

*EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS AND ELDERLY PAROLEES OF POST-INCARCERATION SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMMES IN ETHEKWINI METROPOLITAN*

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***ABSTRACT***

*This qualitative study explored the perceptions of correctional service providers and elderly parolees regarding post-incarceration social work programmes. Primary data were drawn from semi-structured interviews conducted with 15 (n=15) elderly parolees, three (n=3) social workers and two (n=2) correctional officials from South Africa's Department of Correctional Services. The findings of this study indicated that correctional social work programmes often did not prioritise the unique needs of elderly parolees; the study findings also revealed the urgent need for developing social work programmes that cater exclusively to the needs of elderly parolees. Moreover, the study found the need for developing ongoing training programmes to strengthen reintegration services offered to the elderly cohort, and finally, the study also revealed that the increase in the number of elderly offenders being released on parole impacted negatively on the responsiveness of social work post-incarceration programmes. This article concludes by offering recommendations to the Department of Correctional Services and social workers working in community correctional centres.*

***Keywords:*** *community correctional centres, correctional service providers, elderly parolees, post-incarceration, reintegration services, social work programmes*

## **EXPLORING THE PERCEPTIONS OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS AND ELDERLY PAROLEES OF POST-INCARCERATION SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMMES IN ETHEKWINI METROPOLITAN**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

There has been a significant increase in elderly offenders in the South African prison population. In 2015 it was reported that there were 861 sentenced elderly inmates aged 61 years out of the total number of 161,984; of these elderly offenders, 822 were males and the remaining 39 were females (Bezuidenhout & Booyens, 2018). Yet little is known about the effectiveness of post-incarceration social work programmes meant to reintegrate and rehabilitate this group of offenders (Luallen, 2015). Various studies have revealed that elderly parolees' transitioning from prison to the community are often faced with significant challenges that make it difficult for them to successfully reintegrate into society (Martynowicz & Quigley, 2010; National Economic and Social Forum, 2002; Nelson, Deess & Allen, 2011). The challenges facing parolees often stem from the inadequacy or absence of preparatory programmes, lack of support structures during reintegration, and the fear of the unknown (Brand, Young, Laier, Wölfling & Potenza, 2016). While this is the case, post-incarceration social work services offered by the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa do include a range of programmes that seek to assist parolees in adjusting during their transition from prison to the community (Republic of South Africa, Social Work Services Policy, 2008). However, the available literature on reintegration services also indicates that despite the critical role played by social workers in South Africa, the scope of their work does not support post-incarceration services for parolees (Singh, 2016).

Furthermore, Blowers (2015) argues that the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa has not fully understood the idea of providing programmes and services that target the unique needs of elderly offenders. The limited funding for the Department of Correctional Services to cater for the needs of elderly offenders is tantamount to the violation of the fundamental human rights of the elderly offenders, since little budgetary provision is made for the care of elderly offenders (Bezuidenhout & Booyens, 2018; Porporino, 2014). Literature on elderly parolees remains scarce, with most published records providing researchers, politicians and the lay public with relatively little helpful knowledge on this group of people (Stojkovic, 2007). This article is aimed at addressing this knowledge gap by exploring the extent to which correctional social work programmes are instrumental in assisting elderly parolees in their transition from prison to the community.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The ecological perspective was decided upon as the theoretical framework for the examination of the transition and assimilation of elderly parolees during their reintegration process. The ecological perspective sees people and the environment as in continuous interaction with each other and offers a means of explaining how the environment affects the person and the person affects the environment. The ecological perspective currently provides approaches that allow the social worker to intervene at any systems level (Pardeck, Yuen, Daley & Hawkins, 1998).

The ecological perspective maintains that the environment consists of both the natural geographical environment that impacts on the psychological and social functioning of individuals as well as the

systems (such as the family, the economic, educational, religious and political systems) that influence human development and behaviour.

In this perspective human behaviour is understood as an outcome of the environmental influences on a person. In its account of the environmental and societal influences, the ecological perspective places elderly individuals in a subsystem within a larger system that consists of the family, peer groups, institutions, cultural groups, churches and the wider society (Meyer & Schmidt, 2008). The model consists of a combination of four environmental influences: the micro-system, the mesosystem, the exo-system and the macro-system. Pardeck *et al.*, (1998) argues that current thinking on the ecological perspective indicates that the primary source of human problems stems from the complex interplay of the psychological, social, cultural, political and physical forces affecting individual persons.

The assumption is that any change in one of the systems of the model will affect the whole system (Krieger, 2001). As such, elderly parolees' transitioning from prison to the community affects all parts of the system, especially the family and community into which they are going to be reintegrated. Thus, the intervention of correctional programmes assists in maintaining homeostasis, which is the state of equilibrium or balance where the system is responding to change (Alexander, 1985; Preston-Shoot, 1990).

The ecological perspective postulates that discrepancies between personal and environmental attributes reduce positive outcomes and may lead to problematic behaviour or negatively affect the person psychologically (Germaine, 1973). Throughout their transition, elderly parolees who lack successful reintegration programmes find it challenging to integrate into their families and neighbourhoods and find it hard to affiliate to pro-social groups. In addition, the lack of adequate post-prison rehabilitation services further exacerbates elderly parolees' dissatisfaction with life which may lead to desperation and depression among them (Doherty, Forrester, Brazil & Matheson, 2014). The ecological perspective emphasises the need for elderly parolees to benefit from resources and social support programmes offered by social workers for them to cope with the complicated process of transition.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Release of offenders from correctional centres and placement under correctional supervision and on parole**

Van Heerden (2011) argues that parole is a mechanism used for releasing offenders back into society with the hope that they will not return to criminal life. In the United States of America parole is used to place offenders under correctional supervision in the community prior to the completion of their sentences (Bassett, 2016). Similarly, the South African Correctional Services Act, No.111 of 1998 (RSA, 1998) makes provisions for an offender who has served half of their sentence to be eligible for parole issued by the Commissioner and the Parole Board. According to Champion (2008), parole is a mechanism that emphasises the identification of eligible applicants to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders back into society and has been designed to provide an effective supervision facility. In the case of elderly parolees, the Parole Board considers pre-sentence variables such as the offender's family and age as selection criteria for parolees' placement under correctional supervision (RSA, 2004). One of the dilemmas the Parole Board encounters when placing offenders under correctional supervision in South Africa emerges when the offender is accorded parole status without the Board consulting practitioners such as social workers and psychologists, and sometimes even without rehabilitating systems in place, largely due to personnel shortages, which all have detrimental effects not only for the Department of Correctional Services but also society at large (Van Heerden, 2011).

### **The role and functions of social work programmes offered by the Department of Correctional Services in assisting offenders**

In terms of the Criminal Procedures Act 51 of 1997 (RSA, 1997), offenders released on parole must attend compulsory social work programmes as part of their sentence plan. Therefore, the role and

functions of social work programmes are essential in rehabilitating offenders released on parole. The basic roles of social work programmes include meeting offenders' needs through provision and implementation of needs-based programmes and services meant to improve the adaptation, social functioning and reintegration of the offender into the community (Department of Correctional Services, 2006). However, the literature reveals that the current social work programmes do not appear to be inclusive of post-incarceration services for offenders on parole (Singh, 2016). The following programmes fall under the comprehensive programmes offered by social workers to all categories of offenders in the Department of Correctional Services:

- Orientation

This programme introduces the parolee to the parole conditions and the alternative services or programmes available in enhancing their successful re-entry into society. The orientation of the parolee is done immediately after assessment (Dawes, 2009).

- Life skills

The programme aims at educating offenders about interpersonal communication, negotiation, and problem-solving and decision-making abilities. These skills assist parolees in coping with transformation and maintaining a positive self-image (Department of Correctional Services, 2018).

- Marriage and family care

This programme is offered to preserve the family system, which acts as a support system to the parolee.

- Substance abuse

This programme aims to heighten the parolee's awareness on the dangers of dependency on substances and its implications on the individual's life. It also teaches parolees prevention measures when it comes to substance abuse (Department of Correctional Services, 2018).

- Management of anger or aggression

The programme assists the offender in coping under different circumstances. This programme is offered mostly to offenders charged with murder and/or crimes that lead to physical or bodily harm (Department of Correctional Services, 2018).

- Sexual offenders' programmes

These programmes address gender-related issues and moral and power dynamics that the offender is charged with as an act of sexual violation perpetrated without the person's consent.

Although these programmes are offender oriented (Muthaphuli, 2008), younger offenders are given priority at the expense of their elderly counterparts (Maschi, Kwak, Ko & Morrissey, 2012). The current social work programmes outlined above are tailored to address the "criminogenic needs" of the individual offenders which are informed by the risk-need-responsibility (RNR) model adopted by the Department of Correctional Services (Andrews & Bonta, 2017; Gendreau, 1996). The most glaring shortfalls in the role and functions of social work programmes being offered by the Department of Correctional Services manifest in those environmental factors that are significant predictors of successful reintegration not being taken into consideration as factors affecting reintegration (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003; Pratt & Cullen, 2005). Therefore, the rising demography of elderly offenders and the lack of geriatric social work programmes in the Department of Correctional Services present major challenges for the successful reintegration of elderly parolees into society.

### **The experiences of elderly parolees during re-entry into the community after incarceration**

It's well documented that transitioning from prison to the community is generally a difficult process for offenders. It is worth mentioning that on the day of release from prison, most offenders go through traumatic experiences (Brand *et al.*, 2016). In Ireland parolees and ex-offenders perceived their transition

from incarceration to the community as not symbolic of the birth of their freedom, but rather as the beginning of a strained and challenging journey without sufficient material and social support. Other challenges commonly experienced by both elderly and younger parolees include physical pain, emotional impairment and remorse, which further accelerate the ageing process for elderly parolees (Bezuidenhout & Booyens, 2018). However, it is important to note that the experiences of young and middle-aged parolees are remarkably different from those of their elderly peers (Porporino, 2014).

After incarceration, re-entry into society often poses challenges for elderly parolees as they often struggle with personal identity, and the meaning and purpose of life (Higgins & Severson, 2009). During their transitional phase, elderly parolees may grapple with feelings of hopelessness, depression, unresolved internal conflicts and an unstable family relationship which intensifies their propensity for alcohol or substance abuse (Ray, Poythress, Weir & Rickelm, 2009). Upon their release, elderly parolees also face challenges securing affordable housing, which further impedes their successful reintegration (Baccile, 2017). Therefore, elderly parolees' successful transition from prison to the community is dependent on preconditions such as "ties to family, a stable residence, and a means of subsistence that allows full participation in community life and fulfilment of the socially valued roles of kin, citizen and worker" (Western, Braga, Davis & Sirois, 2015: 22).

Additionally, one of the positive attributes of elderly offenders after incarceration is the limited inclination towards exhibiting reoffending behaviour compared to their younger counterparts, who behave otherwise. Owing to ageing, elderly parolees face a high risk of encountering physical, psychological and social problems that hinder their productivity (Wyse, 2018). Some elderly parolees may find it challenging to perform daily self-care activities such as maintaining personal hygiene, getting dressed, feeding themselves and taking medication as prescribed (Blowers, 2015). Upon their release from prison, elderly parolees return to often unsafe neighbourhoods and, after long-term incarceration, their relationship with the community and family members is weakened, thus necessitating intervention by social workers (Higgins & Severson, 2009). Some of the needs of elderly parolees are unequivocally so complex that the Department of Correctional Services ought to take them in account when facilitating the transition of elderly parolees from prison to the community.

In South Africa there is still a dearth of literature documenting social work programmes offered to the elderly parolees by the Department of Correctional Services, prompting the researcher to consider focusing specifically on elderly parolees' experiences as a special research area separate from those of the younger parolees.

The overall aim of the article was to explore the experiences of social reintegration from the perspectives of elderly parolees and correctional service providers in eThekweni Metropolitan. The study sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To understand how correctional social work programmes assisted elderly parolees in assimilating back into society;
- To examine how social work programmes are planned and implemented to accommodate the needs of elderly offenders.

The researcher worked on the assumption that the experiences and needs of elderly parolees are different from those of younger parolees, and that correctional social work programmes rendered by social workers fell short of meeting the unique needs of the elderly parolees.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted at a community correctional centre located in Durban Central. The correctional centre served approximately 4,000 parolees and probationers. It currently has two satellite offices located at Umlazi and Nsimbini, and these are strictly for parolees and probationers assigned to these areas. The centre was chosen to work directly with parolees sanctioned in terms of the Criminal Procedures Act No. 51 of 1977 (RSA, 1997), Sections 276(1)(I) to attend to educational and therapeutic social work

programmes as part of the parole conditions for the parolees. The rationale for the choice of this setting is motivated by the researcher's personal experience as a social work student.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of correctional service providers and elderly parolees in eThekweni Metropolitan. The qualitative methodology was developed out of a need for in-depth contextualised interpretation that offered a rich understanding of the problem or social phenomenon (Lietz & Zayas, 2010). This research approach allowed the researcher to interpret the experiences of elderly parolees and correctional service providers from their own perspectives (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). According to Mohajan (2018:36):

*“qualitative research tends to be associated with the idea that social life is the product of social interaction and beliefs of actors, that the social world is not populated by things, but by relationships and actions”.*

Therefore, the qualitative research approach helped the researcher gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences regarding post-incarceration programmes offered to elderly parolees by the Department of Correctional Services.

The interpretive paradigm guided the study in understanding the views of elderly parolees and correctional service providers regarding post-incarceration social work programmes. According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), the central focus of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. Emphasis is placed on understanding the individual and their interpretation of the world around them. Through the interviews, the researcher was mostly interested in establishing the participants' perspective of the phenomena being researched. Therefore, the interpretive paradigm adopted in the study enabled the researcher to understand the perspectives, emotions and experiences of elderly parolees and correctional service providers regarding post-incarceration social work programmes. The justification for selecting an exploratory research design over other designs, such as investigative and descriptive designs, is that this study is indeed motivated by the general lack of knowledge around the experiences of elderly offenders released on parole (Blanche, Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Moreover, the exploratory research design leaves space for further research, whilst other research designs are definitive and leave little room for additional questions to be answered (Sandhusen, 2000).

### **Ethical considerations**

Researchers are guided by a certain ethos that ensures that boundaries are set for the researcher, participant and anyone else who would be implicated in the study. According to De Vos (2002:63), ethics is:

*“a set of moral principles that are suggested by an individual or group, are subsequently widely accepted, and offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employer, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students.”*

In complying with the appropriate standards, data collection did not commence until ethical clearance from both the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the Department of Correctional Services Research Committee was granted.

To obtain permission from participants, an informed consent form was signed by them before each interview session. The informed consent form contained crucial details that included the aim, risks and benefits associated with the study. The researcher also clearly indicated that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage of the research.

The individual's participation was voluntary, and the researcher used no form of coercion. The researcher was open, honest and transparent to the participants and did not use any form of deception as the objectives and aim of the research were explained to the participants. The researchers ensured anonymity by using pseudonyms and not revealing the identity of the participants or any of their information to the public.

### **Study population and sample size**

The total number of participants interviewed for this study was 15 (n=15) elderly parolees, three (n=3) correctional social workers, and two (n=2) correctional officials purposively selected from the Department of Correctional Services in eThekweni Metropolitan. The purposive sampling technique was chosen based on participants' knowledge and experience of post-incarceration social work programmes. Dantzler (2015:141) views the purposive sampling technique as a matter of "accessibility to units or individuals that are part of the target population. The selection is based on the researcher's knowledge of the topic, the target population, and accessibility". Thus, the purposive sampling strategy enabled the researcher to focus primarily on people who possessed the knowledge and expertise required to address the study question.

The criteria used to select the sample are indicated below.

#### ***Eligibility criteria used in selecting parolees***

Selection was based on the following criteria:

- The participant is placed under the care of community corrections;
- The participant is on parole for more than 6 months;
- The participant is 60 years old and above for women and 65 years old and above for men as prescribed by the Older Persons Act, No. 13 of 2006 (RSA, 2006);
- The participant is still attending social work correctional programmes at the time of the interview.

#### ***Eligibility criteria used for DCS staff***

Selection was based on the following criteria:

- The participant is an employee working for the Department of Correctional Services with more than 6 months working experience in this setting;
- The participant is a social worker registered under a professional body, or is a parole officer;
- The participant is responsible for rendering correctional services to parolees.

### **Method of collecting primary data**

Interviews in this study were based on an interview schedule. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit the views of participants regarding post-incarceration programmes offered to parolees by the Department of Correctional Services. Separate semi-structured interviews were conducted with elderly parolees and correctional services providers. This method had many advantages to this study; for instance, first-hand knowledge was elicited from the interviewees. According to Seidman, Hudis, Albanell, Albanel, Tong, Tepler, Currie, Moynahan, Theodoulou, Gollub and Baselga (1998), one interviews for the purposes of finding out more specific details about a given phenomenon. The semi-structured interview guide allowed the participants to share their personal experiences and stories, since the questions were open-ended rather than closed-ended. The interview schedule had the following sample questions:

- Did things work out the way you expected when you were released?
- Are these programmes the same as the ones you have done in prison?
- Do you think that these programmes assist elderly parolees? If yes, how so?
- What part of the programme was beneficial to you?

The reasoning for asking these questions was to understand how correctional social work programmes assist elderly parolees in assimilating back into society. The approach gave the researcher and participants the much-needed flexibility to discuss the topic in depth. The semi-structured interview format was beneficial for the study as it assisted the researcher to delve into the participants' personal

views, knowledge, impressions or accounts of the social work programmes developed for the elderly. The researcher was able to follow up on any new insights emerging during the interview, and the participants were able to provide an in-depth understanding of their experiences when they were interviewed (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). During the interviews, the participants shared their views on social work programmes, which directly conferred on the participants the role of an expert in providing the required knowledge (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009). This was important because the participants were given an opportunity to voluntarily share their own stories.

### **Method of data analysis**

Thematic content analysis was adopted to analyse the collected data. This technique allowed the researcher to generate codes, as well as organise and present the data according to the themes or patterns (Rubin & Babbie, 2011). According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), the sole purpose of analysing data thematically is to identify themes or patterns in the data that are interesting and address the research question and objectives that guide the study. This entails much more than merely summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of data, and this was achieved through transcribing audio-recorded data into Word format. The researcher then read all the transcripts repeatedly and generated codes. After the coding process, the patterns that originated from the data were assembled based on the research questions that guided the study.

The researcher followed the steps outlined in Table 1 to analyse data utilising thematic content analysis.

**TABLE 1: BRAUN AND CLARKE'S (2006) SIX-PHASE FRAMEWORK FOR DOING A THEMATIC CONTENT ANALYSIS**

Step 1: Familiarisation with the data Step 2: Generating initial codes Step 3: Searching for themes	Step 4: Reviewing themes Step 5: Defining themes Step 6: Working on the write-up
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### **Limitations of the study**

One of the critical limitations of this study is that the sample size of correctional service providers was too small to generate the required data. Recruiting participants from one correctional unit made it difficult for the researcher to recruit other participants from another unit, because some participants from other units did not have the required knowledge for this study. The participants, however, demonstrated an in-depth understanding of their experiences during the interviews. Undertaking research on elderly offenders on parole has its inherent limitations, as the participants were worried about imperilling their parole conditions or expressing something derogatory during the interview thus threatening or undermining their parole status. Therefore, the researcher adhered strictly to the ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity. Furthermore, the findings of the study were reviewed to ensure that anonymity was preserved and that the results would not compromise the participants' anonymity or provide clues about their involvement in the research.

### **The need for ongoing training in the management of elderly parolees**

Elderly parolees who had experienced psycho-social issues such as family problems, depression and anxiety required specific interventions and were usually assigned to specialist agencies that provided such care. Despite having gained the necessary expertise and qualifications, social workers and correctional officers were depicted as ill-prepared to administer and deliver programmes that were relevant to the needs of elderly parolees. The heavy reliance on other agencies to support the reintegration of elderly parolees shows that correctional service providers required ongoing preparation to develop their ability to cope with and handle the changing needs of elderly parolees, as indicated in the following comments by social workers:

*When working with elderly parolees, we normally refer to such external stakeholders as social workers in the Department of Social Development (DSD), which contrasts with what we do with younger offenders. Even though younger parolees might present issues that are similar to those of their elderly counterparts, we are able to confidently help the younger ones. My experience working with the elderly indicates that it has always been about family abuse. I call the DSD and then compile a referral report. (Ngcobo, Social Worker)*

*We normally refer the elderly parolees to non-governmental organisations such as the Association for the Aged because no one can provide the special and extra care they need. (Dudu, Social Worker)*

The need for ongoing training was also motivated by the unintended rise in the number of elderly parolees now that the under-utilisation of the parole facility has been addressed and the impact of the earlier implementation of tough-on-crime policies (RSA, 2005). Correctional service providers also reported that the Department of Correctional Services hardly provided any training on the management of elderly offenders, specifically; therefore, the Department of Correctional Services appears to treat the needs of all the parolees as homogeneous. The participants advocated the ongoing training initiative for correctional personnel to capacitate them to deal with elderly parolees, and their justification for the training was based on the fact that a significant number of the parolees were incarcerated at a young age and grew old while in prison. Below are some of the views expressed by the correctional service providers.

*Everything I do for the elderly is based on my experience working with the elderly before I joined the Department of Correctional Services. Training is urgently needed on how to deal with elderly parolees, thus making them realise that they are still important. After the training, social workers can then be able to train other social work personnel such as monitoring officials. The training should be cognisant of the rights of the elderly parolees. The elderly population is evolving, and we can learn a lot from them. We ought to engage with elderly parolees as often as we do with their younger counterparts. (Nthombi, Social Worker)*

*Training should target both social workers and correctional officials. There should be a programme for both groups, teaching us to conduct ourselves patiently when dealing with the elderly parolees because most of them have hearing impairment, and are slow and sickly. Correctional officers often talk anyhow, depending on the mood; they are harsh and so the proposed programmes must inculcate in them effective communication skills. (Khoza, Unit Manager)*

The need for ongoing training for correctional service providers was reportedly significant in improving their services and enhancing their competence in dealing with elderly parolees. Research has demonstrated that the ageing demographic group is a special category that has spent lengthy periods in prison hence are likely to experience challenges reintegrating into the community with fewer services being availed to address their needs (Edin, Nelson & Paranal, 2004; Lopoo & Western, 2005). Therefore, the lack of training has emerged as a major shortfall that characterises the services of the Department of Correctional Services, which makes it unable to address the needs of elderly parolees.

## **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

This section presents the participants' demographic profile, followed by the themes and sub-themes emerging from the data. The participants' identity details, such as names, were excluded from this article and their anonymity was preserved by the use of pseudonyms.

## Demographic profile of correctional service providers (Sample 1)

TABLE 2

### DETAILS OF THE CORRECTIONAL SERVICE PROVIDERS THAT FORMED PART OF SAMPLE 1 INTERVIEWS

Pseudonym	Ngcobo	Dudu	Nthombi	Ndaba	Khoza
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female	Male
Age	38	46	53	54	53
Race	African	African	African	African	African
Language	IsiZulu	IsiZulu	IsiZulu	IsiZulu	IsiZulu
Highest Educational Level	B. Social Work.	B. Social Work	B. Social Work	Diploma in Correctional Management	Diploma in Correctional Management and B. Tech
Years working	3 years	6 years	27 years	32 years	30 years
Years working in a Community Corrections Centre	3 years	3 years	14 years	14 years	7 years
Division and Rank	Social worker (Grade 1)	Social worker (Grade 2)	Supervisor social worker (SCO-Rank)	Senior Motoring and Supervision Officer (Grade 3)	Manager: Parolees and Probationers

The interviews for this sample were conducted in the participants' offices located at Durban Community Corrections, a reintegration centre. The participants were all employed by the Department of Correctional Services and had experienced working with different categories of offenders released on parole. The profile of correctional service providers included two (2) male and three (3) female participants. This profile also shows that the correctional service providers held various occupational ranks, with the highest being the Unit Manager and the lowest at entry level (Grade 1). The participants were informed about the potential risk arising from participating in this study and agreed to have the interviews audio recorded.

## Demographic profile of elderly parolees (Sample 2 participants)

TABLE 3

### DETAILS OF THE ELDERLY PAROLEES WHO FORMED PART OF SAMPLE 2 INTERVIEWS

Pseudonym	Gender	Race	Age	Level of education	Marital Status	No of children	Living with children	Criminal offence	No. of years convicted for	Period served
Charles	Male	African	65	Grade 12	Single	04	Yes	Murder and 2 robberies	Life sentence and 32 years	22 years
Smith	Male	White	65	Master of Business Admin.	Single	04	Yes	Conspiracy to murder	7 years	4 years
Mfanozi	Male	African	65	None	Married	03	No	Robbery	24 years	12 years
Mjoli	Male	African	67	None	Married traditionally	02	Yes	Rape	20 years	10 years
Thulani	Male	African	68	None	Single	02	Yes	Murder and robbery	Life sentence and 25 years	19 years
Xulu	Male	African	68	None	Married (in the process of divorce)	09	Yes	Rape	16 years	08 years
Zodwa	Female	African	66	Care-giving Certificate	Married (Widow)	03	Yes	Murder	Life sentence	21 years
Marriam	Female	African	62	Bachelor of Education	Married (widow)	01	Yes	Attempted murder	10 years	5 years
Masinga	Male	African	70	BA Law Degree.	Married	08	Yes	Attempted murder	5 years	3 years
Pravesh	Male	Indian	65	Grade 12	Single	02	Yes	Armed robbery and hijacking	14 years	7 years
Shange	Male	African	69	None	Married	04	Yes	Murder and attempted murder	75 years reduced to 50 years	19 years
Zakhele	Male	African	65	Police training	Married (polygamy)	10	Yes	Murder	Life sentence and 15 years	19 years
Robert	Male	African	66	None	Married	10	Yes	Possession of firearm	12 years	6 years
Qinisela	Male	African	67	None	Single	None	N/a	Murder	50 years	21 years
Khan	Male	Indian	65	B. Com	Divorced	01	Yes	Theft	10 years	5 years

The real names of the participants were not included and pseudonyms were used.

The elderly parolees were interviewed individually and privately at the Department of Correctional Services. All the participants resided in various parts of eThekweni Metropolitan and were involved in many post-incarceration social work programmes offered by the Department of Correctional Services. In terms of gender, the elderly parolees consisted of 13 males and 2 females. The age distribution of the elderly parolees ranged from 60 years and above for females and 65 years and above for males; these ranges were in line with the Older Persons Act No. 13 of 2006 (RSA, 2006). Data were collected from 12 Africans, 2 Indians and 1 White person, as depicted in Table 1.3 above. The participants' duration in prison ranged from 3 to 22 years. Murder was the most common criminal offence committed by the elderly parolees, followed by robbery and rape. In terms of the marital status of the elderly parolees, nine were married, five were single, and one was a divorcee.

### **The suitability of post-release social work programmes in assisting elderly parolees**

The suitability criteria used by social workers to assign parolees into programmes were based on the offence the offenders had committed, and no attention was paid to developmental factors such as the age of the offender. Similarly, Andrews and Bonta (2017) argue that most of the programmes offered by the Department of Correctional Services are tailored to fit only the "criminogenic needs" of the individual offenders. This corroborates Singh's (2016) view that the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa has a variety of social work correctional programmes that concentrate on the offender's rehabilitation; however, the available literature also suggests that in spite of that critical role, social work programmes do not appear to support the post-release services being offered to the elderly parolees. The lack of appropriate post-release programmes has made it more difficult for the elderly parolees to adjust during the reintegration process. In addition, the elderly parolees felt that the social work programmes being offered to them were not relevant in addressing their unique needs. Consequently, this lack of appropriate post-incarceration programmes has also influenced the elderly parolee's responsiveness to social work programmes in general. This argument is supported by the following responses from the elderly parolees regarding social work programmes:

*These social work programmes are a waste of my time because they don't address my needs. I am now elderly and past the stage where I am unable to control my anger. So, these programmes do not effectively address my problems. Additionally, I have got health problems, and they take too long to address them. (Khan, 65 years)*

*It's useless that an old person like me is made to attend Sunday school programmes. Since there is no choice, I simply have to register my presence. These programmes are just general and are too brief to address our concerns as elderly people. (Masinga, 70 years)*

*These programmes only assist younger parolees because they are still active. They are not suitable for us elderly parolees because we are mature. (Mjoli, 67 years)*

Similarly, one social worker and one correctional official shared the same sentiments as elderly parolees. They supported the perception that the current post-incarceration social work programmes were of little value as they hardly served the needs of elderly parolees. They uttered the following sentiments:

*I don't really think they are helpful because parolees that mostly need the assistance of the social workers are youngsters who are mostly involved in alcoholism. I have never experienced problems with elderly parolees to the extent of requiring the assistance of the social worker. The elderly don't abuse drugs, but young parolees are the ones who often face that problem. (Khoza, Manager)*

*These programmes don't accommodate the elderly parolees who merely attend the sessions in spite of not benefiting from them as compared to the younger parolees. (Dudu, Social Worker)*

The findings of the study suggest that post-incarceration social work programmes benefited younger parolees, but did not meet the basic age-specific needs of elderly parolees (Maschi *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, these programmes are crucial when an offender has been granted parole. These findings are

supported by Albertus's (2010) study, which established that the first six months of release constitute the most vulnerable period for ex-prisoners as most of them have to face the harsh reality of re-entry into society. Similarly, Cronwell's (2004) study found that the lack or absence of suitable programmes during the reintegration process makes it difficult for the offender to adjust and assimilate after incarceration. The findings of this study confirm that the structure and content of post-incarceration social work programmes rendered by the Department of Correctional Services hardly benefited elderly parolees who felt that their unique needs were not taken into consideration.

### **The need for separate programmes for elderly parolees**

Most elderly parolees who participated in this study felt excluded from the current programmes and expressed their desire to be accommodated by age-specific social work programmes rendered by the Department of Correctional Services. They further indicated that they wanted unique programmes that would exclude younger parolees. More specifically, the elderly parolees felt uncomfortable about joining younger parolees in the same programmes during social work sessions. The elderly parolees felt that it was a challenge participating in programmes that included younger parolees. They found it difficult to speak openly during social work sessions, as depicted in the statement below:

*These programmes don't recognise that we are elderly people. Furthermore, we are always being mixed with the younger parolees, and this sometimes makes us uncomfortable, especially when the young ones speak about sex or when they speak in English. We believe that we can't discuss our lives with young children; we don't even understand the English they speak. (Zodwa, 66 years)*

*These social work programmes don't even address our needs as the elderly. We must be given our space because being with younger parolees is somewhat abusive because we all have to speak about our problems in front of younger parolees. They put us in a classroom with younger parolees, where we are forced to discuss our problems in front of small boys. These young ones end up telling other people out of prison what we are as old men. It will not be a secret anymore. (Xulu, 68 years)*

*Yes, it would be a pleasure for us to be separated from the younger parolees because our needs are different from those of younger parolees, and this would make the programme smooth and enjoyable for both of us. (Mjoli, 67 years)*

Furthermore, due to a lack of age-appropriate programmes designed to cater to the needs of elderly parolees in correctional centres, social work services were provided utilising a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. The responses elicited from social workers and correctional officials confirm that the existing social work programmes merely focused on crime, ignoring the effect of old age on the reintegration and adaptation processes. The programmes were offered on the assumption that the same programmes being rendered to younger parolees would appropriately serve the interests of the elderly as well. In that regard, some participants said:

*Most of the social work programmes are aligned to the crimes committed by the offenders. The age doesn't matter most since there are juveniles who committed the same crime. However, I think the offenders need age-appropriate programmes that address their problems depending on the crimes they committed. (Ndaba, Correctional Service Official)*

*The programmes are not specifically structured to suit the age-specific needs of elderly parolees. Our decisions are often based on the crime for which the offender was incarcerated. This often determines the nature of programme to be rendered to the offender. (Nthombi, Social Worker)*

Clearly, elderly parolees had unique needs that the current social work programmes cannot address. According to Doherty *et al.*, (2014), upon their release from prison, those who were denied support from

the Department of Correctional Services often found it challenging to affiliate to pro-social groups and were likely to experience hopelessness, which in turn led to depression. Therefore, social work programmes explicitly addressing the needs of elderly parolees have led to the huge gap in South Africa's correctional services system.

### **The perspectives of social workers on elderly parolees**

The study has shown that post-incarceration social work programmes are mandatory for individuals placed on parole, including elderly parolees. The study findings have revealed that social workers rendering these programmes at the Department of Correctional Services conceptualised their experience of working with elderly parolees as being complicated and challenging compared to their experiences working with younger offenders on similar parole conditions. Similarly, this finding corroborates other studies which also suggest that correctional staff favoured working with more youthful offenders and were more inclined towards prioritising the needs of younger offenders than those of the elderly (Carcach & Grant, 1999; Harrison, 2006; Hipp, Jannetta, Shah & Turner, 2011; Trotter & Baidawi, 2015). It is worth noting that elderly parolees were also not given priority in outreach community projects conducted by social workers. This is in line with the findings of McNeece and Robert (2001), who established that there are currently no practice standards for correctional social workers entrusted with the provision of services to elderly parolees, which additionally made it problematic for them to dispense specialised services to that demographic group. Below are some of the views expressed by social workers:

*Working with elderly parolees is a challenge because they are not similar to young people. Young people understand new things much quicker than the elderly. With the elderly, you have to repeatedly explain yourself, and they keep doing things their way due to age. (Dudu, Social Worker)*

*There are no projects specifically meant for these elderly parolees. However, the project currently available for younger parolees is agriculture. (Ngcobo, Social Worker)*

These findings confirm the claim made by Ray *et al.*, (2009) that social work involving elderly people is an area that continues to be devalued and undervalued, with students and practitioners being reluctant to learn and train on issues relating to elderly people. On this note, the elderly parolees also shared their views regarding the treatment they received from social workers. They said the following:

*I have been placed under a number of social workers in the Department of Correctional Services. Some of them are impatient and rude and can't take good care of us. (Shange, 69 years)*

*Social workers lack patience and listening skills. They still need to improve extensively on these aspects, and they ought to keep abreast with current information. (Charles, 65 years)*

The above statements suggest that elderly parolees received substandard treatment and were unlikely to be considered for external projects and programmes offered by the Department of Correctional Services. Moreover, it emerged that elderly parolees are struggling with real problems in the most unreal of all worlds; thus, reintegration programmes must be devoted to mirroring the realities of the outside world in order to lighten the burden of reintegration for elderly parolees and other members of the ageing population who are released to become citizens contributing to the wellbeing of society (Wyse, 2018).

### **The increase of elderly parolees and the impact on the implementation of social work programmes**

The surge in the number of elderly offenders has become a global epidemic, costing correctional facilities double the resources required to serve younger offenders (Bezuidenhout & Booyens, 2018). This fact has been confirmed by this study, which found that correctional service providers noticed a sharp increase in the number of elderly offenders released on parole, with serious implications for the implementation of social work programmes. It is worth mentioning that most of the elderly parolees suffered from memory loss, hearing problems, and were frequently unable to remember the programmes they were participating

in while in custody and when they were on parole. Consequently, this hampered the implementation of social work programmes by the social workers, as they could not assess the responsiveness of elderly parolees to the programmes being provided. The challenges faced by social workers during the programme implementation phase are captured in the following responses:

*Programme implementation is difficult as some of the elderly parolees are illiterate. Even after attending some educational programmes in prison, they can only write their names. So, they really can't fill in the pre-evaluation and post-evaluation forms. Some of them have hearing impairments, which means you have to talk loudly as they don't have hearing aids. (Dudu, Social Worker)*

*There are serious challenges impeding the provision of social work programmes. Essentially, there are too many parolees to be served and during our evaluation sessions, we often fail to attend to those who cannot read and write. So, we have problems assisting them as social workers. They also have challenges articulating their opinions, as their minds tend to be elsewhere, or they end up recalling past experiences. (Nthombi, Social Worker)*

Owing to the limited number of social workers, elderly parolees were combined with younger parolees during programme implementation. This made it difficult for social workers to coordinate programmes and focus on the unique needs of elderly parolees. Furthermore, correctional social workers felt that their scope of practice in community correctional centres replicated the work of officials in custodial correctional facilities. This, however, is not part of their job description, since correctional social workers should concentrate on parolees' reintegration into society and community development to allow parolees and probationers to lead meaningful lives. Therefore, the escalating number of elderly parolees and the lack of adequate and appropriate resources are key challenges affecting the implementation of social work programmes in the Department of Correctional Services.

### **Team dynamics between social workers and correctional officials**

Under the South African rehabilitation system, the professional functions of social workers and correctional officers ought to be interrelated and interdependent for them to comply with the terms of the White Paper on Corrections (RSA, 2005) and the Correctional Services Act, No. 111 of 1998 (RSA, 1998). However, the social workers and correctional officials who participated in this study did not share a common understanding of how best to render aftercare programmes to elderly parolees. The reason was that correctional officials felt undermined by social workers and were oblivious of any programmes being rendered to elderly parolees by social workers. The study findings suggest that the lack of cohesion amongst social workers and correctional officials impinged on the implementation of social work programmes. This study supports this claim as it revealed that correctional officials did not inform social workers of the problems brought to them by elderly parolees during programme monitoring and supervision. Poor communication between correctional officers and social workers contributed to the lack of updated knowledge on a range of health, emotional and social issues the elderly parolees were facing, as depicted in the following comments.

*Correctional officials are not involved when social workers plan their work; but for them to improve on their plans, we feel that our views should be included for the benefit of the elderly parolees and probationers. When we make an admission, we need to determine the needs of different people, but we cannot go to them. (Ndaba, Correctional Official)*

*When I visited social workers, I was so disappointed because they asked me why I hadn't been trained as a social worker. When I told them that some people needed a particular programme, they rudely retorted that I should have been trained in that area. As human beings who have been working in the Department of Correctional Services for a long time, it's easy as an elderly yourself and the experience I have working in the Department of Correctional Services helps me recognise that certain persons need social work assistance because of the problem they*

*encountered upon their release from prison. However, it's not easy for us to go to the social worker and tell them what I found when I was doing an admission. Honestly, I was quite disappointed (Khoza, Manager)*

Social workers reported that correctional officials often discouraged elderly parolees from attending post-incarceration social work programmes, which made it challenging for social workers to implement social work programmes without any assistance from correctional officials. The observation the researcher made of the gestures of both correctional officials and social workers during the interviews confirmed that the relationship between the personnel of both groups was dysfunctional; not only did it affect their professional relationship, but it also impinged on the implementation of all the programmes in the Department of Correctional Services. Social workers offering correctional services grapple with hostility, suspicion and resistance from other professionals within the Department of Correctional Services (Reamer, 2004).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Elderly parolees are considered a special category of offenders in the Department of Correctional Services. They have unique needs compared to younger offenders, yet not much is known about the role of social work programmes in assisting elderly parolees successfully reintegrate into society. The study revealed that the Department of Correctional Services provided a range of social work programmes to parolees during their reintegration into society. However, the findings from this study strongly suggest that the current post-incarceration social work programmes do not specifically support elderly parolees' transition from prison to the community. The reviewed literature and the findings from this study indicate that social work programmes focus exclusively on the ex-offenders' inclination towards reoffending, with no attention being paid to the age-related needs of elderly parolees. Therefore, the lack of gerontological programmes during post-incarceration presents an additional challenge for both elderly parolees and correctional service providers in the Department of Correctional Services. In this regard, there is an urgent need for developing social work programmes that address the gerontological needs of elderly parolees. Also, the elderly parolees recommended that group-based programmes must be cognizant of the needs of elderly parolees. Therefore, some of the group-based discussions must target elderly parolees exclusively, thus affording them the opportunity to discuss matters that affect them. Social workers in community correctional centres need to review their programmes to determine the extent to which they address the unique needs of their diverse clients and, therefore, develop concrete plans and mobilise resources to ensure that services meet their key objectives.

In the light of the fact that elderly parolees felt excluded from these programmes, it was not surprising to note that social workers viewed the provision of specialised treatment for elderly people as a major obstacle. The findings of the study demonstrated that currently there are no practice standards for correctional social workers and correctional officials entrusted with the provision of care to the elderly. This has also made it impossible for social and correctional officials to offer specialised services to individual groups. Therefore, social workers and correctional officers advocated the need for continuous training to equip themselves with a well-defined and uniform approach to the treatment of the elderly in community correctional centres. Furthermore, the study revealed that correctional staff felt that their scope of practice in community correctional centres mirrored the work being performed by officials in custodial correctional facilities. Their focus was on reintegration of ex-offenders and community development to enhance community participation and rehabilitation of ex-offenders within their communities. Arguably, the lack of a clear definition of social work in community correctional centres compounds the difficulty of dealing with the large number of elderly offenders being released on parole.

Additionally, the responses from social workers and correctional officials strongly suggested the existence of team dynamics between these two groups of personnel, which severely affected the coordination and management of social work programmes. Sadly, the role of social workers in the Department of Correctional Services is currently being marginalised, and little value is placed on their ability to contribute meaningfully towards programme implementation during the reintegration phase.

This suggests the need for calling on other professions to complement the duties of social workers in the correctional system.

This article makes the following recommendations for consideration by social workers and the Department of Correctional Services in responding effectively to the needs of elderly parolees. The study noted that elderly parolees feel uncomfortable sharing their views when they are mixed with groups of younger parolees. The study recommends that social workers to consider categorising parolees according to their stage of development to meet the specific needs of each group. In addition, the study recommends that social workers give preference to support groups over therapy groups when working directly with elderly people. Support groups have a significant impact on reintegration, as the needs of the elderly are much more complex than those of the younger ones. Support groups can better assist the elderly in taking care of their affairs by associating with people with similar problems. The study revealed that there was a shortage of social workers in the Department of Correctional Services. It is proposed that more social workers be hired by the Department of Correctional Services to adequately staff all community correctional facilities, thus allowing social workers to concentrate more on special types of offenders such as elderly parolees by assigning them controlled and monitorable caseloads. Furthermore, the Department of Correctional Services should provide ongoing training to both social workers and correctional service officials. The training must provide social workers operating within community correctional centres with a clearly defined scope of practice. In addition, preparatory programmes may also offer a generic approach to the administration and arrangement of programmes to address the specific needs of elderly parolees.

Lastly, the study revealed that poor coordination between correctional officers and social workers contributed to a lack of updated knowledge on various health, mental and social problems facing elderly people released on parole. It is recommended that the Department of Correctional Services consider holding annual team-building workshops and discussions with a focus on the value of establishing working partnerships and efficient contact. In addition, seminars aimed at understanding social workers' scope of practice within correctional facilities will allow correctional officers to recognise the role of social workers in these facilities as well as the importance of post-incarceration social work programmes.

Little is still understood regarding the feelings of families and victims after elderly offenders have been released on parole; hence focused studies should fill this research gap. It is also proposed that a significantly wider sample size and many other correctional centres be included in future research. Lastly, future research could also explore stress and depression among social workers and correctional officials in the Department of Correctional Services, with a specific emphasis on job satisfaction and performance.

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