Forensic Social Workers' Reintegration of Ex-Convicts for Reducing Recidivism in Ibadan Metropolis Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

In Nigeria, the challenge of reintegrating ex-convicts back into society is ongoing, particularly where post-release support is fragmented and institutional resources are limited. This study examined the nature and extent of reintegration interventions made available to ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria and identified institutional and policy factors that hinder or promote their delivery. Qualitative research design based on interpretivist orientation was utilized in the study. Data was obtained through interviews with 20 selected participants, comprising 10 ex-convicts, five welfare professionals, and five key informants. Furthermore, a multidisciplinary focus group discussion was held with five experts in the respective fields. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyze interview data and focus group data thematically. The findings suggest that reintegration support in the study area is largely fragmented and informal, with counseling being reported as an intervention. Psychosocial support, however, was often not accompanied by assistance such as accommodation, employment opportunities, food support and sustained follow-up. The study also found that there were few structured post-release programs, gaps between policy and practice, inadequate funding and staffing and challenges around professional identity and specialization in forensic social work. Non-governmental and faith-based organizations participated in reintegration efforts, but funding and continuity problems affected their services. The study concludes that effective reintegration requires coordinated, resourced and sustained interventions combining psychosocial care with practical support. It calls for stronger institutional collaboration, better professional training and clearer role recognition and stable funding for post-release services. The study examined reintegration practices, but did not measure recidivism.

Keywords: Ex-convicts, reintegration, forensic social work, post-release support, institutional challenges, Ibadan Metropolis.

INTRODUCTION

Re-integration of released individuals from correctional facilities to the society is a significant problem for criminal justice systems. For many formerly incarcerated people, release does not automatically mean successful adjustment to community life. Instead, they may experience unemployment, housing problems, social stigma, rejection by family and limited access to support services. These issues raise important questions about the sufficiency of rehabilitation programs, the extent of post-release support, and the ability of communities and institutions to support successful reintegration. In addition to concerns for public safety, reintegration difficulties can lead to social exclusion and economic vulnerability, and place additional stress on correctional facilities. Thus, addressing these issues requires more than incarceration and eventual release. It requires sustained attention to the social conditions, institutional arrangements and professional interventions that affect the transition from correctional facilities to community life. Reintegration of ex-convicts is an

important part of the criminal justice process, as individuals leaving correctional facilities must reestablish social relationships and secure the resources necessary for independent living. They may have difficulties in finding jobs and housing, reuniting with family, overcoming social stigma, and being accepted back into their communities. Reintegration should therefore be seen as a continuous process, which requires adequate preparation, continuous support and collaboration among relevant stakeholders. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) stresses the importance of interventions that equip offenders for release and reintegration into the community. Similarly, Mathlin et al. (2024) point out employment, housing, social relationships and institutional support as important factors in the reintegration process. Taken together these perspectives imply that successful reintegration requires coordinated interventions that target the individual needs of formerly incarcerated persons, as well as the social conditions they encounter upon release.

Forensic social work offers a vital professional perspective for addressing the welfare and social needs of those involved in the criminal justice system. It applies social work knowledge, skills, values and ethical principles in legal and correctional settings. Its practice areas may include needs assessment, counseling, access to welfare services, family support, referral coordination and advocacy for the rights and social inclusion of persons involved with the justice system. Such functions in correctional and post-release settings may involve rehabilitation planning and community reintegration preparation. Uche et al. (2023) illustrate the relevance of social work to correctional rehabilitation in Nigeria by examining the role of social workers in educational programs for offenders. The work shows the contribution that social work practice can make to meeting the welfare and developmental needs of individuals in correctional facilities.

Reintegration interventions can take many forms, depending on the needs of the formerly incarcerated individual and the resources available in the correctional and community setting. These interventions may include counseling, support for vocational training and education, employment assistance, family mediation, housing assistance, mentorship, and community engagement. However, the existence of these services does not mean they are available, adequately coordinated or sustained post-release. Berghuis (2018) in a review of re-entry programs for adult male offenders, highlights the need to investigate the components of interventions designed to support the transition from correctional facilities to community life. Connell et al. (2023) similarly review employment interventions for people released from prison, emphasizing the essential part that employment support plays in the reintegration process. These studies suggest that understanding of reintegration needs to take into account not only the availability of interventions, but also their nature, organization and delivery.

The Nigerian Correctional Service Act 2019 provides the legal framework for the reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders in Nigeria. The Act provides for duties related to correctional services and provides a basis for rehabilitation programs including educational and vocational activities aimed at preparing inmates for life after incarceration (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019). The Nigerian Correctional Service is therefore a vital agency in the implementation of the correctional rehabilitative and reintegrative efforts. But the fact that there is a legal framework does not guaranty that the services and support provided for in the law are delivered in practice. The practical implementation of these responsibilities is dependent on institutional resources, trained personnel, professional capacity and collaboration with organizations providing support beyond the correctional facilities.

Besides the government agencies, non-governmental and faith-based organizations also contribute to the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-convicts in Nigeria. Through the likes of the Onesimus Project and Halfway Home, Prison Fellowship Nigeria provides vocational training, counseling, mentorship and transitional support. The Center for Legal Support and Inmate Rehabilitation is also involved in activities for the welfare, rehabilitation and reintegration of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people. Likewise, Hope Behind Bars Africa works alongside correctional facilities and community stakeholders to promote rehabilitation, reintegration and community support. These organizations exemplify the role of non-state actors in reintegration efforts. However, the fact that there are many organizations involved also raises questions about the coordination of their interventions, their continuity, their accessibility and their sustainability. Where institutional collaboration and resources are lacking, support can be fragmented, making it difficult to meet the ongoing needs of individuals once they are released.

Thus, the policy and institutional environment is an important dimension in understanding the delivery of reintegration interventions. Availability and quality of services may be affected by inadequate funding, lack of trained personnel, limited professional recognition, poor referral systems and lack of collaboration between correctional institutions and community organizations. Successful reintegration is not simply a matter of whether or not the individual reoffends, but also encompasses broader issues such as social support, employment, housing and institutional assistance (Mourão et al., 2025). Similarly, Ike et al. (2025) explore public perception and attitudes toward ex-offenders in Nigeria, emphasizing the role of the social environment in shaping reintegration experiences. These perspectives show that reintegration is shaped both by the interventions individuals receive and the broader social and institutional context into which they reenter society.

Ibadan Metropolis, the capital of Oyo State, is a significant setting for the study of reintegration of ex-convicts and the provision of related social work interventions in Nigeria. Ibadan is a major urban center in south western Nigeria with social, economic and community structures that shape the experiences of individuals returning from correctional facilities. Agodi Correctional Center, a major correctional facility, is located in the city and through it people are released into Ibadan and its neighboring communities. Once released, they must face the issues of community acceptance, job opportunities, family relationships, and access to social support. Their experiences raise important questions about what interventions are available to support reintegration and the institutional arrangements that facilitate or constrain the delivery of such services. The discussion of these issues in Ibadan Metropolis offers an opportunity to understand the reintegration practices in the particular social and institutional context.

While previous studies have examined recidivism, correctional rehabilitation, employment support and reintegration of formerly incarcerated people, there is still a need to explore the nature and scope of reintegration interventions within the specific context of Ibadan Metropolis. There is also a need to understand the institutional and policy factors that facilitate or impede delivery of these interventions. The relationship between formal commitments to correctional rehabilitation and the practical arrangements for providing sustained post-release support needs further attention in particular. In this regard, the present study explores the nature and scope of reintegration interventions offered to ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis and the institutional and policy factors that constrain or facilitate their delivery. The study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of reintegration practice and to provide insights that may inform improved institutional coordination, professional practice and sustainable support for ex-convicts in Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

The problem of the re-integration of ex-convicts into the society is a big problem in Nigeria. Many people exiting correctional facilities face unemployment, social stigma, family rejection, lack of adequate housing and limited access to support services. These challenges make it difficult for them to rebuild their lives and to be accepted as members of their communities. Successful reintegration therefore requires strong psychosocial, economic and institutional support beyond release from incarceration.

Rehabilitation and reintegration services are provided by the Nigerian Correctional Service and non-governmental organizations including Prison Fellowship Nigeria, Hope Behind Bars Africa and the Center for Legal Support and Inmate Rehabilitation. These types of interventions are often fragmented, with limited professional follow-up and poor institutional coordination. These services may also be impacted further by challenges around funding, staffing and policy implementation that may affect their continuity and accessibility. Furthermore, although the professionals perform functions similar to forensic social work, their roles and professional recognition within the Nigerian correctional system are yet to be fully established. This brings up questions regarding the nature of professional involvement and the institutional conditions impinging on the delivery of reintegration interventions.

Against this background, this study investigated the nature and scope of reintegration interventions provided to ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis and identified the institutional and policy factors that constrain or facilitate their delivery. The study does not measure reoffending per se but the practice of reintegration and recidivism is the wider policy context.

Objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to examine forensic social workers' reintegration of ex-convicts for reducing recidivism in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the nature and scope of reintegration interventions provided by forensic social workers to ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis.

2. identify the institutional and policy factors that constrain or enable the effectiveness of forensic social work reintegration interventions within the Ibadan correctional context.

3. Research Questions

1. What is the nature and scope of reintegration interventions provided by forensic social workers to ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis?

2. What institutional and policy factors constrain or enable the effectiveness of forensic social work reintegration interventions among ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Forensic Social Work

Forensic social work is a specialized field of social work practice where professional knowledge, skills, values and ethical principles are applied within legal and criminal justice systems. It is about working with people, families and communities who find themselves in contact with the law through their circumstances. Forensic social work "is the application of social work knowledge and intervention to those individuals who come into contact with the legal and criminal justice systems" (Lattas et al., 2024). Likewise, Natale et al. (2024) describe the field as encompassing diverse practice settings involving interaction with legal systems and criminal and civil law.

Forensic social work services in the area of corrections and reintegration may include psychosocial assessment, counseling, rehabilitation support, case management, family intervention, referral to community resources and advocacy. These interventions are important in managing the social and psychological problems experienced by individuals during imprisonment and after release. They can also assist ex-offenders in rebuilding family relationships, obtaining access to welfare services and overcoming obstacles to community reintegration. However, in the Nigerian context, it is important to make a distinction between forensic social work as a specialized field of practice and the formal professional titles used in the correctional institutions. Some professionals who perform relevant welfare and rehabilitation functions may be identified as social welfare officers, rehabilitation counselors or community development officers rather than being formally designated forensic social workers. This study therefore uses the term forensic social work as an analytical category to describe social work-related functions in correctional rehabilitation and reintegration, not to imply that all professionals involved are formally qualified or designated in forensic social work. The distinction provides a basis for the examination of the contributions of these professionals and the challenges of professional recognition and specialization in Nigeria.

Ex-Convicts' Reintegration

Reintegration is the process of returning to society, reestablishing social connections and playing a meaningful role in community life for people released from correctional facilities. "It's not just about getting out of prison. The formerly incarcerated need to relearn social expectations, reestablish relationships and access resources that help them live independently. Mourão et al. (2025) suggest that a successful reintegration should comprise several dimensions, namely personal development, social support, community participation and access to institutional services. Likewise, Francis et al. (2026) define reintegration as "the process of social inclusion

and active participation in community life after prison release." This may involve looking for a job, a place to live, reestablishing family relationships and being accepted by the community. But many ex-convicts struggle with unemployment, discrimination, social stigma and rejection. These challenges can impact their ability to establish stable lives post-incarceration. Effective reintegration therefore requires ongoing professional support, family support and community-based interventions that respond to the social and practical needs of formerly incarcerated individuals.

Recidivism

Recidivism is the reoccurrence of an undesirable behavior after experiencing negative consequences of that behavior. It is usually measured by means of indicators such as rearrest, reconviction and re-imprisonment. Yukhnenko et al. (2023) studied the measurement of recidivism with these indicators and the differences in the measurement of recidivism in different countries. Bouchard and Wong (2024) also argue that recidivism is a multidimensional concept and the results of studies may differ depending on the indicators of repeated offending. Problems for people returning to society could be unemployment, social exclusion, substance misuse and lack of support after release. Rehabilitation, counseling and other reintegration interventions are thus important areas of consideration in efforts to address the challenges of reoffending. But social inclusion, access to employment, stable housing and community participation are also important outcomes, and reintegration should not be judged solely on whether an individual reoffends.

The study examines the reintegration of ex-convicts in the wider context of recidivism in the criminal justice system. However, the study focuses on reintegration interventions and the institutional and policy factors influencing their delivery, and does not directly measure rearrest, reconviction or re-imprisonment.

Reintegration Programs

Reintegration programs are interventions and support services which help ex-convicts to cope with life after incarceration and to participate meaningfully in society. The importance of re-entry programs in facilitating the reintegration of individuals leaving correctional facilities back into their communities is discussed by Berghuis (2018). Similarly, Connell et al (2023) look at employment interventions and their role in improving employment outcomes for those leaving prison. These programs can involve counseling, vocational training, educational support, employment assistance, family mediation and psycho-social services. Interventions of this kind are designed to help former prisoners develop practical skills, tackle emotional and social difficulties and rebuild positive relationships. Negi et al. (2026) also identify psychosocial support, healthcare, vocational training and relationship-based programs as important domains of correctional rehabilitation and community re-entry.

The relevance of these interventions is partly dependent upon their ability to address the individual needs of ex-convicts and the availability of continued support post-release. Hence, reintegration programs should not only comprise activities implemented during incarceration, but also appropriate post-release assistance, supporting individuals in their reintegration into their communities.

Institutional and Policy Issues

Institutional and policy factors are laws, resources, organizational structures and professional arrangements which influence the delivery of rehabilitation and reintegration services. These are the factors that influence how far reintegration interventions can be delivered, coordinated and sustained. Oyewo (2023) identified some of the major barriers to effective inmate rehabilitation in Nigerian correctional centers to include inadequate funding, insufficient training of staff, poor institutional collaboration and challenges of policy implementation. The Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019) provides the legal framework for the reform, rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. However, the existence of legislation does not guaranty the effective delivery of the services provided for under the Act.

Institutional support services also play an important role in the reintegration process. Institutional support is one of the dimensions associated with successful reintegration after release from prison (Mourão et al., 2025).

In the absence of adequate resources, trained professionals and effective implementation arrangements in institutions, reintegration programs may be inconsistent and difficult to sustain.

Thus, it is important to involve government institutions, social workers, families and non-governmental organizations in the provision of support to reintegration. The proper collaboration of these stakeholders may aid in improving the coordination and continuity of services available to formerly incarcerated individuals. Thus, the study investigated the influence of institutional resources, policy implementation and professional arrangements on the delivery of reintegration interventions in Ibadan Metropolis.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a qualitative research design that was interpretivist in nature. The approach was considered appropriate to study the experiences of ex-convicts and the views of professionals involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. This presented the study with an opportunity to explore participants' accounts of the reentry interventions that are available to people who have been formerly incarcerated and the institutional and policy factors that influence the provision of these interventions.

Study Population

The study population comprised ex-convicts released from Agodi Correctional Center between January, 2019 and December, 2023, welfare professionals and relevant institutional and community stakeholders involved in rehabilitation and reintegration activities in Ibadan Metropolis.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

Twenty participants were selected purposively for in-depth semi-structured interviews. The participants included 10 ex-convicts, five welfare professionals and five key informants. The participants were selected purposively, based on the notion that they had the ability to provide relevant information due to their experiences or professional engagement in rehabilitation and reintegration. A multidisciplinary focus group discussion was also conducted with five experts in the fields of social work, law, criminology, correctional services and law enforcement.

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

Data were gathered using semi-structured interview guides and a focus group discussion guide. The instruments examined the nature of reintegration interventions, rehabilitation support, psychosocial services and institutional challenges impacting the delivery of reintegration services. The semi-structured interviews enabled participants to share their experiences and perspectives, and the multidisciplinary focus group discussion provided professional perspectives on the institutional and policy conditions that influence reintegration interventions.

Data Analysis Method

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the interview data to explore participants' experiences and the meanings they ascribed to reintegration interventions. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data from the focus group discussion to identify recurring patterns and issues relevant to the study.

Validity of the study

To increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation, member checking and peer debriefing were used. These strategies were used to help ensure the consistency and credibility of interpretations that were drawn from the participants' stories.

Ethical Considerations

The research process was conducted according to ethical principles. These included: informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and that they could volunteer to participate. To protect the identity of the participants, the participant codes were used in the reporting of the findings.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the nature and scope of reintegration interventions provided by forensic social workers to ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis?

Analysis of participants' accounts revealed three central themes: fragmented and informal reintegration provision, counseling as the main intervention modality and the absence of structured post-release programs.

Table 1: Emerging Themes on the Nature and Scope of Reintegration Interventions

Major Themes	Sub-themes	Supporting Participants
Fragmented and informal reintegration provision	Inconsistent professional contact; absence of individualised case management; limited post-release follow-up	EC4, WP2, FGD participants
Counselling as the central intervention modality	Emotional support; rebuilding self-confidence; addressing shame and identity challenges	EC7, WP4, FGD participants
Limited structured post-release programmes	Discontinuity of rehabilitation services; inadequate community-based support; absence of structured transition programmes	EC9, KI2, FGD participants

Theme One: Fragmented and Informal Reintegration Provision

The findings revealed that the reintegration interventions for ex-convicts were largely informal, fragmented and inconsistent. Participants reported that support was often delivered shortly before release or during incarceration, with little professional contact once they returned to their communities. This showed the lack of an integrated case-management system to provide continuous support during the reintegration process. For instance, one participant, a 29-year-old male called EC4, who was serving a sentence for drug trafficking, said that the welfare officer told him to return whenever he needed help. But soon after he was released, the officer was transferred and there was no effective provision for ongoing support. It wasn't a programme," he said. That's just handshakes."

WP2, a social worker inside the correctional system, also explained that the lack of sufficient personnel, resources and institutional arrangements made it difficult to keep in touch with ex-convicts after their release. "We don't have case management, in any real sense," the participant said. "What we have is fire-fighting. These accounts suggest that while some assistance for reintegration was available, the interventions lacked the coordination and continuity necessary to support successful reintegration into the community.

Theme Two: Counseling as the Main Intervention Modality

Another important finding was that counseling was the most-reported form of professional intervention by participants. The service provided emotional support to ex-convicts encountering shame, uncertainty, identity struggles, and difficulties adjusting to life outside correctional facilities. The social worker was really good to me," said EC7, 34, who served 18 months for fraud. "She treated me like a human being and helped me to feel good about myself again. She said the counseling sessions made her feel valued and helped her to continue to rebuild her life. "I would leave her office and feel like I could last one more day," she said.

However, the findings also suggested that counseling alone was not enough to address the practical challenges associated with reintegration. WP4, a rehabilitation counselor with 12 years of experience, emphasized that emotional support needed to be accompanied by help with the basic needs of accommodation and food. "You can't build a new identity on an empty stomach," the participant explained. This indicates that standardized counseling is important in supporting emotional and psychological adjustment of ex-convicts, but that its effectiveness may be limited when other essential needs for reintegration remain unmet.

Theme Three: Lack of Formal Post-Release Programs

A third theme concerned the lack of structured programs available to assist ex-convicts after release. Some participants reported receiving vocational training, literacy support, and counseling while incarcerated, but these services were rarely sustained after release. This meant that a lot of people went very quickly from living in an institution to living on their own in the community. This challenge was illustrated in the following quote by a male participant with a history of convictions and carpentry training (EC9): "They teach you to swim inside the prison… Then they throw you into the deep ocean and stand on the shore watching.

Likewise, KI2, a state government official, explained that post-release support was often a gray area between the responsibilities of correctional institutions and state social welfare departments. The participant mentioned that the correctional institution's involvement usually declined after discharge, and that the state agencies involved did not have sufficient resources and personnel to provide continuous support. The findings therefore suggest that the lack of structured post-release programs creates a gap between rehabilitation in correctional institutions and the practicalities of community reintegration.

Research Question Two: What institutional and policy factors constrain or enable the effectiveness of forensic social work reintegration interventions among ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis?

Table 2: Emerging Themes on Institutional and Policy Factors Affecting Reintegration Interventions

Major Themes	Subthemes	Supporting Participants
Legislative-implementation gap	Inadequate funding; insufficient staffing; limited infrastructure; weak implementation arrangements	KI1, FGD-Lawyer, FGD-Correctional Officer
Professional identity deficit	Lack of specialized professional recognition; inadequate specialist training; absence of clear professional practice standards	WP1, KI4, FGD-Social Worker

Theme One: The Legislative-Implementation Gap

The results showed that there is a wide disparity between the provisions of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019 and the actual implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration responsibilities. While the law provides an institutional framework for the reform, rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, participants identified inadequate funding, insufficient personnel and limited infrastructure as major obstacles to effective implementation. KI1, a senior correctional administrator, stated that the expansion of responsibilities within institutions had not been matched by improvements in funding, staffing and infrastructure. "We're asked to do more with less. This act greatly broadened our mandate. Our budget did not increase. Our staffing did not increase. Our infrastructure remained the same." The focus group discussion also revealed the lack of clear minimum service standards, adequate resource commitments and effective implementation mechanisms. These findings highlight that the presence of legislation alone does not ensure effective reintegration services without the institutional capacity and resources to implement its provisions.

Theme Two: Part Two: Absence of Professional Identity

A second theme was the limited professional recognition and specialization of forensic social work in the correctional and reintegration setting. The participants explained that welfare and rehabilitation professionals

were often given different titles such as social welfare officers, rehabilitation counselors and community development officers. The situation led to uncertainty about professional roles, special skills and standards required for practice in forensic social work. For example, WP1, a qualified social worker, differentiated between professional commitment and specialized competence, stating "caring is not the same as competency". The participant stressed the importance of recognized specialization, suitable training, professional assessment frameworks and continuing professional development.

Likewise, the members of the focus group discussion pointed out that the absence of a clearly defined professional specialization impacted the establishment of a structured training pathway and the recognition of forensic social work within correctional institutions. The findings suggest that improvements in professional identity, specialist training and standards of practice may enhance the quality and consistency of reintegration interventions.

Theme Three: Lack of support for NGOs and Faith-based Organizations

The third theme focused on the important but fragile contribution of non-governmental and faith-based organizations in the reintegration of ex-convicts. Participants acknowledged that these organizations offered services such as counseling, vocational training, family mediation, accommodation assistance and peer mentoring. However, these interventions often could not be sustained because of unstable funding and the lack of institutional partnerships. KI3, a civil society organization leader, said some reintegration programs were heavily dependent on international donor support for their sustainability. One participant said that changes in donor priorities could endanger the continuation of programs and the welfare of staff involved in service delivery.

The focus group discussion also highlighted the need for stronger collaboration between government institutions and non-governmental organizations. Effective partnerships, supported by adequate funding and clear service standards, would improve the continuity and accessibility of reintegration services, participants argued. The findings therefore suggest that while the role of non-governmental and faith-based organizations in reintegration efforts cannot be underestimated, their interventions cannot substitute government services that are adequately funded and coordinated in the long run.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study's findings offer an understanding of the nature and extent of reintegration interventions provided to ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis and the institutional and policy factors that affect their delivery. The study concluded that reintegration interventions were mostly fragmented and informal, with counseling being the most frequently cited intervention. Other findings were limited structured post-release programs, inadequate continuity of professional support, a gap between legislation and implementation, limited professional recognition of forensic social work, and the financial vulnerability of non-governmental and faith-based organizations. These findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and implications for practice of reintegration. The finding that the reintegration interventions were largely fragmented and informal suggests that the support for ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis is not consistently organized around a continuous process of care. Participants described some support being available while they were incarcerated or just prior to release, but not consistently continued after people returned to their communities. This finding is relevant to Berghuis (2018) who studied re-entry programs and interventions aimed at supporting offenders' transition from correctional facilities to their communities. This is also consistent with the view of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) whereby the importance of preparing offenders for release and the provision of support for their reintegration into society is emphasized. The experiences of participants suggest that the transition from incarceration to community life requires more than isolated interventions. Once released, people may have difficulty getting the support they need if there are no proper arrangements for follow up, referrals and continued professional contact. So, the finding emphasizes the need for continuity and coordination in the reintegration practice. WP2's account indicates that there is limited availability of personnel and institutional resources which can be a possible explanation for the fragmented nature of services. Discontinuity of services can also occur due to poor coordination between correctional institutions and community agencies and unclear institutional responsibilities.

Another important finding was that counseling was the most commonly reported type of professional intervention. Participants spoke of its role in providing emotional support, restoring self-confidence and helping ex-convicts reintegrate into life outside correctional facilities. This demonstrates that psychosocial interventions are an important part of reintegration support. But the discovery that counseling was not enough without help with accommodation, food and employment suggests that interventions focusing mainly on emotional adjustment without dealing with practical needs have their limitations. This is consistent with the general perception of reintegration as a process of social support, employment, housing and institutional assistance discussed by Mourão et al. (2025). Similarly, Connell et al. (2023) reviewed employment interventions for people leaving prison and stressed the necessity of employment-related support during the reintegration process. These perspectives imply that counseling and material support are not competing approaches, as they tackle different but related aspects of reintegration. This relationship is illustrated by the accounts of EC7 and WP4. The counseling helped the participant to regain his confidence, said the rehabilitation counselor, adding that, "emotional recovery can be tough when there are unmet basic needs. Thus, reintegration initiatives should combine psychosocial assistance with relevant referrals and practical support, based on the specific situation of ex-convicts.

The study also found that formal post-release programs were limited. Some participants said that they had received vocational training, literacy support and counseling whilst in prison but these services were rarely continued on release. This finding indicates a disconnect between the rehabilitation activities within correctional institutions and the practical support needed by individuals returning to their communities. This is consistent with the reintegration perspective of Berghuis (2018), emphasizing the significance of re-entry programs in helping individuals transition from correctional facilities to community life. The findings are also consistent with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) which notes the importance of preparation for release and ongoing reintegration support. EC9's experience, which likened the transition to community life after prison to being taught to swim and then thrown into the deep ocean, speaks to the challenges that can occur when people are rehabilitated while in prison, but receive little to no support once they are out. KI2's explanation also implies that the uncertainty of the roles of correctional institutions and state social welfare agencies might be a factor in this gap. These findings indicate the need for better defined institutional arrangements and structured support after release.

Another major finding was the disconnect between the provisions of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019 and the actual implementation of rehabilitation and reintegration responsibilities. Key obstacles to effective implementation identified by participants were inadequate funding, insufficient staffing and limited infrastructure. This observation is consistent with the findings of Oyewo (2023) who cited funding challenges, staff training issues, poor institutional cooperation and policy implementation problems as obstacles to the rehabilitation of inmates in Nigerian correctional centers. The findings demonstrate that the mere existence of legislation does not automatically translate into the provision of effective reintegration services. The Nigerian Correctional Service Act provides a legal frame work for the reformation rehabilitation and re-integration of offenders. However, the actual delivery of these services depends on institutional resources, trained personnel and effective implementation arrangements. The challenge is illustrated by KI1's description of increased institutional responsibilities with no corresponding increases in budget, staffing and infrastructure. It suggests that policy expectations may outrun the operational capacity of institutions responsible for implementing them. Thus, improving reintegration services requires attention not only to the provisions of correctional legislation but also to the resources and administrative arrangements needed to put those provisions into practice.

The finding about professional identity points to a major divorce between the activities of welfare professionals and their official professional designations. Participants said that people involved in welfare and rehabilitation activities were known by different titles like social welfare officers, rehabilitation counselors, community development officers, while specialized recognition of forensic social work was still limited. This finding is significant when compared to Lattas et al. (2024) and Natale et al. (2024) who write about forensic social work as a specialized area of practice in legal and criminal justice systems. The findings from Ibadan suggest that some of the functions of forensic social work may be carried out in correctional and reintegration settings with the professionals not necessarily identifying themselves as forensic social workers. This distinction is important, as the study should not assume that all welfare professionals involved in reintegration have a specific qualification in forensic social work. Instead, this study uses forensic social work as an

analytical category in an effort to explore relevant social work functions in correctional rehabilitation and reintegration. The statement by WP1 that "caring is not the same as competency" further emphasizes the need for specialized knowledge, professional training and clear practice standards. Thus, the findings point to the need for professional development and greater clarity around the competencies required for social work practice in correctional and reintegration settings.

The study also found that non-governmental and faith-based organizations are also contributing to reintegration through counseling, vocational training, family mediation, accommodation assistance and peer mentoring. However, participants noted that the sustainability of these interventions was compromised by unstable funding and limited institutional partnerships. This finding is relevant for the broader discussion about institutional support in reintegration presented by Mourão et al. (2025). It also reflects the significance of social and community support in the reintegration process as discussed by Ike et al. (2025). The results suggest that NGOs have an important role to play in supporting individuals after incarceration, particularly in settings where government services are limited. However, dependence on donor funding may result in uncertainty of program continuity. Changes in donor priorities may affect availability of services and the capacity of organizations to maintain their activities. This implies that partnerships between government institutions and non-governmental organizations need to be underpinned by clearly defined responsibilities, reliable funding arrangements and appropriate service standards. However, such partnerships may improve the continuity of reintegration support, although the findings do not determine the relative effectiveness of individual organizations.

Overall, the findings have implications for the understanding of reintegration as a process involving individuals, professional practitioners and institutions. They indicate that a re-integration cannot be conceived merely in terms of the personal adjustment of formerly incarcerated individuals. It is also affected by the availability of professional support, access to basic resources, institutional coordination and community engagement. The findings suggest a need for more consistent follow-up, appropriate case-management arrangements, psychosocial support and referrals to services addressing practical needs, for professional practice. They also emphasize the need for specialized training and clearer professional standards for those working in the area of correctional rehabilitation and reintegration. The findings at institutional level suggest that policy commitments should be supported by adequate funding, staffing and collaboration between correctional institutions, government agencies and community organizations. While the implications are useful for improving reintegration practices, it is important to stress that the study did not directly test a theoretical model or measure the impact of specific interventions on recidivism. Thus, its contribution is in explaining the professional and institutional conditions that shape the delivery of reintegration interventions in Ibadan Metropolis.

Limitation of the study

The findings of the current study should be interpreted in the light of its limitations.

1. The study comprised of 20 participants who were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. The sample provided relevant experiences and professional perspectives, but the findings should not be seen as representative of all ex-convicts and reintegration professionals in Nigeria.
2. The research was conducted in Ibadan Metropolis and focused on persons released from Agodi Correctional Center between January 2019 and December 2023. Thus, the findings may be a reflection of institutional and social conditions in this setting and may not be directly transferable to other correctional and community settings.
3. The study was based on the participants' account of their experience and professional activities. Such accounts may be limited by recall or social desirability, particularly where participants speak to institutional performance and availability of reintegration services.
4. There may be practical difficulties of accessing ex-prisoners and getting detailed accounts of their experiences. The experiences in the study may therefore not be representative of all reintegration circumstances of all persons released from correctional facilities.
5. Finally, although recidivism is the broader criminal justice context for the study, the research did not collect or analyze data on rearrest, reconviction or re-imprisonment. Thus, the study is unable to

conclude that the reintegration interventions it studied reduced recidivism. It learned only about the nature and scope of reintegration interventions and the institutional and policy factors that affect their delivery.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the nature and extent of reintegration interventions provided to ex-convicts in Ibadan Metropolis and the institutional and policy factors affecting their delivery. The findings indicated that reintegration support was largely fragmented and informal, with counseling being the most commonly reported intervention. However, limited professional follow-up and lack of structured post-release programs challenged the return of individuals to their communities. The study also found institutional constraints such as the gap between legislative provisions and implementation, the limited professional recognition and specialization of forensic social work and the financial vulnerability of non-governmental and faith-based organizations involved in reintegration support.

The findings indicate that sustainable reintegration necessitates coordinated services, ongoing professional support, adequate institutional resources, and collaboration between government agencies and community-based organizations. They also emphasize the necessity of recognizing the practical needs of formerly incarcerated people, as well as their psychosocial needs. The study offers insights into reintegration practice and the circumstances under which it is provided, but does not establish whether the interventions studied reduce recidivism, because reoffending outcomes were not collected. Its contribution is to identify the professional and institutional conditions framing reintegration support in Ibadan Metropolis.

RECOMMENDATION

The study, based on its findings, recommends the following:

1. There should be better arrangements between the correctional institutions and relevant welfare agencies to contact ex-convicts after release. This can include referral systems and follow up procedures to help maintain continuity of care.

2. Counseling should be accompanied by appropriate assistance or referrals for accommodation, food, employment and vocational opportunities within reintegration interventions.

3. The government should provide the funding, personnel and infrastructure required to support the rehabilitation and reintegration responsibilities set out in the Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019.

4. The relevant institutions and professional bodies should promote specialized training and continuing professional development for social workers and other welfare professionals working in the area of correctional rehabilitation and reintegration.

5. Correctional institutions, state social welfare agencies, non-governmental organizations and faith-based organizations should work toward establishing clearer partnership arrangements to enhance the coordination and continuity of reintegration services.

6. Government and relevant stakeholders should investigate sustainable funding and partnership arrangements for organizations offering reintegration support, thus decreasing over-reliance on volatile donor funding.

7. Future research should examine reintegration interventions across a variety of correctional settings and consider longitudinal designs that can assess outcomes such as employment, housing stability, social inclusion, rearrest and reconviction.

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