusive economic policies, equitable distribution of resources, and effective governance to address underlying structural issues and reduce crime and recidivism rates in Kenya.

1.6 Methodology

1.6.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design with a mixed-methods approach to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. The descriptive survey design is suitable as it facilitates the collection of quantitative data through questionnaires to gather numerical data on socioeconomic factors and recidivism rates. The qualitative data collection involved interview guide to gain deeper insights into the experiences and perspectives of key informants.

1.6.2 Study Area and Target Population

The study was conducted at Naivasha Maximum Security Prison in Nakuru County, Kenya. The target population was 2,000 current inmates, 1,200 former inmates and 350 prison staff (wardens, rehabilitation officers, social workers). Also included were key informants such as the Officer in Charge, Deputy Officer in Charge, five section heads, and four chaplains.

Table 1 Target population

Category	Target population
Current inmates	2000
Former inmates	1200
Prison staff	350
Total	3550

1.6.3 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representativeness. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for sample size determination:

$$n = Z^2 \cdot p \cdot (1-p) / e^2$$

Where:

- (n) = sample size.
- (Z) = z-value (1.96 for a 95% confidence level).
- (P) = estimated proportion of the population (assumed to be 0.5 for maximum variability).
- (e) = margin of error (0.05).

Based on this formula, 355 participants were selected, distributed as follows: 200 current inmates who are directly experiencing the conditions of incarceration and are crucial for understanding immediate factors influencing recidivism, 120 former inmates to provide insights into post-release challenges and factors that contributed to their reoffending or successful reintegration, and 35 prison staff members to offer a different perspective on the institutional and programmatic factors affecting recidivism

Table 2 Sample size

Category	Target population	Sample size
Inmates	2000	200
Former inmates	1200	120
Prison staff	350	35
Total	3550	355

Adding the 11 key informants of the study including the officer in charge, deputy officer in charge, four chaplains for all denominations in the facility (Catholic, SDA, Islam and protestant churches), and five prison administrators of various sections that includes tailoring section, carpentry, mechanics, formal education and health/hospital facility section made a total of 366 sample size.

1.6.4 Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires for inmates and prison staff were used while Interview guide was used to conduct interviews with key informants for qualitative insights.

1.6.5 Data Analysis

According to Baily (2006), data analysis procedure includes the process of packaging the collected information, putting in order, and structuring its main components in a way that findings can easily and effectively be communicated. Data analysis was done using qualitative and quantitative techniques and presentation done using tables, bar charts and line graphs. Descriptive Statistics was used to summarize demographic data and key variables, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations to provide an overview of socioeconomic factors and recidivism rates. Data from interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Coding was done to identify key themes and patterns. The qualitative data from thematic analysis was presented through narrative summaries and direct quotes.

1.7 Results and Discussion

1.7.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The demographic characteristics included the age, education level and marital status of inmates. This section provides insights into the background information of the respondents, which is useful in understanding the population under study.

Age of respondents

Table 3 Age distribution of inmates

Variable	Frequency (N=304)	Percentage (%)
Age Group		
18-29 years	73	24.0
30-39 years	100	33.0
40-49 years	79	25.9
50 years and above	52	17.1

As shown in table 4.2, most of the inmates (33%) fell within the 30–39 age bracket, followed by 25.9% aged 40–49. A significant proportion (24%) were young adults aged 18–29, while the least

at 17.1% were aged above 50 years. The predominance of younger inmates aligns with prior studies indicating that individuals within these age groups are more susceptible to criminal behavior due to socioeconomic vulnerabilities such as unemployment, peer influence, and lack of stable income (Ngugi, 2017; Makori&Otieno, 2019).

Older inmates (50+ years) represent the smallest group, which is consistent with criminological theories suggesting that criminal activity declines with age due to increased social stability and a natural process of desistance (Sampson & Laub, 2005). These findings highlight the need for targeted rehabilitation efforts, particularly vocational training and reintegration programs for younger offenders to reduce recidivism.

Table 4 Education level of inmates

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Primary	122	40.1
Secondary	91	30.0
Tertiary	30	9.8
None	61	20.1
Total	304	100

From table 4, the majority of inmates were found to have low educational attainment, with a significant proportion amounting to 40.1% having only primary education, while 30% secondary education. A smaller percentage of 20.1% had no formal education, while an even smaller group, 9.8%, had attained tertiary education. These findings indicate a correlation between limited educational attainment and criminal behavior, as individuals with lower education levels often face economic instability and limited employment opportunities, which increases their likelihood of engaging in crime then and again. A few inmates were found to have tertiary education indicating that higher education attainment exposes one to better opportunities and therefore lowers criminal behavior.

The prevalence of low education levels among inmates aligns with existing literature suggesting that limited education contributes to higher crime rates and recidivism (Ngugi, 2017). Poor educational backgrounds often limit employment opportunities, making individuals more susceptible to criminal activities as a means of survival. The finding also aligns with Prinsloo (2021), who highlighted education as a critical factor influencing recidivism

These findings call for the need for robust prison education programs that provide inmates with employable skills and certifications. Collaboration with educational institutions and employers can enhance the effectiveness of these programs.

Marital status of respondents

The study sought to establish whether marital status of respondent could influence recidivism in Naivasha maximum prison. The results are given in table 5

Table 5 Marital status of inmates

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	167	55
Married	107	35
Widowed/divorced	30	10
Total	304	100

Findings in table 5 indicate that a significant proportion of respondents were single (55%), followed by married (35%), with widowed/divorced respondents constituting 10%. Marital status data show that most inmates are single, highlighting the potential role of weak family support systems in recidivism. Single inmates were found to lack stable family support systems, which may contribute to their involvement in criminal activities and subsequent recidivism. This means that family structures do provide emotional and economic stability, and their absence exacerbates vulnerabilities among single offenders. This aligns with Mutilla (2020), who emphasized the role of family connections in successful reintegration and reduced recidivism.

Studies indicate that single individuals have higher recidivism rates than married individuals (Makori & Otieno, 2019). They often lack stable family support upon release, making reintegration into society difficult. The absence of strong social ties may increase reliance on criminal networks for survival. Marriage is therefore a protective factor against recidivism, as family obligations and emotional support can provide motivation for desistance. However, incarceration strains relationships, and some married inmates return to find broken families or separation, increasing stress and the likelihood of reoffending.

1.7.2 Influence of Social Factors on Recidivism in Naivasha Maximum prison in Nakuru County.

The first objective sought to assess the influence of social factors such as family support, peer influence, and social stigma & discrimination on recidivism. Data from the questionnaires and interviews were used to gauge the extent to which these factors contribute to reoffending. The results are as shown in figure 1.

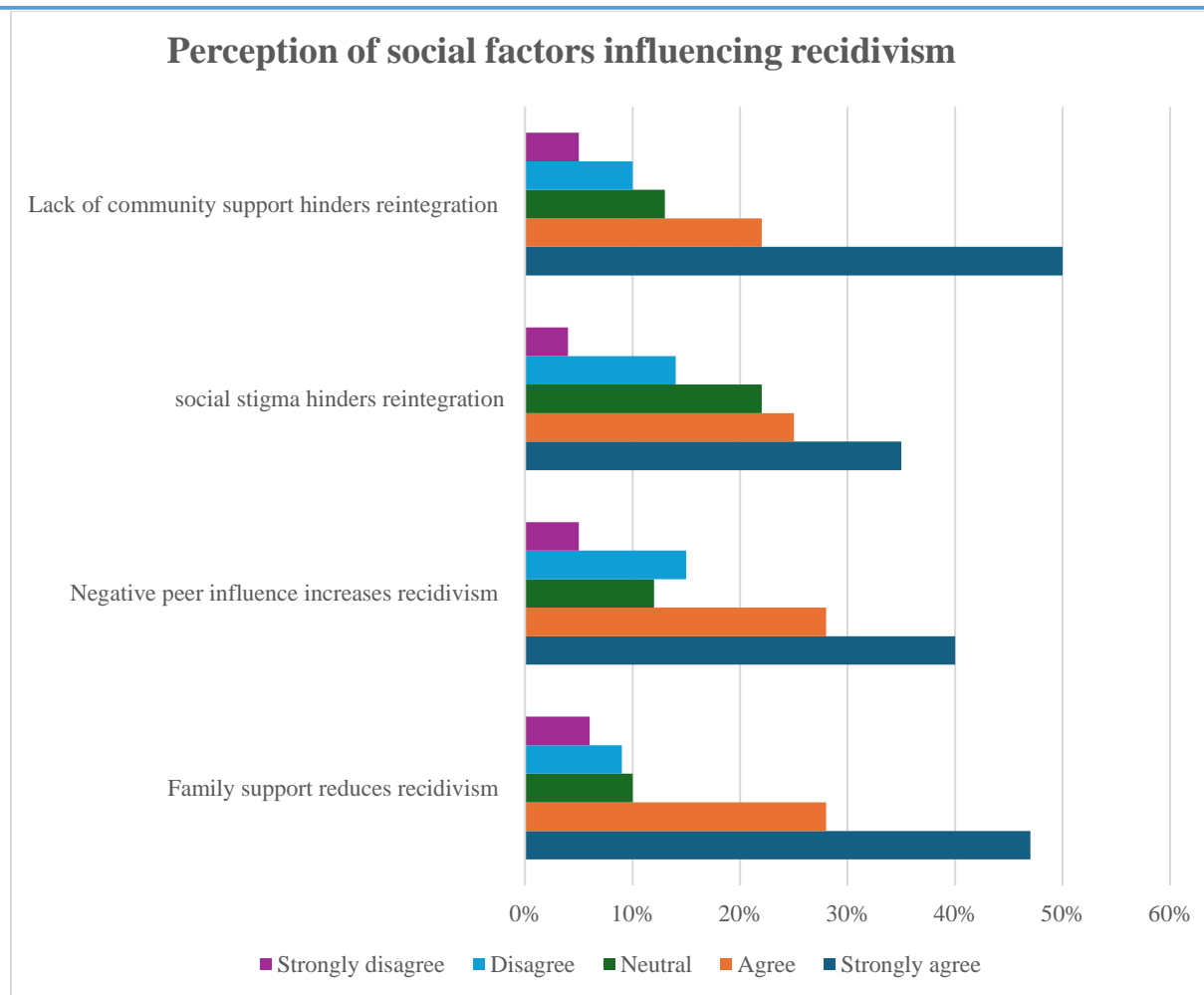


Figure 1 Perception of respondents on the influence of social factors on recidivism

Influence of Lack of Family support on recidivism in Naivasha maximum prison in Nakuru County.

As shown in figure 1, the findings indicate 75% of respondents agreed that lack of family support significantly contributes to recidivism. Majority of recidivates reported strained relationships with family members, citing stigmatization and lack of acceptance upon release. Only 15% of the respondents disagreed and felt that lack of family support does not increase recidivism, they mentioned different social challenges that they have encountered. Other respondents which account for 10% remained neutral.

The study found that the ex-offenders who do not maintain solid family connections frequently face emotional and financial instability, significantly raising their chances of returning to criminal behavior. This result corroborates prior research by Mutilla (2020), Muriuki (2023), and Prinsloo (2018), all of whom emphasize the exacerbating effects of neglected familial relationships on post-incarceration recidivism. The findings indicate that family support plays a pivotal role in providing

emotional stability and aiding reintegration, as inmates with strong family ties often benefit from a structured support system that facilitates their adjustment after release.

Conversely, the respondents reported that absence of family support leads to isolation, frustration, and eventual re-engagement in criminal activities. Most respondents emphasized that inmates who maintain strong family ties are more likely to reintegrate successfully into society. They cited that families provide a vital support system, reducing feelings of isolation and offering a safety net. As the Officer in Charge noted:

“Family support acts as an anchor that stabilizes inmates post-release, reducing the temptation to revert to crime.”

Some of the key informants strongly suggested that efforts to strengthen family bonds should include family counseling sessions and opportunities for regular visitation during incarceration. That programs that support family reunification post-release, such as transitional housing for inmates and their families, could further enhance reintegration outcomes.

Influence of Negative Peer Influence on recidivism in Naivasha maximum prison in Nakuru County.

As indicated in figure 1, about 68% of respondents identified negative peer influence as a major driver of recidivism. Despite the strong agreement on the role of negative peer influence, 19% of respondents disagreed, while 13% remained neutral on the matter. Inmates reported that while incarcerated, individuals often develop associations with peers engaged in criminal behavior, forming networks that extend beyond prison and facilitate continued involvement in crime. These connections perpetuate a cycle of criminal activity, particularly when inmates lack access to alternative positive influences. Prinsloo (2021) observed similar trends, where ex-offenders often find it easier to reintegrate into familiar criminal circles than to establish legitimate relationships in society. Theoretical frameworks such as Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) support this finding, asserting that behavior is learned through observation, imitation and modeling.

Those who disagreed argued that personal choice and self-discipline play a more significant role in determining whether an ex-inmate reoffends. Others felt that family support is a stronger determinant of successful reintegration than peer influence, as a supportive family can help them avoid criminal networks. Those who were neutral suggested that the impact of peer influence varies from individual to individual, meaning it cannot be considered the sole driver of recidivism. They further argued that not all peer interactions are negative—some inmates form positive networks with fellow rehabilitated individuals who encourage lawful behavior.

The findings indicate that young offenders are especially vulnerable to peer pressure, with many being recruited into gangs or organized crime during incarceration. Majority of inmates reported that they had been influenced by peers to engage in illegal activities after release, highlighting the strong impact of social networks in reinforcing criminal behavior. Similarly, prison staff observed that many repeat offenders tend to reconnect with criminal peers, which hinders their reintegration efforts.

Research has shown that negative peer influence is one of the strongest predictors of recidivism. Melde & Esbensen (2016) found that former inmates who maintained ties with delinquent peers had significantly higher chances of reoffending within the first year of release. Another study by Schubert et al. (2018) highlighted that the need for group belonging often leads ex-offenders back into criminal associations, reinforcing deviant behavior patterns. In the context of Naivasha Maximum Security Prison, these findings underscore the challenge of breaking the cycle of recidivism. Without targeted interventions to disrupt negative peer associations, rehabilitation efforts may have limited success.

Addressing this challenge would require targeted interventions, such as mentorship programs and exposure to positive role models within correctional facilities. Additionally, structured rehabilitation programs can help inmates sever ties with criminal networks and develop new, law-abiding relationships. According to Prinsloo (2021), effective community-based reintegration strategies should include structured support groups aimed at fostering accountability and encouraging positive social interactions for ex-offenders.

Influence of Social Stigma on recidivism in Naivasha maximum prison in Nakuru County.

The data from figure 1 reveals that 60% of respondents acknowledge stigma as a barrier to successful reintegration. Most respondents emphasized that societal rejection and discriminatory attitudes toward ex-offenders often limit their opportunities for employment, housing, and social reintegration. These challenges heighten their vulnerability to reoffend. As Karuti Kanyinga (2021) highlighted, the stigma surrounding ex-offenders often labels them as “perpetual criminals,” undermining rehabilitation efforts.

Some respondents mentioned having experienced housing discrimination against them as ex-offenders stating that some landlords are unwilling to rent to individuals with criminal records, pushing them into homelessness or unstable living conditions. Research by Harding et al. (2019) shows that lack of stable housing is one of the strongest predictors of recidivism, as individuals without a secure home face difficulties in maintaining employment and reintegration into society.

Survey participants also highlighted familial stigma and rejection as significant obstacles, particularly for offenders whose actions directly impacted their relatives. Inmates reported difficulties in reconnecting with their children, spouses or extended family members due to prolonged incarceration. According to a study by Bahr et al. (2010), ex-prisoners who lack family support upon release are more likely to relapse into criminal behavior compared to those who reintegrate into a supportive family structure. The emotional and psychological impact of being rejected by loved ones often leads to social isolation, increasing susceptibility to negative peer influences.

The study established that one of the most significant impacts of stigma is the difficulty ex-offenders face in securing employment. Many employers hesitate to hire individuals with criminal records, fearing potential risks or reputational damage. As a result, former inmates often struggle to find stable income sources, increasing the likelihood of returning to crime as a means of survival.

Studies by Pager (2003) demonstrated that individuals with a criminal record are 50% less likely to be called back for a job interview compared to applicants without records, even when their qualifications are identical.

Stigmatization can lead to self-perception as a criminal, which reinforces criminal identity and limits rehabilitation efforts. Psychological studies indicate that social exclusion can result in stress, depression, and anxiety, all of which can contribute to poor decision-making and increased recidivism rates (Uggen et al., 2014). The findings aligns with Strain Theory (Merton, 1938) which posits that individuals who experience blocked opportunities, such as employment and housing discrimination, may turn to crime as an adaptive response to their marginalized social status. The barriers created by stigma reinforce the socioeconomic disadvantages that push ex-offenders back into criminal activities

The findings also align with Labeling Theory (Becker, 1963), which suggests that societal perceptions shape individual identities and behaviors. Once individuals are labeled as criminals, they may find it difficult to shed this identity, even after serving their sentences. This theory explains why stigma can create a self-fulfilling prophecy, where former inmates struggle to reintegrate due to societal rejection and eventually reoffend.

These barriers emphasize the need for public awareness campaigns to educate communities about the importance of reintegration. Government policies should encourage employers and landlords to provide opportunities for rehabilitated individuals. Initiatives such as tax incentives for businesses that hire former inmates have proven effective in other countries.

Influence of Weak Community Reintegration on Recidivism in Naivasha Maximum Prison in Nakuru County.

As shown in figure 1, approximately 72% of respondents agreed that challenges in community reintegration are significant contributors to recidivism, with most citing challenges such as insufficient transitional support, weak community assistance frameworks, and skepticism from local residents as frequent disruptors of the reintegration process for former inmates. Findings align with Dr. Winnie Mitullah's observation that economic deprivation in urban areas amplifies social marginalization, leading to re-offense.

The study found that former inmates often encounter stigma and mistrust from community members, which hampers their ability to secure employment, housing, and social support. This aligns with the study by Kanyinga (2020) which underscores the role of community perception in shaping the reintegration process, noting that positive community attitudes can significantly reduce recidivism rates. Additionally, Social Bond Theory (Hirschi, 1969) suggests that strong community ties deter individuals from engaging in criminal activities. When former inmates lack meaningful community bonds, they are more likely to relapse into criminal behavior due to the absence of positive societal influences.

Participants emphasized the importance of community-based programs, such as mentorship and reintegration support groups, to bridge the gap between ex-offenders and their communities. One chaplain noted:

“Rehabilitation efforts within prisons are often undone by the lack of community reintegration programs outside prison walls.”

Community leaders, faith-based groups, and non-governmental organizations hold a crucial responsibility in promoting social acceptance and mitigating stigma toward ex-offenders. Mentorship programs involving community volunteers could help ex-offenders build trust and establish new social connections.

1.8 Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The study concludes that demographic characteristics influences recidivism rates among inmates at Naivasha Maximum Security Prison. The findings indicate that younger ex-inmates, from eighteen years to mid-thirties, are more prone to reoffending due to challenges such as negative peer influence, lack of stable employment, and social reintegration difficulties.

Additionally, the study concludes that marital status and family support are crucial in reducing recidivism, as inmates with strong family ties were less likely to reoffend. Conversely, those with strained or broken family relationships faced increased reintegration challenges. Education and vocational skills significantly impacted post-release outcomes, with higher education levels and prison-acquired skills contributing to lower recidivism rates.

In relation to the first objective of the study, the study concludes that social factors such as family relationships, stigma, peer influences, and community support systems significantly influence recidivism among inmates at Naivasha Maximum Security Prison. Strong family ties and supportive communities were found to reduce the likelihood of re-offending by providing emotional and material support for reintegration. Conversely, stigmatization and weak social bonds contribute to feelings of isolation and a return to criminal behaviors. There is a need therefore, for interventions that promote familial and community involvement in the rehabilitation process.

Recommendations

The government and prison authorities should implement structured family support programs that encourage frequent and meaningful contact between inmates and their families. This could include organized family visitation days and counseling sessions aimed at restoring broken relationships.

Community sensitization programs should be launched by a collaborative effort involving government agencies, religious institutions and community leaders such as chiefs and elders to reduce stigma and encourage the acceptance of former inmates. Such programs could involve community leaders, local businesses, and religious organizations in providing support and mentorship to released inmates.

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