

Perceived Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting the Re-integration of Discharged Prisoners: A Case Study of Ilorin Emirate

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Abstract. This study examines the perceived socio-cultural factors affecting the re-integration of the discharged prisoners in Ilorin Emirate of Kwara State, Nigeria. Questionnaire and interview were the instruments of data collection. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were adopted to select a total of 1187 and 3 (1190) respondents respectively. The data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists and thematic analysis. The study found that there is a relationship between the socio-cultural factors and reintegration challenges of discharged prisoners in Ilorin. The study concludes that a successful reintegration is pertinent to society's readiness to receive and accept the discharged prisoners. Thus, the paper suggested that a coordinated effort to develop public enlightenment programs aimed at sensitising individuals and communities (at both micro and macro level) about the responsibilities of the society and significant roles members could play in the reintegration process of discharged prisoners would seem appropriate.

Keywords: Socio-cultural; Discharged-prisoners; Prison; Ex-convict; Reintegration; Ilorin; Nigeria

1. Introduction

Crime and criminality are inevitable in every human society, this is because they are considered as parts of or emanated from social interaction. No society is, therefore, free of crime (Glaeser et al., 1996). However, the degree of crime and how offenders are treated or

perceived vary from culture to culture and society to society. Similarly, the nature and effectiveness of the social control measures and the societal attitude towards offenders (and ex-offenders) greatly determine the level of crime and how society treats or perceives offenders (Quinney & Treviño, 2001).

In the traditional pre-colonial African societies, for instance, violators of the societal norms and values were perceived as sinners and enemies of the gods whose transgressions may incur the anger of the gods on the whole society. They were considered as outcasts, wicked and evil (Osayi, 2013). Punishment for such individual include but not limited to public flogging and humiliation, temporal and permanent excommunication, payment of fine or spiritual ingredients to pacify the gods and performance of rituals to cleanse the offender, his family and the community from the infractions and wrath of the gods (Osayi, 2013; Diop, 1987). However, most of these practices die out following the emergence of the colonial lords and the introduction of the formal justice system.

In Nigeria, for example, the traditional justice system which is rooted in the cultural beliefs and practices, and processes offenders based on the norms or traditional social control system was replaced with a modern criminal justice system that now processes offenders through the law enforcement agents, the court and correctional and rehabilitation system. This formal justice system tremendously changed peoples' beliefs, particularly in the area of considering offenders as the enemies of gods, response to crime and

treatment of offenders by allowing the state to handle and process offenders in accordance with the rule of law (Dada et al., 2015).

In most cases, imprisonment is considered as the most appropriate formal form of punishment. The formal perspective of punishment is, therefore, primarily aimed at considering offenders as individuals who could be transformed and/or redeemed with the expectation of being restored back into the society (Osayi, 2013). It should be noted; however, that incarceration was also an aspect of the traditional criminal justice system in many societies in Nigeria. The major modifications to it are in the area administration and functions or purposes. For instance, incarceration was not widely considered as punishment for some criminal offences (capital and misdemeanour crimes such homicide and theft), as we have today, it was regarded as a confined place where offenders are kept pending a decision on their punishment (Olonisakin et al., 2017; Ogunode, 2015).

Despite the wide acceptance of and trust people have in the formal criminal justice system to handle offenders, the general traditional beliefs or perception of offenders as dangerous individuals still remain pertinent among some people and communities, particularly in Ilorin Emirate of Kwara State. In addition, as we (researchers) observed there seems to be an increasing negative judgement about all categories of offenders (including the accused or suspects) who have been processed through the formal criminal justice system among Ilorin people. Though, empirical research that gauges public perception about those who have been accused of a criminal offence(s) or gone through the criminal justice system (particularly ex-prisoners) in Ilorin is rare. However, Osayi (2013) reported that there is a continuous stigma against offenders especially those who have passed through the prison (ex-convicts) in virtually all communities (particularly in Anambra State) in Nigeria. Also, Shajobi-Ibikunle (2014) and Aniekan (2016) observed that common perception among communities is that little or nothing could be done to rehabilitate or change the behaviour of ex-offenders. This

notion, therefore, incites certain attitudinal beliefs that anyone who has been sentenced or convicted is a condemned person whom should not be associated with.

Furthermore, this negative judgement strongly informs and influences general perceptions and the way members of the society relate with discharged prisoners. Thus, discharged prisoners or ex-offenders face numerous hardships and challenges (including a meaningful connection at micro and macro level) following their release into these communities. They are being stigmatized or labelled as dangerous fellows who cannot be associated with, employed, married or assisted in any way. This negative perception often serves as a major obstacle that interferes with a successful reintegration and smooth transition into being a productive member of their own communities (Osayi, 2013).

The label 'ex-prisoner or offender' ascribed to them appears to have generated certain destructive impression in their psyche which in turns hinders their reintegration. From our observation, it appears that an individual is routinely branded a miscreant or reprobate once he is discovered to have been processed through the criminal justice system or an ex-prisoner. This continuous form of rejection and mistreatment has in effect, remains the major impediment that continues to hinder effective reintegration of discharged prisoners. In addition, the legal structure in the country also created a complex barrier (conviction collateral) that strictly disallowed ex-prisoners from holding public office and participating in election for a certain number of years following their release. This also prevents ex-offenders' ability to reconnect to the social and economic arrangements that would allow full reintegration into society (Osayi, 2013; Ogbozor, Odoemena and Obi, 2006).

Based on the foregoing, it is pertinent to conduct a research of this nature to gain an insight into the socio-cultural factors affecting the successful reintegration of the discharged prisoners in Ilorin Emirate. Also, given that very few empirical studies have actually explored this

development in Nigeria, this study, therefore, seeks to bring to light the socio-cultural beliefs and sentiments that inform the ways people perceive and treated discharged prisoners in Ilorin Emirate of Kwara State, Nigeria.

2. Objectives

Specifically, the objective of this study is to examine the extent to which socio-cultural factors affect the reintegration of discharged prisoners (ex-convict) in Ilorin Emirate of Kwara State, Nigeria. Other objectives include:

- To examine the perception and attitude of the people of Ilorin towards the discharged prisoners,
- To find out the challenges ex-offenders encounter upon their return to communities in Ilorin,
- To investigate how socio-cultural factors have affected the reintegration of the discharged prisoners in Ilorin, and
- To provide strategies that could be adopted for the successful reintegration of discharged prisoners

3. Literature Review

The terms ex-convict, ex-offender, ex-prisoner and discharged prisoner have been variously used by different scholars to describe individuals who have been sentenced, convicted or confined to prison for a period of time as punishment for the offence(s) which he/she has been found guilty by a competent court of law. These terms are used interchangeably in this study to refer to such individuals.

3.1 Socio-cultural Characteristics of Ilorin People and Perception of Discharged Prisoners

Ilorin Emirate, the present day capital city of Kwara State, is located in the North Central region of Nigeria. Ilorin is one of the ancient cities in the country known for her historical socio-cultural heritage. It is a city with the mixture of three distinct tribes in Nigeria (Hausa, Fulani and Yoruba). Ilorin comprises of 35 wards or communities clustered into 3 local government areas (Ilorin East, South and West)

under a single traditional ruler called ‘Emir of Ilorin’ (Na’Allah, 1994). The last Nigeria population census in 2006 estimated the population of Ilorin to be around 777,667, making it the sixth largest city in Nigeria in term of population (NBS, 2016).

The city is known with a strong Islamic influence and age-long transformation into a stronghold of Arabic and Islamic scholarship. Ilorin Emirate is an irresistible centre of attraction (Na’Allah, 2009). This justifies the description given by Oladosu (2010:45) that ‘...historians are attracted to its historical landmarks; geographers are interested in its strategic location; migrants admire its serene atmosphere; businessmen and women love its economic viability; politicians seek solace in its relatively political stability.learned men have earned it, ..the seat of erudite Muslim scholars’. However, Christianity and other religions are now widely practised in the multicultural settlement/part of the city due to the significant immigration of people of different cultural and religious background from other parts of state and Nigeria. Consequently, Ilorin like other emerging cities in Nigeria is gradually experiencing changes and steady development (Oladosu, 2010).

The socio-cultural traits of Ilorin people are highly influenced by Islamic values. The way of life: marriage and family life, education, social interaction and relationships, and economic activities are shaped by the Islamic principles. Thus, paramount to the cultural belief of Ilorin people is the concept of ‘omo lua bi’ meaning ‘an obedient or cultured person’. The concept in itself encompasses such traits as uprightness, morality, law-abiding person, peacefulness and virtuous family. In other words, the concept of ‘omo lua bi’ advocates good manner and behaviour, modesty, decency and opposes defiant acts such as waywardness, disobedience, misconduct and exploitation (O’Hear, 1994).

Thus, the act of crime or criminal behaviour is considered forbidden among all members of the communities. Anyone who commits a crime is not only seen as a criminal, his entire lineage are treated as such (that is not considered as omo lua

bi). Also, anyone convicted or sentenced to prison is seen as a condemned individual which people will not associate with, even his family members see him as a disgrace to the family. In addition, there are other concepts related to omo lua bi which is used to denounce acts of criminality. Such concepts include 'eniti o ba ja le, lo ba omo je' meaning 'he who steals or commits a crime dishonoured his personality' and 'ole o raye wa' meaning 'a thief or criminal does not have a life'. These concepts are held in high esteem by families and community members. Younger members of the community are taught in schools, at family and community level to be law abiding and to always remember that a thief or criminal does not have a place in the family and community. Such word as 'mo omo eni ti iwo nse' meaning 'always remember the child of whom you are' is a repeated warning family give to their members most especially younger ones (O'Hear, 2006; Rafiu & Adeyemi, 2013). The essence of all these is to discourage people from committing crimes and send a clear message that criminals are not tolerated.

It is interesting to note that with the increasing level of education, industrial development, technological innovations and population outburst of the city, all these cultural values still exist till today and are highly valued by the indigenes. Based on this, it will be very difficult for anyone who had been convicted or sentenced for a crime and discharged prisoner to reintegrate or reconnect with people in such communities. Therefore, the possibility of a successful reintegration or re-entry of an ex-convict may be very narrow. This study seeks to investigate the general perception of the Ilorin people on discharged prisoners and the challenges of reintegration.

3.2 Discharged Prisoners and Re-integration Challenges

Over the last few years, the issue of increased states' reliance on imprisonment as a response to or punishment for criminal behaviour and the volume of individual sentenced to prison every year, the welfare of prisoners, and the nature of prisoners rehabilitation and reformatory programs have dominated the criminal justice

literature. In the recent time; however, much more attentions have shifted to the reintegration of ex-prisoner into the larger society. This is due to, perhaps the increasing number of individual discharged from prison on daily basis, the quality and effectiveness of the rehabilitation programs, available opportunities, challenges and the possibility of recourse to crime.

Experts in this field have been concerned with the various challenges ex-prisoners encounter in the process of reconnecting with their families, friends, colleagues, and their communities and other socio-economic networks. As Lynch (2006) observed a larger number of prisoners are released unprepared to face life in the community. The majority of them have been trained in programs specifically designed to address issues such as employment, education and substance dependencies. These rehabilitation programs and trainees were designed to enable ease re-entry; however, in the actual sense reintegration requires a lot more. The impacts the larger society is likely to have on the reintegration process particularly in accommodating or accepting them is also significant to an ease re-entry.

When prisoners are released, they face a challenging environment and a range of obstacles at every level (micro and macro) as they try to re-establish their old relationships and reconnect with the system. These challenges include social, economic and personal encounters that often deter them from becoming a productive member of the society (Visher et al., 2005). Borzycki and Makkai (2007) observed that some of these encounters are a result of the past experiences (in term of personal relationship, lifestyle, employment history etc.) of the offender and factors directly associated with the consequences of confinement (prison experiences, loss of livelihood, personal belongings, relationships and family trust, mental or psychological health difficulties and so on), conviction collateral (existing legal framework such as prohibition from certain employment or public positions and voting rights) and more importantly the societal perception and/or acceptance of ex-offenders.

Bonta et al. (2000) also stressed that ex-prisoners' prior way of life (employed or unemployed; married, widowed or single; close contact with relatives; friends and colleagues or social isolation; emotional functioning; poor financial management skills etc.) and societal readiness to accept or accommodate them upon release from prison are paramount to an effective reintegration or re-entry. Travis et al. (2001) pointed out that though factors such as prior lifestyle, prison experience and other related issues are important in prisoners' re-entry; however, they are secondary to the complementary attitude (positive perception) and willingness of the society to receive them. Therefore, society's judgement towards discharged prisoners is germane to a successful reintegration.

Van-Dooren et al. (2011) observed that the major adjustment challenges ex-prisoners face is the ability to secure a social connection following their release. Van-Dooren et al. stressed that prison life is a totally structured one, with time prisoners (especially those serving long sentence) become familiarised to the condition, which consequently results in feelings of deep distress and trauma. By the time they return to their home and communities, their usual social networks may have completely changed or no longer exist. This means that a discharged prisoner must create new social networks which are often tasking or struggle to hang out with former ones if they are ready to accept him back.

A number of empirical researches have shown the implications of socio-cultural influences on the reintegration of ex-offenders. Benson et al. (2011) observed that reintegration into the community is another phase of serious psychological strain commonly faced by discharged prisoners. Very few people seemed to care about their affairs and how they survive. Using psychological theory, Crocker et al. (1998) stressed that being labelled as ex-prisoner has a considerable influence on the impression or how they think about themselves, and how they expect other people in their environment to treat them.

Different studies have also proved the connection between how a member of a society perceived a group or person and the self-image of the person. For instance, a psychological research conducted by Inzlicht et al. (2012) revealed that societal stigma and individuals' responses to it can have a significant effect on mental health, brain functioning and lead to maladaptive behaviours. In addition, it could lead to difficulty relating to people and participating in the community. However, how individual or group responds to stigma (positively or negatively) is a major factor that predicts outcomes. An individual that feels not threatened or ignored stigma (to a certain extent) are much more likely to experience moderate negative outcome.

Nevertheless, ex-offenders are one of the groups that highly experience and respond to stigmatization in many societies, and stigmatization has been identified as one of the major barriers that hinder reintegration (Morani et al., 2011). That is ex-offenders' psychological responses to stigma play a very crucial role in their reintegration into the community after release from prison. In a study on perceived stigma, withdrawal tendencies and self-esteem, Link et al. (2001) observed that perceived stigma predicts a future psychological and social consequences leading to withdrawal tendencies and depression in individuals or group.

Going by the assumption of the labelling theory and Modified labelling theory which states that being labelled as an ex-offender by the public makes one internalize stigmatizing attitudes, most especially when one feel threatened by interacting with others, thereby withdraw from the conventional society or social contacts they perceive rejecting (Lemert, 1974; Link et al., 1989). Kelly et al. (2016) adopted this theory in a study to explain the effects of public stigma on ex-criminal offenders. Kelly et al. observed that public stigma often results in ex-offenders' odd feeling that they are like outsiders, causing them to withdraw from the community, and making them more disposed to criminal actions. Also, Chiricos et al. (2007) found that being labelled ex-felon predicts poorer adjustment in the community and inability to function in the

community, causing poor reintegration. They also observed that perceived stigma predicts social withdrawal or avoidance.

In another study that adopted labelling theory and Modified labelling theory, Perlick et al. (2001) noted that ex-prisoners who experience stigma most especially from network of people (such as family members, friends or associates) believed to understand their condition and expect to receive them back, withdraw from such network and possibly from any activities (such as community events) that may link them or bring them closer, leading to poor community functioning and poor integration. Also, Corrigan et al. (2010) found that discharged prisoners who expect a great deal of discrimination is likely to have less motivation to relate with community members (even with former friends or peers) and engage in any community activities. That is perceived or anticipated stigma discourages successful re-entry.

Several studies have linked stereotyping and stigma to a defensive behaviour, fear, pressure and avoidance of situations and responsibilities, which often weakens functioning. For example, Visher et al. (2004) stressed that public negative perception or judgement may overpower or overwhelm the labelled group, as a result, they

may withdraw and isolate from others or give up their social responsibilities.

4. Material and Methods

The research adopted both primary and secondary source of data. The primary data include the quantitative and qualitative descriptive design that analyses issues relating to the research questions and objectives. The secondary data include previous academic works published in journals, books and other outlets. The population of this study include all the indigenes of Ilorin Emirate and ex-prisoners residing in Ilorin. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques were employed to select 1187 and 3 (ex-prisoners) samples respectively, making a total of 1190 respondents from the 35 communities or wards in Ilorin Emirate where indigenes of Ilorin reside. Questionnaires and interview were used as a framework for collecting information. The quantitative data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) in generating simple percentage, frequency distributions, and correlation on some factor analyses of the responses relating to the research questions and objectives. In addition, the qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis.

5. Results and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percent%
Sex Distribution		
Male	762	64
Female	428	36
Total	1190	100
Age Distribution		
20-29yrs	345	29
30-39yrs	516	43
40-49yrs	202	17
50yrs-Above	127	11
Total	1190	100
Marital Distribution		
Single	275	23
Married	758	64
Divorced/ Separated	53	4
Widowed	104	9
Total	1190	100

Edu. Qualification		
Informal education	278	24
Primary school education	109	9
Secondary education	158	13
Tertiary education	645	54
Total	1190	100

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2017

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of all the respondents (N=1190). It indicates that 64% of the respondents were male and 36% were female. In addition, 29% of the respondents fall between the ages of 20-29 years old, 43% were between 30-39 years old, 17% falls between 40-49 years old and 11% fall between 50 years and above. The majority of the respondents fall within age bracket 30-39. In the marital distribution of the respondents, 23% of the respondents were single, 64% were married, while 4% were divorced or separated, 9% were widowed. The majority of respondents were married. Finally, 24% of the respondents have informal education, 9% have primary education, 13% have secondary education and 54% have tertiary education. This indicates that the majority of the respondents were educated.

Table 2: Perceived Sociocultural Beliefs and Practices influencing Discharged Prisoner's Reintegration

Operational Variables	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total
Discharged prisoners are condemned individuals or contaminated with criminal influences	247 (21%)	586 (49%)	97 (8%)	257 (22%)	1187 (100%)
Discharged prisoners should not be associated with	283 (24%)	612 (52%)	78 (6%)	214 (18%)	1187 (100%)
Discharged prisoners should not be trusted.	570 (48%)	427 (36%)	48 (4%)	142 (12%)	1187 (100%)
Discharged prisoners should be banned from public places	95 (8%)	261 (22%)	344 (29%)	487 (41%)	1187 (100%)
Discharged prisoners should not be given employment (particularly in the public sector or work with other people)	296 (25%)	384 (32%)	223 (19%)	284 (24%)	1187 (100%)
Discharge prisoners should be denied marriage (marrying or being married)	183 (15.4%)	486 (41%)	134 (11.3%)	384 (32.3%)	1187 (100%)

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2017

Table 2 presents the respondents' opinions on the discharged prisoners in Ilorin. While 21% and 49% of the respondents strongly agree and agree respectively that discharged prisoners are regarded as condemned and individuals with criminal influences, 8% and 22% strongly disagree and disagree respectively. In addition, the table also shows that 24% and 52% of the respondents strongly agree and agree respectively that discharged prisoners should not be associated with, while 6% and 18% strongly disagree and disagree respectively. Also, 48% and 36% of the respondents strongly agree and agree that discharged prisoners should not be trusted, while 12% and 4% strongly disagree and disagree respectively. Furthermore, 8% and 22% of the respondents strongly agree and agree that discharged prisoners should be banned from public places so as to avoid mingling with other people, while 41% and 29% of the respondents strongly disagree and disagree. However, 25% and 32% of the respondents strongly agree and agree that discharged prisoners should not be given employment (particularly in the public sector or work together with other people), while 24% and 19% strongly disagree and disagree. Finally, while 15.4% and 40% of the respondents strongly agree and agree that discharge prisoners should be denied marriage, 32.3% and 11.3% strongly disagree and disagree.

The above results suggest that the majority of the respondents perceived discharged prisoners as condemned and individuals with criminal influences. That they should not be trusted, associated with and given employment in the public sector or placed to work together with other people (non-convicts). Also, the discharged prisoners are considered individuals that should not be allowed to marry or be married by non-convicts. These results show the level of stigma or negative perception people of Ilorin has toward the ex-convicts. However, the majority of the respondents disagree that discharged prisoners should be prohibited from going or visiting public places. These findings corroborated the results reported by

Morani et al. (2011) where they found that ex-offenders experience stigmatization and hatred from the general public more than any other marginalised groups. Also, Visser et al. (2005) reported that when prisoners are discharged from prison, they are encountered with a challenging environment and a range of obstacles that makes life difficult at both micro and macro level.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents Perception of the Responsibility of the (members) Society in Reintegration (needs) Process of the Discharged Prisoners

Variables	Yes	No	Indifferent	Total
Are you aware of the responsibilities of the (members) society in reintegration process of discharged prisoners	347 (29%)	732 (62%)	108 (9%)	1187 (100%)
Should the (member) society assist or participate in reintegration process	308 (26%)	673 (57%)	206 (17%)	1187 (100%)
Are you willing to assist discharges prisoners in the reintegration process	262 (22%)	841 (71%)	84 (7%)	1187 (100%)

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2017

Table 3 presents the distribution of respondents' perception of the responsibility of the (members) Society in the reintegration (needs) process of the discharged Prisoners. The table shows that 29% of the respondents were aware of the responsibilities of the (members) society in reintegration process of discharged prisoners, 62% were not aware and 9% were indifferent. In addition, the table shows that 26% of the respondents were of the support that the society should assist or participate in the reintegration of the discharged prisoners, while 57% do not support and 17% were indifferent. Also, 22% of the respondents were willing to assist discharges prisoners in reintegration process, 71% were not willing and 7% were indifferent.

The above results indicate that the majority of the respondents were not aware of the responsibilities of the society in the integration of discharged prisoners. That is they do not know the obligations of the society (members) in the re-entry process of the discharged prisoners. Also, the majority of the respondents were of the perception that the society should not participate in the reintegration process. Similarly, the majority of the respondents are not willing as a member of the society to participate or assist in the reintegration process of the discharged prisoners. The implication of these findings is that there is strong negative perception or stigma against discharged prisoners among Ilorin people.

5.1 Testing of Hypothesis

H₀: There is no relationship between ex-offenders' reintegration and the socio-cultural stigmatization of ex-offenders

H₁: There is a relationship between ex-offenders' reintegration and the socio-cultural stigmatization of ex-offenders.

Table 4: Cross-Tabulation of the Perceived Sociocultural Beliefs and Practices, and Perceived Responsibility of the Society in Reintegration Process

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df.	X ² c	Critical Value X ² t
Perceived Sociocultural Beliefs and Practices	1187	1.3993	0.60821	2	664.13	5.991
Perceived Responsibility of the Society in Reintegration Process						

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2017.

X²c= 664.13, df =2, level of significance =0.05, X²t = 5.991. Therefore X²c = 664.13>X²t = 5.991. Thus H₀ rejected and H₁ accepted.

It can be observed from table 4 that the calculated chi-square (X²c) value is 664.13,

while the critical value (table value- X^2_t) is 5.991 at 0.05 level of significance with 2 degree of freedom (Df.). Thus, since the calculated chi-square is greater than the critical value, the H_0 is rejected and H_1 accepted. Therefore, the socio-cultural factors of the Ilorin people have a positive impact on ex-offenders' reintegration. This finding implies that socio-cultural factors or societal perception play a significant role in the reintegration process of ex-offenders. The finding, therefore, validates the results reported by Travis, et al. (2001) where they found that the attitude or judgement (positive or negative perception) and willingness of the society to receive ex-offenders following their release from prison are germane to a successful reintegration. Similarly, the finding also substantiates the result of Benson et al. (2011) where they established that ex-offenders' reintegration into the community is a major psychological challenge. This is because the members of the society are often uncooperative and unfriendly, they develop a certain negative attitude or social stigma 'ex-convicts' towards the ex-offenders which make reintegration nearly impossible.

Furthermore, from the interview conducted, respondents reported that the major challenges which often demoralised and discouraged them from relating with people (most especially those who are aware of their history) is a social stigma or humiliation they experience from their own people (Ilorin people). Respondent 1 reported that 'life in prison is a serious struggle to survive, but life after prison is even a more serious battle. People don't want to relate with you in public (even my family members, friends and former colleagues). The family members or friends that want to assist prefer to send someone else to you or give you an appointment at a neutral place where people don't really know you or late in the night when everywhere is dark. This is as a result of the society's negative attitudes to people like me who have been to prison. I later decided not to go close to any of the people that know me and my history, especially my community members'.

Also, respondent 2 noted that 'it is disheartening to realize that your own people don't seem to want you around anymore. One cannot just be

the usual person one used to be. My relatives, friends, neighbours and people who I had assisted before I went to prison completely rejected me. They don't want to have anything to do with me, even my wife. I had no choice than to withdraw from them for a while. It is so hard, I wish had not gone through that wall and I will regret it for the rest of my life'.

Similarly, Respondent 3 observed that 'going back to my community after being discharged is much more difficult than I expected. Though I knew our society very well. They do not accept ex-prisoners so easily, but I didn't realise it will be this tough. For the past 4 years, I have been discharged I couldn't get a job. No one is ready to relate with me, some will even tell you point blank that they do not trust you. I am 43 years old now, I couldn't get anyone to marry me. Anytime I try, they (women or girls and their family) keep reminding me of my status in the society as ex-convict'.

Regarding reintegration, the respondents reported that it was not easy for them, but as time goes on and on they learn to live with the challenges and move on. Respondent 1 noted that 'after 5 months of (discharged) trying to mix up with the people to reconnect with old friends and colleagues, I realised it not going to be easy. So, I first go far away from Ilorin to Lagos. Thinking that if I come back after some time, peoples' perception would change. I came back after few months, but things remain the same some people even said that I was caught again and sent back to prison.... then, I decided to stay and fight the battle no matter what. As time goes by, I get off the feelings of guilt and stigma, and move on'.

Respondent 2 also noted that 'our society is not ready to accept people like me back. I knew that and I am ready to live with it. This is where I was born and my community, I must stay here. I cannot reverse what has happened, so I have to move on if at all I want to live the remaining part of my life in peace. I cannot continue listening to what people say. Because our people are not ready to assist or accept people like me back into the society'. Also, Respondent 3 stressed that 'though it is not easy living around people who don't want you or trust you, I have

to live. Connecting with people is very difficult., ...one of the most demoralising thing is one cannot attend a social gathering, it really affects my way of life’.

It can be observed from the above findings that discharged prisoners faced a number of challenges in Ilorin. The challenges range from rejection by family, friends and colleagues to social stigma which has affected the reintegration process. The findings, therefore, corroborates the finding of Perlick et al. (2001) where they found that ex-prisoners who experience humiliation or stigma most especially from people (such as family members, friends or associates) who they believed to understand their condition and expect to accept them back, withdraw from such network and possibly from any activities (such as community events) that may bring them closer, leading to poor community functioning and poor integration.

Furthermore, the findings validate results of Link et al. (2001) where they observed that perceived stigma predicts a future psychological and social consequences leading to withdrawal tendencies and depression in individuals or group. Also, Lemert (1974) and Link et al. (1989) found that being labelled as an ex-offender makes the victim internalize stigmatizing attitudes, most especially when one feels threatened by interacting with others. Thus, they withdraw social contacts they perceive rejecting. Similarly, Visser et al. (2004) also observed that public stigma often results in ex-offenders having an unusual emotion that they are like strangers, causing them to withdraw from the community.

However, regarding respondents’ responses on how they move on despite the stigmatisations, this finding validates the findings of Inzlicht et al. (2012) where they reported that societal stigma and individuals’ responses to it can have a significant effect. How individual or groups respond to stigma (positively or negatively) is a major factor that predicts outcomes. An individual that feels not threatened or ignored stigma (to a certain extent) are much more likely to experience moderate negative outcome.

Table 5: Respondents’ Sentence Profile

Respondents	Offences	Prison term
1	Theft and robbery	9 years
2	Fraud	6 years
3	Internet Scam and Fraud	4 years

Source: Author’s Field Survey, 2017

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Discharged prisoners are faced with several challenges following their release from the prison. These challenges are often social, economic and personal in nature which invariably hinders effective re-entry. This research investigated the socio-cultural factors affecting the re-integration of discharged prisoners in Ilorin Emirate of Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that ex-prisoners in Ilorin experience stigmatisation and are considered a potential risk that may pose a serious threat to the larger communities they return to. As a result, most of the community members (even their relatives) withdrawn their supports and declined to relate with them. Consequently, re-integration has become so difficult for the discharged prisoners in Ilorin.

Amazingly, one of the findings revealed that the larger percentage of the respondents are not aware of the role of the society in the reintegration process and they are not willing to assist or support discharged offenders to reconnect back to the communities. This study, therefore, calls for the need to prepare all communities for the returning ex-offenders in order to prevent the possible consequences poor reintegration could result in, in Ilorin and other cities in Nigeria. Thus, a coordinated effort to develop public enlightenment programs aimed at sensitising individuals and communities (at both micro and macro level) about the responsibilities of the society and significant roles members could play in the reintegration process of discharged prisoners would seem appropriate.

These programs should be designed to identify common socio-cultural issues shaping peoples’ perception of the discharged prisoners and other challenges facing all ex-offenders and various ways people could be of assistance. For instance, the challenges of housing, feeding and other basic needs can be provided by community

members pending the time the ex-convict is able to stand on his/her own. Accordingly, he/she will blend with the community members along the line.

In addition, a collaborative effort in the form of a program between communities and government to support discharged prisoners that may require special care such as women with children, or those with disability (mental or physical health problems) would also go a long way in assisting discharged prisoners' reintegration. From the foregoing, this study concludes that a successful reintegration is pertinent to society's readiness to receive and accept discharged prisoners. Therefore, the role of the society cannot be overemphasised in the reintegration process.

7. Limitations

Research of this nature is often accompanied by a number of limitations with regard to the interpretation and generalization of the findings, and this study is no different. The findings basically depend on the views derived from self-reported data. The data on the socio-cultural perspective of the Ilorin people about discharged prisoners and the experiences of discharged prisoners presented is distinctive because it indicates the general perception and the reintegration challenges discharged prisoners encounter. Thus, the findings in this study are credible. However, it is important to bear in mind that, the findings may include some factual inaccuracies resulting from such lapses as the possibility of the respondents to over or under-report certain experiences. For this reason, the findings are expected to incite further research. Nonetheless, the research is confident that the findings presented are valid and as accurate.

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