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EFFECTIVENESS OF PAROLE SERVICES IN SUPPORTING EX-OFFENDERS' REINTEGRATION INTO NIGERIA COMMUNITIES

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Abstract
This study investigated the effectiveness of parole services in supporting ex-offenders' reintegration into Nigerian communities. The study adopted the descriptive survey method. Three (3) objectives guided the study while three (3) research questions were raised for the study. The study adopted the sample random sampling technique to select 50 ex-offenders currently on parole, 50 parole officers from Correctional Service Owerri and 70 community leaders from selected communities in Imo State totaling 170 respondents. A 30 item questionnaire titled **"**Effectiveness of Parole Services in Supporting Ex-Offenders' Reintegration into Nigeria Communities (QEPSERNC) was used to elicit relevant information from the respondents. The instrument was validated by experts in the field of Adult Education and a reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained using a test retest method from a group of 10 respondents outside the sample size. The response was based on a 4 point Likert scale and was patterned using Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD). The research questions were answered using mean. The following findings were made, that: parole services provide adequate support for ex-offenders' reintegration, parole officers are effective in facilitating ex-offenders' reintegration and parole services address the specific needs of ex-offenders were inadequately provided by parole services for ex offenders; that parole services are inadequate across multiple dimensions; that inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, and lack of trained personnel are the major challenges facing parole services in Nigeria, that facilitating access to employment and education for ex-offenders, increasing funding for parole services and strengthening family support systems were some of the ways to improve parole system. Based on the findings recommendations were made and conclusions drawn.

Keywords: Effectiveness, Parole Services, Ex-Offenders, Reintegration, Communities.

Introduction

The process of helping former prisoners return to their communities is a significant challenge in Nigeria, mirroring similar struggles faced by other nations worldwide. In 2020, Nigeria's correctional system was responsible for over 73,000 individuals who served different prison terms. Mbara, Ewelum and Madu (2015) posited that the Nigerian Prison Service, empowered by national legislation, is tasked with a critical mission: to receive and detain legally committed individuals while simultaneously developing rehabilitation and training programs. The ultimate goal of these efforts is to prepare inmates for successful reintegration, enabling them to become law-abiding citizens upon their return to society.

The core idea suggests that once offenders are properly rehabilitated, they should not present security risks to society, which is crucial for progress across economic, social and political domains. Rehabilitation specifically focuses on using effective methods to help convicted people become contributing citizens after serving their sentences. Prison reform encompasses initiatives aimed at improving conditions within prisons, creating better penal systems, or finding alternatives to imprisonment. These facilities face criticism for several systemic problems, including overcrowding, poor living conditions, and inadequate rehabilitation programs that don't meet inmates' needs. These institutional shortcomings have serious consequences when inmates complete their sentences. After release, many former prisoners struggle significantly with community reintegration. This difficult transition often leads to two connected problems: high rates of reoffending and broader community instability.

To throw light on the mechanics of this cyclical pattern: When rehabilitation initiatives prove insufficient, individuals depart from correctional facilities lacking the necessary competencies, assistance networks, or fundamental resources required for successful community reintegration. This initiates a sequential chain of consequences - without adequate preparation for post-incarceration existence, former offenders frequently encounter significant obstacles securing employment opportunities, reconstructing interpersonal relationships, or accessing essential services. These formidable challenges may compel some individuals to revert to illicit activities, thereby sustaining a repetitive cycle that adversely affects not merely the individuals themselves, but extends to their familial units, residential areas, and the comprehensive social infrastructure of Nigerian communities. The effectiveness of parole services in supporting ex-offenders' reintegration into Nigerian communities is a critical issue that has garnered significant attention in

recent years. Researches from Mensah (2021) and Ndlovu (2020) revealed that parole services can play a vital role in reducing the recurrence of criminal behaviour after release from prison or completion of a sentence. Mbara and Ewelum (2016) also found that parole services, combined with probation and community-based corrections, can effectively manage and rehabilitate offenders while reducing the burden on correctional facilities.

Research by Opara (2008) underscores the transformative potential of parole services in supporting ex-offenders' successful return to society. A 2017 study of the Nigerian Prison Service in Ilesha, Osun State, demonstrated that after-care services significantly influence both inmate reintegration and their subsequent employment opportunities. However, the implementation of these services is fraught with substantial challenges. Critical obstacles include chronic underfunding, insufficient institutional infrastructure, and a shortage of professionally trained personnel. The rehabilitation and reintegration of former inmates represent a complex societal challenge, with recidivism rates presenting ongoing concerns. Recognizing these critical issues, the Nigerian government established the National Council for the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NCRO) in 1974. This pivotal organization was designed to provide structured parole services, offering comprehensive support to formerly incarcerated individuals as they navigate the challenging process of social reintegration and personal reconstruction. The NCRO's foundational mission focuses on creating structured pathways that enable ex-offenders to successfully reestablish themselves as productive members of society, addressing the multifaceted challenges of post-incarceration life.

Opara (2008) critically observed a paradoxical dynamic within correctional institutions: the very systems designed to rehabilitate offenders may inadvertently reinforce deviant behaviors. The critique of punitive imprisonment centers on its fundamental incompatibility with genuine offender reformation, challenging the traditional approaches to criminal justice. Braggins and Talbot (2007) advocated for a transformative approach, arguing that prisoners should emerge from incarceration in a markedly improved state compared to their entry. This perspective aligns with a progressive ideology embedded in modern prison service philosophies, emphasizing personal growth and rehabilitation over mere punishment.

The National Council for the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NCRO) addresses these challenges through a comprehensive parole services framework. Central to their approach is an

intensive counseling and mentorship program. Highly trained professionals engage directly with former prisoners, providing personalized support that addresses critical psychological and emotional challenges. These interventions focus on healing past traumas, developing robust coping mechanisms, and equipping individuals with strategic skills for making positive life choices, ultimately facilitating a meaningful and sustainable reintegration into society. The vocational aspect of their services focuses on economic reintegration. Understanding that stable employment significantly reduces the likelihood of repeating a similar offence, the NCRO provides comprehensive job training programs. The programs teach both practical skills and soft skills like workplace communication and professional conduct. Following training, the organization actively assists in job placement, working with employers who are willing to provide opportunities to individuals with criminal records. Housing stability forms another crucial pillar of the NCRO's support system. The organization helps former prisoners to secure safe and affordable housing, recognizing that stable accommodation provides the foundation for successful reintegration. This might involve working with landlords, providing temporary housing assistance, or connecting individuals with housing programs. Opara (2008) highlighted significant challenges confronting Nigeria's parole system, including critical issues such as insufficient financial resources, infrastructural limitations, pervasive social stigma, and inadequate professional training and capacity development. The National Council for the Rehabilitation of Offenders (NCRO) attempts to address these challenges through a comprehensive reintegration strategy. Their approach emphasizes rebuilding fractured family relationships, mediating community interactions, and establishing supportive social networks for former prisoners. This holistic intervention aims to mitigate the isolation that frequently contributes to recidivism.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of parole services remains questionable. Statistics from the Nigerian Correctional Services reveal a deeply concerning trend: over 50% of ex-offenders reoffend within their first year of release, as reported in 2020. This high recidivism rate suggests that current rehabilitation mechanisms are fundamentally inadequate in providing the necessary support for successful community reintegration. Recognizing these systemic challenges, this study seeks to critically examine the effectiveness of parole services in supporting ex-offenders' transition back into Nigerian communities, with the ultimate goal of understanding and improving rehabilitation strategies.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it will provide insights into the effectiveness of parole services in Nigeria, highlighting areas of strength and weakness. The findings of this study will be useful for policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders seeking to improve the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-offenders in Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do parole services in Nigeria support the reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities?
2. What are the major challenges facing parole services in Nigeria in supporting ex-offenders' reintegration?
3. How can parole services in Nigeria be improved to enhance the reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities?

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey method that examined the effectiveness of parole services in supporting ex-offenders' reintegration into Nigerian communities. Three (3) objectives and three (3) research questions were used to guide the study. The study also utilized a random sampling technique to select 50 serving offenders currently on parole; 50 warders from Correctional Services Imo State Command and 70 community leaders totaling 170 respondents. A researcher made questionnaire of 30 items titled "Effectiveness of Parole Services in Supporting Ex-Offenders' Reintegration into Nigeria Communities Questionnaire (EPSSERNCQ) was used to elicit relevant information from the 170 respondents. The questionnaire was validated by experts in the field of adult education. The reliability coefficient of 0.87 was obtained using a test retest method from respondents gotten outside the sample group. The questionnaire was administered on the respondents by the help of 2 research assistants. Efforts were made to collect completed questionnaire on the spot which ensured a high return rate of completed copies. The questionnaire was based on a 4-point Likert scale with a response pattern of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly disagree (SD). Data collected for the study was analyzed using mean.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: To what extent do parole services in Nigeria support the reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities?

Table 1: **Showing extent parole services in Nigeria support the reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities**

SN	Support	Mean
1	Parole services provide adequate support for ex-offenders' reintegration.	2.8
2	Parole officers are effective in facilitating ex-offenders' reintegration.	2.5
3	Parole services address the specific needs of ex-offenders.	2.2
4	Parole services facilitate ex-offenders' access to employment and education.	2.1
5	Parole services provide adequate counseling and mentoring for ex-offenders.	2.0
6	Parole services facilitate ex-offenders' reconnection with their families and communities. |	2.3
7	Parole services provide adequate support for ex-offenders' mental health and well-being.	2.2
8	Parole services facilitate ex-offenders' access to healthcare and social services.	2.1
9	Parole services provide adequate support for ex-offenders' vocational training and development.	2.0
10	Parole services facilitate ex-offenders' successful reintegration into their communities.	2.3

The mean scores for each item indicate a moderate level of support for parole services in Nigeria. However, items 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 9 have mean scores below 2.3, indicating areas for improvement. This data provides valuable insights into the perceived effectiveness of parole services in Nigeria, measured on a 4-point Likert scale (where 2.5 would be the midpoint). The results reveal stakeholders' assessments of how well the current system supports ex-offender reintegration across various dimensions. The data paints a concerning picture of Nigeria's parole services, with most items rated below the midpoint of 2.5, suggesting that stakeholders generally perceive these services as inadequate across multiple dimensions.

Research Question 2: What are the major challenges facing parole services in Nigeria in supporting ex-offenders' reintegration?

Table 2: Showing Challenges facing parole services in Nigeria in supporting ex-offenders' Reintegration

SN	**Challenges**	Mean
1	Inadequate funding is a major challenge facing parole services in Nigeria.	3.2
2	Insufficient infrastructure is a major challenge facing parole services in Nigeria.	3.1
3	Lack of trained personnel is a major challenge facing parole services in Nigeria.	3.0
4	Stigma and discrimination against ex-offenders is a major challenge facing parole services in Nigeria.	2.9
5	Inadequate community support is a major challenge facing parole services in Nigeria.	2.8
6	Limited access to employment and education is a major challenge facing parole services in Nigeria. |	2.7
7	Inadequate counseling and mentoring services are a major challenge facing parole services in Nigeria.	2.6
8	Limited access to healthcare and social services is a major challenge facing parole services in Nigeria.	2.5
9	Inadequate support for ex-offenders' mental health and well-being is a major challenge facing parole services in Nigeria.	2.4
10	Corruption and bureaucratic red tape are major challenges facing parole services in Nigeria.	2.3

The mean scores for each item indicate that inadequate funding, insufficient infrastructure, and lack of trained personnel are the major challenges facing parole services in Nigeria. This data presents important insights into the perceived challenges facing parole services in Nigeria, measured on a 4-point Likert scale. The results reveal a hierarchy of challenges that stakeholders believe are affecting the parole system's effectiveness. Inadequate Funding (3.2), Insufficient Infrastructure (3.1), Lack of Trained Personnel (3.0) , Stigma and Discrimination (2.9), Inadequate Community Support (2.8) , Limited Access to Employment and Education (2.7) , Inadequate Counseling and Mentoring (2.6), Limited Access to Healthcare and Social Services (2.5), Inadequate Mental Health Support (2.4), Corruption and Bureaucratic Red Tape (2.3)

Research Question 3: How can parole services in Nigeria be improved to enhance the reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities?

Table 3: Showing how parole services in Nigeria can improve the reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities?

SN	Ways for improvement	Mean
1	Increasing funding for parole services would improve their effectiveness.	3.3
2	Providing additional training for parole officers would improve their effectiveness.	3.2
3	Providing more counseling and mentoring services for ex-offenders would enhance their reintegration.	2.9
4	Improving infrastructure and facilities for parole services would enhance their effectiveness.	3.1
5	Increasing community involvement and support for parole services would enhance their effectiveness.	3.0
6	Facilitating access to employment and education for ex-offenders would improve their reintegration outcomes.	3.4
7	Implementing technology-based monitoring systems would improve the effectiveness of parole supervision.	2.8
8	Developing culturally appropriate rehabilitation programs would enhance reintegration of ex-offenders.	3.2
9	Strengthening family support systems for ex-offenders would improve their reintegration outcomes.	3.3
10	Establishing formal partnerships between parole services and private sector employers would enhance reintegration.	3.0

The analysis on Table 3 revealed that the highest-rated improvement factor is "Facilitating access to employment and education for ex-offenders" (3.4), suggesting stakeholders strongly believe economic opportunities are crucial for successful reintegration. "Increasing funding for parole services" and "Strengthening family support systems" tied for second-highest (3.3), highlighting the importance of both institutional resources and social support networks."Technology-based monitoring systems" received the lowest rating (mean 2.8), possibly indicating skepticism about technological solutions in the Nigerian context or concerns about their implementation.

Discussion of Findings

The research uncovered that parole services in Nigeria offer a moderate level of support for ex-offenders' reintegration, revealing critical insights into potential reforms. The study highlighted several key strategies for enhancing rehabilitation efforts, with particular emphasis on

addressing ex-offenders' specific needs, facilitating employment and educational opportunities, and providing comprehensive counseling and mentoring services. Aligning with global challenges, Nigeria struggles to effectively reintegrate former prisoners into society. The research corroborated findings by Adeola (2019), demonstrating the transformative power of employment and education. Notably, ex-offenders who secured stable employment within six months of release experienced a remarkable 62% reduction in recidivism compared to those facing prolonged unemployment. Furthermore, Adebayo's 2023 observations underscored the importance of consistent psychological support. Ex-offenders receiving regular counseling demonstrated significantly improved mental health and stronger community integration, highlighting the critical role of comprehensive rehabilitation services. These findings underscore the complex nature of prisoner reintegration and the multifaceted approach required to support successful social rehabilitation and reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

The study's findings align closely with the Nigeria Corrections Service Research from 2022, which critically highlighted systemic deficiencies in employment and educational support for ex-offenders. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Report further validates these observations, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions that prioritize vocational training, mental health support, and comprehensive community reintegration programs. Physical infrastructure emerges as a crucial element in the rehabilitation process, serving both practical and symbolic functions. According to Johnson and Osaghae (2022), rehabilitation facilities are more than mere physical spaces—they represent a society's commitment to restoration rather than punitive measures. Nwafor's 2023 research provided a sobering assessment of parole service facilities across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. The study revealed a significant infrastructure crisis, with 67% of facilities failing to meet fundamental standards. These shortcomings encompassed critical areas such as private counseling spaces, technological resources, physical accessibility, and essential safety requirements. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in Nigeria's correctional and rehabilitation infrastructure, highlighting the complex challenges in creating effective support systems for ex-offenders.

The African Criminology Association Study (2023) provides a comprehensive overview of the substantial obstacles confronting ex-offenders in Nigeria. The research identifies critical reintegration challenges, including restricted economic opportunities, pervasive social stigmatization, and inadequate support infrastructure. Mensah (2021) articulated the fundamental challenges plaguing Nigeria's parole services, highlighting three primary areas of concern:

insufficient funding, limited infrastructure, and a pronounced shortage of trained personnel. Beyond these systemic issues, ex-offenders encounter additional significant barriers, such as persistent social stigma, minimal community support, and constrained access to employment and educational opportunities. The analytical landscape reveals a complex web of interconnected challenges. Funding and infrastructural limitations emerge as the most pressing concerns, underscoring the need for a nuanced, multi-dimensional approach to rehabilitation. Onyinyechi (2021) emphasized the pivotal role of parole services, characterizing them as a critical bridging mechanism between incarceration and full societal reintegration. Complementing this perspective, Obioha's 2020 research illuminated the multifaceted nature of ex-offenders' challenges. The study revealed that experiences of stigmatization, family rejection, and social marginalization are deeply contextual, varying significantly based on factors such as offense type, sentence duration, age, and other demographic characteristics. These insights collectively highlight the intricate and personalized nature of rehabilitation, demanding sophisticated, tailored approaches to support ex-offenders' successful reintegration.

The research findings align with Ndlovu's (2020) assessment, revealing a critical perspective on Nigeria's rehabilitation system. The study highlights a clear prioritization of structural and resource-based challenges encompassing funding, infrastructure, and personnel training over service-delivery aspects like counseling, healthcare, and mental health support. This prioritization suggests that key stakeholders perceive foundational resource constraints as the most urgent concern for system improvement. The analysis unveils a nuanced hierarchy of challenges, with institutional factors dominating the priority list, while social reintegration elements occupy an intermediate position. This ranking underscores the complex dual nature of effective parole services, which must simultaneously address both institutional capacity and social acceptance. The relatively subdued consideration of corruption is particularly intriguing. This could indicate that respondents view systemic capacity issues as more critical than potential integrity concerns, or perhaps reflect a reluctance to openly discuss corruption-related challenges. These insights provide a robust, data-driven framework for potential policy reforms. The research offers a comprehensive roadmap for strengthening Nigeria's parole system, with a strategic focus on enhancing institutional capabilities while simultaneously addressing the social dimensions of ex-offender reintegration.

To improve parole services in Nigeria, increasing funding, providing additional training for parole officers, and improving infrastructure and facilities are essential. Furthermore,

increasing community involvement and support, providing more counseling and mentoring services, and facilitating access to employment and education can enhance the effectiveness of parole services. The findings agreed with The Global Rehabilitation Standards Report (2022) that identified professional training as a critical component of effective parole services. According to (GRSR) training components should include: Psychological counseling techniques, cultural sensitivity training, modern rehabilitation strategies and conflict resolution skills. Also Journal of African Criminology (2024) demonstrates that improved facilities significantly impact: Rehabilitation success rates, psychological well-being of ex-offenders and reduction in recidivism.

Recommendations

1. Increase funding: Allocate more resources to parole services to address the specific needs of ex-offenders. Prioritize funding increases and target budget allocations specifically for parole services
2. Provide additional training: Offer regular training and capacity-building programs for parole officers to enhance their effectiveness.
3. Improve infrastructure and facilities: Upgrade the physical infrastructure and facilities of parole services to provide a conducive environment for ex-offenders' reintegration. At same time create a phased approach to address facility and equipment needs.
4. Increase community involvement and support: Foster partnerships with community organizations and stakeholders to provide support and resources for ex-offenders. Also address stigma and discrimination through public education.
5. Provide more counseling and mentoring services: Offer counseling and mentoring services to address the specific needs of ex-offenders and facilitate their reintegration.
6. Public-Private Partnerships: Develop collaborations to enhance employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

Implications of the Findings

The results have implications for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders involved in the provision of parole services in Nigeria. The findings suggest that: Parole services are effective Parole services in Nigeria as they provide support for ex-offenders' reintegration. The study identified some specific areas for improvement such as facilitating access to employment, providing counseling and mentoring services. The study also identified some targeted

interventions by suggesting that policymakers and practitioners should develop targeted interventions to address the areas identified for improvement.

Conclusion

The study revealed that ex-offenders are often released from prison without adequate preparation, support, or resources to facilitate their reintegration into society. That parole services in Nigeria may not provide sufficient counseling and mentoring to address the complex needs of ex-offenders, including substance abuse, mental health issues, and vocational training. Ex-offenders often face significant challenges in accessing basic necessities like housing, employment, and healthcare, which can exacerbate the risk of recidivism. Finally, the study concluded that parole services in Nigeria provide support for ex-offenders' reintegration though specific areas require improvement to enhance the effectiveness of parole services. The findings also have implications for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders involved in the provision of parole services in Nigeria.

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