

Example of research paper on prison life and decreasing recidivism in the modern ...

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



1. 0 Introduction

Imprisonment is defined as a means of punishing wrong doers through their exclusion from society for a given period of time. The period of time is determined by the nature of the crime. The aims of imprisonment are as follows: to express society's disapproval for the act committed by the prisoner, to atone for the crime perpetrated and to offer the offender an opportunity to come to the realization of the real impact of their act.

Imprisonment ensures that the offender does not get an opportunity to further harm the society by repeating the crime. The time spent in prison offers the offender time to acquire some skills that can help them earn a living once they have been released. The vocational training also helps in giving a much needed boost for the self-esteem of the offender.

According to research, American jails and prisons house approximately 2 million inmates, which is twice the number of inmates they used to have in the 1990's. Out of this population, roughly 600, 000 are released back into the society each month. Two thirds of those who are released are re-arrested within three years of being arrested thus former inmates make up a significant portion of current and future crime. The relapse in to criminal activity by a former prisoner is known as recidivism.

For decades, prisons were viewed as a quick solution to rampant crime in most societies. This has worked well in some cases with reports of individuals making a complete turnaround from criminal activities such as drug abuse or robbery with crime. However one scholar argues that “prisons are universities of crime” hence the released prisoners simply “graduate” to carrying out acts of crime with reckless abandon. This paper shall therefore

address the problem of recidivism, the measures taken to avoid it and how society can be part of the solution to the problem.

2. 0 Rehabilitative programs in prisons

The reduction of recidivism entails taking measures right before the prisoners are released in order to ensure that they reform. Law enforcers have in the recent past increased their focus on drug offences. Research shows that between 1995 and 2006, there was a 150% increase in the number of prisoners arrested for drug related offences such as drug possession or drug trafficking. As a result of this influx of drug offenders, it is imperative for the prisoners to carry out mass screening programs.

Through these programs, the prisoners who have persistent drug problems can be identified. In addition to that, complications arising from drug abuse such as mental illness can be identified in good time. A survey across prisons in the USA shows that more effort is geared towards arresting the drug offenders than rehabilitating hence often leading to a repeat of drug offenders upon release.

Once the prisons have established regular screening programs, they can set up programs aimed at rehabilitating the drug offenders. Treatment programs are essential in most prisons where studies have shown that up to 70% of the inmates in some prisons in the USA have a drug related problem.

However the programs have had little success given the mistrust between the authorities and the prisoners.

A survey carried out among the inmates has shown that most of them have little or no education at all. This makes it difficult for them to find suitable jobs upon release. The few who get jobs find low paying jobs that cannot

sustain them or their families. As a result of the need for education among the prisoners, most prisons run educational programs that enable the inmates to acquire critical skills which come in handy in securing employment upon release.

3. 0 Programs undertaken to reduce recidivism after release

High rates of recidivism are an endangerment to public safety and are costly to the government and in turn the taxpayer. Expenditures on law enforcement, maintenance of prisons and prison staff escalate considerably as a result of recidivism. High rates of recidivism also have implications on society because it takes an emotional toll on the family members of the offender and also the person to relapse into prison. It is therefore imperative to have programs to prevent recidivism.

After prisoners have been released, they face several challenges: they need to reunite with their families, they need to reconnect with former friends, neighbors and the community at large, and they need to find a place to live and a job to do. Reconnection with family members, friends and society is often a problem given the suspicion that has been sown in their minds in addition to a long period of absence from their lives. Studies have also shown that inmates that are released back into their old communities are often prone to relapse back into their old habits as compared to those who relocate to new neighborhoods. This further makes it necessary for the former inmates to find a different place to live in and start anew.

In order to assist former prisoners adjust, programs have been initiated which have been aimed at counseling close family members and friends of prisoners prior to their release. These programs entail having supervised

visits during which the family and friends get an opportunity to interact with the prisoner. They get to play games, share food and talk in order to shed off the doubt that has been sown over the period of imprisonment.

Parole based programs exist across the different states in United States of America. These programs involve close supervision of the prisoners after release by a parole officer. They not only serve as a mechanism of monitoring the prisoners but also as a means of protecting the public. Parole officers require the released prisoners to avail details of their whereabouts in addition making visits and reporting any behavior that may be deemed suspicious. However most parole officers are often overwhelmed: with some having to follow up as many as 100 cases at a given time. Most of the former prisoners end up violating the conditions of the parole thus they are likely to relapse into prisons.

Studies have shown the weakness of the parole systems which has therefore given rise to improved programs. One example is Operation Spotlight in Illinois which is aimed at increasing the resources available to the parole programs i. e. funding and more parole officer officers.

Drugs and alcohol have been linked to criminal activity. One study estimated that 50% of all crime that is committed is drug related. Out of these, about 20% of the offenders were reported to have been involved in crime in order to obtain money to purchase drugs or alcohol. It is therefore important to extend drug treatment programs beyond prison. Only 61% of the prisons in the United States of America have an in-house drug treatment. Notable among these prisons is the Sheridan Correctional Center in Illinois, which exclusively caters for prisoners with substance abuse problems. The prison

works closely with four organizations in order to treat the inmates not only during their stay in prison but also beyond prison.

In addition to this, drug courts which were formed in the 1990's have been instrumental in hearing of cases involving nonviolent drug related offences. They offer individuals an opportunity to be a part of extensive substance abuse treatment programs. Participants in one study were found to be less likely to relapse back into prison the following year when tried in drug courts and subsequently committed to drug treatment programs. It has been found that the likelihood of recidivism among such prisoners is reduced by up to 32%.

Rates of mental disorders such as schizophrenia, bipolar maniacy have been found to be two to four times higher among prisoners as compared to the rates within the general population. These problems are often aggravated by the rampant use of drugs within the prison population. This makes it harder for released prisoners who suffer from such conditions to re-integrate into the society and find suitable employment.

Approximately 70% of the prisons in USA screen the prison and 60% of prisoners have been recipients of either prescription drugs or counseling services while serving their terms. However accesses to these services are rarely accessible to the prisoners upon release. About two thirds of prisons in the United States provide the released prisoners with a referral facility address but they do not follow up to ensure that treatment is continued. Less than a quarter of parole agencies have facilities to cater for the needs of mentally ill patients. This puts the released prisoners in a precarious position where they are likely to return to their former habits hence relapse to prison.

Employment provides an individual with a source of income thus enables them to meet their daily needs. It also occupies time which is important for former prisoners since idling promotes participation in criminal activities. There is no national framework in the USA to assist the prisoners in finding job placements. Higher paying jobs are linked to reducing recidivism by about 29% according to one study. One program in New York known as New York Community and Law Enforcement Resources Together program has been instrumental in aiding former inmates to find job placements.

4. 0 Recommendations

It is imperative that parole programs be improved in order to closely monitor former prisoners and also make it easy for them to re integrate back into the society. Parole programs should also be devolved further and involve family members during the counseling sessions so as to foster co-operation between the parole officers and families of released prisoners. This would enable the families to report signs of relapse therefore arrest further dissension into crime that would lead to recidivism.

Mental treatment programs for the released prisoners ought to be improved. This can be done by having follow- up treatment instituted for prisoners that were enrolled in treatment programs while in prison. In addition to this, measures ought to be put in place to co-ordinate parole services with mental treatment and substance abuse treatment.

Surveys ought to be carried out to identify the needs of the prisoners. It is also important to identify the gaps in the prisoner's transition period and come up with appropriate programs that will ease their adjustment back into

society. Educational and vocational programs should be tailored to meet specific needs in the job market thus making it easier for the prisoners to find job after they have been released. Most prisons have GED courses but few have programs that allow the prisoners to go beyond that level with their education. More funds ought to be devoted towards developing and equipping the education programs run in prison.

Conclusion

The prisons are not just a holding bay for criminals but avenues for rehabilitation of errant persons who if given an opportunity can reform and become more productive members in the society. Recidivism is expensive socially and economically as compared to efforts aimed at rehabilitation. It is therefore important for the programs run in prisons and beyond prisons to be improved consistently in order to keep the rates of recidivism low at all times.

References

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