

Ex-Offenders' Labelling, Stigmatisation and Unsuccessful Re-Integration as Factors Leading into Recidivism: A South African Context

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Abstract—For successful re-integration, the individual offender must adapt and transform, which requires that the offender should adopt and internalise socially approved norms, attitudes, values, and beliefs. However, the offender's labelling and community stigmatisation decide the destination of the offender. Community involvement in ex-offenders' re-integration is an important issue in efforts to reduce recidivism and to control overcrowding in our correctional facilities. Crime is a social problem that requires society to come together to fight against it. This study was conducted in the Limpopo Province in Vhembe District Municipality within four local municipalities, namely Musina, Makhado, Mutale, and Thulamela. A total number of 30 participants were interviewed, and all were members of the Community Corrections Forums. This was necessitated by the fact that Musina is a very small area, which compelled the Department of Correctional Services to combine the two (Musina and Makhado) into one social re-integration entity. This is a qualitative research study where participants were selected through the use of purposive sampling. Participants were selected based on the value they would add to this study in order to achieve the objectives. The data collection method of this study was the focus group, which comprised of three groups of 10 participants each. Thulamela and Mutale local municipalities formed a group with (10) participants each, whereas Musina (2) and Makhado (8) formed another. Results indicate that the current situation is not conducive for re-integration to be successful. Participants raised many factors that need serious redress, namely offenders' discrimination, lack of forgiveness by members of the community, which is fuelled by lack of community awareness due to the failure of the Department of Correctional Services in educating communities on ex-offenders' re-integration.

Keywords—Ex-offender, labelling, re-integration, stigmatisation.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE correlation between ex-offenders labelling, stigmatisation and successful re-integration becomes the impediments or factors to reduce correctional services overcrowding in the South African context. Formal labels are applied to individuals that have come into contact with correctional systems with the authority to officially label the individual as deviant [1]. In South Africa, terms such as "inmate"; "prisoner" and "offender" are used while in America, the commonly used formal label is "felon". These formal labels are also some of the most severe labels that can be applied by the criminal justice system. Simply, formal

labels such as "offender" or "felon" are tools of social control reacting to an individual's deviant behaviour [2]. The high recidivism rates suggest that secondary deviance is likely behaviour for convicted offenders. Reference [3] noted very clearly that there is new support for the labelling theory when they wrote that, "Although labelling theory has a history of being very problematic, current theory and research has reconsidered its merit as an explanation of deviance". Preparing for offenders' release is one of the important tasks that should not be undermined. Furthermore, [4] indicated that, the modus operandi of correctional systems or centres is more convincing that it is strictly for the betterment of offenders for the purpose of rehabilitation in order to prepare them to deal with the labelling and stigmatization prior to release. Communities as indirect victims of crimes committed by ex-offenders become the decider during re-entry, and not only the family members of the ex-offenders. Formal labels may lead to failure of re-integration and contribute to the increase of recidivism rates in the country. Formal labels insist that "once a criminal always a criminal" no matter how far the offenders show that they have changed through correctional rehabilitation programmes. This makes it very difficult for the community, with stigmatisation playing a major role to understand and accept ex-offenders back in their communities. Few African traditional societies perform rituals in order to accept ex-offenders back to the community. References [5] and [6] quote [7] who states that the Thembu people in the Eastern Cape and the vha-Venda people in Vhembe (the study area) exercise restorative justice. In both instances, the offender is required to compensate the injured party and then to share in a ritual meal, in which all the people would eat one of the animals imposed as a fine upon the offender. The symbolic meaning of the sharing in the meal is that the crime is expiated and that the criminal is readmitted into the community. This may work against labelling in communities in these communities. Clearly, the *Ubuntu* philosophy is evident here.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Department of Correctional Services in South Africa is currently under fire, communities across different sectors or fields are questioning the rehabilitation programmes [8]. It becomes very strange when ex-offenders relapse to criminal activities after release. The South African parliament (especially the Justice Portfolio Committee) is forever debating about the overcrowding in all correctional facilities

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[9]. None of government institutions or the community themselves manage to identify the association with ex-offender's labelling, stigmatisation and unsuccessful re-integration as a major contributing system towards re-offending. Community involvement makes it imperative that governments and communities must develop effective interventions that will assist ex-offenders to successfully re-integrate and reduce further recidivism. It is reasonable to attempt to prevent crime by preventing ex-offenders from continuing their criminal behaviour after release. Offenders participate in various rehabilitation programmes during their incarceration. The challenge is to sustain these rehabilitation efforts after their release from correctional facilities [10]. The study identified the following factors that ex-offenders encounter upon their release, such as the need for employment, food, shelter, and dealing with the stigma of having been imprisoned (labelling by community members). Society is usually reluctant to receive ex-offenders after their release. Consequently, ex-offenders struggle to find employment because of this stigma, which often translates into family break-ups [11]. They are then expected to invent new ways of making a living and surviving without any help from the community. Subsequently, they fall back into crime. Where correctional facilities and community resources exist and can be mobilised, the offender's re-entry process can be more effectively managed in order to reduce the likelihood of recidivism, and also to support successful re-integration back into the community. In light of the above statement, this study argues that effective re-integration of ex-offenders into society should be seen as a central part of a comprehensive crime prevention strategy. The study observation is that successful re-integration of ex-offenders benefits society and potentially reduces crime and victimisation. However, community members should be in the forefront of the efforts to fight labelling and stigmatisation. Currently, there is a lack of community engagement into ex-offenders' re-integration which makes it difficult for ex-offenders to settle back in their communities. Reference [12] argues that the re-integration approach holds greater promise to reduce crime than a strictly punitive approach.

III. SUCCESSFUL RE-INTEGRATION VERSUS RECIDIVISM

Community engagement during offender re-integration is one of the vital tasks of the South African government. The government introduced a rehabilitation programme [13] where the focus is on the pre-release programme. The main objective of the pre-release programme is to prepare offenders for successful re-integration into society by providing them with skills and information to enable them to cope with possible challenges they may have to face after their release. Offenders go through the pre-release stage to help them plan for their transition into the community. However, community engagement to support the successful re-integration during this stage of pre-release is omitted. According to [14], this stage is characterised by intensive preparation for release, formalising the re-integration plan and establishing solid links with the community. The core of the re-integration plan should provide

strategies to ensure access to: food, shelter and legitimate sources of financial support. Apart from these welfare needs, resettlement literature also mentions other relevant targets such as training; employment; mental disease; physical health; finance; thinking and behaviour. According to [15], "[e]ffective institutional programmes tend to focus on a number of dynamic risk factors and offenders' challenges or needs that require attention in order to prepare the offender for release and successful reintegration". Of great concern with the offender's pre-release process must be community safety and offenders' reception in the community. The objective is to contribute towards assistance of offenders to focus on re-integration into the communities and the reduction of re-offending.

IV. PRE-RELEASE AND RE-INTEGRATION

Pre-release stage is very important especially when addressing the association between ex-offenders labelling, stigmatisation and successful re-integration. This study assumes that factors such as labelling, stigmatisation and recidivism can only be best explained when the contribution/involvement of the community is involved. According to [16], "the terms pre-release and re-integration are often used interchangeably without much variation". However, these two terms represent distinct phases on the Offender Rehabilitation Path (ORP).

A. Pre-Release Model

The punitive oriented correctional system releases offenders back into the community with a little more than what they came into correctional facilities with. However, the focus is still directed towards the fulfilment of the successful re-integration with aim of reducing the rate of recidivism. The preparation usually involves the completion of a form (address confirmation and completion of the G326 form) and identifying where the offender expects to reside and the likely place of employment. According to [17], "[o]ffenders are expected to make as much arrangements as they can from correctional facilities, with most issues left to the offender after returning to the community". Labelling and stigmatisation becomes hindrance against these pre-release model directives.

This study fully agreed that offenders' are engaged in 'active participation model' that outlines stages offenders go through before release in order to have a successful re-integration. This model deals with stages based on the needs of each offender in order to promote public safety. The offender active participant model supports re-integration and promotes public safety through active participation of offenders in all stages. However, the prevention of exposing offenders to the factors that may lead them to re-offending such as labelling and stigmatisation by communities might create attitude of "*me against them*" and immediately this can lead into a relapse of criminal activities. Reference [17] introduced several different models that focus on empowerment as a form of strengthening the offender's commitment to new goals. According to [18], the interest by

the South African justice system in re-entry is not just an exercise; it is a commitment to public safety through the successful re-integration of the offender into the community. However, communities are recognised as on the driving seat of labelling and stigmatisation are not engaged. Community/public safety is very important when offenders are at pre-release stage, but it is very crucial to consider the role-played by the community.

B. Post Release Model (from Release Day to 30 days and afterwards)

It is very important to have a proper interlink between both pre and post release in order to address factors such as labelling and stigmatisation. However, [19] indicated, "what issues take precedence at the post-release phase depends on the emphasis during the pre-release phase and the offender's analysis of his/her own adjustment". In the active participant model, the early stages of release should focus on the offender's perception of adjustment in the community and a re-assessment of criminogenic factors. However, not doing away with labelling and stigmatisation as leading factors to either successful re-integration or recidivism even though the offender successfully completes the active participation model during pre-release stage.

If the re-entry process has a pre-release phase that develops a reasonable plan for the offender, then the purpose of the post-release phase should be to stabilise the offender by making sure that more attention is paid to the quality of life issues [20]. If there is no pre-release phase, then the focus of the post-release plan should be on securing and stabilising the offender in the basic survival areas of home, work, and extra-curricular activities and dealing with labelling and stigmatisation outside the correctional facilities. According to [19], more attention needs to be paid to the offender's survival needs and determining how these impact the offender's ability to maintain a crime-free lifestyle. This will in turn reduce the opportunity of a possible relapse into criminal offending.

C. Re-integration

Though offenders may be engaged in some form of a pre-release plan within the duration of their sentence, such services may be more concentrated and comprehensive in the months preceding their release. Successful re-integration influenced by deleting elements such as labelling and stigmatisation with full support of the community. According to [15], re-integration connotes something more deeply entrenched than offenders' physical return to communities. At this stage, they become familiarised with financial, professional, social, civic and familial challenges and expectations and increasingly become active participants within re-integration. Offenders' re-entry exposes them to different environment, treatment, receptions. However, they are still expected to adjust and apply skills they acquired during incarceration. Reference [21] describes re-integration as "...the process of transitioning from incarceration to the community, adjusting to life outside of correctional facilities, and attempting to maintain a crime-free lifestyle". Re-

integration is a complex process that occurs over time and there is much to do in the process [22].

During re-integration, ex-offenders require a safe place to sleep after their release from correctional facilities. Housing is a critical component of any release plan, even if that initial housing is temporary or transitional in nature. Many ex-offenders in South Africa reported that they reside with family, friends or in their own homes on their first night of release [23]. Reference [23] further indicated that,

...living with family and friends may appear to be the best and most affordable option for returning offenders, these living arrangements may not be stable or even feasible in the long run. Many recently released ex-offenders reported that they had few other options but to live with their family in RDP housing; finding an apartment of their own was improbable, and few desired to live in the shelter system.

Family members may refrain from providing housing based on past negative experiences with the returning ex-offender, while others may be legally prohibited from having an ex-offender reside with them if they live in Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) areas [23]. Offenders may also be prohibited from living with family or friends for other legal reasons, such as protective orders or conditions of supervision [23]. Ex-offenders often live with family members more out of necessity than out of choice.

V. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The theoretical cornerstone of this study is the labelling theory. The correlation between labelling and stigmatisation that leads to either successful re-integration or recidivism is influenced by anger and hatred to the ex-offenders by community members. The intention of this study is to expose the gap between the community and the Department of Correctional Service (DCS) with the objective of restoring the broken relationships between ex-offenders and their communities. The genesis of these broken relationships is the commission of crime by the offender. In order to contextualise the study theoretically, labelling is the core theory of the study while a further three theories namely: control, conflict and re-integrative shaming theories are also dealt with. Furthermore, restorative principles as normative theory of intervention will be discussed with reference to the research literature in order to deal with the stigma the community might have against ex-offenders.

For successful re-integration, the individual offender must adapt and transform, which requires that the offender adopt and internalise socially approved norms, attitudes, values and beliefs. Both factors such as labelling and stigmatisation are eliminated upon the offenders' arrival or entry back to the community. The offender must, therefore, change his or her thinking and behaviour and unlearn the criminal ways in favour of learning socially responsible behaviour. The offender can accomplish this goal only if he or she is willing to engage in an on-going self-transformation process, which should theoretically start from the time he or she first enters a correctional centre. The study initially claimed that the

criminal justice system began formally labelling offenders as deviants or criminals before community members did. The word deviant is applied to an individual who violates the state law or constitution, which is the supreme law of the country. However, this is influenced by government institutions such as Correctional Centres and Judiciary. In South African context, these individuals are recognised as an “inmate”; “prisoner” or “offender”. These formal labels are also some of the most severe labels that can be applied by the criminal justice system. Simply, formal labels such as “offender” or “felon” are tools of social control reacting to an individual’s deviant behaviour [2]. Stimulated by high recidivism rates, there has been a recent revival in the research into the criminogenic effects of formal labels [24]. The high recidivism rates suggest that secondary deviance is likely behaviour for convicted offenders. Reference [3] noted very clearly that there is new support for the labelling theory when they wrote that: “Although labelling theory has a history of being very problematic, current theory and research has reconsidered its merit as an explanation of deviance”. Formal labels may lead to failure of re-integration and contribute to the increase of recidivism rates in the country. Formal labels insist that “once a criminal always a criminal” no matter how far the offenders show that they have changed through correctional rehabilitation programmes. This makes it very difficult for the community, with stigmatisation playing a major role, to understand and accept ex-offenders back in their communities. Reference [25] claims that labelling theory is one of the most important approaches to the understanding of criminality. As Giddens points out,

Labelling theorists interpret deviance not as a set of characteristics of individuals or a group, but as a process of interaction between deviants and non-deviants.

He further posits that one must discover why some people care to be tagged with a “*deviant*” label to fully understand the nature of deviance itself. Reference [26] states that the impact of social reaction to certain types of behaviour or particular categories of people is crucial in explaining the criminalisation process;

Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as ‘outsiders’.

From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an “*offender*”. Becker further indicates that once people are judged by society/community, it is very hard to get back to what they once had, and often they experience an identity change. Reference [26] regards this as a social problem, because labelling these people ruins their lives to a point where they have no choice but to respond to the label they were given. The stigmatisation of ex-offenders by society often hampers their successful re-integration into the community. Offenders are often labelled because of their incarceration. Upon release, they sometimes find it difficult to secure employment because of the label attached to them as an “*ex-offender*”. According to

[26], a deviant label can lead to further deviance. It is essential to introduce measures in which communities can change the way they perceive those who violated the trust of community members by breaking the law. Reference [27] emphasises that a community can help to restore the offender’s identity by erasing the social stigma associated with being an ex-offender. Labelling theory essentially states that society labels certain behaviours and actions as criminal, but once sanctioned for the criminal act, the offender is permanently labelled by society [28]. Once labelled as a criminal, the individual has few legitimate opportunities to re-integrate successfully back into the community.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative in nature. The research method adopted in this study is supported by [29] who indicated that qualitative research is a strategy of enquiry, which moves from the underlying assumptions to research design, and data collection. This research was designed to generate qualitative data by exploring community members’ perceptions of their understanding of the correlation between labelling and stigmatisation that results to either successful re-integration or recidivism. Reference [30] states that “qualitative research is naturalistic; it attempts to study the everyday life of different groups of people and communities in their natural setting. It is particularly useful to study corrections settings and processes”. According to [31], qualitative research aims to explore and discover issues about the problem on hand, where very little is known about the problem. The qualitative data source of this study is focus group interviews. This is a qualitative study which made use of a phenomenological approach to gather relevant data. The phenomenological approach concerns itself with understanding and interpreting the meaning that participants give to their everyday lives [32]. The phenomenon of the correlation between labelling and stigmatisation lead to either successful re-integration or recidivism. Community perspectives towards ex-offenders’ re-integration have not been researched in the study area and a qualitative approach presents an opportunity to explore the research problem. Apart from its inherently interpretive nature, the choice of a qualitative research strategy is informed by the understanding that qualitative data are reliable. For the purpose of this study, the researcher selected non-probability sampling which gives the researcher assurance about the selected population. In the context of this study, only community members who were representing communities and not attached (employed) to the Department of Correctional Services were considered for participation. Reference [33] states that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with the available time and resources. The researcher believed that, making use of the purposive sampling technique in the study is appropriate in order to make sure that community members from all four municipalities were included in the study. In addition, the researcher could ensure that the required

characteristics as stipulated above were represented in the focus groups. In this study, the respondents were selected purposively because of their experience with the central phenomenon or key concept being explored. Thus, the sample size of the present study was limited to 30 participants chosen in terms of being members in Community Corrections Forums with 10 per group and municipality, but Makhado (8) and Musina (2) municipalities were combined because the Musina community members were too small in number to form a focus group on their own. According to [34], focus groups usually include six to 10 participants. The study made use of thematic data analysis. Reference [33] states that qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. Patton further points out that qualitative researchers have an obligation to monitor and report the analytical procedures they use in their research projects. This means that they must observe their own processes, and analyse and report on the analytical process. Reference [35], on the other hand, describes data analysis as the editing, coding, transcription and verification of data. This study treated the elements of ethical principles very serious. Elements such as informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, and risk and harm applied were thoroughly explained to the participants. Qualitative research involves

researchers and informants and is based on mutual trust and cooperation between the two groups [36]. It is also based on promises, conventions and expectations as the outcome of the research project.

VII. DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

A. Demographic Data

The demographic data of the respondents who participated in this study are presented hereunder. According to [37], demographic information refers to socio-economic characteristics of a population expressed statistically, such as age and gender. For the purpose of this study, the focus is on the gender, employment status and location of participants. The respondents were from four different local municipalities in Vhembe District. Mutale and Thulamela had the same number of representatives with 10 participants each. During the interviews and analysis, it soon became evident that there were no major differences in the perceptions and opinions of the three groups, therefore the data from the three groups were integrated for purpose of presentation. In instances where individual views differed from the group data, the views were presented in the data.

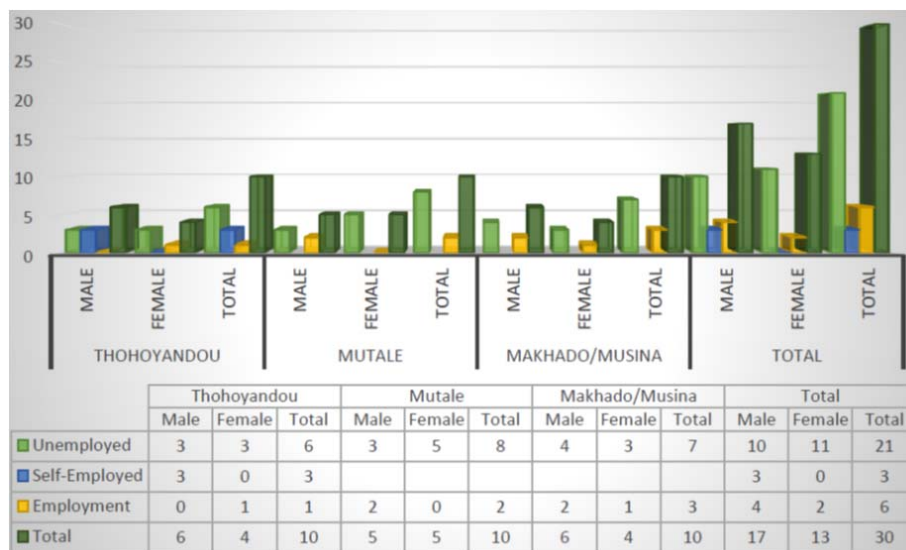


Fig. 1 Respondents by Gender, Employment status and Municipality

Fig. 1 indicates that, the majority of participants (21) were not employed. Only three male participants were self-employed while four males and two females were employed. The gender distribution reflects that there were a majority of males (n=17) and fewer (n=13) females respectively represented in the focus groups.

B. Emerged Themes

All themes generated from the data collected are presented below and clearly demonstrate the correlation of labelling and stigmatisation that lead either to successful re-integration or to recidivism. The study generalised answers because almost

90% of participants agreed or said the same things. Categories and sub-categories were discussed in order to explain the link between the main themes. Data presented in this study were coded firstly in groups then compared with other groups that helped to develop final themes. The following is the interpretation of data according to the data obtained from the focus groups.

1. Theme 1: Labelling Attitudes

Community members treat ex-offenders as outsiders and call them by different names. Stigma becomes a factor of relapse to criminal activities instead of successful re-

integration. Becker suggested that once people are judged by society, it is very hard to get back to what they once had, and often they experience an identity change. This study concurs with Becker's analysis especially on the issue of anger shown by members of the community towards ex-offenders. Reference [26] regards this as a social problem because labelling these people ruins their lives to a point where they have no choice but to respond to the label they were given. The following are the sub-themes generated from the main theme of labelling attitudes towards ex-offenders by the community.

a. Sub-Theme 1: Offender Labelling

This study outlined above the role played by both formal and informal labelling. Reference [27] emphasises that a community can assist to restore the offender's identity by erasing the social stigma associated with being an ex-offender. Communities view ex-offenders with different mind-sets and this makes ex-offenders' re-integration very difficult and it may end up being unsuccessful. To support the above statement, one of the respondents indicated in Tsi-Venda that:

Muthu na ho wa tamba wa dola senenga a lituwi (A criminal does not change his/her habits).

This is a Tshivenda idiom which explains the way people view others in the community. The strange part of this idiom is that, once a group of people start to say it, they are likely not to change their perceptions about an ex-offenders' behaviour' According to [38], labelling theory is largely about formal labelling, dealing with real criminals, but the stigmatising social processes that affect these people seem to apply to targeted individuals as well. The only difference in formal labelling is that at least criminals are aware of their formal label owing to their previous incarceration. Respondents felt that:

Ex-offenders will remain with their labels until such time when they demonstrate to the community that they have really changed; and it is also a matter of how individual ex-offenders deal with the stigmatisation when they are called names or insulted.

However, it becomes difficult for the ex-offenders to demonstrate/prove to the community that they have changed since this stigmatisation comes out during their release or re-entry stage. This study has shown the correlation between labelling and stigmatisation as a major factor influencing ex-offenders to re-offend. The impact of social stigma and community isolation on successful community re-entry is well documented in literature. Reference [39] stated that:

The transition from captivity to freedom is a vital time to concentrate on inclusion. Social inclusion is needed in the attitudes of the ex-offender and society, to give ex-offenders a sense of belonging and to encourage each one to think of himself or herself as a citizen with a contribution to make to his or her community and society.

This study supports the idea of curbing these factors in order to deal with de-labelling practice by communities themselves. The main role player in the re-integration process

is the community because it can change the way it perceives those who violated the trust of community members by breaking the law. The truth is that forgiveness might be very difficult for community members who were victimised. The counselling they received after the victimisation may assist in this regard. Those who still feel the trauma may not cooperate with re-integration.

b. Sub-Theme 2: Provocation

Many ex-offenders go through anger management as part of rehabilitation process/programme. This helps ex-offenders to deal with the situation of provocation by members of the community upon their release and also assist them to treat both the labelling and stigmatisation factors. Such conduct by the community where one induces another to do a particular deed such as the act of inducing rage, anger, or resentment in another person may cause that person to engage in an illegal act. Reminding the ex-offender about a previous conviction may provoke feelings of resentment, rejection and anger, especially when he/she cannot control his/her temper. These feelings may result in withdrawal to criminal peer groups and even retaliation. Respondents agreed that when family members label an ex-offender as a criminal, this may incite community members to act against such an ex-offender under the perception that the family will approve of such action. The important factor here is that the ex-offender's relatives sometimes engage in encouraging members of the community to provoke their relatives. There is a serious need for community intervention to assist members of the community as well as relatives of ex-offenders on how they should conduct themselves in the presence of ex-offenders. This could promote successful re-integration because ex-offenders will develop a sense of belonging and trust towards the community. To elucidate this view, one respondent further stated that;

Community members provoke ex-offenders, okay, let's put it this way. A person can be released and when he arrived home he is no longer a criminal, but the thing of people calling him a criminal doesn't make him a criminal or to commit a crime again. It depends on the person himself as to whether he was rehabilitated successfully.

During the focus group discussions, respondents shared their views on this concept of provocation and agreed that sometimes this concept is a factor of recidivism. Nevertheless, they emphasised that community members behave in this manner because they are ill informed the about the ORP programme that ex-offenders go through during their time of incarceration. One of the findings of this study was the provocation of ex-offenders by members of the community. Ex-offenders may react in a negative way to such provocation and may even react violently towards members of the community. Some members of the community always want to test whether an ex-offender has indeed changed by provoking him or her. Provocation is one of the serious factors that can hinder the success of ex-offenders' re-integration because ex-offenders have the right to be respected by community

members, instead of the community members violating the ex-offenders' rights. According to [40], Chapter 2 Bill of Rights under section 10 states that every person has the right to human dignity while sections 9 and 14 accords every citizen the right of equality and privacy.

2. Theme 2: Lack of Knowledge of Re-Integration Policy

The establishment of re-integration policy framework was intended to reduce the high rate of re-offending/recidivism in order to control the overcrowding in the correctional facilities across the country. Re-integration policy is considered the main tool targeted to reduce the high rate of recidivism. Rule 80 of the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, states that:

...from the beginning of a prisoner's sentence, consideration shall be given to his/her future after release and the ex-offender shall be encouraged and assisted to maintain or establish such relations with persons or agencies outside the institution as this may promote the best interests of his/her family and his/her own social rehabilitation [48].

One of the aims of the social re-integration policy framework is to prepare the offenders for successful re-entry to ensure public safety. However, labelling and stigmatisation might become the obstacles to this vision if not properly considered within the involvement of the community. Re-integration into the community is multi-faceted, and typically, ex-offenders experience wide-ranging challenges in re-integration if the policy is not well observed and implemented. The following are the sub-themes generated to provide a clear explanation on community understanding/knowledge on the re-integration policy.

a. Sub-Theme 1: Access to Re-integration Policy

It was revealed through the focus group discussions that communities do not receive copies of the policy that can guide and educate them about offenders' re-entry. Although the community members who participated in this study take part in DCS activities; the Department still failed however to provide them with relevant material to guide them on their operations. Participants from Makhado Municipality received policy documents during the focus group interview for the first time because one of the DCS members noted that they were not familiar with the policy and that whatever they did was not informed by any written material. Some remarks made by participants are as follows; "How will you work without a policy document?", "Is like we are using our own common sense, we can say that the implementation of the policy is unsuccessful". It is very important for policymakers to promote education and training for community members so that when they are busy assisting ex-offenders they will be guided by the policy. This will enable them to engage with ex-offenders and community members meaningfully using the appropriate skills and knowledge necessary for re-integration. Through the skills acquired during policy training or workshops, community members could assist ex-offenders to be more productive and to be fully engaged in their

communities, working and supporting their families. This could contribute towards successful re-integration and safer communities. To elucidate this view, one respondent stated:

Policies are there but we do not have it and there is no one to train and evaluate us. The responsibility of the department is to inform the CCF on how to apply this policy.

The DCS is responsible for educating community members through disseminating policy information and training community members. These are important issues in the re-integration process together with community corrections because without the policy and training, community members will be just inefficient structures serving no real purpose.

In summary, it was discovered that the Department of Correctional Services did not distribute or share the appropriate policy documents with members of the community. Furthermore, the DCS is not conducting an evaluation on how community members understand the implementation of policy because it is essential for successful policy implementation and to ensure intended outcomes. Community members emphasised that this responsibility requires determining whether offender re-integration policy or programmes are implemented correctly, the right programmes and strategies are used, progress is measured appropriately and ex-offenders and communities are benefiting. The implementation of re-integration policy is very vital because through this policy, community members advise on what to do and how to perform ex-offenders' re-integration successfully.

3. Theme 3: Ex-Offender Re-Integration

The emphasis of this study is the success of ex-offender re-integration based on the support to address the correlation of labelling and stigmatisation leading to successful ex-offender re-integration back to their community. Reference [41] further described re-integration "as the process of transitioning from incarceration to the community, adjusting to life outside of correctional facilities, and attempting to maintain a crime-free lifestyle". Re-integration is a complex process that occurs over time and there is much to do in the process [22]. The perceptions of community members are vital for the success of re-integration. The following are the sub-themes generated from the responses given by participants during focus group interviews.

a. Sub-Theme 1: Reception (Red Carpet)

The community members during interviews understand this reception as something special and refer to it as rolling out "the red carpet" to make ex-offenders feel free and welcome. Their reception of ex-offenders is an important point of departure for the re-integration process of ex-offenders as it reflects the goodwill of the community towards them meaning that the correlation of both factors (labelling and stigmatisation) during this reception is interpreted as *rolling out the red carpet*. *The rolling out of the red carpet* will lead ex-offenders to successful re-integration instead of relapsing into criminal activities. Through this reception, it can be easy for the community to exercise *Ubuntu* towards the ex-

offenders. Reference [42] states that the necessary statutory structures should be created to formalise communities' roles in the reception of ex-offenders. The relationships between the DCS and community members, Non-Government Organisations and faith-based organisations such as churches are critical to the successful achievement of the rehabilitation and re-integration of offenders. The formalisation of community representation as recommended by Muntingh above should make provisions of participation from these groups. Respondents agreed that:

- They were elected by the respective communities;
- They were responsible for making offenders feel comfortable by laying out a red carpet;
- The DCS encourages community members to work with other departments "to promote community corrections re-integration among the community members they represent".

It is evident that offender re-integration is a reciprocal process involving not only the perceptions, will and efforts of the returning offender but those of the community as well.

In summary, the outcomes from this sub-theme is that, for ex-offenders to be successfully re-integrated into communities, the ex-offender must shed the label and find a new identity that fits positively within his or her community. Through community intervention, ex-offenders need to be morally and socially re-integrated. However, ex-offenders also have to feel that this re-integration has been justified by their own efforts to make good and redress past crimes. According to [43], in order for re-integration to successfully occur, these efforts toward restoration must, in turn, be acknowledged and rewarded by the ex-offender's family and community.

b. Sub-Theme 2: Forgiveness

Labelling and stigmatisation represent the hatred and anger towards ex-offenders that is why is difficult to have successful re-integration. However, the forgiveness between the community and the ex-offenders will lead to happiness for both parties. Offenders will feel welcome and free around the community if the path to forgiveness is properly followed and channelled to achieve desired outcomes. To elucidate this view, one respondent stated:

Community members are not ready to forgive and forgot (forget) ex-offenders, because some they do not talk or open up to them.

It is evident that community members need serious attention from the DCS and other relevant stakeholders to work together to remove stigmatisation. This behaviour towards ex-offenders by members of the community raises questions on the effectiveness of South African restorative justice efforts. There is considerable variability in the nature and extent of community involvement in the various restorative justice approaches [44]. For example, in Victim Offender Mediation (VOM), the community is absent and the process consists of a mediator, the offender and the victim. Reference [45] indicated that, "principles of restorative justice define crime as an injury and recognise the need for actions to repair that injury, plus a commitment to involve all those affected in the

response to crime". It is important for the Department to introduce or involve community members in the restorative justice system such as the VOM. Participants indicated that community members are not informed about incarceration and rehabilitation and are intent on retribution rather than reconciliation. This point can be demonstrated by the following statement a participant made during the focus group 1 interview:

Community, they do not accept that a criminal going to the correctional centre pays for the crime, they want criminals to rot in jail. They do not understand when offenders have been released after committing a serious crime like murder; they think that offenders paid bribes. The other thing is that we (they) do not form part of Victim Offender Mediation and Offender Rehabilitation Programs, just to have an understanding on what is happening to them (offenders) before they are released back to us.

According to the responses or remarks above, it seems very difficult for the community to accept that ex-offenders have paid their debt by being sentenced to imprisonment. Reference [39] conducted a study on Greene County jail inmates and their re-entry into society. One of the participants in their study stated that:

When is our debt going to be paid and be treated better by the community, and when will we be recognised as respected citizens, with rights like everyone else in the community. We will cease to be viewed as criminals by the community only when society stops treating us that way and accepts us for who we are and who we can be and not who we were.

The extensive literature on restorative justice indicates that there are no chances of the DCS succeeding in re-integration if restorative justice is failing or not properly planned. To show the importance of restorative justice, [46] indicated that ex-offender accountability includes taking personal responsibility to repair the harm caused to the victim and atoning the community for disrupting their peace and violating societal norms. To elucidate this view, one respondent stated that;

The community does not accept ex-offenders because when they are back they (ex-offenders) do not show any remorse or regret for what they have done to the community.

It is evident that the existence of a correlation of labelling and stigmatisation is that community members want to see and experience a situation where the ex-offender takes responsibility for his/her actions and to make amends. Reference [47] describes breaking away from the effects of institutionalisation as one of the most daunting struggles faced by ex-offenders. Certain behaviours and attitudes can become more pronounced in a correctional environment as a way of coping and surviving but then become obstacles to an ex-offender's ability to relate and work with people in the outside community.

Participants believed that if ex-offenders were not forgiven by community members they would struggle to adjust or settle back in the community which would make them to reoffend.

Forgiveness, according to this group, should be given even if it is not asked for. Support was largely based on the attitude of community members towards ex-offenders. Without forgiveness, support would not easily be given. Offenders need counselling, social workers and support services to bring them to a point of accountability and restitution. To elucidate this view, one respondent stated that; It would depend on how they (ex-offenders) got rehabilitation, re-integrated, and the support he/she gets from the community and Department of Correctional Services.

Participants emphasised that if rehabilitation is implemented correctly and the correlation of labelling and stigmatisation is avoided or eliminated it can reduce the high rate of recidivism. Therefore, community members need to form part of the rehabilitation programme so that it can facilitate the development of a relationship between community members and ex-offenders which will make forgiveness and restoration easier. Community members can then assist to facilitate restoration and re-integration processes. This point is duly amplified by a respondent who said:

If the Department of Correctional Services assist or train community member/leaders on how they conduct themselves towards ex-offenders to settle back to their communities and have continuous rehabilitation or treatment inside and outside correctional facilities.

According to [39], offenders need to be reassured that they can embrace the norms and values of mainstream society and be embraced back. Reference [39] further indicated that one of the respondents in their study indicated that:

I know what I did was wrong, and I'm paying for it by being here. Everyone makes mistakes, but everyone deserves to be forgiven, especially after they've done their time. We need to be assured that we are forgiven, not just by our families, but by society in general. This is the only way that we can let go of the past and start anew.

It is important to facilitate processes within the restorative justice system that will assist with the process of restoration and forgiveness as this will greatly help the ex-offenders who show remorse and regret for what they have done.

The finding is that, community members have an important role to play with the emphasis on members being involved in the total rehabilitation process and so get acquainted with offenders that will be released. It is very important to address the correlation of labelling and stigmatisation throughout the restorative process. Rehabilitation and Restorative Justice (RJ) processes make ex-offenders to realise that they wronged society and this is crucial for reintegration. Through involvement of community members, ex-offenders will start a new life once they show remorse and forgiveness. The community believe that ex-offenders need support systems (e.g. counselling, social work etc.) outside correctional centres to support them to settle back to the community. It is very important for communities to forgive ex-offenders but that can only happen if ex-offenders are assisted by the DCS. Under this sub-theme, the issues of engaging community members in ORP, VOM and RJ were raised which are very crucial points that need to be addressed in order to have successful re-

integration of sex-offenders.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Despite the efforts by the government to curb the high rate of recidivism, the numbers have kept on increasing every day. The correlation of labelling and stigmatisation that lead to either successful re-integration or recidivism is ignored. The re-integration of ex-offenders into communities is indeed a complex phenomenon that needs careful analyses of the correlation of labelling and stigmatisation that lead to either successful re-integration or recidivism. South Africa's re-integration programmes should be perceived as a process whereby the transformation of the offenders into law-abiding citizens is achieved through a cooperative effort between criminal justice agencies and society as a whole. There are serious challenges that make community members in the study area to say DCS is dysfunctional during the focus group discussions. All respondents agreed that the Department of Correctional Services does not recognise their role in the re-integration process.

Mr Solly Mashabela published an internal notice to all staff communication called "let's communicate" on 27 September 2013 where an ex-offender was asking for a second chance from the community. The ex-offender had completed his study (LLB degree) while he was still in incarceration, however, during his release, he indicated how his life made a turn for the worse. He indicated challenges like labelling attitudes taking centre stage within communities. However, what is clear is the failure of the DCS approach in effectively administering the process with the involvement of members of the community. Community members have a low sense of confidence in the implementation of the re-integration policy. The manner in which correctional services perform their internal activities and not having enough community representatives during the Parole Board and post-release supervision stages is also a significant factor leading to recidivism. There was even some evidence to suggest that the community is relatively unaware of how the re-integration process unfolds, yet they showed some support for ex-offenders in some situations. This can probably be attributed to *Ubuntu*. Although immediate change can be challenging, offender re-integration is proving invaluable to re-entry efforts that seek to address and engage the mutual needs of ex-offenders and the reciprocal nature of systemic re-integration and settlement in communities. However, if community members are not engaged or consulted for their input, this is doomed to fail.

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