

Recidivism at the Kumasi Central Prison: A look into Guidance and Counselling Services

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Abstract

Recidivism is on the increase as ex-convicts who are expected by the society to be reformed in prison and reintegrated to lead meaningful lives, only return to crime shortly after their release and find themselves back into prison in spite of the harsh punishment and counselling services received while incarcerated. The study aimed to identify the adequacy and effectiveness of the Guidance and counselling services offered prisoners in Kumasi Central Prison, Ghana. Qualitative research method was primarily used to obtain data. The investigation revealed that the major setback in the Guidance and Counselling section of the Ghana Prisons is the lack of competent and adequate professional counsellors in the prison. Further findings indicated that there are no separate offices for the counsellors, neither are there counselling rooms, thus there is no privacy during counselling sessions. Besides, the prison is over-crowded making it very difficult for counsellors to meet counselling demands of inmates. The government should resource the Prison Service to attract qualified youth to reduce the problem of recidivism.

Keywords: China insurance industry, Foreign fund, Challenge

1. Introduction

In Ghana, people are identified by their family, clan and ethnic group. A clan is a cluster of families who share common values and mostly live in the same community (Ossei-Akoto, 2013). Each family in a clan is identified by a unique name which identifies an individual to a particular family in the clan. Names and families play important roles in the lives of Ghanaians; therefore, individual members of such groups protect the name and identity of their families. Hence, antisocial behaviours such as theft, rape, and murder are strongly objected to. Offenders are arraigned before the family courts for settlement and if the case is beyond their power; it is referred to the chief for settlement.

Here punitive measures such as fines and sanctions were meted out to culprits who have committed minor offences. However, serious cases such as persistent stealing and adultery are given stiffer punishment or banishment from the community, to serve as deterrent to others. Owing to the social effect of punishment and the destruction of the family name and integrity, people learnt to live in conformity with community values and norms. Members of the community have learnt to keep the social order living in peace so as to promote the social cohesion of the people. Deviants are stigmatized and mostly live in isolation. These deviants who refused to change and live in conformity with the social order, are stigmatized and banished as a sign of protest to their antisocial conducts. Eventually, they converged to become bandits who rob from community to community and become social nuisance, disturbing the peace of the people.

With the advent of Western education and culture in Ghana, the Ghana Police Service was established and mandated to meet the security needs of the citizens by protecting life and property. The police also arrests and prosecute offenders at the law court so as to keep the social order and cohesion of the public. In the same vein, the law courts of Ghana have also given the mandate to offer fair trial to offenders arraigned before them and those found guilty, are given various punishments ranging from fines to custodian sentences which are to be

served in hard-labour to serve as deterrent to others. Further, the Prison Service of Ghana is designed to accept and accommodate prisoners jailed by the courts to serve their various jail sentences in-hard-labour to be a deterrent enough to alert people about the punitive measures attached to crime. Unfortunately, some offenders, in spite of the severe punishment, remain in the cycle of crime and land back in prison (recidivism), hence, defying the deterring aspect of the harsh punishment given them and continue to commit more crimes after their release from prison.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The upsurge of crime in Ghana is a noted cause of worry to many law abiding citizens. In spite of the tremendous efforts advanced by the police and other security agencies to reduce the menace of crime and its resultant fear and panic in the populace, activities of crime is rather on the increase as daily reports of crime in the Newspapers and the electronic media carry headline publications of crime in the various locations of Ghana. The police who serve as the conveyance belt of the criminal justice system of Ghana arrest offenders of the law and arraign them before the law courts.

After trial, those found guilty of the offence are sentenced to various jail terms which are to be served in- hard-labour. The harsh prison sentences pronounced on offenders of the law was meant to serve as deterrent. However, after their release from prison some ex-prisoners continue to commit serious crimes without recourse to the harshness of the punishment suffered while in prison. Even though they go through some kind of Guidance and Counselling programmes meant to enhance their reformation, a preliminary investigation seems to indicate that the Guidance and counselling programme at the Ghanaian Prisons leaves much to be desired (K.B. Asante, personal communication, 13th January, 2012).

This study therefore intends to investigate the guidance and counselling programmes employed in the Ghanaian Prisons and their effectiveness to reducing the menace of crime.

1.2 Methodology

The study was mainly qualitative using Case Study and Descriptive research methods. However, data gathering was triangulated for diversity of perspective using interview, observation and questionnaire (Berg, 2007). The population for the study being heterogeneous required use of stratified random sampling to select the accessible one totalling 140 (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1996). It comprised 30 Superior Officers of the Kumasi Central Prison; 50 Counsellors from the Kumasi Central Prison and Kumasi Central Police Station; 30 Social workers from the Department of Social Welfare in Kumasi and 30 prisoners from the Kumasi Central Prison.

1.3 Results and Discussion

1.3.1 Overcrowding causing a derisory Counsellor-Prisoner ratio

Through observation, it was realized that overcrowding of inmates was one major setback. The Kumasi Central Prison, a colonial legacy that was established around 1901 and reconstructed in 1925 to house approximately 800 inmates (Boadu, 2013) has been overstretched over the years due to escalating and ever growing inmate's population of the prison. As of February, 2011, the total prisoners' population stood at 1,754. Out of this number, 1,462 were Convicted Prisoners, Remand prisoners were 265 whereas Trial Prisoners were also 27. Currently, (12th May, 2013), the population stands at 1,879; with 22 condemned prisoners, 473 remand prisoners with the rest being convicted prisoners (Boadu, 2013).

Sarkin (2009) indicated that overcrowding is perhaps the single most pressing concern facing African prisons which has its roots in the continent's colonial past and the prisons have always been at or above capacity nearly since their inception. Boadu (2013) confirms this stance and note that, congestion, which is one of the major problems of the Kumasi prison, has resulted in prisoners sleeping in turns with all the attendant negative consequences such as poor hygiene and ill-health. The huge prison population is thus an index to a stretched and overburdened prison officers (ad counsellors) which will make it difficult for them to supervise prisoners or counsel them.

The high population is an indication that the Officers will be over working coupled with the narrow nature of the prison. From interviews with the three qualified Counsellors in addition to the three After-Care officers making a total of six counsellors attending to the counselling needs of 1879 prisoners. With this disparity in numbers, it will be very difficult for them to be able to address their needs and assist the inmates.

1.3.2 Guidance and Counselling Programmes Available to Inmates

From the copies of questionnaire, it was revealed that the Kumasi Central Prison has a structure to offer personal and group Guidance and Counselling to inmates. The counselling section has a counselling structure to offer educational, vocational and personal or psychological counselling to the inmates. These services are to be offered in either personal or in group forms.

Educational counselling was to assist inmates who are assessing tuition in Senior High and Junior High education in the Prison school located within the walls of the Kumasi Central Prison, to be able to adjust and choose the right subjects that suited their interest. Further, the Vocational counselling was meant to assist inmates to choose the right vocations available to them within the prison and also to help them adjust to the comprehensive nature of these vocations and; also to appreciate the dignity of working so that they can fully be on their own when released from prison. In addition, Personal counselling is offered to inmates to assist them to make choices that will cause changes in them.

Unfortunately, there was nothing appreciable to show for the execution of this documented structure of counselling. It is more of a proposal than an activity since there were no physical structures put in place for the counselling section to function. The type of counselling that was effective was the Orientation/Interview programmes for new prisoners and prisoners who were soon to be released. This shortfall was seen as alarming and a dent to the successful implementation of the concept of reformation and reintegration of prisoners into the society for them to live normal lives. This neglect is evidenced that the low premium is placed on Guidance and Counselling in the prison.

More so, it fully advertised the Criminal Justice System of Ghana as an adversarial type where due punishment is awarded for crime committed and the emphasis is on the offender and punishment and not the victim of the crime.

Guidance and Counselling is an important aspect of life. This is the case because the aim is to assist individuals appreciate their situation and make choices offered by counsellors so that they can effect a positive change that will eventually affect their immediate community and the society at large. It should be respected that most inmates got incarcerated due to no fault of theirs so even as criminals they are still victims. Example is the inmates who experienced single parenthood as a result of divorce of their parents or inmates who lost their parents at a tender age and there were no support for them and through peer pressure ended in prison. The research has therefore established that the Counselling section of the Kumasi Central Prison is a skeletal section without office, and inadequate counselling staff.

1.3.3 Social Welfare Department (After-Care Agent)

The Social Welfare Department has a responsibility of seeking the welfare of inmates in prison with the sole aim of assisting in social integration. After-Care Agents are social workers assigned to the Kumasi Central Prison to work closely with the Prison Counsellors to render welfare services to prisoners. The After-Care Agents are the link between the prisoners and their relatives and function predominantly as the internal welfare officer.

1.3.3 Duties and Responsibilities of After-Care Agents in the Prison

The Prison based Social Workers are legally required to meet with prisoners to assess their needs. This is in order to support them with their prison sentence and work towards their release. They are to provide support and encouragement to inmates and reduce the offending rate so that the general public is protected from harm. The After-Care Agents work to address offending behaviour of prisoners and prepare prisoners for a successful return to the community.

The After-Care officer is required to talk with prisoners and find out more about them and their situation. This include information about family contacts, planned accommodation, health, offending behaviour, risk factors and what help prisoners can be offered, both before and after release. The aim is to assist prisoners to making positive changes to their lifestyle and behaviour. They also prepare reports as required for the Parole Board, and have regular contact with community-based Social Workers and other resources. All information and behaviour that relates to a prisoner's past offending or that places a prisoner at risk of committing further offences may be shared with other prison staff, community-based social work, and the Parole Board. They may also share some information with agencies that may work with prisoners after their release from prison. Importantly, they are duty bound to pass on any information that they receive which could indicate that a prisoner is a potential risk of harm to him/herself or to others. The prison Social workers keep information about

prisoners in a file that is kept within the prison and it accompanied the prisoners if they are transferred to another prison.

According to Dadzie (2009, p.82) “the After-Care Officer interviews and also finds surety for prisoners”. This is an indication that the social worker attached to the prison has very important functions to play in relation to the welfare of inmates. Nonetheless, interviews granted the researcher, has shown that the importance of a prison social worker has been played down. This is so because no motivation is granted them. Besides, their number as compared to the increasingly, high prison population is just too low and has increased the workload on them and so they cannot perform very professionally. The researcher can authoritatively state that, if this very issue of motivating the Prison Social worker is not addressed properly and timely, the important role these officers are to play in order to reintegrate prisoners will be a mirage and the entire Ghanaian society will be at risk.

1.3.4 Lack of Counselling Room

Counselling is personal, private and confidential as such counselling services are to be offered in privacy. Guidance is however, less personal, and can be done publicly. Counselling sought to develop personal working relationship between the counsellor and the client. Owing to professional observance of ethics by the counsellor; absolute confidentiality between the parties is eventually developed because discussions are held in private whether in personal or group counselling where group members have the responsibility to keep discussions and outcomes in secret.

The research has revealed that there is no single Counselling-room in the Kumasi Central Prison. The Counsellor’s office is a general office shared among four Senior Prison officers and there is no privacy. This is an indication that effective counselling where privacy is ensured cannot take place in the prison as every discussion held will be in the open as other members of the office will be privy to the information discussed. This is a big setback in relation to the principles of privacy; confidentiality leading to intimate working relationship between counsellors and their clients is concerned. This position will render counselling services ineffective as it will be very difficult for inmates to confidently and adequately, express their feelings, thought, emotional conflicts and anxieties to the counsellor. Conversely, the counsellors will not also be able to discharge professionally, what is required of them due to intrusions of others therefore rendering the counselling environment hostile and not conducive to both parties due to lack of concentration, confidentiality and privacy.

Counselling being the interaction between a person handicapped in some way and in need of help; and the counsellor being a professional trained in helping people with handicapped situations. The Counselling section of the prison needed to be provided with counselling rooms where inmates will feel safe to talk with professional counsellors about their concerns or problems; no matter how minor or serious, which might be a personal or prison related concerns. More so, the counselling approaches must be tailored to fit the individual inmate’s situation. The counsellors should focus on stabilization and assisting inmates to return to their normal functioning on their release from prison. This should be the case in the prison because the object of counselling is to assist in resolving personal issues that may be preventing people from achieving their potentials. Hence there is the need for inmates to have privacy with their counsellors so that they can pour out their anxieties and complexities which might include depression, relationship difficulties, eating problems, stigma, drug or alcohol use, interpersonal conflicts and stress. There is the urgent need for the government and cooperate bodies to update the counselling unit of the prison if they hope or dream to reduce crime to the lowest. The counselling section is the major player in reformation hence the need to address these concerns to enable the officers to play their quota to the reformation of prisoners.

1.3.5 Lack of logistical Supply

Ideally, the Counselling section of the Kumasi Central Prison was to be fully equipped with logistical inputs such as vehicles, computers, offices with furniture and impress for their use in the case of emergency. Unfortunately, the research has established that the Counselling section cannot boast of an office let alone the mentioned items. The criminal Justice System of Ghana is adversarial. This meant that the criminal justice is not victim oriented but punishment oriented and do not address the need of the victim of the crime but rather, it is interested in punishing the offending party. This was amply observed through the downplay of the counselling section even though the Kumasi Central Prison in principle adheres to the concept of reformation and integration but in it was deficient in practice which is a paradox. Counselling is an integral part of reformation and re-integration of prisoners into society for them to function appropriately in conformity with societal norms and values. Based on these needs Counsellors were to be given the necessary inputs to enable them to effectively perform their duties

and responsibilities towards the inmates with the objective of effecting a positive change in them. Through interviews conducted and questionnaires administered, it was established that, there is no single vehicle allocated to the unit and beside there were no computers or enough furniture for the counsellors. The After- Care officer shared the only desk with the Counsellor. The Social Worker being the Welfare Officer for the inmates will not be able to discharge his duties because he has no office of his own which was an indication that, he could not do his work well as much as he would try. Running of errands was at a difficulty since there was no vehicle for the section or impress issued to them. This has shown that, important matters relating to inmates that were to be carried outside the precinct of the prison will be postponed.

To a large extent, this will affect follow up of discharged prisoners to monitor their level of integration and acceptance by their relatives and the society at large; and also difficult to monitor the progress or otherwise of the trade acquired in prison. This development will affect follow up and increase recidivism.

The Prison Service has to come out with concrete policies that will address the logistical setbacks at the Counselling section if it aims at achieving the goal of reformation and re-integration of prisoners into normal life; as this cannot be achieved without Guidance and Counselling. Society and cooperate bodies like the churches, banks and philanthropists and Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as well as good spirited individuals should take the challenge to assist in supplying these logistics for the section.

1.3.6 Inadequate Follow Up Services

Szumski (1985, p.20) stated that “prison inmates are the most maladjusted people in society”. That is why it was very imperative for continued supervision and correction. The Social Worker at the prison duty is to give Follow Up services to discharged inmates from prison and write progress report on them. It was realised that most discharged or ex-prisoners were not given the follow up service due to logistical constraints. This was seen as a very big setback in relation to reintegration of ex-prisoners who were to be assisted because of their long stay in prison to adjust to the realities of the society to be on their own. The community of the ex-prisoners also needed education and explanation on the stand of the ex-prisoner for them to be able to accept them back as community members. Society would like criminals to emerge from prison reformed, educated and ready to enter the workforce and become productive members of their community. Rehabilitated prisoner is not the one who learns to survive well in prison but one who succeeded in the world outside prison on release.

The reformatory programmes in the prison such as the acquisition of employable skills were to be based on the activities outside the prison. This means, for example, linking the work that prisoners do in prison to the work possibilities outside. Prisoners were being helped to these skills and capacity to earn a living and support their family, in view of the discrimination that ex-prisoners were likely to face when trying to get job.

The After- Care officers were to make arrangements for the inmates during their incarceration for their jobs and also assist them find accommodation to settle after they are released and to create a form of social structure which will help them to be re-accepted into society. It will be very difficult to achieve this in the Kumasi Central Prison because of the constraints of logistics, qualified Counsellors and other prison staff coupled with severe overcrowding in the prison. There is the need for adequate equipment and other logistical needs to be provided to update the section for them to render follow up services to the ex-prisoners else the idea of making a safe community for the society especially children will be unattainable.

1.3.7 Recidivism

The shortage of trained and qualified counsellors and other prison staff have made it difficult to reform and reintegrate ex-prisoners into society. Research has established that there is the problem of recidivism in the Kumasi Central Prison as the result of the deductions made from personal interviews and the questionnaires administered. This singular problem has drawn attention to the fact that, inmates were either not reformed while in prison or those who were reformed but were not properly reintegrated into society.

Recidivism simply means ex-prisoners committing more crimes and sentenced back to prison. Under the normal circumstance, the community expected that after prisoners have undergone harsh punishment in prison; they were to be reformed and reintegrated into society to lead meaningful and productive lives; and lead crime free lives and not to return to a putrid place like prison. This to some extent has not been achieved due to the following suggested variables that were seen to have militated against the aim of reintegration. Thus:

- The limited number of qualified counsellors to work in the prison. This has gone a long way to increase the workload on the very few counsellors available in the prison. The low personnel strength at the

Counselling section of the prison had made it difficult for few to work toward the few job opportunities outside the prison so as to link the inmates with the world outside the prison. Further, these counsellors were unable to reach all inmates who required their services to prepare them adequately to be strong and live beyond the society's hostile reception that would be meted out to them when they leave and are on their own.

- There were no effective training and education that suited social life outside the prison. Most of the training of employable skills in the prison was almost obsolete with insufficient and almost obsolete machines and workshops. There was no modern equipment for the training. The few job training available was carpentry, kente weaving, masonry, general electrical, plumbing, shoemaking, doormat making, blacksmithing, bakery, crocheting and dressmaking. There was no computer laboratory in the prison to give training in Information and Computer Technology (I.C.T.). Dadzie (2009,p.48) posited that "Ghana Prison Service is not able to give the prison inmates adequate vocational training skills". Most of the above do not meet the interest of the youth who formed the majority in prison. The overcrowding and the high prison population have also made it difficult for the counsellors and the social workers to provide any comprehensive programmes for the inmates in the prison.
- No financial assistance programmes to help released prisoner who have acquired employable skills in prison. On their release from prison and after making fruitless efforts to get employed, and no financial assistance from government or relatives they end up desperate and revert to committing crime and get themselves back to prison.
- Most prisoners have no friends or families after their release because most friends and family members shun their company due to the label ex-prisoner. This position put constraints on the ex-convicts as to how to feed, clothe and house themselves since there was no support from any where they may end up committing more crime so as to survive.
- Prisoners who got incarcerated because of drug abuse and drug related crimes may quickly turn to crime if not well supported through proper counselling and well prepared to face life outside the prison. Some of them continue with their drug use even while in prison and if no support they will continue with crime to support their addictiveness and may end up in prison again.

To have these concerns addressed, the government should liaise with the Ghana Prison Service, psychologists and educationists to develop strategies that will reduce the menace of recidivism. The Ghana Prison administration should also consider developing partnerships with civil society and educational organizations in the community in order to increase education and public awareness about employable skill available in the prison and also job opportunities available to ex- prisoners. The media should also be brought in to give public awareness about the good work being done in the prison to reform prisoners.

Intensive public education will assist the society to have a change perception about the released prisoner as a reformed person. This will also reduce the level of stigma attached to ex-prisoners with its attendance scorn for them to be accepted back by their love ones, relatives, friends and the society as a whole.

1.4 Conclusions

The findings of the research have established that setbacks of Guidance and Counselling in the Kumasi Central Prison were as the result of the Government of Ghana, the Ghana Prison Service and the entire society's inability to support the Counselling section of the Prison Service. The government who has the major responsibility and duty of resourcing the Prison Service has to some extent failed its duty by less resourcing the institution. The Prison Service like any of the security services has the duty of ensuring the security of the populace and need government support to empower them do their work effectively. Crime is a threat to the Ghanaian society so the Prison Service and the Social Welfare Department are to be well resourced to make these two institutions attractive to the youth so that qualified staff can be recruited to reduce the problem of recidivism.

The administration of the Prison Service has not placed premium on Guidance and Counselling services leading to reformation in the prison and therefore has not provided the necessary inputs for their work. The inmates have not been attracted to receive counselling services due to lack of counselling room. The Counsellors are not equipped with logistics to function effectively in the prison. The designed counselling programmes are not accessible in the prison due to the lack of structure therefore; the Counselling section exists in a skeletal form. The Prison Service has not developed rapport with the public through the media so the public is in the dark of

what has been going on in the prison. The researcher is of the opinion that the Prison Service should develop working relationship with the media and educate the public of their achievements, failures and constraints/challenges.

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