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Parolee reintegration adversities in South Africa: Insights from Social Workers in the department of correctional services

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ABSTRACT

The aftercare phase plays a critical role in the offender rehabilitation process, functioning as the transitional stage between incarceration and reintegration into society globally. From an aftercare perspective, the role of social workers extends beyond the supervision of parolees to encompass the provision of comprehensive psychosocial support aimed at promoting rehabilitation, reducing recidivism, and fostering successful reintegration. The research article examines the adversities faced by parolees upon re-entering society in South Africa, drawing on insights from social workers employed at community corrections offices within the Department of Correctional Services (DCS). A qualitative research approach, utilising explorative and descriptive designs, was adopted for this study. This study employed a non-probability purposive sampling technique, through which 19 participants were selectively recruited from community corrections within the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) in South Africa. The sample included social workers, their supervisors, and heads of community corrections offices. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The study draws from the ecological systems theory. The findings highlighted that parolees experience reintegration challenges upon entering society. The challenges identified include relationship problems, unemployment, family and community stigma and substance abuse. The article concludes that social workers should educate families about the significance of supporting parolees financially as they are struggling to find employment.

KEY TERMS: aftercare, community corrections, rehabilitation, reintegration, parolee, South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Parolees re-enter society after serving half of their sentences within correctional centers, completing the remainder under parole supervision in the community. Although they are outside correctional facilities, they remain under the South African Department of Correctional Services (DCS) system and should continue to receive social work services to support their successful rehabilitation and reintegration. Such services often include counseling, support groups, and rehabilitation programmes, all designed to help parolees navigate the challenges of re-adjusting to life after incarceration. By addressing their needs holistically, the risk of recidivism can be significantly reduced, fostering safer communities and more successful transitions for parolees. The social work profession carries a vital responsibility in this process, serving as a vehicle for transforming individuals in conflict with the law into law-abiding citizens. This article has been extracted from a doctoral thesis titled “The challenges facing social workers responsible for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of parolees: guidelines for social work support services”. This study is significant given South Africa’s persistently high rates of recidivism and the considerable difficulties parolees face in reintegrating into society. The article examines the adversities experienced by parolees upon re-entry, drawing on the perspectives of social workers within the Department of Correctional Services. By foregrounding these professional insights, the study seeks to address and help close the gap identified in the existing literature on parolee reintegration in South Africa. It begins with background information, followed by a literature review that provides an overview of rehabilitation and reintegration processes. The subsequent section outlines the research methodology, leading into the presentation and discussion of findings. The article then concludes with a discussion of the study’s conclusions and offers recommendations on strategies to better support parolees during their reintegration journey.

BACKGROUND

Parole, as a mechanism for rehabilitating offenders, is not unique to South Africa but is a practice implemented globally (Mathlin, Freestone, & Jones, 2024). Within this framework, the social work profession plays a pivotal role in ensuring that parolees are not only rehabilitated but also successfully reintegrated into society. For decades, social workers within the DCS have been at the forefront of this process, delivering professional services to offenders and their families (Sandra, Ndolo & Mugah, 2018). According to Alexander (2017), social workers hold the responsibility of providing essential services and programmes that support both parolees and their families throughout the reintegration process. Social work and the criminal justice system have been intertwined for many decades, and the profession is primarily concerned with the objective of rehabilitating offenders (Franke, Treglia & Cnaan, 2017). As part of rehabilitation, offenders should participate in the DCS rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, which should assist them to be able to live a crime-free life upon entering the community (South Africa, 2005).

Offenders should be given the opportunity to acquire new skills through educational programmes during the rehabilitation process, as this enhances their prospects for successful and sustainable reintegration into the community (Murhula & Singh, 2019). Since many individuals engage in criminal activities and subsequently enter the prison system, the number of parolees being released continues to rise, often leading to dramatic changes in their lives (Mahamba, 2024). Upon release, parolees encounter multiple challenges in their re-entry into society, necessitating professional intervention to support their reintegration (Xiaoyu & Guoyi, 2024). Offender reintegration refers to the process through which individuals transition from incarceration back into mainstream society, with the goal of resuming a law-abiding and crime-free life (Chikadzi, 2017; Goger, Harding, & Henderson, 2021). The Directorate of Social Work Services in DCS plays a significant role in rendering professional services for the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders (Murhula & Singh, 2019). Social workers provide an array of clinical, case management and advocacy services to individuals, families, and communities, all of which are essential for offenders and parolees. (Nduli & Mthembu, 2022). According to Goger et al. (2021), the successful reintegration of parolees into the community is crucial, as it not only supports their rehabilitation but also enhances the safety and protection of the communities in which they reside. Parolees are empowered with skills that help them to be able to deal with their own problems (Mathlin et al. 2024).

Research on social work within correctional environments has extensively documented the challenges experienced by social workers working with inmates in correctional centres. However, despite the pivotal role social workers play in parolee rehabilitation and reintegration, limited research has explored their lived experiences and professional perspectives within the South African context, particularly in community corrections settings of the DCS. This paper responds to this gap by exploring social workers’ perspectives on the adversities faced by parolees during the critical phase of re-entry into society. Addressing these adversities through informed policy development, improved resource allocation, and strengthened community support systems is essential not only for promoting successful reintegration outcomes, but also for reducing recidivism rates in the country.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach to explore the challenges of social workers responsible for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of parolees within the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa. This research approach was chosen because of its ability to explore, explain and describe people's experiences, perceptions, and behaviour in their social environment (Aspers, 2021). The approach and design allowed participants to share challenges and suggestions from their own perspectives. Participants were purposefully selected from three populations which consisted of social workers working at community corrections offices nationally; their supervisors; and the heads of community corrections offices within the DCS. Participants consisted of ten social workers, five social work supervisors and four heads of community corrections offices responsible for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of parolees. They were all recruited after meeting the requirements of the inclusion criteria designed for this study and were interviewed at their offices to ensure confidentiality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Data from the participants was gathered by means of semi-structured interviews aided by an interview schedule as suggested by Pealer (2017). These interviews were conducted at the participants' locations and included both face-to-face and telephone conversations. A total of nineteen participants were subsequently interviewed, and the number thereof was determined by the principle of 'data saturation'. Data saturation was achieved when the researcher began to hear from the participants the same information being repeated ((Liamputtong, 2020). All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using Tech's eight steps of data analysis, as outlined by Creswell (2014). To enhance the credibility of the findings, data were analysed by both the researchers and an independent coder. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model of data verification was applied to ensure trustworthiness. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed, including securing informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and upholding participants' rights to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participants were not subjected to any physical or emotional harm during the study. Written consent was obtained from all participants, who were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the DCS, while ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa's research and ethics committees.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is guided by Ecological Systems Theory, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interaction between individuals and their environments. The theory is particularly useful in explaining how social workers and parolees interact, as well as the multiple challenges parolees face when re-entering society after incarceration. Ecological Systems Theory views individuals in a holistic manner, emphasizing that people cannot be understood in isolation from their surrounding environments (Guy-Evans, 2020). Instead, individuals exist within interconnected systems that influence their behaviour, experiences, and opportunities. In the context of this study, parolees are not seen only as individuals adjusting to life after incarceration, but as persons operating within various social systems such as family, community, employment structures, the criminal justice system, and broader societal norms.

The theory also assisted social workers in understanding the parolee's social environment more effectively. It highlights the different systems that parolees interact with, including immediate environments such as family and peers. At the same time, the theory recognizes the parolee as a system, acknowledging their personal history, psychological state, coping skills, and behavioural patterns. Furthermore, Ecological Systems Theory facilitates insight into the origins of the difficulties individuals such as parolees encounter within their environments (Crawford, 2020). Challenges such as unemployment, social stigma, lack of family support, or limited access to community resources are not viewed solely as personal failings, but as the result of interactions between the individual and multiple environmental systems. This perspective allows social workers to identify not only individual-level needs but also systemic barriers that may hinder successful reintegration.

LITERATURE

The literature review provided a comprehensive background on the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders into society. The review was informed by the national and international studies examining rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders and parolees. Literature shows that rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders have become prominent themes in correctional discourse across many countries globally (Alamu & Makinde, 2019; Martufi, 2018). The increase in criminal activity worldwide has prompted numerous countries to share a common goal of rehabilitating and effectively reintegrating offenders back into society (Pike, 2018). Different countries manage the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders differently (Onyekachi, 2016). In many correctional systems, offenders are exposed to structured rehabilitation programmes within correctional centres that aim to equip them with skills necessary for meaningful participation in society upon release (Vandala, 2019). These programmes are designed to address individual behavior while simultaneously fostering social competence and

responsibility, thereby strengthening offenders' functioning within their immediate social environments (Bartollas & Siegel, 2018).

In Namibia, all offenders are subjected to educational, vocational and employment-readiness programmes to promote effectiveness and compliance within society (Fredericks et al., 2021). These initiatives are designed to ensure that offenders lead productive lives upon re-entering the community. In Kenya, aftercare services and programmes provide supervision and support to facilitate successful reintegration (Osayi, 2015: 40). Similar to the South Africa context, professionals in Kenya have developed educational and vocational programmes aimed at rehabilitating offenders and supporting their reintegration into society (Juma & Githigaro, 2021). In Nigeria, interventions combine vocational training with psychosocial support. However, recidivism rates remain high, partly because punishment often continues informally after discharging due to negative public attitudes toward former offenders (Stephen & Dudafa, 2016). In South Africa, released parolees report to community corrections offices under the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) to complete their sentences within the community. In terms of the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998 (Section 41(1)), the DCS is mandated to develop programmes and activities that address the rehabilitation needs of offenders. Overall, the management of offender rehabilitation and reintegration differs significantly across countries (Onyekachi, 2016), reflecting variations in policy frameworks, societal values, and prevailing philosophies of punishment and rehabilitation.

Globally, offender rehabilitation is structured around educational, vocational, and employment-readiness programmes, which aim to enhance offenders' compliance and functional participation in society (Fredericks, Mbukusa, & Tjibeba, 2021). From an ecological systems perspective, these interventions primarily target the microsystem by strengthening individual skills and capacities that support lawful living. Empirical evidence suggests that offenders who participate in such programmes are less likely to reoffend and more likely to secure employment upon release compared to those who lack access to these opportunities (Davis, 2018; Pike, 2018). Sheppard and Ricciardelli (2020) reported that offender reintegration is supported through aftercare services that provide supervision and structured support during the transition from incarceration to community life. These services reflect a more integrated ecological approach, as they extend rehabilitation efforts beyond correctional facilities and into community settings. The involvement of multiple professionals in the development and delivery of educational and vocational programmes further illustrates an attempt to strengthen coordination between correctional services, social welfare systems, and community structures (Ganapathy, 2018).

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings on the adversities faced by parolees upon re-entering society after a period of incarceration. Most of the study participants were females, with males being underrepresented. All participants had been employed at community corrections offices for a period of more than two years, providing them with substantial experience and insight into parolee reintegration. Data analysis generated six overarching themes. However, for the purpose of this article, attention is focused on one theme, which encompasses five subthemes. The selected theme and its associated subthemes are presented and discussed below.

Theme 1: Social workers description of the challenges parolees face upon reentering society.

Participants highlighted a range of re-entry difficulties experienced by parolees, which emerged through data analysis. Five key subthemes were identified: relationship problems, unemployment and financial challenges, substance abuse, community and family stigma, and parole violations or non-compliance. These subthemes illustrate the complex and interconnected difficulties parolees encounter as they strive to reintegrate into society. These subthemes are discussed in detail below.

Sub theme 1: Relationship problems

Family support plays a pivotal role in ensuring parolees' stability and reducing the risk of recidivism during reintegration (Chikadzi, 2017). However, several participants reported that parolees often experience strained relationships with their family members following release from correctional centers. These tensions hinder the reintegration process and may increase feelings of isolation and vulnerability. The following excerpts from participants' interviews illustrate the relationship difficulties faced by parolees:

Within a month there is a family problem, the parolee is complaining that 'I don't have a place to stay, I am sleeping in the dining room and other family members watch TV while I'm sleeping. (Participant 2)

The other thing is marriage or relationship problems. Most of them go to prison married and when they come back, they start to have problems with their partners, the wife, or the girlfriend. (Participant 5)

So, you find parolees relocating from one place to the other, staying with grandmothers, staying with mothers and whoever because support is no longer there, there seems to be a problem between parolees and their significant others. (Participant 9)

Subtheme 2: Unemployment and financial challenges

The lack of sustainable employment not only undermines parolees' ability to achieve financial independence but also increases the risk of reoffending, as economic hardship often drives individuals back into criminal activity. Participants reported that most parolees struggle to secure employment upon release from correctional centres. The participants stated that this difficulty is largely attributed to their limited educational background and lack of job-related skills. The following responses of participants confirm this theme:

Some of them it's because of lack of skills, they were arrested without any qualification, so unemployment is the biggest problem. (Participant 3)

They struggle to find work because of their criminal record and as a result, they are coming back here to consult with social workers, and this affects their daily functioning. (Participant 8)

They always come to us, and we cannot assist them with employment, they don't have food and because they are hungry this leads them back to crime, we always refer them to the Department of Social Development for food parcels. So, it's a strain for parolees and sometimes with their families, because now they are dependent on their caregivers. (Participant 5)

The views expressed by participants align with findings from Zakaria (2018) who argue that parolees often face significant barriers to employment due to limited education, lack of work experience, poor cognitive skills, and the stigma of having a criminal record. These barriers not only reduce opportunities for meaningful employment but also hinder the parolees' ability to achieve financial independence. As a result of these challenges, parolees rely on the Department of Social Development (DSD) for basic support, such as food parcels.

Subtheme 3: Substance abuse

In addition, participants highlighted substance abuse as a persistent challenge for many parolees. Upon re-entering society, parolees often continue to struggle with drug and alcohol dependency, which significantly hinders their successful reintegration (Best & Savic, 2020). Participants observed that some parolees resort to alcohol consumption as a coping mechanism, which not only exacerbates their personal challenges but also leads them to neglect or violate parole conditions. The following responses from the participants underlined the substance abuse challenges parolees are facing:

Substance abuse is the biggest challenge that parolees experience, when they relapse, they no longer respect parole conditions. (Participant 2)

Because they are under parole, they don't have any other things to do. They will resort to substance abuse for them to cope with house arrest and boredom. (Participant 10)

Participants further noted that substance abuse directly affects parolees' ability to comply with parole conditions. This observation is supported by Stephen and Dudafa (2016), who found that unresolved substance abuse problems are closely associated with reoffending. One participant emphasized the severity of this issue, stating:

Due to addiction to substances, if they don't have money to buy, they reoffend by stealing and doing house breaking so that they can sell the stolen goods to satisfy their craving. (Participant 1)

Subtheme 4: Community and family stigma or mistrust

Participants' responses included that, upon release from correctional centres, parolees often experience the stigma associated with their incarceration (Fredericks et.al, 2021). The feedback indicated that stigma is not only perpetuated by the wider community but also by parolees' own families. Such stigmatization undermines parolees' sense of belonging, making it difficult for them to rebuild social relationships and reintegrate successfully into society. Despite parolees' positive decisions and good intentions, responses also showed that society and families do not trust them. Participants shared the following sentiments:

Parolees encounter challenges with stigma attached to them by the community and their families as well. It is not easy for the community to accept parolees because they still regard them as criminals who are

robbing other people. (Participant 3)

Again, parolees are complaining that they are not accepted in the communities, there is a stigma attached to them due to the crimes they have committed, when they are at home, the family is not supporting them, they are fighting, and the biggest problem is the trust issues. (Participant 7)

It is evident from upon their release, they often feel unwelcome, as families struggle to rebuild trust after years of deceit, theft, and broken promises that resulted in imprisonment. Research on offender re-entry highlights that parolees commonly face significant challenges, particularly stigma from both their families and the wider community (Bartollas & Siegel, 2018; Levenson, 2018; Quinn-Hogan, 2021).

Subtheme 5: Parole violations or non-compliance

Participants reported that many parolees struggle to comply with parole conditions due to the adversities they face within their families and communities. Some parolees even relocate from their homes to escape family-related challenges, which further complicates their ability to adhere to parole requirements. These difficulties underscore how environmental and relational factors can directly impact compliance and, consequently, the risk of recidivism. The following responses of participants confirm this theme:

Sometimes if they have family problems, they will relocate to stay with a girlfriend, and if there is no change of address it's a violation because it was not done appropriately through the office to update the file. (Participant 2)

When the parole officers do supervision at their places some of them are not always at home. They will either be on the street drinking - not at home - without notifying the parole officers. (Participant 10)

Within community corrections, parolees are required to report to multiple supervisors, which can lead to confusion. The following sentiment underlined this challenge:

Another issue is the issue of confusion of supervision roles because they have many supervisors who sometimes give them different information about their conditions, and they end up being confused and they will bring it to my attention. They are confused and at the end of the day they violate the parole conditions. (Participant 5)

DISCUSSION

This article explored the adversities parolees experience upon re-entering society after a period of incarceration. The findings highlight the complex and interconnected challenges that parolees face during reintegration. Five subthemes emerged: relationship problems; unemployment and financial challenges; substance abuse; community and family stigma; and parole violations or non-compliance. Together, these themes illustrate the dynamic interplay between individual, familial, and systemic barriers to successful reintegration. Family support was identified as a critical factor in promoting successful reintegration; however, participants reported that many parolees experience strained or absent family relationships. This finding aligns with Chikadzi (2017), who argues that familial support plays a significant role in reducing recidivism. The absence of emotional and social support may intensify feelings of isolation, increase vulnerability to relapse or non-compliance, and ultimately hinder parolees' adjustment to community life. Participants indicated that parolees often struggle to secure employment due to limited education, insufficient job-related skills, and societal stigma. Zakaria et al. (2018) note that parolees are frequently perceived as unreliable or prone to reoffending, which further limits economic opportunities. Inability to achieve financial independence can force parolees to rely on social assistance, increasing their vulnerability to recidivism.

Substance dependency emerged as a major barrier to reintegration. Participants reported that parolees often fail to comply with parole conditions while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This is consistent with Best and Savic (2020), who found that unresolved substance abuse is strongly linked to recidivism. Participants described parolees as unable to remain abstinent, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions addressing addiction. Stigma was another significant challenge. Participants reported that parolees face discrimination and social exclusion from both family members and the wider community, consistent with Fredericks, Mbukusa, and Tjibeba (2021). Stigmatization reduces parolees' confidence, limits their social support networks, and further restricts access to employment or rehabilitation opportunities.

Participants observed that adversities in family and community environments often lead parolees to breach conditions, including relocating from their homes. Moreover, inconsistent guidance from multiple parole supervisors creates confusion, further complicating compliance. These findings highlight how systemic issues

within community corrections can inadvertently contribute to non-compliance and potential recidivism. The study underscores the necessity of holistic support, including family counseling, employment and skills development programs, substance abuse treatment, community sensitization to reduce stigma, and consistent guidance from parole supervisors. Such comprehensive interventions can improve reintegration outcomes, enhance compliance with parole conditions, and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. The findings underscore the need for integrated reintegration policies that address the multidimensional challenges faced by parolees. Within the Department of Correctional Services, community corrections policies should prioritise structured re-entry planning that begins prior to release and continues post-release. This includes strengthening intersectoral collaboration between correctional services, social development agencies, employment services, mental health providers, and community-based organisations. Furthermore, policies aimed at reducing recidivism should incorporate family-centred interventions, recognising the protective role of positive family relationships in reintegration outcomes.

Based on the findings of the study, the DCS should institutionalise comprehensive, individualised reintegration plans that begin prior to release and continue during community supervision. These plans should include family engagement strategies, employment preparation, and referral pathways to community resources. Furthermore, given the critical role of family support, structured family counselling, mediation, and reunification programmes should be prioritised. Social workers should facilitate restorative family dialogues where appropriate, preparing both parolees and their families for reintegration. The DCS should develop partnerships with the private sector to facilitate job placement opportunities for parolees. Integrated substance abuse treatment programmes should form part of both custodial and community-based rehabilitation. Community awareness campaigns should be implemented to reduce discrimination against parolees.

CONCLUSIONS

The study explored the challenges experienced by social workers responsible for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of parolees. Participants in the study have attested to the reintegration challenges experienced by parolees upon incarceration. It was deeply concerning to discover that the majority of parolees experience stigma and rejection from both their families and the broader community, factors that may contribute to recidivism. Participants indicated that some parolees choose to leave their family homes in search of alternative accommodation due to strained relationships and unresolved conflict. Such instability not only undermines their prospects for successful reintegration but may also result in violations of parole conditions, particularly where residence requirements form part of their supervision agreements. These findings highlight the urgent need for strengthened family mediation, community education, and structured support systems to mitigate stigma and promote reintegration stability. Nixon (2020) states that the successful reintegration of parolees depends on the presence of significant others and in this study, it was revealed that parolees are unable to maintain healthy relationships with their family members. Social workers within community corrections of the Department of Correctional Services should therefore prioritise educating families on how to provide both emotional and practical support to parolees upon their return to the community. Parolees experience financial difficulties as they are unable to secure employment due to criminal record and limited education. They are seen as useless and unreliable and most of them reoffend when they can't find employment. Social workers educate families about the importance of supporting parolees financially as they are struggling to find employment.

The majority of parolees struggle with substance abuse and addiction to cope with the challenges they experience. They are unable to refrain from substance abuse and this is placing them at risk of reoffending and being incarcerated again. Social workers should consider networking with the rehabilitation centres where they can refer parolees for substance abuse rehabilitation.

Upon re-entering the society, parolees suffer from the stigma associated with their incarceration. They are being stigmatised for being ex-offenders and despite their good intentions and positive choices, parolees are nonetheless stigmatized by society and families, which hinders their effective reintegration. After years of deceit, theft, and broken promises that resulted in incarceration, the family still finds it difficult to trust the parolees. They feel devalued because they are stigmatised by their families and the community, and this devaluation makes reintegration challenging. The DCS should organise awareness campaigns to give the community information about the parole system as well as the significance of accepting and supporting the parolees who are trying to reconnect with the community. Social workers to provide awareness in the community to deal with stigmatization of parolees. Parolees are not complying with parole conditions due to the challenges they experience. Due to financial difficulties, they are unable to visit the office as expected. In most cases, they violate conditions because of lack of family support.

There is a need for further qualitative comparative research examining differences between urban and rural community corrections contexts, as such studies would generate valuable insights into how structural inequalities, service availability, and resource disparities influence reintegration outcomes. Furthermore, policies aimed at reducing recidivism should incorporate family-centred interventions that recognise, strengthen, and sustain the protective role of positive family relationships in promoting successful reintegration and long-term desistance

from crime.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

The findings of this study are significant for social work as a helping profession. In the best interests of parolees, social work interventions should prioritise counselling and family education initiatives aimed at strengthening both emotional and practical support systems. By equipping families with knowledge about the reintegration process and the challenges parolees face, social workers can foster more supportive home environments that enhance stability, promote accountability, and contribute to sustainable reintegration outcomes. Strengthening family relationships can reduce isolation and promote compliance with parole conditions. Parolees should have access to vocational training, educational programs, and job placement initiatives. Equipping them with marketable skills can improve financial independence and reduce reliance on social assistance, thereby lowering the risk of recidivism. Targeted rehabilitation programs addressing drug and alcohol dependency are essential. Continuous monitoring, counseling, and support groups can help parolees maintain sobriety and comply with parole conditions. Community sensitization programs should be implemented to reduce stigma against parolees. Encouraging acceptance and social inclusion within families and communities can improve reintegration outcomes. Parole officers should coordinate to provide clear, consistent guidance to parolees to reduce confusion and enhance compliance with parole conditions. Social workers, community organizations, and correctional authorities should collaborate to offer integrated services addressing the emotional, social, and economic needs of parolees. Holistic support can facilitate successful reintegration and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper explored the challenges faced by parolees from the perspectives of social workers within South Africa's Department of Correctional Services. The findings underscore that successful reintegration is contingent upon comprehensive and coordinated support structures, particularly the strengthening of familial relationships and the mitigation of societal stigma. Social workers play a pivotal role in facilitating this process through psychosocial interventions, advocacy, family mediation, and community education initiatives. Addressing these factors holistically is essential for promoting long-term desistance from crime and enabling parolees to participate fully and constructively in society. Future efforts should prioritise the expansion of formal and informal support networks, enhancement of rehabilitation and aftercare programmes, and the fostering of collaborative partnerships among families, communities, and correctional services. In addition, social workers should actively educate families about the importance of both emotional and practical support during the reintegration process. Temporary assistance with basic needs such as housing, food, transportation, and job-search expenses can significantly reduce reintegration-related stressors and enable parolees to focus on securing sustainable employment and rebuilding their lives.

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