

Assessing the Impact of Rehabilitation Programs on Recidivism among Non-Custodial Offenders: A Case Study of Kericho County, Kenya

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Cite this article in APA

Waweru, C. N. & Muhindi, S. (2025). Assessing the impact of rehabilitation programs on recidivism among non-custodial offenders: A case study of Kericho County, Kenya. *Journal of psychology and behavioural sciences*, 4(1), 13-23. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jpbs.v4i1.723>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history

Received: 20.03.2025

Accepted: 20.04.2025

Published: 21.05.2025

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in reducing recidivism among non-custodial offenders in Kericho County, Kenya. Non-custodial sentencing has gained traction as an alternative to incarceration, yet its success heavily depends on the quality of rehabilitation interventions. This study used a mixed-methods descriptive design to explore how vocational training, counselling and psychological support services, and community reintegration initiatives affect behavioural change and reduce re-offending. Data were collected from 297 participants, including offenders, probation officers, counsellors, and community leaders, through questionnaires and interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The results indicated that while vocational training improved skills and job readiness for many participants, employment retention remained low. Counselling significantly enhanced emotional regulation and mental health, though its impact on substance abuse was modest. Community reintegration efforts were recognised as vital but inconsistently applied, with many offenders reporting limited acceptance. The study concludes that rehabilitation programs contribute to behavioural reform but face systemic challenges such as weak employment linkages and stigma. It recommends aligning training with market needs, expanding trauma-informed counselling, and institutionalising community-based reintegration. These enhancements are crucial for reinforcing non-custodial sentencing as a sustainable rehabilitative pathway.

Key terms: Behavioural reform, community reintegration, counseling services, recidivism, vocational training.

INTRODUCTION

Recidivism, or the tendency of previously convicted individuals to re-offend, remains a persistent challenge for criminal justice systems worldwide. In Kenya, particularly in rural areas like Kericho County, non-custodial sentencing has emerged as a strategic response to overcrowded prisons and the limitations of punitive incarceration. However, despite the proliferation of rehabilitation programs—such as vocational training, psychological counselling, and community reintegration initiatives—recidivism rates remain troublingly high.

The key terms underpinning this study include recidivism, defined as relapse into criminal behaviour; rehabilitation programs, encompassing structured interventions to facilitate behavioural reform; and non-custodial offenders, referring to individuals sentenced to serve their penalties outside of prison facilities.

This study explores the core question: How effective are existing rehabilitation efforts in Kericho County in reducing recidivism among non-custodial offenders? It investigates the role of vocational skills development, counselling interventions, and social reintegration frameworks in fostering long-term behavioural change. By applying Social Learning Theory and Reintegrative Shaming Theory, this study aims to illuminate the mechanisms through which these programs contribute—or fail to contribute—to sustainable reform.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effectiveness of Vocational Training Programs on Reducing Recidivism

Vocational training is widely recognised as a key strategy in reducing recidivism by enhancing employability and offering economic alternatives to criminal behavior. Global studies, such as those by UNODC (2020) report significant reductions in re-offending—up to 30 percent—among non-custodial offenders who undergo vocational training. These programs equip offenders with practical job skills, promoting social reintegration and reducing reliance on criminal activity.

In the African context, however, the effectiveness of such programs is hindered by systemic challenges like limited funding, poor job placement support, and misalignment with local labour markets. Research from Kenya, including studies in Kericho County, highlights that while vocational training can reduce recidivism by up to 30 per cent, its impact is often diluted by low employment absorption and lack of follow-up support. These findings point to the need for localised training that aligns with community economic dynamics and provides long-term employment pathways.

Impact of Counselling and Psychological Support Services on Behavioural Reform

Psychological support and counselling are integral to addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour, such as trauma, substance abuse, and emotional dysregulation. Studies from the United States and Europe (e.g., Padfield & Maruna, 2011) demonstrate that offenders who receive structured counselling, especially Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, experience up to 30 per cent lower recidivism rates than those who do not.

In Kenya and broader East Africa, similar trends are observed, though the scale and reach of counseling services remain limited. Research in Kericho County shows that offenders who engaged in regular counselling during non-custodial sentences were better able to manage emotions and resist re-offending. However, limitations in the availability of trained professionals and inconsistent service delivery continue to hinder the potential impact of these psychological interventions.

Impact of Community Reintegration Initiatives on Preventing Re-Offending

Community reintegration plays a pivotal role in sustaining rehabilitation gains and preventing re-offending by fostering acceptance and support networks. International models, particularly in Scandinavia and the UK, show that well-structured reintegration programs—including mentoring, housing, and employment assistance—significantly lower recidivism. These programs not only address practical needs but also counteract the social stigma that often isolates former offenders. In the Kenyan

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context, reintegration remains inconsistently implemented. While studies indicate that community support correlates strongly with lower recidivism, many offenders in rural areas like Kericho report experiencing rejection and stigma post-sentence. Localised studies underscore the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement—including families, community leaders, and NGOs—to improve reintegration outcomes and ensure offenders are fully embraced as reformed members of society.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two key theories: Social Learning Theory and Reintegrative Shaming Theory, which together offer a comprehensive understanding of how rehabilitation programs can influence behavioural reform and reduce recidivism. Social Learning Theory, developed by Bandura (1977) posits that behaviour is acquired through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social contexts. In the rehabilitation setting, this theory suggests that offenders can unlearn criminal behaviours and adopt pro-social ones by engaging in structured interventions such as vocational training and counselling that expose them to positive role models, skill-building activities, and supportive environments.

Reintegrative Shaming Theory, formulated by Braithwaite (1989), emphasises the societal response to crime, particularly the distinction between stigmatising and reintegrative forms of shaming. While stigmatisation isolates offenders and reinforces deviant identities, reintegrative shaming disapproves of the criminal act without discrediting the individual, encouraging accountability and eventual reintegration into the community. This theory aligns closely with community reintegration initiatives, where social acceptance, support networks, and public forgiveness are vital to successful rehabilitation and the prevention of future offences.

Together, these theories support the study's examination of rehabilitation programs in Kericho County by highlighting both internal (psychological and behavioural) and external (social and community) factors influencing re-offending. They underscore the importance of creating environments that reinforce lawful behaviour while addressing the emotional,

cognitive, and societal barriers that offenders face during and after serving non-custodial sentences. By applying these frameworks, the study provides a multidimensional perspective on how targeted interventions can transform offender behaviour and reduce recidivism.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in reducing recidivism among non-custodial offenders in Kericho County. The descriptive research design was employed to document and analyse current practices, allowing for a detailed exploration of how vocational training, counselling, and community reintegration initiatives are implemented and experienced. The mixed-methods approach enabled the triangulation of data—quantitative insights provided measurable patterns, while qualitative data offered contextual depth and meaning to those patterns.

The target population included non-custodial offenders, probation officers, counsellors, and community leaders engaged in rehabilitation efforts within the county. A sample size of 297 respondents was selected from a population of approximately 1,285 using Krejcie and Morgan's formula. Stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation across different respondent categories, while purposive sampling was used for key informants such as probation officers and community leaders who possessed expert knowledge about rehabilitation programs. Data collection tools included structured questionnaires for offenders, counsellors, and officers, as well as semi-structured interview guides for community leaders.

To ensure validity and reliability, the research instruments were reviewed by experts in criminology and piloted among a sample of 30 participants in a neighbouring sub-county. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential techniques via SPSS, while qualitative responses underwent thematic analysis to uncover recurring patterns, perceptions, and lived experiences. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the study,

including informed consent, participant confidentiality, and the necessary approvals from institutional review bodies and the Ministry of Education. These measures ensured that the study met academic and ethical standards while capturing rich, actionable insights into rehabilitation outcomes in Kericho.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the collected data provided critical insights into the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in reducing recidivism among non-custodial offenders in Kericho County. Specifically, the study addressed three core objectives: the effectiveness of vocational training programs, the impact of counselling and psychological support services, and the role of community reintegration initiatives in preventing re-offending.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were examined to evaluate how these interventions influenced

behavioural reform and long-term desistance from crime.

Effectiveness of Vocational Training Programs on Reducing Recidivism

The study revealed that vocational training programs moderately contributed to skill development and employability among non-custodial offenders. Specifically, 58 per cent of respondents acknowledged an improvement in skills, while 50 per cent reported increased job readiness. However, the impact was somewhat diluted by low job absorption rates, as only 28 per cent of participants secured employment within six months post-training, and just 32 per cent maintained employment over a longer duration. These findings suggest that while vocational training is foundational for behavioural reform, its effectiveness in reducing recidivism depends heavily on follow-up mechanisms and alignment with local labour market demands.

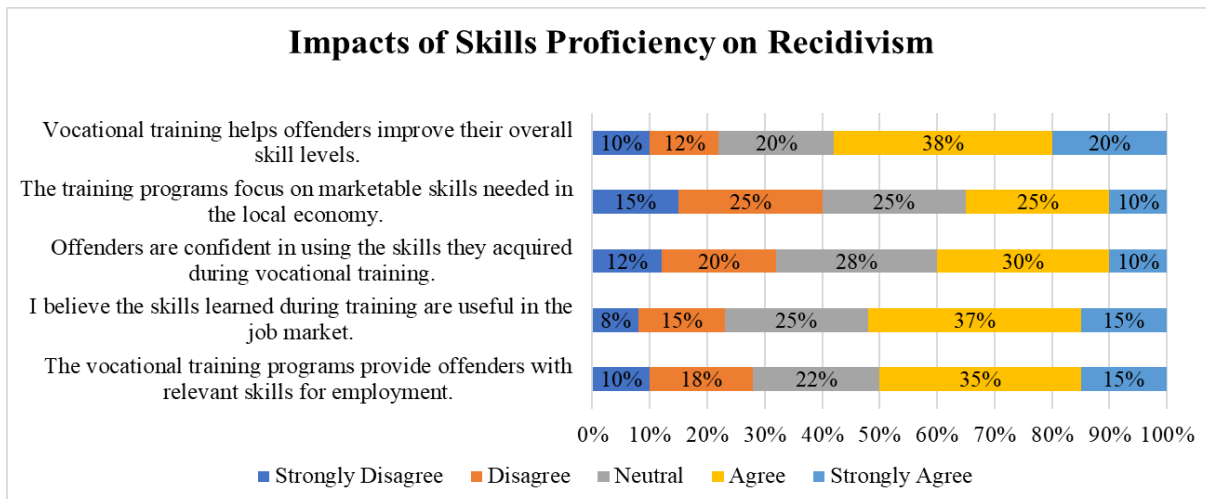


Figure 1: Impacts of Skills Proficiency on Reducing Recidivism Rates among Non-Custodial Offenders

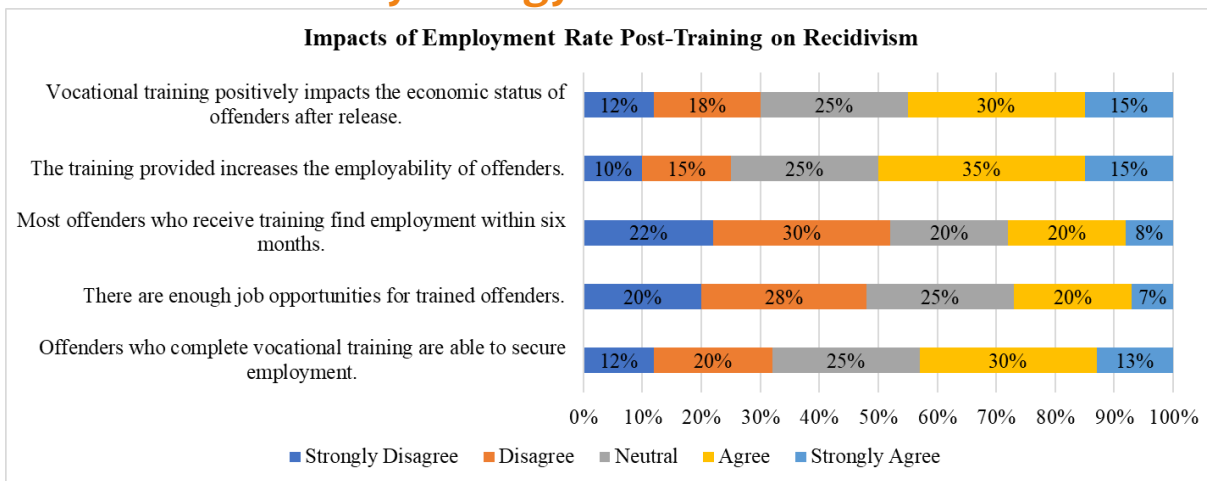


Figure 2: Impacts of Employment Rate Post-Training on Reducing Recidivism Rates

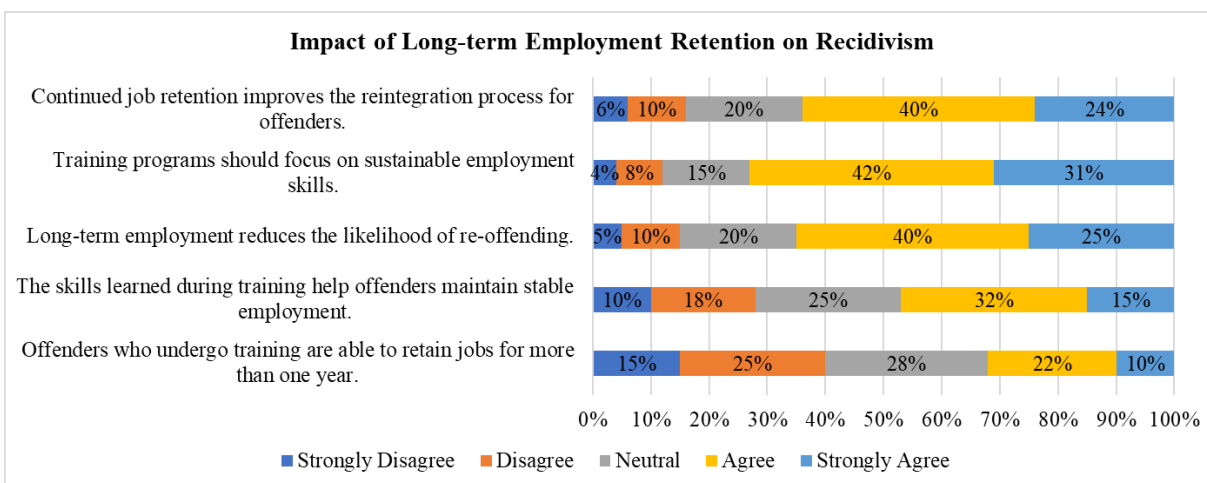


Figure 3: Impact of Long-Term Employment Retention on Recidivism

Impact of Counselling and Psychological Support Services on Behavioural Reform

Counselling and psychological support services were found to have a substantial effect on emotional and behavioural outcomes. More than 60 per cent of participants reported improvements in mental health, emotional regulation, and decision-making. These findings reflect the central role of therapy in

promoting pro-social behaviour and self-awareness. Nonetheless, substance abuse remained a persistent concern, with only 45 per cent of respondents affirming counselling as significantly effective in curbing addiction. This signals the need for longer-term therapeutic engagement and better aftercare support mechanisms.

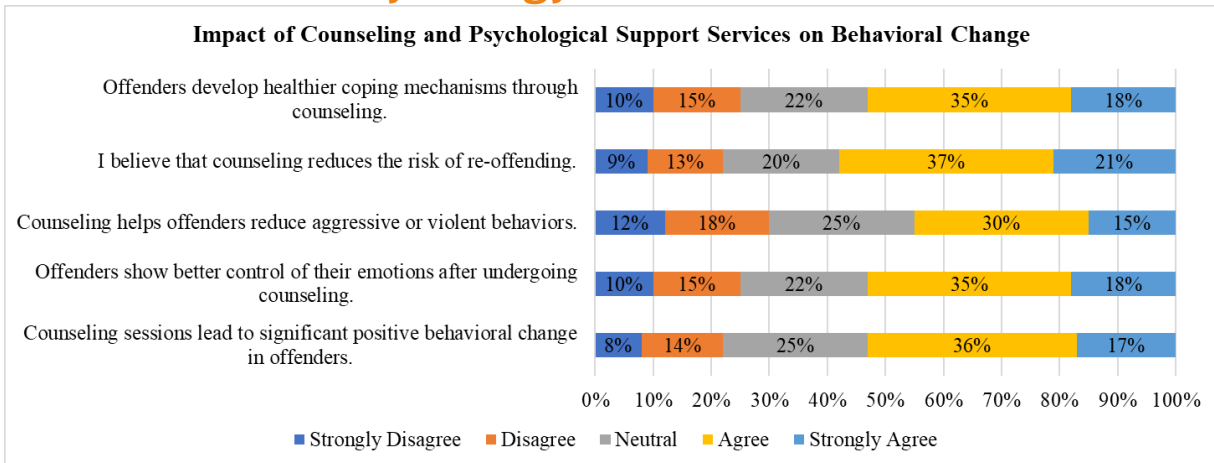


Figure 4: Impact of Counselling and Psychological Support on Behavioural Change

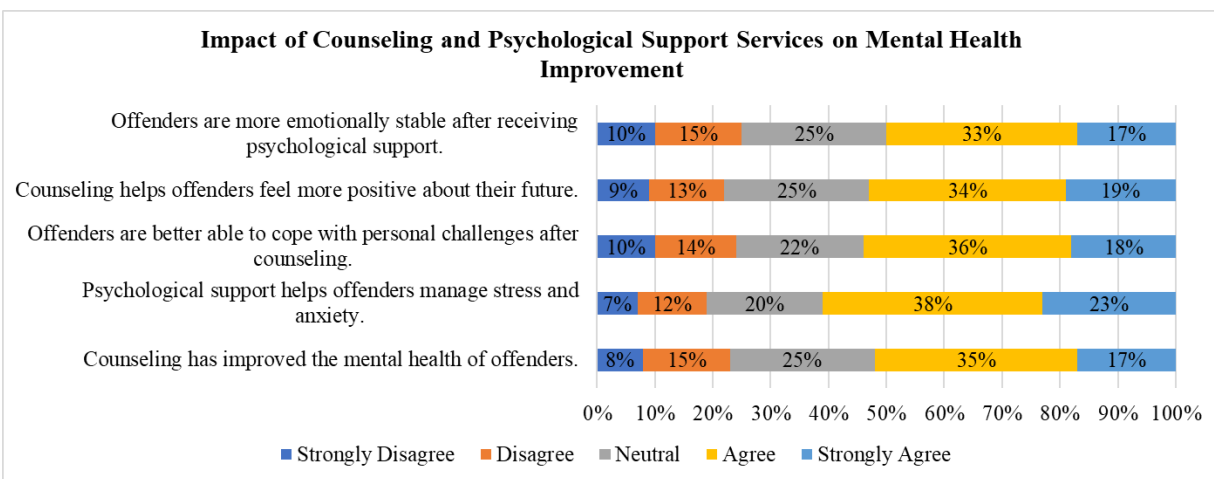


Figure 5: Impact on Mental Health Improvement among Offenders

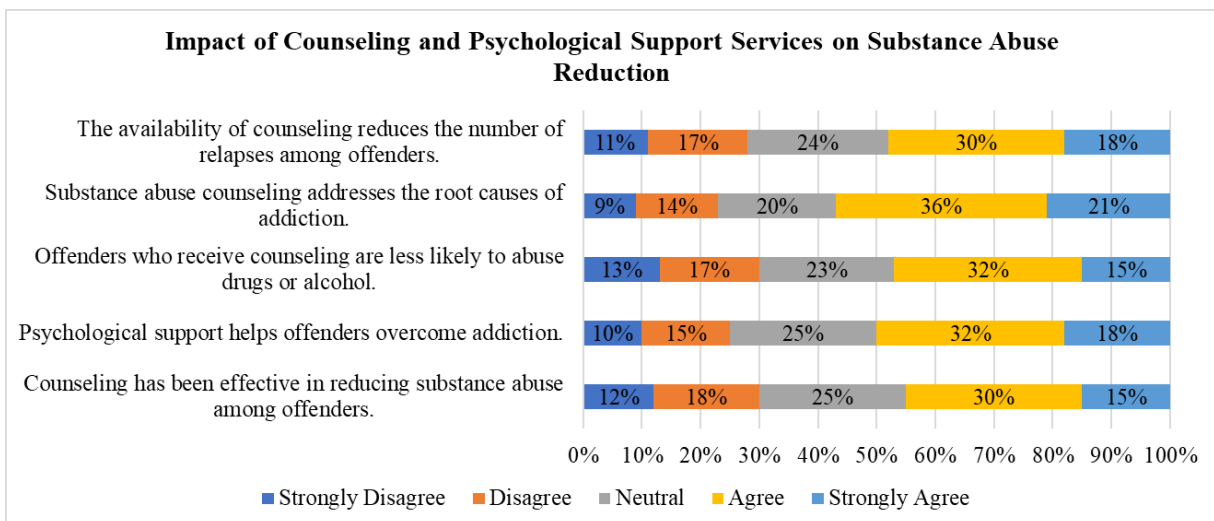


Figure 6: Impact on Substance Abuse Reduction

Impact of Community Reintegration Initiatives on Preventing Re-Offending

Community reintegration emerged as a critical yet inconsistently implemented aspect of rehabilitation. While 67 per cent of respondents agreed that community support and acceptance are crucial in preventing recidivism, only 30 per cent felt genuinely

welcomed back into their communities. This disconnect points to significant social stigma and weak support structures, which may undermine even well-designed rehabilitation programs. Strengthening community education and collaborative reintegration strategies is therefore essential for improving post-sentence outcomes.

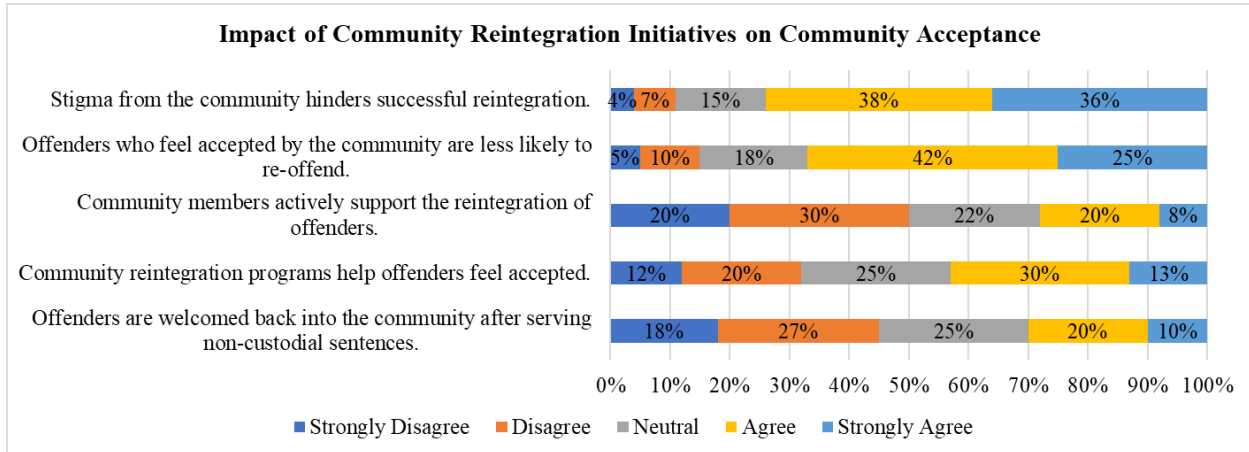


Figure 7: Impact of Reintegration Initiatives on Community Acceptance

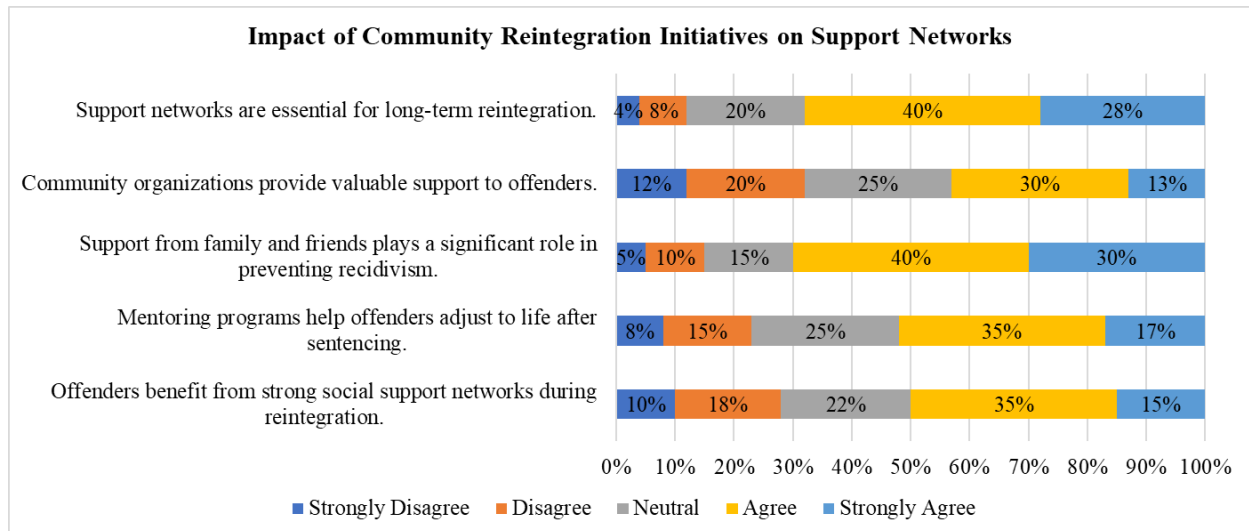


Figure 8: Role of Support Networks in Reintegration

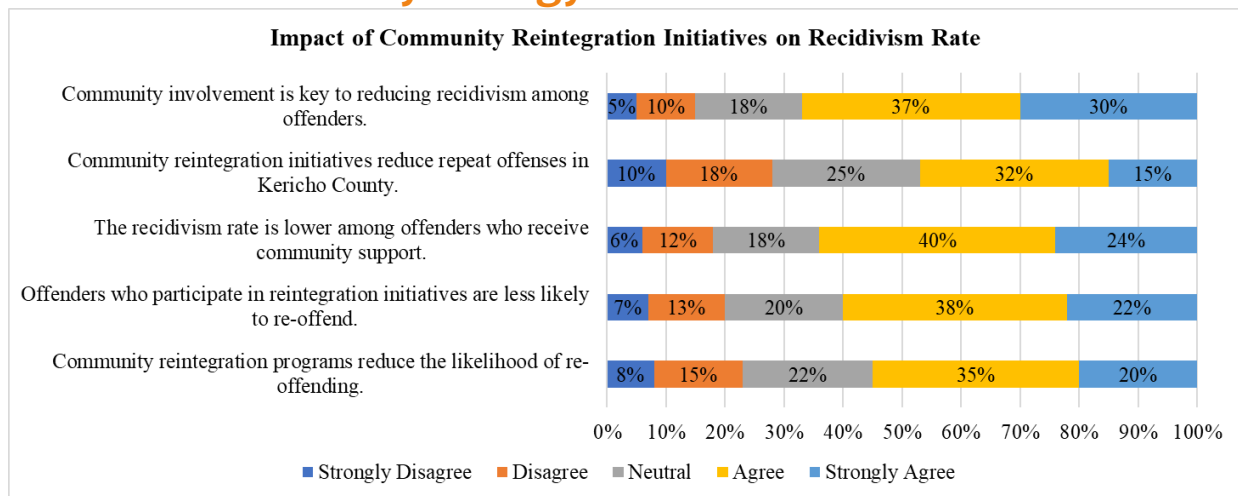


Figure 9: Influence of Reintegration on Recidivism Reduction

Discussion

Effectiveness of Vocational Training Programs on Reducing Recidivism

Skill Proficiency and Offender Reform

The findings revealed that a significant proportion of non-custodial offenders—58 per cent—reported acquiring new skills through vocational training programs. These skills included tailoring, carpentry, welding, and agribusiness, which are relevant to the local economic context of Kericho County. This result supports Social Learning Theory, suggesting that exposure to structured, skill-building environments enables behavioural transformation. However, the scope of training was sometimes limited by resource constraints and lack of training equipment, highlighting the need for expanded investment to enhance program quality and coverage.

Employment Rate Post-Training

Despite improvements in skill acquisition, only 28 per cent of respondents secured employment within six months after training. This indicates a gap between training and actual job placement, a finding echoed in earlier studies that emphasise the need for post-training support and job linkage services. The weak transition from training to employment undermines the long-term impact of vocational programs and partially explains the continued risk of recidivism among trained offenders. Market-aligned training and collaboration with local employers could improve employment outcomes.

Long-Term Employment Retention

Only 32 per cent of the employed offenders reported stable job retention beyond six months. This suggests that even when jobs are secured, sustainability is not guaranteed, often due to a lack of capital, market saturation, or relapse into criminal networks. These findings indicate that vocational training alone is insufficient unless reinforced with follow-up mentorship, financial literacy, and access to microcredit schemes. Sustainable reintegration thus requires holistic economic empowerment strategies beyond skills training.

Impact of Counselling and Psychological Support Services on Behavioural Reform

Behavioural Change and Emotional Regulation

Over 60 per cent of participants reported noticeable changes in behaviour and improved emotional control following counselling sessions. Many acknowledged being more self-aware and less prone to impulsive or aggressive conduct. These results validate the application of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approaches, which have been widely supported in global literature for their role in reshaping thought patterns and emotional responses. This underscores the value of embedding behavioural therapies within probation services to prevent re-offending.

Mental Health Improvement

Participants highlighted a significant improvement in mental well-being, including reductions in anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. This positive

mental health shift directly contributes to lower recidivism, as stable mental states reduce vulnerability to criminal influences. However, access to continuous mental health services was limited, particularly in rural zones, due to a shortage of trained counsellors and insufficient outreach. Strengthening mental health infrastructure is essential for the long-term success of rehabilitation programs.

Substance Abuse Reduction

Only 45 per cent of respondents felt that counselling significantly reduced substance abuse. While some benefited from substance abuse awareness sessions, others relapsed due to limited aftercare and a lack of residential rehabilitation centres. This finding illustrates the need for more specialised drug treatment interventions within probation frameworks. Integrating substance abuse treatment with psychological counselling could increase effectiveness and help address one of the core drivers of re-offending.

Impact of Community Reintegration Initiatives on Preventing Re-Offending Community Acceptance

Although 67 per cent of respondents recognised the importance of community support in their reintegration process, only 30 per cent felt genuinely accepted back into their communities. This discrepancy reflects ongoing societal stigma, particularly in conservative rural settings. According to Reintegrative Shaming Theory, offender reform is most effective when reintegration is emphasised over marginalisation. The current findings highlight a failure to bridge policy intentions and community attitudes, underscoring the need for stigma-reduction campaigns and public education.

Support Networks and Social Reintegration

Access to consistent support networks—such as family, religious groups, or local NGOs—was cited by many as a protective factor against re-offending. However, such support was unevenly distributed. While some communities offered mentoring and moral guidance, others shunned returning offenders. This inconsistency reduces the effectiveness of reintegration initiatives. A more structured framework

involving formal reintegration support systems can mitigate these disparities and enhance social cohesion.

Impact on Recidivism Rates

Despite the clear intent of reintegration programs to prevent re-offending, their implementation remained inconsistent. Participants who experienced inclusive community support were markedly less likely to re-offend, while those who faced rejection were more susceptible to recidivism. This aligns with studies showing that social isolation is a significant predictor of re-offending. Therefore, formalising community-based reintegration partnerships between justice institutions and civil society organisations is essential to sustainably reduce recidivism.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study examined the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in reducing recidivism among non-custodial offenders in Kericho County. The findings highlight key insights across vocational training, counselling services, and community reintegration, revealing both progress and persistent gaps in program implementation.

Effectiveness of Vocational Training Programs on Reducing Recidivism

Vocational training contributed significantly to offenders' skill acquisition, with a majority of participants acknowledging improvement in their trade capabilities. These new skills were seen as essential in promoting personal growth and fostering positive identity transformation. However, the range and quality of training varied, pointing to a need for standardised training curricula that reflect local labour demands.

Despite improved skills, only a minority of offenders transitioned into employment shortly after completing their training. The employment gap reveals a disconnect between vocational instruction and job availability in the region. This suggests that vocational training programs must be paired with job placement services, business incubation initiatives, or access to credit to bridge the gap between training and economic reintegration.

Long-term job retention among trained offenders remained low. Many cited unstable work conditions, lack of capital, and relapse into old behaviours as barriers to sustainable employment. Without ongoing mentorship and entrepreneurial support, even those who initially gain employment may struggle to maintain it. Therefore, vocational training must be integrated into a broader reintegration strategy that ensures continuity beyond skills acquisition.

Impact of Counselling and Psychological Support Services on Behavioural Reform

Counselling programs were effective in facilitating behavioural change among non-custodial offenders. Participants reported improved self-awareness, emotional control, and decision-making capacity. These outcomes highlight the centrality of psychological intervention in rehabilitation and underscore the need for its full integration into probation and aftercare services.

Mental health outcomes also improved significantly for many participants, including reductions in anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal. These improvements are vital in reducing the emotional triggers that often contribute to criminal behaviour. However, gaps in service availability and access, especially in rural or underserved areas, limit the reach of such interventions, necessitating investment in mental health infrastructure and community-based outreach.

Reduction in substance abuse was a partial success. While counselling helped some offenders better manage addiction, others continued to struggle due to limited follow-up care and the absence of specialised drug treatment services. The findings affirm that short-term counselling must be supplemented with long-term support systems, including relapse prevention programs, residential rehabilitation, and peer recovery networks.

Impact of Community Reintegration Initiatives on Preventing Re-Offending

Community acceptance was found to be a critical factor in successful reintegration, yet it remained elusive for a significant portion of the participants. Social stigma and distrust prevented many offenders

from being fully embraced by their communities after serving their sentences. This resistance undermines reintegration goals and emphasises the need for community sensitisation and reintegrative dialogue.

Support networks played a protective role for those who had access to them. Family, faith-based groups, and local NGOs often served as anchors, reducing the psychological and material vulnerabilities that can lead to re-offending. However, the inconsistency in the availability and strength of such networks revealed disparities in support. Institutionalising community support mechanisms may help fill these gaps and create more equitable reintegration pathways.

In terms of overall impact on recidivism, reintegration initiatives were most effective when they combined structured support with social inclusion. Offenders who were actively supported by their communities demonstrated significantly lower rates of re-offending. In contrast, those without support were more likely to revert to crime. These findings reinforce the argument that reintegration must be both a policy and a community-driven process, with shared responsibility across sectors.

Recommendations: To enhance the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in Kericho County, this study recommends a multipronged approach. Vocational training should be aligned with the county's specific labour market demands and supplemented with job placement services, entrepreneurship development, and access to microfinance. These enhancements would increase post-training employment opportunities and ensure long-term economic reintegration for non-custodial offenders. In terms of counselling services, it is vital to expand the availability of trauma-informed psychological support through increased funding, the deployment of mobile mental health units, and the training of additional personnel. Integrating substance abuse rehabilitation into existing probation services would provide a more holistic support structure for behavioural reform. For community reintegration to be successful, local leaders, civil society, and families must be actively engaged. This includes implementing community sensitisation campaigns to reduce stigma and developing structured reintegration programs that

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offer mentorship and psychosocial support. Collectively, these interventions will foster an inclusive environment conducive to rehabilitation and help reduce re-offending among non-custodial offenders.

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