

# Inmates' Character Reformation and Recidivism in Nigeria: A Study of Okaka Correctional Facility, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2025.120800220>

Received: 22 Aug 2025; Accepted: 28 Aug 2025; Published: 24 September 2025

## ABSTRACT

This research explores how effective character reformation programs are at the Okaka Correctional Facility in Yenagoa, particularly in terms of reducing recidivism rates among inmates. The main goal was to assess the impact of various rehabilitation initiatives on changing inmates' behaviour and their chances of reoffending. The study was founded on principles from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Social Learning Theory. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected quantitative data from 267 inmates via surveys and qualitative information through interviews with 30 key persons interview including inmates and correctional officers. The findings indicate that, although vocational training programs had some positive effects, many other rehabilitation efforts, like counselling, were largely seen as ineffective, leading to considerable inmate dissatisfaction with the quality of the programs. The study concludes that challenges such as overcrowding and poorly structured programs significantly impede successful rehabilitation. It strongly recommends the development of personalized rehabilitation strategies that consider the varied backgrounds and types of offences of inmates, as well as the enhancement of educational and vocational training opportunities to support their successful reintegration into society.

**Keywords:** Inmates, Character Reformation, Rehabilitation, Recidivism, Correctional Facility.

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

As a custodial institution, the prison is responsible for deterring potential criminal offenders by imposing penalties, detaining individuals awaiting trial for alleged crimes, or incarcerating those who have been found guilty and sentenced (Holland, 2013). Additionally, it provides rehabilitative programs, such as education, vocational training, and counselling, to address the root cause of criminal behaviour (Coyle & Fair, 2016). The Nigerian Correctional Services' primary mandate is to ensure the safe custody of those who have been legally interned, as well as to ensure they are reformed, rehabilitated, and effectively reintegrated into society (Ugwuoke, 2015). By providing them with support, putting them in touch with the resources they need, and working with outside stakeholders, it is responsible for encouraging positive behavioural changes in prisoners and preparing them for a smooth transition back into society.

Despite the potential aims of the Nigerian Prison Service and large investments in rehabilitation services, their efficacy in decreasing criminal conduct remains uncertain. Elderbroon and King (2014) describe chronic recidivism as recommitting crimes after receiving punishment or rehabilitation for a prior offence. The institution's actual performance indicates deep-seated structural and operational deficiencies that contradict its purpose. Conditions in overcrowded facilities, which result from prolonged pre-trial detention and insufficient non-custodial sentencing options, are more criminogenic than corrective; prisoners compete for limited bedding, medical care, and wholesome food, and basic sanitation breaks down when the number of inmates exceeds design capacity (Olabamiji, 2025). Correctional programming, such as vocational training, psychiatric counselling, and literacy classes, either works intermittently or not at all in such settings, depriving inmates of the cognitive restructuring and skills necessary for post-release reintegration. These deficiencies are made worse by a persistent lack of qualified correctional officers, who, with inadequate pay and scant professional development, frequently turn to custodial containment instead of transformative supervision, enabling violent,

gang-aligned, and illegal economy-driven prison subcultures to thrive unchecked. Upon release, ex-inmates encounter a society suspicious of their reform: background checks block employment, families struggle with stigma-induced alienation, and halfway homes or organised re-entry help are essentially non-existent (Chikadzi, 2017). Many inevitably return to crime, seeking acceptability and a living in illegal networks that the legitimate economy does not provide. Only three (3) of every ten (10) Nigerians who are remanded in jail often emerge completely rehabilitated, according to a United Nations assessment (UN, 2016). Although Nigeria's Administration of Criminal Justice Act encourages restorative justice and requires speedy trials, its implementation is uneven, and sentencing courts continue to default to incarceration for minor, non-violent offences, further entrenching the cycle of legislative inertia (Augusta et al., 2025). Fundamentally, the prisons' inability to provide meaningful rehabilitation or credible deterrence, caused by overcrowding, underfunding, a lack of staff, and poor post-release support, turns them into havens for more complex criminal activity, exacerbating rather than resolving the issue they were intended to address and guaranteeing that recidivism will continue to be a persistent aspect of Nigerian society.

The most populous nation in Africa, Nigeria, has its share of recidivism problems. Nigeria's socioeconomic progress is seriously threatened by recidivism, which is the propensity of people who have served time in jail to commit crimes again and wind themselves up behind bars. High rates of recidivism in the country can be traced to systemic failures such as poor rehabilitation programs, overcrowded and underfunded correctional facilities, limited post-incarceration support, and societal stigmatization of ex-offenders (Ikoh, 2011; Ashibi & Adams, 2023; Augusta et al., 2025). Due to these circumstances, many ex-offenders are forced back into crime as a way of surviving and are unable to successfully reintegrate into society. Economically speaking, the expense of housing repeat offenders puts a strain on the national budget, taking money away from vital areas like infrastructure, healthcare, and education. Socially, a high recidivism rate damages family units and erodes public confidence in the criminal justice system, particularly in low-income areas where crime is disproportionately prevalent (Ike et al., 2023; Matulis, 2024). Further exacerbating social dislocation and marginalisation is the psychological and emotional toll on families and communities. From the standpoint of development, sustained recidivism hinders attempts to attain sustainable growth and long-term stability. It keeps the cycle going, where poverty leads to crime, which then exacerbates poverty and insecurity.

Bayelsa State's facilities reflect the country's problems in a condensed, resource-constrained microcosm, and the state is not especially exempt from the problems plaguing the Nigerian Prison Service. Because so many formerly jailed repeat offenders still commit crimes, there is a serious lack of effective rehabilitation programs. As a result of extended pre-trial detention, insufficient court sessions, and a lack of viable non-custodial alternatives, the Okaka Correctional Centre struggles with extreme congestion, forcing remand detainees to linger well beyond the legal limitations. With nearly 700 detainees—including those awaiting trial and those convicted—the institution, which was built to accommodate 300 convicts, is presently experiencing acute overcrowding, according to Tayese (2024). Basic human dignity is undermined within these crowded walls by deteriorating infrastructure, sporadic electricity, and a lack of drinkable water, while overworked medical personnel fight to prevent infectious illnesses like scabies and TB. During a federal investigation at Okaka Correctional Centre, several unethical practices were found, including money transfers between staff and prisoners, illicit drug sales, office misuse, and prisoners using mobile phones without authorisation (Tayese, 2024). Rehabilitation programs like literacy classes, vocational workshops, and psychosocial counselling largely exist on paper due to chronic underfunding, a lack of qualified instructors, and unstable supply chains. Correctional personnel, who are frequently selected on short rotations from other southern commands, deal with low morale, little opportunity for professional advancement, and insufficient security equipment—all of which encourage corruption and collusion in the illegal trade (Abeku, 2025). After being released from prison, ex-offenders face the Niger Delta's precarious economy, high rates of young unemployment, and loss of livelihood due to oil pollution. These conditions, together with widespread stigma, increase the risk of reoffending. As a result, the Okaka prisons, like others around the country, serve more as holding depots that unintentionally prolong rather than end criminal trajectories than as centres of correction.

It is pertinent to note that several literatures which directly or indirectly concern the Nigerian prisons have been in existence hitherto this research. For instance, using primary data from a qualitative study, Chikadzi (2017) discussed the challenges faced by ex-offenders when reintegrating into mainstream society in Gauteng,

South Africa. The study findings show that ex-offenders struggle to adjust because of broken family and community relationships, unemployment and lack of after-care services, among other factors. Similarly, Ike et al (2023), in their work, made an original contribution, drawing on a mixed-method approach underpinned by positivist and interpretivist epistemology to understand attitudes towards ex-offenders' reintegration and whether there is a positive association between the level of education and the likelihood of accepting ex-offenders into society. While the quantitative ambit reveals a correlation coefficient of  $r = .025$ , denoting a negative association between the level of education and reintegration, the qualitative analysis further finds a lack of confidence in ex-offenders' genuine reintegration, coupled with the perceived role of community trauma, which collectively fuels a negative social identity against the ex-offenders. Additionally, Ashibi and Adams (2023) employed a mixed method in investigating the effectiveness of reformatory programmes in correctional institutions and the trigger factors of recidivistic tendencies amongst ex-convicts in South-South, Nigeria. Findings from the study suggest that although the reformatory programmes of correctional institutions in South-South Nigeria were well designed and structured to achieve criminal reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration; however, factors such as endemic prison subculture, reintegration labelling effects, and employability redundancy of ex-convicts were significantly implicated as the primary causative factors of criminal recidivistic tendencies. More recently, Olabamiji (2025), using the survey method, investigated the extent and impact of overcrowding at the Ado-Ekiti Correctional Center in Nigeria, focusing on the implications for facility operations, resource management, and the rehabilitation of inmates. The study found that overcrowding negatively affects the delivery of basic services, including healthcare and sanitation, while reducing the effectiveness of rehabilitation and reintegration programs. Contributing factors include high admission rates relative to releases, lack of alternative sentencing options, and insufficient reintegration support. The study also explores the consequences of overcrowding on inmate behaviour, reporting increased incidences of stress, violence, and infectious diseases.

Despite the plethora of extant literature concerning the Nigerian prisons, there is still a vacuum in this literature, especially owing to the fact that none of the above studies have been able to clearly show how rehabilitation programs are designed and implemented and their impacts on ex-convicts or prisoners in society, thus leading to recidivism. It is against this backdrop that this study aims to fill the knowledge gap by critically evaluating rehabilitation programs in the Nigerian correctional service, with a focus on Okaka Prison in Bayelsa State as the case study. It becomes imperative at this juncture to ask to what extent specific types of programs influence inmates' character reformation and recidivism rates in the Okaka Correctional Service? To what extent do inmates' perceptions of rehabilitation programs relate to their rehabilitation progress and likelihood of recidivism in the correctional service? In what ways does the duration of inmates' stay in prison impact the outcomes of their rehabilitation? And how does the categorization of inmates, such as those convicted of armed robbery, rape, or theft, influence the effectiveness of character reformation programs on their rehabilitation progress?

### **Prison rehabilitation in Nigeria and its challenges**

The Nigerian correctional system, recently rebranded as the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS) from the Nigerian Prison Service, signifies a crucial shift in ideology – from mere punishment to an emphasis on reformation and rehabilitation. This transformation acknowledges the inherent human dignity of inmates and the societal imperative to equip them with the skills and mindset necessary for successful reintegration. However, the path to effective rehabilitation in Nigerian prisons remains fraught with significant challenges, raising questions about the extent to which these noble objectives are truly being achieved.

At its core, rehabilitation in the Nigerian context aims to restore inmates to "fullest physical, mental, psychological, social, vocational and economic usefulness" upon release. This is typically pursued through a range of programs including educational services (adult literacy, formal schooling), vocational training (carpentry, tailoring, welding, agriculture, computer appreciation, etc.), psychosocial support (counseling, group work), and recreational activities. The underlying belief is that by addressing the root causes of criminal behavior and imparting valuable skills, inmates can break the cycle of recidivism and become productive members of society. There have been anecdotal success stories of ex-inmates who, through prison rehabilitation, have acquired skills, pursued further education, and even established businesses, demonstrating the transformative potential of such programs.

Despite these aspirations, the implementation of comprehensive and effective rehabilitation programs in Nigerian prisons faces formidable hurdles. Foremost among these is the pervasive issue of underfunding and inadequate resources. Many correctional facilities suffer from acute shortages of equipment for vocational training, teaching materials, and even basic amenities like proper feeding, healthcare, and sanitation. In strengthening this position, Kanu and Kanu (2024) found that most vocational skills and trades were either unavailable or underutilized, severely limiting rehabilitation efforts. This creates an environment unconducive to genuine rehabilitation, undermining the very purpose of the correctional centers.

Furthermore, the problem of overcrowding exacerbates these challenges. Most prisons are overcrowded (Okunola & Ekanem, 2020) with some housing up to three times their intended capacity, straining existing resources, with inmates often confined to spaces barely large enough to stretch their legs and making it difficult to provide individualized attention and effective programming (Ayeleso, 2024). This overcrowding creates a hostile environment for both inmates and prison staff, rendering structured rehabilitation programs nearly impossible to implement (Olabamiji, 2025). The sheer number of inmates can overwhelm the limited staff, including psychologists, social workers, and vocational instructors, leading to a compromised quality of rehabilitation services.

The issue of awaiting trial inmates also complicates rehabilitation. A significant portion of the prison population consists of individuals awaiting trial, sometimes for years. The Nigerian Correctional Services reported that over 10,000 inmates have been held for 1-6 years without trial, and more than 2,000 had been detained for more than 10 years (Odunsi, 2023). A detailed report from the Standard Times NG (2025) highlights how magistrate courts often remand suspects indefinitely, especially in cases involving capital offenses. According to the report, these courts lack the jurisdiction to try such cases, leading to prolonged detention while awaiting advice from the Director of Public Prosecutions. This uncertainty and prolonged detention without conviction make it challenging to engage them in long-term rehabilitation programs, as their future status remains unclear.

Another significant obstacle lies in the dearth of qualified personnel. There is an inadequate number of trained counsellors, psychologists, social workers, Teachers, and vocational instructors to cater to the diverse needs of the inmate population. According to Uche et al, (2023), while some facilities offer some vocational programs, the quality and reach of these programs are limited by a lack of trained instructors. Even the available staff may lack proper motivation or ongoing professional development, further hindering the effectiveness of rehabilitation efforts. Without these critical human resources, the goal of rehabilitating offenders remains largely aspirational.

Beyond the prison walls, societal stigmatization poses a major challenge to the successful reintegration of ex-offenders. Sakib (2022), in his study emphasized that stigmatization leads to ostracism and community anxiety, especially around fears of recidivism and public safety. Even if an inmate acquires valuable skills and undergoes genuine reformation, the negative perception and discrimination from the public, including employers and communities, can make it incredibly difficult for them to secure employment, housing, and social acceptance. This lack of post-release support can push individuals back into criminal activities, negating the efforts made during incarceration.

Despite these daunting challenges, there are ongoing efforts and initiatives aimed at strengthening rehabilitation in Nigerian prisons. The renaming to "Nigerian Correctional Service" is a symbolic step, but it is accompanied by policies and collaborations with NGOs and international organizations like the UNODC, which are working to improve conditions, provide training, and introduce innovative programs like "Chess in Prisons" to foster critical thinking and social skills. The government has also reaffirmed its commitment to the transformation of correctional services, emphasizing the need for a collaborative approach involving government agencies, the private sector, and civil society. In some correctional facilities, particularly in urban areas, inmates are being provided with skills acquisition programs in tailoring, carpentry, welding, and farming. A few NGOs and religious organizations have also partnered with the NCS to offer literacy classes, life skills workshops, and post-release support.



## RESEARCH METHODS

For this study, a mixed-methods research design was chosen. This is because it allows for the combination of quantitative and qualitative research approaches in studying a social phenomenon. According to the records officer of the Correctional facility, the area has a population of 800 persons, which comprises 686 inmates and 114 prison warders and instructors. The sample size of this study is 267 respondents drawn using the Taro Yamane statistical technique as represented thus  $n = N \div (1 + Ne^2)$  where  $n$  is the expected sample size, ' $N$ ' is the total population which is equal to 800 and ' $e$ ' is the level of significance which in this case is 0.05. The study adopted the stratified sampling, simple random sampling and the purposive sampling techniques to select participants for the study. While the stratified sampling technique was employed to divide the population into subgroups (strata) based on certain characteristics relevant to the study, such as participation in character reformation programmes, the simple random was used to get particular inmate from the strata, ensuring each inmate has an equal chance of being included in the study. Thereafter, the purposive sampling technique was deployed to select 30 key persons who have close proximity to the theme of this research. These are repeat offenders, correctional staff with relevant experience with character reformation, etc., because they have more experience in the subject matter given the nature of their job status. Meanwhile, stratified sampling was applied to select participants who have been involved in rehabilitation programmes based on factors such as the length of participation in reformation programmes, the type of programme attended, and the level of engagement in programme activities. Those that have participated in rehabilitation programmes were categorized in one stratum, those who have not were grouped in another stratum. Additionally, the various types of programmes undertaken were stratified, for instance, those belonging to vocational training were in one stratum and those undertaking Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) were in another stratum, those receiving basic or advanced education were in another stratum and from each of these strata, participants were randomly selected to participate in the survey. The study's primary data was gathered through a self-developed questionnaire and Key Persons Interviews (KPIs), while secondary data was obtained from published sources. The respondents were fully informed about the study's objectives and their other rights as participants, including anonymity. The descriptive-analytical technique was utilized to interpret the data in this study. The data were summarized using frequencies and central tendency metrics. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS), while Information from the Key Persons Interview was collected with electronic tape and notes and was later transcribed, synthesized and organized under thematic headings. Significant statements were quoted verbatim to corroborate or refute important findings.

## RESULTS

### Presentation of Substantive Data

**Research Objective 1: To examine the extent specific types of programs influence inmates' character reformation and recidivism rates in Okaka Correctional Service.**

Table 1: Types of programs and how they influence inmates' character reformation and reduce recidivism

Variable	Percentage Score		
	VI	I	NI
<b>Types of programs</b>			
Chaplain (Religious) Programmes	5.12%	2.00%	2.07%
Recreational Activities such as Football, Table Tennis, Ludo game, Volleyball, e.t.c	2.00%	1.33%	2.00%
Counselling / Cognitive Therapy Programmes Case work inmate			

Commissary	1.01%	1.10%	3.22%
	1.00%	2.23%	2.10%
	0.00%	1.17%	2.00%
<b>Academic Programs</b>			
Adult Literacy	1.00%	1.33%	2.00%
Remedial Classes (WAEC & NECO Examination)	0.00%	0.25%	6.00%
Degree Classes (NOUN Degree)	2.00%	1.31%	5.02%
<b>Vocational Programs</b>			
Carpentry	2.00%	1.00%	1.25%
Soap Making			
Shoe and Bag Making	1.00%	1.20%	1.05%
Tailoring	1.10%	1.23%	1.00%
Painting	2.07%	1.10%	1.00%
Building and Stone Work	1.00%	2.22%	2.11%
Tie and Dying	0.00%	2.10%	1.07%
Barbing and Hairdressing	0.05%	1.25%	2.00%
Beads Making and Make Up	0.00%	4.17%	0.00%
	1.00%	1.15%	2.10%
<b>After-Care Programs</b>			
Farming	1.02%	1.11%	1.00%
Tools and Spare	0.00%	0.00%	4.17%
Finance and Technical Support	0.00%	0.50%	4.17%
Post Discharge Supervision	0.00%	0.00%	3.25%
Business Patronage	0.30%	1.00%	1.00%
<b>Total</b>	<b>21.67%</b>	<b>28.75%</b>	<b>49.58%</b>

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Note: The following means; Very influential (VI) Influential(I) Not influential (NI)

The table above presents data pertaining to research question one, which aims to examine how specific types of character reformation programs influence inmates' recidivism outcomes. The table shows a variety of programs and their percentage scores, indicating their impact on reducing recidivism among inmates. Starting with the Chaplain (Religious) Programs, we see that they have a percentage score of 5.12%. This suggests a notable influence in helping inmates reform their characters and potentially reducing their chances of

reoffending. Following this, we have Recreational Activities like football, table tennis, and volleyball. These activities scored 2.00%, indicating that while they offer some benefit, their impact on reducing repeat offenses might not be as strong as other programs.

Next are the Counseling/Cognitive Therapy Programs, which received a score of 1.01%. This low score could imply that while counseling is essential for inmate rehabilitation, it might need to be more structured or regulated to produce better outcomes given the context. The Case Work program had a slightly better score of 1.00%, suggesting a minimal but present influence in character reformation. Additionally, the Inmate Commissary received a score of 0.00%, indicating that this program does not appear to have any significant impact on recidivism, which is quite revealing. It suggests that merely providing inmates access to goods does not foster reformed behaviors.

Moving on to Academic Programs, they varied in effectiveness. For instance, Adult Literacy Programs scored 1.00%, while Remedial Classes for WAEC and NECO examinations had a score of 0.00%, meaning they showed no effect on recidivism. Conversely, Degree Classes through the National Open University of Nigeria showed a score of 2.00%, indicating a better chance of helping inmates achieve positive outcomes. Among these academic programs, other scores illustrate a broad spectrum of benefits: 1.33% for an unspecified program related to education, 0.25% for another, and 1.31% again signify some positive influence, though not overwhelmingly high.

Looking at Vocational Programs, the data reveals various opportunities for inmates. For example, Carpentry has a score of 2.00%, while Shoe and Bag Making shows 1.10%, manifesting that practical skills teaching facilitates a degree of change in character. Programs like Tailoring and Painting also have scores around 1.00% to 2.22%, indicating they contribute to skills acquisition and potentially reduce the likelihood of returning to crime. The After-Care Programs focused on support post-release. Here we see varied percentages: Farming got 1.02%, Tools and Space received 0.00%, and Finance and Technical Support also scored 0.00%, implying these aspects might not provide sufficient support. Meanwhile, Post Discharge Supervision gained 0.30%, suggesting slight benefits, whereas Business Patronage had a notable impact with 1.00%, indicating that financial backing can help former inmates reintegrate into society successfully.

These findings altogether implies that, while some programs show promise, many have low or zero scores, suggesting that improving the implementation and structure of these character reformation efforts could be crucial in reducing recidivism among inmates. It is evident from these results that a combination of educational, vocational, and supportive after-care measures plays a fundamental role in achieving lasting changes in inmate behaviour.

### **Excerpts from the qualitative insights**

Insights from the qualitative survey corroborate the data obtained from the quantitative survey. For instance, in the case of the religious program, one inmate expressed this sentiment:

I found strength in the teachings, which have helped me rethink my future after my sentence. While I was navigating the challenges of incarceration, I discovered profound wisdom in the lessons shared by mentors and fellow inmates. These teachings opened my eyes to new perspectives and possibilities I had never considered before. They encouraged me to reflect on my past choices, understand the underlying reasons for my actions, and instilled in me a sense of hope for a better tomorrow. I began to see my time in prison not just as a punishment, but as an opportunity for growth and transformation. This newfound strength inspired me to set goals and cultivate skills that would enable me to reintegrate into society successfully. (KII Participant, Male, Inmate, aged 36years).

This belief highlights the potential for spiritual guidance to inspire change and support character reformation efforts. In contrast, the recreational activities opinion suggested a lesser impact than the religious impact. An inmate reflected that:

Playing football helps pass the time, but it doesn't teach me anything that will stop me from coming back here. While it provides a temporary escape and a way to bond with others, I realize that it distracts me from the deeper issues I face. The thrill of the game and the camaraderie it fosters can't replace the skills or knowledge I need to truly change my life. I need to focus on learning and developing new habits that will keep me out of these walls for good. Without real growth or change, I fear I'll just end up trapped in this cycle again, caught between fleeting moments of enjoyment and the harsh reality of my circumstances. (KII Participant, Male, Inmate aged 29years).

This statement illustrates that while recreational activities can provide some relief and enjoyment, they may not address the deeper issues contributing to recidivism. Furthermore, the Counseling/Cognitive Therapy Programs received a condescending perspective as gotten from the quantitative information. An inmate remarked,

Talking to someone is good, but it often feels like we're not really getting anywhere. It's as if we're going in circles, addressing the surface of our concerns without diving deep into the underlying issues. The conversation might flow, and it's comforting to share our thoughts and feelings, but I find myself yearning for real breakthroughs. I want the kind of dialogue that sparks transformation that challenges my perspectives and encourages growth. Sometimes, it feels like we're skimming the top of the ocean when there's a whole world beneath the surface waiting to be explored. I crave a connection that pushes past small talk and truly unravels the complexities of what I'm going through. Only then can I begin to make sense of my feelings and chart a course toward genuine healing. (KII participant, female, inmate, aged 28years).

This statement suggests that while inmates recognize the value of counseling, they may perceive a need for more effective or structured approaches to truly aid in their rehabilitation. Additionally, the academic and vocational programs, including Carpentry and Degree Classes indicated a more positive influence on inmate reform. One participant shared,

Learning a trade gives me hope to start fresh when I get out. It's not just about acquiring a set of practical skills; it's about opening doors to new opportunities and rebuilding my life on a solid foundation. Each lesson I learn feels like a step toward reclaiming my future, providing me with a tangible way to demonstrate my worth and capabilities. The idea of gaining expertise in a specific craft instills a sense of purpose in me. It paints a picture of a life where I can support myself, contribute positively to my community, and break free from the patterns that led me here. With each passing day, I can envision myself stepping into a new role, one that embraces responsibility and creativity, and fosters a sense of pride. This journey isn't just about survival; it's about thriving and proving to myself that change is possible. (KII Participant, Female, inmate, aged 31years).

This speaks to the importance of practical skills and education in providing inmates with opportunities to build a new life upon release. Lastly, the inquiry on After-Care Programs revealed a mixed picture, with unsatisfactory opinion indicating insufficient support for reintegration. An inmate noted;

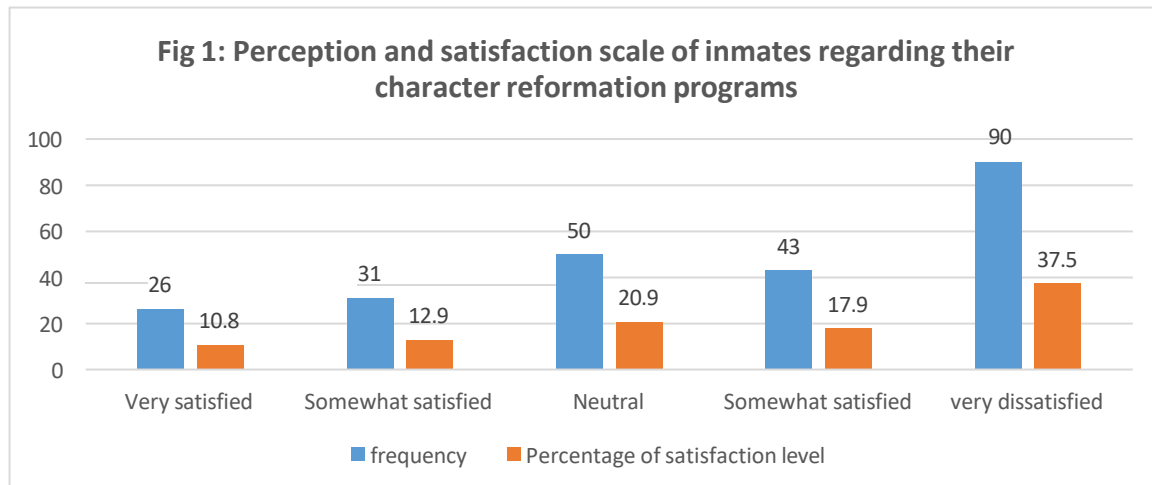
Without resources after prison, we often feel lost and return to what we know. When we're released, the world can feel overwhelming and alien, filled with challenges that seem insurmountable. The lack of support systems—whether it's access to stable housing, job training, or mental health services—leaves us feeling adrift. In those uncertain moments, the familiar paths we've walked before can seem like the only options available, even if they lead to places we wish to escape. It's a cycle that many of us want to break, but without the necessary help, we find ourselves falling back into old habits and environments that don't foster growth. More help is needed—comprehensive programs that provide mentorship, resources, and pathways to reintegration into society. We need a community that believes in our potential for change, offering guidance and support as we navigate our new freedom. It's not just about avoiding recidivism; it's about creating a foundation for a hopeful and successful future. (KII Participant, Male, Inmate aged 38years).

This opinion reflects the necessity of comprehensive support systems post-release to help former inmates navigate their transition back into society to prevent recidivism. Many individuals leaving prison face a myriad of challenges that can easily overwhelm them, including securing stable housing, finding employment, and reconnecting with family or friends. Without a robust support system in place, the risk of returning to old



habits or environments increases significantly. Comprehensive support goes beyond just basic needs; it includes access to job training, education, mental health services, addiction counseling, and legal aid. It also involves mentorship programs that connect former inmates with those who have successfully reintegrated into society, providing guidance and fostering hope. Such systems can help bridge the gap between incarceration and community reintegration, empowering individuals to build healthier lives and make positive contributions to society.

**Research objective 2: To probe how inmates' perception of rehabilitation programs relates to their rehabilitation progress and likelihood of recidivism in the correctional service?**



Source: field survey, 2025.

The figure above, illustrates the levels of satisfaction among inmates regarding the character reformation programs. The data collected from the survey reveals a diverse range of opinions from the respondents. Out of the total participants, only 26 individuals, representing 10.8%, reported being very satisfied with the programs they are privy to. This indicates a modest level of enthusiasm about the effectiveness of the initiatives in fostering positive change. The next group, comprising 31 respondents or 12.9%, indicated that they were somewhat satisfied with the character reformation programs. This suggests that while they found some aspects beneficial, their overall satisfaction might be tempered by specific elements that could be improved or expanded.

In contrast, a notable portion of the participants—50 respondents, or 20.9%—expressed a neutral stance toward the programs. This neutrality may point to ambivalence, where inmates neither fully endorse nor completely reject the value of the programs offered. Such responses could imply that the programs may need to address gaps or inadequacies to foster a stronger impression among the inmates.

On the other hand, 43 respondents, which accounts for 17.9%, reported being somewhat dissatisfied with their experiences. This group's feedback can be vital for program enhancement, indicating that certain elements did not meet their expectations or needs. Most strikingly, a substantial majority of the respondents—90 individuals, constituting 37.5%—indicated that they were very dissatisfied with the character reformation programs. This high percentage raises critical concerns about the effectiveness and relevance of the initiatives currently in place. The level of dissatisfaction may reflect systemic issues within the programs, such as a lack of resources, inadequate training for facilitators, or a misalignment between the programs' offerings and the inmates' real needs.

**Excerpts from the qualitative insights as regards the perceptions and satisfaction of inmates on the character reformation program in Okaka facility.**

As gathered from the quantitative data, the perceptions of respondents from qualitative survey did not prove otherwise as most participants expressed dissatisfaction towards the program. As opined by one of our participants;

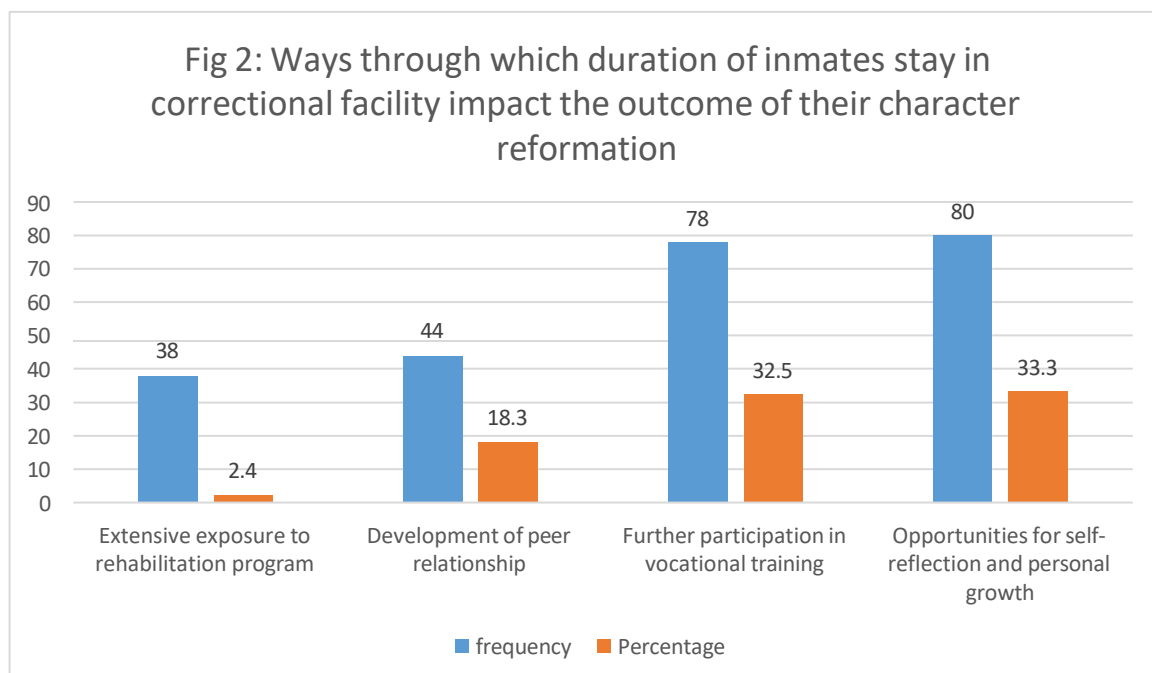
I entered the program hoping to change for the better, but I often feel like I'm stuck in the same place. The initial excitement of starting this journey filled me with optimism and a sense of purpose. I envisioned a future where I could break free from the cycles that had held me back for so long. Yet, as time passes, I find myself grappling with the weight of my past and the habits and mindsets that linger like shadows, pulling me back into familiar patterns. Despite the efforts I make, there are days when progress feels elusive, and frustration sets in. I question whether the changes I seek are truly attainable, or if I am destined to keep reliving the same struggles. It can be disheartening to put in the work and still feel stagnant, as if I'm running in place while others seem to be moving forward. What I remind myself, though, is that transformation is not always linear. There will be setbacks and challenges along the way, but I must strive to remain patient and focused on the goals I set for myself. In moments of doubt, I try to seek encouragement from others in the program and reflect on the small victories I have achieved, understanding that each step, no matter how small, is part of the journey toward a better version of myself. (KII Participant, Male, Inmate, aged 33years).

This captures how many inmates feel—the programs might exist, but they're not causing the meaningful changes that were promised. Also, another participant noted that;

I learnt a few things, but not enough to really make a difference in my life even after I leave here. While I appreciate the lessons and skills I've picked up during this time, they often feel superficial in the grand scheme of what I need to thrive on the outside. The knowledge I gained doesn't quite bridge the gap between theory and real-life application. I worry that once I step back into the world, I will find myself unprepared to face the complexities of daily living, such as navigating job searches, managing finances, or cultivating healthy relationships. I had hoped for more comprehensive training that would equip me not just with facts or techniques, but with practical, applicable skills that I can rely on when times get tough. The fear of returning to my old ways looms large, and I understand that without a solid foundation, it becomes all too easy to slip back into familiar habits. As I look toward my future, I feel a pressing need for more extensive resources and support systems that go beyond the basics, helping me not just survive, but truly thrive in this new chapter of my life. (KII Participant, Female, inmate, aged 36years).

This highlights the mixed feelings that some inmates have; they recognize some benefits, but overall satisfaction is lacking because expectations aren't being met. This also suggests that many inmates feel that the character reformation programs are falling short of their needs. Imagine going to a class designed to help you improve your skills, only to find it disorganized and unhelpful.

### Research Objective 3: To assess the ways in which the duration of inmates' stays in prison impact the outcomes of their rehabilitation?



Source: field survey, 2025.

Figure 2 above divulge the various ways in which the length of an inmate's stay in a correctional facility influences the outcomes related to their character reformation. The data indicates that 38 respondents, representing 15.8%, believe that a longer duration of incarceration allows for greater engagement with rehabilitation programs, which can lead to meaningful changes in behavior and mindset. In addition, 44 participants, or 18.3%, observed that extended time in a correctional facility fosters the development of positive peer relationships. This social aspect is crucial, as it can provide inmates with support systems that encourage rehabilitation and emotional well-being.

A notable majority, comprising 78 respondents (or 32.5%), identified the importance of duration in facilitating increased participation in vocational training programs. These training opportunities are essential for equipping inmates with practical skills that enhance their employability upon release, thus contributing to their overall reformation. Most prominently, 80 respondents, accounting for 33.3%, mentioned that a longer stay in correctional facilities affords individuals the chance for self-reflection and personal growth. This period of contemplation can empower inmates to evaluate their past behaviors, understand the consequences of their actions, and set goals for a more constructive future.

### **Excerpts from the qualitative insights**

To further understand the ways in which the duration of stay in the correctional service impact character reformation efforts, expert opinion gotten from the qualitative survey by the rehabilitation officers provided mouthwatering revelations. For instance, according to one of the counseling unit officer;

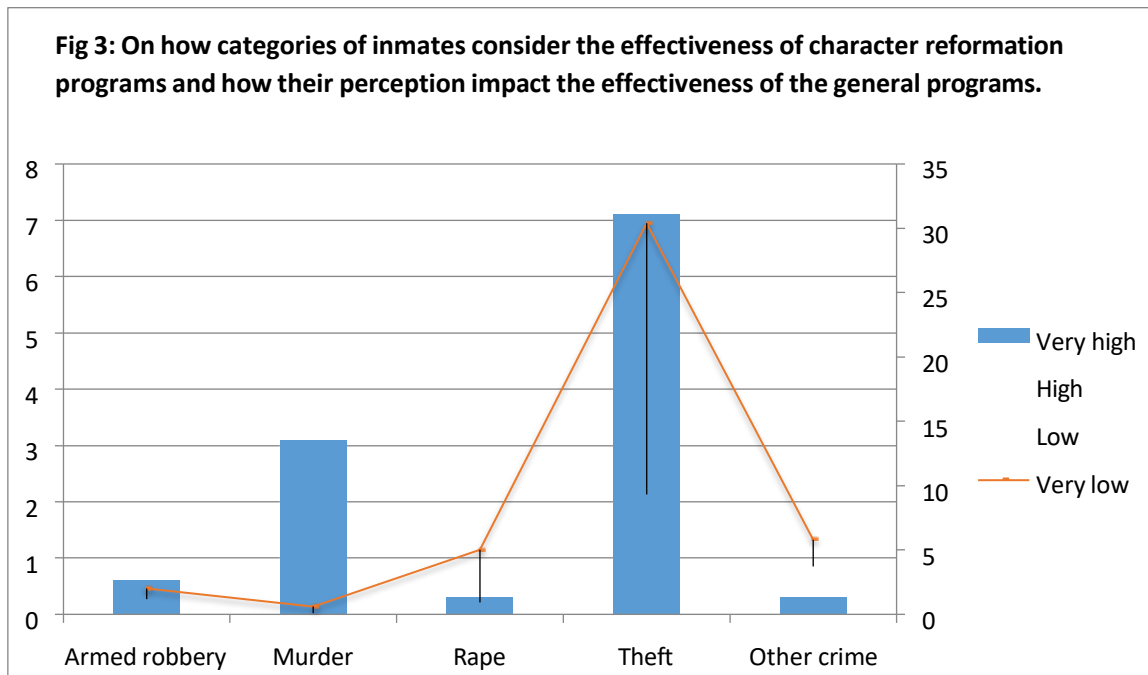
Part of the reason why some of these inmates reengage in criminal activities is that sometimes, the period they stay in the correctional service is not enough to fully reorient them. Other times, these inmates are used for irrelevant activities that are not fruitful fir their rehabilitation process thereby increasing their chances of reoffending. (KII Participant, Male, Counseling officer, aged (undisclosed)).

This is to say that the limited duration of incarceration often prevents inmates from undergoing sufficient reformation and rehabilitation. Additionally, when inmates are engaged in activities that do not contribute meaningfully to their rehabilitation, it further detracts from their ability to successfully reintegrate into society. As a result, these factors can significantly heighten the likelihood of these individuals reverting to criminal behavior upon their release. In another note, a warder clarified that;

Part of the essence of incarceration is the chance to self-reflect, but issues such as congestion and overcrowding does not allow for such moments of individual isolation. As a matter of fact, we often times wish that the duration of sentence for inmates is not too long because the longer the stay under such conditions and in the midst of probably hardened criminals, their chances cross criminalization and eventual reoffending is significantly higher. (KII Participant, Male, Warder, aged (undisclosed)).

This statement points out the negative effects of overcrowding in prisons on the ability of inmates to rehabilitate. It stresses that when inmates are in cramped spaces, they miss out on important moments of self-reflection, which are essential for personal growth and change. Additionally, it raises the concern that being locked up for a long time in these crowded conditions increases the chances of inmates falling back into criminal behavior, especially when they're around more experienced criminals. This all highlights the need for better environments in prisons that support rehabilitation and help inmates develop so they are less likely to reoffend.

**Research objective 4: to examine how the categorization of inmates, such as those convicted of armed robbery, rape, or theft, influence the effectiveness of character reformation programs on their rehabilitation progress?**



Source: Field survey, 2025

Figure 3 above presents data on how various categories of inmates view the effectiveness of character reformation programs and how their perceptions impact the overall success of these programs. Starting with inmates charged with armed robbery, the perception ratings are quite low, with only 0.6% rating it as very high, 1.2% rating it as high, 1.3% rating it as low, and 2% giving it a very low rating. This indicates that most armed robbery inmates do not see these programs as particularly effective. When we look at inmates convicted of murder, the numbers are similarly modest. Only 3.1% consider the programs very high in effectiveness, while a minuscule 0.1% think they are high. The low and very low categories have ratings of 0.2% and 0.6%, respectively, showing that the majority of murder inmates also have a weak belief in the effectiveness of these programs. For those charged with rape, perceptions vary slightly but still remain low overall. Just 0.3% view character reformation initiatives as very high, 0.9% as high, 1.9% as low, and 5% as very low. Here, we see a bit more skepticism expressed.

In contrast, inmates guilty of theft show a starkly different picture. A larger portion believes in the effectiveness of these programs, with 7.1% rating them very high and 14% rating them high. Meanwhile, 9.3% consider them low, and a significant 30.4% express a very low opinion. This suggests that while some see value in the programs, a substantial number still feel disillusioned. Finally, looking at inmates involved in other crimes, the ratings are diverse but not overwhelmingly positive. Only 0.3% see the programs as very high, while 4.6% rate them high. The low and very low ratings stand at 3.7% and 5.8%, respectively, reflecting a mix of perceptions, but still indicating a general skepticism about the effectiveness of these initiatives.

### **Qualitative insights from experts' opinion on how different categories of inmates respond or perceive character reformation program.**

Since the perception of inmates from various categories were gathered in the quantitative aspect of the study, the qualitative survey went further to gather opinion from officers in charge of the facility to gather their perception on how different criminals respond to reformation proceedings. In line with this, the deputy head of warders in the facility noted witnessing reluctance amongst more hardened offenders such as those convicted for murder and armed robbery. According to him;



We have observed that those Inmates convicted for theft are much more open and willing to partake in character reformation program in this facility unlike the inmates convicted for murder or armed robbery. Though, the reason for this has not been ascertained, however, it is believed that these set of offenders just want to comply with the activities to facilitate quick release. Meanwhile the supposed “hardened inmates” already feel condemned and do not consider the rehabilitation efforts whatsoever. (KII Participant, Male, Deputy Head of Warder).

This finding supports the earlier quantitative data presented in fig 4.3 showing that people convicted of theft are more willing to participate in rehabilitation programs than those charged with armed robbery or murder. This means that inmates who stole tend to take the chance to change their behavior more seriously, while those with more serious crimes might not be as interested in these programs. The reasons for this difference are not completely clear, but it seems that theft offenders might see rehabilitation as a way to get out of prison sooner. In contrast, those convicted of murder or robbery might feel discouraged and ignore the rehabilitation efforts. This points to the need for different strategies to engage various types of offenders in the rehabilitation process effectively.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The discussion of findings is done in line with the research objectives. There are several things that were discerned in the course of this study. The first finding in this study dealt with objective 1 and the relevant data were presented in Table 1 above. The result reveals a mixture of outcomes regarding their effectiveness. For example, religious programs were seen positively (5.12%), while recreational activities were considered less helpful (2.00%). This result is consistent with the KPIs' insight since all participants completely agree that religious teachings have helped them rethink their future after my sentence. This supports previous findings on the benefits of faith-based programs by Johnson (2007), indicating that just having recreational options may not lead to significant changes in behavior.

Additionally, the low-rating for counseling programs (1.01%) highlights a lack of effective cognitive therapy options, which research by Landenberger and Lipsey, (2005) suggests are important for rehabilitation. Inmates expressed doubts about the counseling programs, suggesting that just providing these services isn't enough to meet their emotional and psychological needs. This result is consistent with the KPIs' insight since all participants completely value the prospects of counseling, they need a more effective or structured approaches to truly aid in their rehabilitation. Vocational training offered some hope, with carpentry and tailoring courses showing moderate influence. Other studies such as Davis et al., (2013) have found that learning job skills can help reduce reoffending by making inmates more employable. Inmates shared positive attitudes about gaining skills that could help them reintegrate into society after release.

Inmates were generally unhappy with the character reformation programs, with 37.5% reporting very low satisfaction. This dissatisfaction points to weaknesses in how these programs are delivered and how well they meet inmates' needs. Again, this result is consistent with the result from qualitative survey as most participants expressed dissatisfaction towards the program. Qualitative feedback indicated that despite participating in programs, inmates felt stuck, highlighting the need for better engagement and relevant activities that connect to their lives after prison.

Additionally, how long inmates stay in prison appears to affect rehabilitation success. This finding is consistent with the excerpt from the qualitative insights as respondents unanimously reported that part of the reason why some of these inmates reengage in criminal activities is that sometimes, the period they stay in the correctional service is not enough to fully reorient them. Petersilia (2003) noted that longer sentences allow inmates to engage more deeply in rehabilitative activities. However, overcrowding and poor living conditions can prevent inmates from reflecting on their behavior, which increases the chances of reoffending (Tewksbury & Dabney, 2009).

Finally, the research also shows differences among groups of inmates. Those convicted of theft seem to be more open to rehabilitation programs than those charged with more serious crimes like armed robbery and murder. This aligns with earlier studies such as Morris & Tonry (1990) which found that individuals convicted

of less severe offenses are generally more willing to participate in rehabilitation. Feedback from facility staff suggested that serious offenders face psychological challenges that require special strategies to motivate them effectively.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, based on the findings, this research points out serious problems with the character reformation programs at the Okaka Correctional Facility and suggests that important changes are needed in how these programs are run and where resources are directed. As the data reveals, many of the current initiatives lack the depth and effectiveness necessary to foster genuine transformation among inmates. There is a crucial need for thorough assessments and improvements in education and job training, along with customized support for inmates tailored to their individual needs and circumstances. Such an approach is vital not only for lowering the rate of recidivism but also for equipping inmates with the skills and confidence they need to successfully reintegrate into society. The findings make it clear that merely offering programs is not sufficient; rather, a more organized and strategic approach is essential to create a comprehensive framework that promotes lasting change. This includes investing in professional development for program facilitators, ensuring that the curriculum is relevant and engaging, and fostering partnerships with local businesses and community organizations to enhance employment opportunities post-release. The stakes are high—by taking these necessary steps, we can significantly impact the lives of those incarcerated, helping them move from a cycle of incarceration to a path of constructive living, and ultimately benefiting society as a whole. Based on the results and conclusions drawn, the study offers the following recommendations:

To ensure that character reformation programs effectively meet the needs of inmates, systematic evaluations should be implemented. This involves gathering feedback from participants regarding the relevance and effectiveness of the programs, as well as assessing their individual progress in skill development and personal growth. Such assessments can guide program modifications, ensuring that the content and delivery are aligned with inmates' aspirations and realities. Additionally, engaging external experts in correctional education can bring fresh perspectives and methodologies that enhance program efficacy.

Expanding educational resources, including literacy programs, GED preparation, and vocational training, is essential for inmates to gain the qualifications needed for employment upon release. Collaborating with local educational institutions and workforce development organizations can provide inmates with access to accredited courses and hands-on training in various trades. By offering a diversified curriculum that includes both hard and soft skills—such as communication, teamwork, and critical thinking—these programs can better prepare inmates for the workforce and create pathways to stable careers.

Recognizing that each inmate has unique circumstances, backgrounds, and goals is crucial for effective rehabilitation. Personalized support plans should be developed for each individual, focusing on their specific needs, strengths, and challenges. This could involve one-on-one mentoring, counseling services, and tailored workshops that address their personal and professional development. Establishing a support network that includes mental health professionals, social workers, and former inmates who have successfully reintegrated can create an environment conducive to healing and growth.

Building collaborations with businesses can create job placement opportunities for inmates upon release. By engaging local employers in program development, facilities can ensure that training aligns with market demands, making inmates more attractive candidates for employment. Additionally, community organizations can provide resources such as housing assistance, financial literacy workshops, and skills training that ease the transition back into society. These partnerships can also promote community buy-in and support for inmates, reducing stigma and fostering an environment of acceptance.

Equipping program staff with ongoing training and professional development opportunities is vital to maintaining program quality. Facilitators who understand best practices in adult education, counseling techniques, and behavioral interventions can significantly impact inmates' learning experiences. Regular workshops, conferences, and networking events can enhance the skills of staff, creating a more knowledgeable

and empathetic team dedicated to the mission of reformation. Additionally, encouraging facilitators to seek input from inmates on their teaching methods can foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

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