Review Article

Reducing Recidivism Among Former Offenders: Strategies To Increase Success In Social Reintegration

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Abstract

As with the increased global prison population and recidivism rate, the social reintegration barriers among former offenders called for significant attention by related parties. Scholars and criminologists have investigated the dynamic challenges experienced by former offenders psychologically, socially, and economically in focus. Among the compelling issues related to difficulties in reintegrating into the society is the exclusion of former offenders as a vulnerable category in a national policy or legislation, low self-esteem and inferiority complex among former offenders towards changing environment outside the prison, poor relationship and support from family and society, experienced difficulties in fulfilling necessities, limited access to economic assistance, and the lack of access to aftercare support and services. This paper analyses and organized seven social reintegration strategies, namely, the establishment of national reintegration policy, assistance in the pursuit of basic needs, equipment of knowledge and marketable skills meeting the current social and economic, enhancement of family, community, professional engagement with the former offender, improvement of aftercare support and services, strengthen the social-ethnic relationship, and involvement of former offender with volunteerism, advocacy, and activism. The proposed suggestions hope to set a new horizon of the current reintegration interventions implemented by related parties to develop national reintegration strategies and policies aligned with former offenders' conditions, needs, and abilities.

Keywords: Recidivism, Social Reintegration Strategies, Offenders, Prisoners

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The world prison population experienced a drastic burgeoning in 2018 with a total growth of 24% compared to the year 2000, which is almost similar to the estimated increase in the world's population for the same

Duration (Walmsley, 2018). The institute for crime and justice policy research at the University of London in world prison population reported about 11 million prisoners held in penal institutions worldwide (Walmsley, 2018). The rapidly increased population numbers have led to overcrowding in prison, where recidivism is one contributing factor (Chin & Dandurand, 2018).

Bushway (2006) stated that a total number of 93% of offenders sent to prison would reintegrate into society at some point of his or her life. Bureau of justice statistics in 2005 indicated about 67.8% of prisoners released from united states prisons rearrested within three years, and 76.6% are arrested within five years after released (durose et al., 2014). The alarming numbers raised significant concern in society, and the reintegration of former offenders is a crucial issue in the criminal justice pathway (Barquín et al., 2019). The former offender has no choice but to reintegrate and become part of society during and after serving their sentences (Astbury, 2008). However, not every former offender would succeed to reintegrate due to the dynamic challenges from the outside world (Larsen et al., 2019). Struggling to reintegrate into society and desist from crime would force the former offender to be trapped in the "evil cycle" of relapse, recidivism, and other obstacles (Morse et al., 2014; Durnescu, 2018). The recidivism rates worldwide are reported at 50% and do not decrease for the past few years (World Population Review, 2021). High recidivism rates suggest that prisons have not adequately prepared the prisoners for life after incarceration (Narayanan, 2018).

Experience and the results of pivotal studies by researchers and criminologists identified several barriers experienced by former offenders during their reintegration process. Larsen et al. 2019 found out that the current former offender's reintegration system or policy does not meet their conditions, needs and abilities. Moreover, the absence of relevant policy has disconnected former offenders from the appropriate social context and category (Bazemore and Erbe, 2003; Durnescu & Istrate, 2020). The former offenders also unable to adjust their life upon reintegration, facing the changing environment of the outside world (Chikadzi, 2017). The struggle is contributed by the rehabilitation programme undergone by prisoners focused on the internal deficits and risk needs than the broader perspective of current social and environment (Byrne et al., 2001; Narayanan, 2018). To make things worse, former offenders couldn't avoid the negative stigma and poor relationship with their family and society upon reintegration (Larsen et al., 2019).

Another primary concern about former offenders' reintegration into society is fulfilling their basic needs such as housing and employment often becomes obstacles in restarting their life plan and becoming worthy of a family (Cherney & Fitgerald, 2016; Sirois, 2019; Durnescu & Istrate, 2020). Limitation on the access to social and economic assistance has also contributed to the adversity among former offenders upon reintegration, especially in the absence of family, close kin or partner (Larsen et al., 2019). Last but not least, the former offender often confronted difficulties in adapting the life post-incarceration, mainly associated with the lack of aftercare support and services such as counselling, health assistance and drug services (Chikadzi, 2017; Durnescu, 2018). The absence of such assistance and services would increase the chances of recidivism.

Durnescu (2018) notes that the first three or four weeks after release is critical as former offenders are in their most vulnerable stage to re-offend. Incapable of addressing the barriers and challenges of reintegration among former offenders during the critical period would gradually deplete their hope, motivation and resilience from criminal associates and behaviour (Durnescu, 2018). Lack of reintegration opportunities, marginalized in the outside community, many would likely shift to fellow criminals and continue their life in the criminal world, re-offend, relapse while waiting to be rearrested. Reintegration into society is crucial in preventing re-offending among former offenders and becoming an essential portion of the criminal justice system (Chikadzi, 2017; Durnescu & Istrate, 2020).

The prevention of recidivism among former offenders begins with the reintegration plan (Clinkinbeard & Zohra, 2012). Reintegration is a process rather than regarded as an occasion or ritual for former offenders. It is a social process which mostly centred around social and environment in nature. Durnescu (2018) has conceptualized reintegration into five stages that begin with pre-release anticipation, recovery and reunion, activation, and finally, either the former prisoner manages to embrace his or her new identity law-abiding citizen in the consolidation stage or choose to re-offend or relapse. Therefore, the burden to equip the necessary preparation for the former offender in joining the society not only rely on the penitentiary institution, but the most critical role is by the society members and organizations. Chikadzi (2017) further highlighted that instead of merely blaming offenders for crime, several reintegration theories argue that society should be held responsible for creating environments that breed criminals. Social and individual change works in a give and takes relationship as the transformation required in both to succeed (Maruna & Lebel, 2009). Successful reintegration of the former offender into society is the main agenda of crime reduction, or they are likely to resort to re-offending.

Even though previous scholars have discussed the theories, models, risk, and protective factors regarding reintegration and recidivism, it is crucial to place the knowledge into implementation and socially oriented. This study offers a conceptual framework for understanding one of the most pressing social concerns and challenges of re-offending, challenges faced by a former offender after release, and potential strategies towards successfully reintegrating into mainstream society.

1.2 Methodology

In order to develop a social reintegration strategy, related papers are analyzed by connecting any identified relationship between social reintegration challenges and recidivism among former offenders. Prior to this procedure, significant and related publications were gathered from relevant online database and search engine such as Elsevier-Scopus (http://www.scopus.com/), Sage Publications (http://www.sagepub.com/), Taylor & Francis (http://www.tandfonline.com/), Cambridge University Press (http://www.cambridge.org/) and proquest (http://www.proquest.com/). Keywords, such as "reintegration strategy", "reentry strategy", "resettlement strategy", "offenders" and "prisoners" were applied in the search string. As a result, a sum of 257 articles then identified and reduced to 49 articles following the selection

In the second stage. About 35% of the chosen articles discussed the reintegration strategy and challenges faced by former offenders, while the remainder were generally related to social reintegration and recidivism. The articles centred around social issues faced by former offenders, challenges, and intervention strategies, whereas a few articles discussed and focused on rehabilitation. The final nine articles became the most important and fundamental guidance in constructing the social reintegration strategy, as the other remains sources assisting in supporting the argument and information for this conceptual explanation paper. Based on the established relationships and findings of the articles, seven social reintegration strategies and approaches suit the former offender's conditions, needs, and abilities.

Given the strong association between reintegration challenges and recidivism among former offenders, this article concentrates on economic, social, psychological challenges experienced among former offenders that may lead to recidivism and the context of the study – that is, former offender, society and government. Seven social reintegration strategies are then recommended; namely introducing or strengthening of national reintegration policy and legislation, equipment of knowledge and marketable skills that meet the current economics, assistance in the pursuit of basic needs, enhancing of family, community, professional engagement with the former offender, improvement of aftercare support and services, strengthening of social relationship, and involvement of former offender with volunteerism, advocacy and activism related to reintegration. The suggested strategies are presumed to be the most suitable approach applicable to the former offender's needs, abilities and conditions.

Table 1

List Of Articles Chosen To Develop The Suggested Reintegration Strategy

Title	Authors	Suggested Reintegration Strategies
Former Prisoners Between Non-Category And Invisibility: The Romanian Experience	Durnescu And Istrate (2020)	a formal classification of the former offender into national policy, especially social welfare and support system to meet their needs due to illness, disability, poverty, drug or alcohol dependence, employment or other situations that may result in an economic and social vulnerability
The Formerly Incarcerated, Advocacy, Activism, And Community Reintegration	Smith (2020)	extend a broader and various opportunity for community and political engagement, especially in the work of advocacy/ activism among former offender, as an alternative measure in transforming the

		way to address transgression and harm in society
A Conceptual Model On Reintegration After Prison In Norway	Larsen, Hean, And Ødegård (2019)	increased an effective interaction between former offender with the welfare system to meet their needs such as housing, employment, economic support and treatment upon reintegration into the society
Household Support And Social Integration In The Year After Prison	Sirois (2019)	implementation of holistic reentry policy that focuses on assisting a former offender on residential stability with the supportive social environment; providing tax credit granted to employers who hire an employee with criminal records; providing a tax credit to those who house their kin after prison to improve the success of reintegration
Rehabilitation, Reintegration And Recidivism: A Theoretical And Methodological Reflection	Narayanan (2018)	implementation of reintegration strategy to improve coordination of in-care and aftercare support and services to the former offender and their family in the areas of employment training and opportunities, accommodation, education, soft skills, substance abuse services and financial assistance; application of holistic intervention where strength-based approach together with psychological/ cognitive as an avenue to a new identity, better social status and meaning.
The Five-Stage Of Prisoner Reentry: Towards A Process Theory	Durnescu (2018)	increase the engagement of former offender with their family, community, employment

		interventionsandaftercare support as early as pre-release stage; allocation of release grant especially for an offender with small social capital.
Challenges Facing Offenders When Reintegrating Into Mainstream Society In Gauteng, South Africa	Chikadzi (2017)	equip the offender with mental and self-confidence in facing and adjusting to the change of environment outside prison; expunction of the criminal record for the former offender that committed a minor crime; education to family and community on the importance of accepting former offender; professionals, families and communities to support former-offenders in access to basic necessities; advocate former offender the access to employment opportunities; increase the aftercare support and services to the former offender.
Race, Reintegration, And Social Capital In Singapore	Narayanan And Kwen Fee (2016)	empowerment of the ethnic communities through funding, education and economic resources towards rehabilitation and reintegration efforts; improvement from bonding to bridging the social capital.
Efforts By Offenders To Manage And Overcome Stigma: The Case Of Employment	Cherney And Fitgerald (2016)	family and friends certifying to community members that the former offender has changed with more appealing identity, noncriminal, committed to work, and help them to improve their skills and competency; community release planning to establish a strong

and positive social tie of the former offender with family and friends; former offender to overcome and manage negative stigma.

2. Challenges Face By Former Offender Upon Reintegration Into Mainstream Society

2.1 Exclusion Of Former Offender As A Vulnerable Category In A National Policy

Former offenders are non-category and invisible, at least in the national policy and welfare system, as they are considered not having risk and difficulties fulfilling their daily needs (Durnescu & Istrate, 2020). Once institutionalized, then underwent prisonization and released with criminalized stigmas and invisible by the society, the former offender would face a daunting and challenging surrounding upon reintegration into the community (Clark, 2012; Gålnander, 2020). Durnescu and istrate (2020) argue that the former offender's struggle and difficulties as trying to familiarise with the red tape of the welfare system called for assistance. However, since they are not a vulnerable group of the society, the distribution of benefits, grant or any aid by the government, financial institutions or organizations would be less priority allocated to the former offenders. Bazemore and Erbe (2003) emphasized the theoretical deficits of current policy and practice of former offender reintegration that:

> (A) Places the returning offender in the context of neighbourhood organizations, local socializing institutions, and individual citizens and (b) articulates a role for these community entities in the reintegration process. (Bazemore & Erbe, p. 247)

In a worst-case scenario, as consequences of the unregulated reintegration process, research among former offenders in Romania by Durnescu and Istrate (2020) revealed that former offenders experienced in-work poverty as they are underpaid and employed without official documentation.

2.2 Low Self-Esteem And Inferiority Complex Towards The Changing Environment

Former offender served their long period in prison and released into immense different surroundings after incarceration. According to Chikadzi (2017), the return of former offenders into society is accompanied by inferiority adjusting to the changing environment outside the prison, which led to an extreme barrier towards becoming law-abiding citizens. Institutionalization has impacted how former offenders view the world as time shaped their mindset and attitude according to the prison's regulations, culture, and routine (Arrigo & Takahashi, 2007). Most of the rehabilitation process during incarceration focuses on the prisoners' internal or psychological state (Narayanan, 2018). Even though addressing the internal deficits of a former offender is necessary, the broader dimensions of the current social environment, economy, culture, race, ethnicity, gender and the interactive effects of these factors are often neglected (Andrew et

al., 2006; Narayanan, 2018). We could not deny the rapid change, dynamic, and fast-paced environment and would be hard for the former offender to deal with.

2.3 Poor Relationship And Support From Family And Society

The study by Chikadzi (2017) identified one of the most significant challenges experienced by a former offender in south africa was to restart a broken relationship with family and community after release. Negative stigma and criminally associated had caused their family and community members to reject and ostracize them, which created a difficult situation to reintegrate. When abandoned, former offenders tend to contact or seek assistance from their fellow criminals or "old friends", risking re-offending (Chikadzi, 2017). Poor relationships with families and society have been shown to contribute to the struggles faced by former offenders upon their release and the failure of their rehabilitation and reintegration processes (Larsen et al., 2019).

2.4 Difficulties In Fulfilling Necessities

Chikadzi (2017) stated that former offenders would face difficulties fulfilling necessities such as accommodation, money, food, and wear with the lack of family support. Housing insecurities and unemployment are some of the primary challenges in successfully reintegrating former offenders into society (Chui & Cheng, 2013; Chikadzi, 2017; Durnescu & Istrate, 2020). In a study by Larsen et al. (2019), former offender in norway reported that being homeless indirectly lead to crime or substance abuse as they are easily lured to the criminal surrounding. The scenario is supported by Herbert et al. (2015), as living on the streets among former offenders is the risk factor of recidivism. The presence of the "old friends" offering their assistance in getting necessities attracted the former offender that usually led to illegal activities and re-offending (Durnescu, 2018).

2.5 Limited Access To Economic Assistance

Challenges reintegrating into the society is also associated with the inability of welfare, social and economy support system to meet the needs and conditions of the former offender (Larsen et al., 2019). Durnescu (2018) further stated that in the absence of family, kinship, or partner, where the former offender is a "lone crusader," the situation would worsen. Durnescu (2021) revealed the findings of a study involving 58 former offenders in romania that to become economically active after release is their main priority. Instead of depending on employment, the former offender needs to seek a more expansive and dynamic option to earn a living in commerce, retail, recycling, and agriculture (Fiedler & Mann 2012; Dunescu & Istrate, 2020). However, without assistance in guidance, finance, and facilities, former offenders will be lost in the new economic landscape.

2.6 Lack Of Access To Aftercare Support And Services

Chikadzi (2017) highlighted the limited or no aftercare support systems provided to the former offender is a daunting challenge in reintegrating into society. Prior to their release, former offender received various care from health assistance, drug rehab programme, counselling and, to some extent, financial incentives. However, when released from prison, there is little or no support regarding aftercare service offered to the former offender (Chikadzi, 2017). Furthermore, Chikadzi (2017) also stressed the importance of evaluating the in-prison rehabilitation and understanding the needs and experiences of former offenders after release. Durnescu and Istrate (2020) found the primary constraint that led to the lack of aftercare support and services for the former offender is limited resources are allocated by the responsible organization.

3. Discussion

Due to former offenders' profound social and economic challenges during their reintegration into society, it is critical to structure and organize an effective reintegration strategy to prevent the situations from worsening. Even though scholars have argued and discussed various theories and factors of desistance and reintegration, this paper organized the suggested application of theories and models in what seems to be the stages of the reintegration strategy.

3.1 Establishment Or Strengthening Of National Reintegration Policy And Legislation

Social theorist believed that classifications play a critical role in managing the world, arranging and making it intelligible (Durnescu & Istrate, 2020). The design of the world is filled with classifications and categories such as male and female, citizens and foreigners, social and economics, prisoner and guard. As far as the criminal justice system is concerned, the former offenders are paid little attention to the national policy and legislation related to society (Durnescu & Istrate, 2020). If classifications and categories such as elderly, women, disable, and children are given special consideration in drafting the national policy or legislation, former prisoners are nonetheless become part of the category (Durnescu & Istrate, 2020). Bird and Grattet (2016) also highlighted the lack of substantial attention is given to how the legal and policy would reform recidivism outcome and reduce the prison's population. The south african criminal justice system took initiatives to improve rehabilitation and reintegration at a policy level where multi-stakeholders become the backbone of reintegration interventions (Chikadzi, 2017). The establishment of a firm, comprehensive, holistic policy or legislation would positively reinstate the former offenders into their social surrounding community institution and ultimately become law-abiding citizens (Bird & Grattet, 2017). Besides articulating the role of community, organization and non-government organizations, such policy and legislation with benefits such as tax credit or deductions would attract extensive coverage of assistance by professionals, private and financial institutions on various reintegration intervention.

3.2 Equipment Of Knowledge And Marketable Skills That Meet The Current Social And Economic Landscape

To promote former offender into the employment sectors and worth investing in, they need to improve their skills and competency (Cherney & Fitgerald, 2016). Correctional institutions, private companies, and professionals should cooperate to transfer such relevant skills and knowledge to former offenders during

And after incarceration. The strengths-based approach could be considered alongside psychological/cognitive interventions to maximize the potentials of the former offender (Narayanan, 2018). Besides upskilling the former offender during incarceration, reintegration intervention should also consider the needs to re-skilling the former offender to meet the rapid change of the current social environment and the need for a new economy. A paradigm shift from job acquires, and employment to entrepreneurship instils in the former offender's mindset before their release. A qualitative study by Fiedler and Mann (2012) shows that entrepreneurship offers vast opportunities and sustainable solutions in earning to live among the former offender coping with numerous challenge and problems in the outside world.

3.3 Assistance In The Pursue Of Basic Needs

Supportive households, stable and well-resourced, could help men and women develop community bonds as citizens, peers, and workers after incarceration (Sirois, 2019; Schartmueller, 2020). With housing, transportation, education, health care, and employment (or some more miniature mix of at least some of these), former offenders have the necessary foundation to pursue reform activities and change (smith, 2020; garland et al., 2017). The crucial immediate access to a supportive household is to provide better opportunities and freedom for former offenders to pursue economic and social support (Sirois, 2019; Gxubane, 2006). With cooperation and engagement between the government, a private company, employer, and community organizations, initiatives such as halfway house, transit residence and employment could be expanded and improved to achieve better reintegration among former offender (Loosemore et al., 2020; Goodstein & Petrich, 2019).

3.4 Enhancement Of Family, Community, Professional Engagement With The Former Offender

It is critical that professionals, families and communities get to support ex-offenders in their quest to find their footing and avoid going back to a life of crime (Chikadzi, 2017; Hart, 2017; Larsen et al., 2019). Family support is required upon reintegration and crucial during incarceration (Durnescu & Istrate, 2020). Community release planning needs to ensure that the released offenders maintain their social ties with family and friends, where these relationships are positive because a failure to do so means they potentially lose a significant resource that can facilitate job attainment or become economically active (Fox, 2015; Cherney & Fitgerald, 2016)

3.5 Improvement Of Aftercare Support And Services

The aftercare support and services assist the former offender in reintegrating into society and evaluate the success of rehabilitation implemented during imprisonment. Chikadzi (2017) stated that aftercare support and services are paramount to smooth reintegration in south africa. Limited mobility in the first two weeks means that recovery services (e.g., counselling, health assistance, drug services, etc.) Should be organized as close as possible to the neighbourhoods where the ex-prisoners tend to return (Durnescu, 2018).

3.6 Strengthening Of Social-Ethnic Relationship

Narayanan and kwen fee (2016) found a significant racial and ethnic difference in reintegration outcome based on a qualitative study of 61 samples in Singapore. They further elaborated that only people of similar ethnicity can best understand and respond to specific and peculiar problems to their respective ethnic communities (Narayanan & Kwen Fee, 2016). This finding is supported by Durnescu (2018) in his research as former offenders in romania show significant differences in how ethnic groups experience reintegration and desistance from a criminal. He also stated how indians and bangladeshis benefited from their family's financial and social support to encourage change and reform for their members compared to the romanian society's exclusionary attitude toward crime and offenders (Durnescu, 2018). Therefore, it is imperative to consider necessary fund and support to racial or ethnic related associations and organizations as an effective strategy assisting the reintegration of the former offender into society.

3.7 Involvement Of Former Offender With Volunteerism, Advocacy And Activism Concerning Reintegration

Volunteering rather than a judicially ordered service allows a former offender to capitalize upon their talents through empowering their agency. Furthermore, the engagement of former offenders with volunteers from community members has proven to strengthen their purpose to be desistance from crime (Gillbert & Elley, 2015). People change with or for others; change is not merely an individual accomplishment but a group process (Smith, 2020). According to Smith (2020), research involving nine former offenders in michigan, united states, shows how opening more opportunities to the former offenders in the community and political engagement produce a positive outcome as an alternative in transforming the way society addresses crime. With the systematic and regulated mechanism, this strategy could achieve the objective not only among the former offenders but also in society.

4. Conclusion

Several studies have been published examining the reintegration challenges experienced by former offenders upon reintegration into society. These challenges are likely to deteriorate further with the current situation and uncertainty of the world. They have been identified as affecting rehabilitation and reintegration among former offenders, leading to recidivism, increasing population, and overcrowding in prison institutions. Therefore, an effective social reintegration strategy must be formulated explicitly emphasized on the seven propositions: (1) establishment of national reintegration policy, (2) assistance in the pursuit of basic needs, (3) equipment of knowledge and marketable skills meeting the current social and economic, (4) enhancement of family, community, professional engagement with the former offender,

(5) Improvement of aftercare support and services, (6) strengthen the social-ethnic relationship, and (7) involvement of former offender with volunteerism, advocacy, and activism. These social reintegration strategies can be the fundamental elements for policymakers, penitentiary institutions, and related parties to introduce effective national reintegration strategies that meet the former offender's conditions, needs, and abilities.

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