



A qualitative inquiry: management of recidivism in South Africa

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Abstract

At a high cost to the community and taxpayers, offenders frequently return to correctional facilities shortly after being released. In South Africa, the management of recidivism has not been researched extensively, and recidivism as a phenomenon has received scant attention. This study explores how the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa manages recidivism using the perspectives of staff and external stakeholders. A qualitative study was conducted with 19 Department of Correctional Services employees and ten external stakeholders. The findings postulate that South Africa's Department of Correctional Services (1) lacks defined policy guidelines, processes, or structure for addressing recidivism; (2) suggests a gap in the system as departments work independently within the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster (JCPS), which includes, among others, the Departments of Police, Home Affairs, Justice and Correctional Services; (3) recommends that the computer systems of the JCPS be integrated to manage recidivism, and the use of a criminal record number for the detection of recidivists; (4) identifies a need for the development of policy, policy procedures, and guidelines for managing repeat offending; and (5) a need for coherent research on the management of recidivism of offenders within the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa.

Keywords Recidivism management · Statistics · DCS · Stakeholders · Offenders

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Introduction

The correctional system in South Africa operates within a complicated structure involving coordination between many government departments at the national, regional and local levels. Understanding this structure is critical for understanding the importance of inter-departmental coordination in reducing recidivism. The Department of Correctional Services (DCS) is in charge of managing and overseeing the whole correctional system on a nationwide scale. This includes the development of policies, standards, applicable legislation and guidelines for the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders. Policies, standards, applicable legislation, and guidelines for the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders are implemented at the Management Area and the Correctional Centre levels. DCS also oversees 243 correctional facilities in South Africa at the national level. South Africa DCS is divided into six regions and 48 management areas. Regional correctional services departments handle correctional facilities within their respective regions. They collaborate with the national department to implement policies and ensure that facilities adhere to national requirements. This cooperation is critical in order to ensure uniformity in the treatment of offenders and their chances of successful reintegration into society. The Western Cape is one of six regions (Eastern Cape, Free State & Northern Cape, Gauteng, KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo, and Western Cape) demarcated by DCS (DCS, annual report, 2021/2022). The regions are further divided into Management Areas, which comprise a few Correctional Centres.

According to Eaglin (2017), recidivism is more complex and difficult to define than it initially appears. Two major definitions of recidivism exist. First, recidivism is defined as an offender who, after being released from custody, reverts to or relapses into previous behaviour patterns and commits a crime, resulting in re-arrest, re-conviction, and/or re-incarceration for an extended period (Eaglin, 2017; Gelb & Council, 2007; Hunt & Dumville, 2016; James, 2014). The second is whether an offender has been re-arrested within a specified timeframe (Ruggero et al., 2015). Recidivism is a word used by Bedell et al. (1998) to refer to both the specific offender who commits a re-offence and the shortcomings in the criminal justice system. The prevalence of recidivism on a global scale has been determined by measuring the recidivism of offenders over a period (Villeneuve et al., 2021; Weisberg, 2014). When prisoners reintegrate into society, they frequently do so under less-than-ideal conditions. Numerous former inmates are unemployed, homeless, confronted with financial difficulties, suffer from alcohol and/or drug addiction, or have physical and mental problems (Bosma et al., 2020). Ciptono et al. (2023) postulates that, ex-prisoners often experience negative stigma from society, making it difficult to find employment upon release. These issues result in prisoners returning to criminal activity, which may lead to recidivism. As Eaglin (2017) suggested, defining recidivism can be complicated; therefore, this study must explore the criteria for recidivism.

According to James (2014), studying recidivism is difficult regardless of the criterion used. The only reliable basis for calculating and comparing recidivism rates with any degree of certainty is a uniform definition of what constitutes recidivism (James, 2014). Despite the difficulty, global recidivism research demonstrates various methods for managing and assessing recidivism. Re-incarceration continues to

be a significant issue for the correctional system (LaCourse et al., 2019). Recidivism research indicates that the majority of the studies on recidivism have been conducted in first-world nations (Fazel & Wolf, 2015; Hunt & Dumville, 2016). According to Zamble and Quinicy (1997), there has been a great deal of research into estimating both general and violent criminal recidivism among formerly incarcerated individuals (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Makarios et al., 2010). It is evident from the literature that a variety of criteria measures recidivism.

The literature focused on various aspects of recidivism, such as the impact of incarceration on recidivism (Loeffler & Nagin, 2022); solitary confinement of inmates associated with relapse into any recidivism, including violent crimes (Luigi et al., 2022); the impact of probation caseloads on reducing recidivism and other probation outcomes (Fox et al., 2022), and the understanding of the relationship between exposure to family violence and risk factors for recidivism in juvenile offenders (Aguilar Ruiz & Pereda, 2022). The study by Loeffler and Nagin (2022) examines the impact of incarceration on the likelihood of recidivism. Loeffler and Nagin (2022) postulate that the majority of research on the impact of incarceration on recidivism discovered that post-conviction imprisonment has no bearing on the probability of recidivism. However, fewer studies find substantial effects—both positive and negative (Loeffler & Nagin, 2022). Luigi et al. (2022) indicate that solitary confinement effectively reduces institutional misconduct or recidivism and can lead to psychological deterioration. Results indicate a weak to moderate correlation between solitary confinement and criminality or violence potential (Luigi et al., 2022). The findings of the study by Luigi et al. (2022) are supported by Lowen and Isaacs (2012). They discovered that prolonged solitary confinement in prison might negatively affect return experiences. Fox et al. (2022) conducted a study to examine the existing empirical data on the effect of probation caseloads on recidivism. The study found that an increasing body of evidence suggests that decreased probation caseloads in the United States of America (USA) positively reduce re-offending (Fox et al., 2022). Aguilar Ruiz and Pereda (2022) posit that to create treatments that specifically address the needs of young offenders, it is crucial to comprehend the link between juvenile exposure to familial violence and criminal recidivism. Their study further noted that young offenders who had never experienced family violence were likelier to re-offend than those who had. In contrast, those who had experienced it were more likely to do so if they started acting violently early (Aguilar Ruiz & Pereda, 2022).

Recidivism in the South African context

Prinsloo (2022) conducted a study examining the reliability and efficacy of the Self-Appraisal Questionnaire (SAQ) when used with South African offenders. Approximately 75% of those who took part had been convicted of violent offences (Prinsloo, 2022). There has been limited research on repeat offenders in South Africa (Gaum et al., 2006; Schoeman, 2010). Musekwa et al. (2021) researched the effectiveness of custodial rehabilitation in a South African setting. Ten parole recidivists who had been convicted more than twice on their rehabilitation service experiences formed part of the study. An interpretive phenomenological analysis of the data revealed

that recidivists regarded inadequacies in their attitudes, behaviours, and programs as obstacles to benefiting from correctional rehabilitation (Musekwa et al., 2021). No research has been conducted on the management of recidivism in South Africa to date.

According to Gaum et al. (2006), the recurrence figures in South Africa are severely limited, while estimates indicate that they are excessively high. There are no definite figures on recidivism in South Africa, but numerous estimates were provided, which include 47% (Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, 2012), 80–94% (Padayachee, 2008), and 55–97% (Muntingh, 2002; Pelsler, 2008; Prinsloo, 1996; Schoeman, 2010). Recidivism statistics have not been scientifically researched. Thus, this research was conducted to enhance the understanding of recidivism management among Department of Correctional Services, (DCS) members and external stakeholders. To classify an offender as a recidivist, a recidivist must first be identified, which is problematic in South Africa because no system or tool exists to identify recidivistic offenders. Due to the paucity of research on recidivism in South Africa and the unacceptably high estimated recidivism rates, this study conducted a qualitative exploration into the management of recidivism within the context of the South African Department of Correctional Services. A qualitative enquiry was undertaken to ascertain how DCS employees in South Africa and its stakeholders experience recidivism management and what policies and procedures exist for recidivism within the DCS.

Methods

A qualitative exploratory study involving in-depth individual interviews was conducted. Exploratory and qualitative studies are necessary, given the dearth of research on the measurement and management of recidivism in South Africa (Muntingh, 2002; Pelsler, 2008; Prinsloo, 1996; Schoeman, 2010). As recidivism is a phenomenon that has not been extensively studied in South Africa, the qualitative method was the most appropriate for this study to gain a deeper understanding of the management of recidivism. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 senior DCS employees and 10 external stakeholders (South African Police Services, Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, National Prosecuting Authority, Non-Governmental Organisations, Faith Base Organisations, Criminologists and Academics) in the Western Cape, South Africa. The semi-structured interviews of all the internal DCS participants were conducted in person at Community Corrections Offices in Bellville, Cape Town, Malmesbury, Mitchells Plain, Paarl and the Regional Office. The External interviews were conducted via Zoom. The semi-structured interviews for this study were aimed to elicit detailed insights and qualitative data from participants about the topic under investigation. The structure of these interviews was flexible, allowing for both pre-set questions and open-ended conversation points. This technique sought to create a balance between uniformity and flexibility, allowing the researcher to investigate specific areas of interest while also allowing participants to contribute their views and experiences more spontaneously. In terms of interview length, each session lasted an average of 45 to 60 min. This time frame allowed

for adequate coverage of the important issues while also allowing participants to elaborate on their responses and provide pertinent experiences. Before collecting any data, all participants provided their informed consent. The data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Research questions and significance of research

A literature review revealed that research on recidivism in South Africa is extremely limited. Therefore, this study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing additional insight into recidivism as a phenomenon and evaluating the correctional system's efficacy. This study sought to explore how DCS employees in South Africa and its stakeholders experience the management of recidivism, as well as what policies and procedures exist for recidivism within the DCS. The following research questions were developed:

1. What is the current management of recidivism in the Department of Correctional Services in SA?
2. What are internal and external stakeholders' perceptions of how recidivism can be managed effectively?
3. What are participants' explanations of existing policies and procedures for the management of recidivism within the Department of Correctional Services in the Western Cape, South Africa?

Sampling method

This study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 19 DCS workers and ten external stakeholders in the Western Cape to study the management of recidivism by DCS staff and stakeholders. Current policies and procedures to manage repeat offending were explored. The authors determined that qualitative data would best suit our purposes given the explored research questions. The intended audience included government departments, civil society, criminological experts, and university experts. The data was gathered using interview schedules.

Data collection

Interview schedules were utilised in the data collection process, and the study utilised a purposeful sampling method. A set criterion was used for participants. Participants were required to have experience in a correctional setting/environment. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all internal interviews were conducted one-on-one, while external interviews were conducted electronically via Zoom. The participants were guaranteed anonymity and ethical conduct. The authors additionally verified that the names of participants would not be revealed and that pseudonyms would be used for the independent coding. The importance of the study's participants was emphasised, as were the researchers' goals of understanding the management of recidivism in the DCS in a South African setting.

Tools

The DCS' current framework for managing recidivism was investigated using closed- and open-ended questions. The interview schedule, consent forms, and questionnaires served as the data collection instruments for the in-depth face-to-face interviews.

For the first and second objectives, semi-structured interviews were considered most relevant for the present study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), the interview tool is the preferred method for conducting qualitative social science research. The authors employed field notes, a method of direct field observation, for the third objective (Aktinson & Hammersley, 1998). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all internal interviews were in-person, whereas all external interviews were via Zoom.

Data analysis

Qualitative data on DCS staff and stakeholders' perceptions of recidivism management, policies, and policy procedures were entered, cleaned, and analysed using content analysis. According to Belotto (2018), the coding process allowed for new interpretations of considerable quantities of text and information. Significant information pertinent to the research questions was acquired through theme analysis. This procedure involved gathering the data, transcribing the data, and re-reading the data to grasp better what the participants were saying, determine the tone of the interview, and identify any recurring or distinctive themes (Sarantakos, 2017). Themes and subthemes were eventually determined by analysing the relationships between these meaning units. This process included capturing the data, transcribing it, re-reading the data to get a better understanding of what the participants were saying, understanding the tone of the interview, and recording similar and identifying themes that will be discussed in this paper. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic inductive analysis is utilised in cases where no prior studies on the phenomenon have been conducted. Thematic analysis of qualitative data was carried out by transcribing questionnaires and interviews, categorising data into groups, and categorising data into themes and sub-themes. Therefore, the present study induces new meanings from the data collected regarding the management and explores the existing policies and procedures for managing recidivism in the DCS in South Africa.

Results and discussion

Each of the primary themes and associated sub-themes and categories (where relevant) will be presented in the subsequent section of this discussion. Direct quotes from the interview transcripts will support them. The body of knowledge will be compared with the identified themes and sub-themes and their supporting stories from the transcripts. The qualitative inquiry has yielded the following themes and sub-themes.

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the qualitative inquiry into the management of recidivism are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Management themes and sub-themes

Management of recidivism	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Participants' explanations of the current management of recidivism	1.1 DCS employees' explanations of the current management of recidivism 1.2 External stakeholders' explanations of the current management of recidivism
Theme 2: Participants' perceptions of how recidivism can be managed effectively	2.1 DCS employees' perceptions of how recidivism can be managed effectively 2.2 External stakeholders' perceptions of how recidivism can be managed effectively
Theme 3: Existing Policies and procedures for the management of recidivism.	3.1 DCS employees' explanations of existing policies and procedures for the management of recidivism. 3.2 External stakeholders' explanations of existing policies and procedures for the management of recidivism

Theme 1 of the current study was the participant's explanation of the current management of recidivism. The subthemes under this theme were the explanations of the management of recidivism by the DCS employees and the external stakeholders.

Theme 2 that emerged from the current study was the participant's perceptions of how recidivism can be managed effectively. The subthemes under this theme were DCS employees' and stakeholders' perceptions of how recidivism is managed effectively.

Theme 3 refers to the existing policy and policy procedures used to manage recidivism. The sub-themes were DCS employees' and external stakeholders' explanations of existing policies and procedures. Subsequently, the themes and sub-themes will be explored.

Theme 1: participants' explanations of the current management of recidivism

The first theme from the transcripts was the participants' descriptions of the current approach to recidivism management. All participants were asked to describe the current management of recidivism.

Sub-theme 1.1: DCS employees' explanations of the current management of recidivism

Employees of DCS were requested to describe the current management of recidivism. Many of the DCS employees explained that the DCS is not managing recidivism or that the management is very low-key. The storylines of participants reflect this: "I will actually say that it (the management of recidivism) is non-existent" (Danie); "There is no such thing as managing it because we are basically working according to a policy that doesn't really address recidivism. In terms of volume 5 – the protocol

used in Community Corrections” (Eddie); and, “It is still difficult to manage it, as we don’t have any policy regarding recidivism” (Fikile). According to Samuels (2023), the Department of Correctional Services South Africa lacks clear policy and policy procedures regarding the management of recidivism.

“Currently, there is no coherent management of recidivism. It is more ad hoc in nature, where psychologists or social workers have picked that up in their interviews. Then they try to deal with it, but it is more ad hoc... there is no structured programme” (Saul).

The DCS staff indicated that recidivism is either not being managed or poorly managed. One participant, Danie, asserts that management of recidivism is non-existent. The DCS is affected by the problem of recidivism, for which high estimates have been provided. The recidivism rate in South Africa is not currently accurately measured by statistics. Still, several estimates have been made, including 47% (Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference, 2012), 80 to 94% (Padayachee, 2008), and 55 to 97% (Pelser, 2008; Prinsloo, 1996; Schoeman, 2010). According to Kiewit (2020), the CEO of the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO), South Africa’s rates indicated that the criminal re-offending rate is high because rehabilitation and reintegration programs are virtually absent from the court system. Although there is no exact data on recidivism or the habitual relapse into crime, the institute’s Betzi Pierce, the CEO of NICRO, claims that it might be as high as 87% (Kiewit, 2020).

In the management of recidivism, it will be important for the DCS to have accurate recidivism statistics, as this will enable the Department to determine the success of rehabilitative and reintegrative efforts. Flynn (2011) also alluded that the effective rehabilitation of inmates requires the establishment of a close, trusting relationship between offenders and the people managing them. How recidivism is managed may impact the overcrowding in South African correctional services. Emphasis is placed on overcrowding. The recidivism rate is alarming; however, according to the staff, the overcrowding, not the recidivism, must be managed. Repeat offending impacts overcrowding, and the management of recidivism becomes pivotal to determining the success of rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. Layman and Lobuglio (2007) argue that managing and measuring recidivism rates for portions of correctional populations is feasible and critical in helping a system manage scarce correctional resources and address overcrowding issues.

There is no unified approach to managing recidivism. According to James (2014), recidivism is a challenging subject to examine regardless of the criterion employed. There are various ways to define recidivism and develop various criteria for designating someone as a recidivist. Hence, there is no “correct” way to measure recidivism (Elderboom & King, 2014; Ruggero et al., 2015). It is evident from the participants’ responses that recidivism is difficult to manage, exacerbated by the lack of a specific policy or policy procedures on recidivism. Recidivism is a sociological and criminological concept that is incredibly complex (Weisberg, 2014). Given that this is a complex concept, the recidivism process must be clear to the DCS staff. However,

DCS employees explained that the management of recidivism is unclear, resulting in ineffective management.

Other DCS employees explained that recidivism is not managed effectively or is unclear: “Currently, the management of recidivism is not up to the expected standard.” (Ayanda). Similarly, The process is very long; if you are a repeating offender with a different name, it is very long for you to be identified as the same person through that criminal record centre because of that backlog – getting the feedback from the criminal record centre, the SAP 69 (the information about you and your previous criminal record). It is not easily accessible and is a process...It is not effective (Norman). The use of pseudonyms by detainees remains a challenge, and the proper identification of the detainees becomes key for accurate recidivism statistics and management (Rani & Sharma, 2014).

According to the DCS, staff recidivism is not effectively managed, and the external stakeholders also hold this view. A challenge with the sentenced management of offenders is that offenders cannot be identified upon admission, which hampers the recidivism data. There is a backlog accessing data from the South African Police Services to determine the SAP 69 (previous criminal record). This report is also an indicator of the person who was previously incarcerated. The most fundamental obstacle to re-offending in South Africa is figuring out the offender’s genuine identity and determining whether they have ever been imprisoned (Report on the OSF, 2010).

Sub-theme 1.2: external stakeholders’ explanations of the current management of recidivism

As an introduction to this subtheme, it is pertinent to note that one of the stakeholders, Frank, emphasised in his response that DCS is not solely responsible for recidivism management:

“I would say the State just plays that into the lap of Correctional Services...we do have Social Development with some form of assistance. But I think it should be much broader and not left to Correctional Services alone. As the police will say, fighting crime is not only the police function as well. In the same way that I feel it should be much broader than only Correctional Services” (Frank).

According to external stakeholders, the following storylines demonstrate that recidivism is not being effectively managed: “I don’t think it’s being managed at all in South Africa, because if it was managed, then there wouldn’t be such a high rate of recidivism or high-rate re-offending by the accused that I see in our court system” (Andrew); and, “...it’s not scientific at all...We do not have a clue how many people are actually coming back, somehow...There is no scientific measure of recidivism and that’s what we need”. (Carol). Schoeman (2010) shared the same notion and noted that there are no actual scientific recidivism statistics and that the data is estimated.

In their response, external service stakeholders indicated that managing recidivism is not solely the responsibility of DCS but should be a collaborative effort with other government agencies. Recidivism is a societal responsibility, according to the

White Paper on Corrections in SA (DCS, 2015). Role players such as NGOs, CBOs, FBOs, the family, judicial partners and the broader community will foster stronger relations in building an Integrated Support System to ensure offenders' successful rehabilitation and reintegration. The consensus of the stakeholders is that the DCS' management of recidivism is inadequate. A lack of qualified personnel, such as social workers, also impacts the management of recidivism. To address the management of recidivism within the department, recidivism as a phenomenon must be a top priority for DCS. The appointment of psychologists, social workers, educators, and other professionals who work with offenders should be a top priority for DCS.

Theme 2: participants' perceptions of how recidivism can be managed effectively

The second theme from the transcripts was participants' explanations of how recidivism can be managed effectively. After explaining how recidivism is currently being managed, participants were asked to describe how recidivism could be managed. Their perceptions of how recidivism can be managed are given in two sub-themes: DCS employees' perceptions of how recidivism can be managed and external stakeholders' perceptions of how recidivism can be managed.

Sub-theme 2.1: DCS employees' perceptions of how recidivism can be managed

Employees of DCS were requested to describe how recidivism is managed within the DCS. The DCS employees' perceptions of how recidivism can be managed were varied, and they are given in seven categories, namely: Need a system / clear guideline; identify and target re-offenders; provide support after release; develop relationships with communities; need holistic intervention by all departments; use parole and supervision more effectively; need to research / keep statistics.

The storylines of participants reflect this. One of the DCS employees emphasised in his response that recidivism is an issue that is not easy to manage: "It is difficult to manage it at this stage. Say for instance a person commits a crime again and they paid the bail, tomorrow he will be outside again." (Norman).

Some participants expressed their perception that a system or clear guidelines are needed to manage recidivism, as expressed in the following storylines:

"...if a person is being released today, you should pick it up if a person committed a crime again. We need a system...The fact of the matter is that you can only measure and manage recidivism if you have a tool that can indicate that the person did not commit a crime over a period of 3 or, 5 or 7 years. Then you can indicate your system is successful or not successful" (Gerald). Samuels (2011) asserts in a study on the challenges that offenders face upon release that leads to recidivism that a tool is needed in the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa to manage and measure recidivism.

"...the Department has got a role to play in terms of coming up with clear policy guidelines in response to recidivism in addition to other programmes that

have been undertaken in the Department like in various Correctional Centres (Khosi). The implementation of developed guidelines for the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa recommended” (Samuels, 2023).

DCS employees indicated a need for a system to manage recidivism or the availability of clear guidelines for the management of recidivism. This article is part of a larger investigation into developing guidelines for managing recidivism within the South African Department of Correctional Services. The development of guidelines will direct DCS staff in their approach to the phenomenon of recidivism. Numerous participants expressed their perception that if re-offenders could be identified and targeted by involving them in specific and appropriate programmes or interventions, this would help to manage recidivism. Casey et al. (2007) postulate that since Martinson’s (1974) influential publication questioning the efficacy of treatment programs, there has been an ongoing debate among practitioners, academics and policymakers about the value and impact of offender rehabilitation programmes.

“If we have a system where we can detect those who are continuously coming into our system, we will be able to categorise them in a certain group and focus our resources mainly and use strategies in line with that particular category” (Ayanda).

One participant, Ayanda, noted that DCS should have a system to detect when a person returns to the correctional centre. She furthermore indicated that recidivistic offenders should be categorised in certain groupings. The resources should be channelled to address recidivism. The usage of multiple registration numbers by DCS makes it difficult to track individual offenders. The individual, upon admission, receives an offender registration number, and upon returning, he gets another number. It is recommended that the same number must be used for the fingerprint or criminal record number (CR) should be used to identify offenders. This recommendation must be further researched to ensure the better management of recidivism. The criminal record number usage across the Justice Crime Prevention Security Cluster (JCPS) can be the solution to identifying offenders in South Africa. The Report on the OSF (2010) notes that identifying offenders is problematic in South Africa, and the authors suggest using the criminal record number for identification. The criminal record number should be added to the respective numbers that the various government departments use for perpetrators of crime. This can contribute to the body of knowledge as the criminal record number is currently not used by all government departments in the JCPS cluster.

A common perception of the DCS employees was that support needs to be provided to inmates after release. This is reflected in the following storylines.

“The involvement of other departments can assist, especially maybe Social Development. The problem lies at home, where they don’t have a support system that is conducive for rehabilitation. I think that will assist with recidivism” (Fikile) “... when an offender is in our correctional facilities, he or she has sometimes been a model prisoner, but as soon as he or she goes out, that person relapses because the social environment is a challenge. If that person does not have a proper solid support

system, the chances of him or her relapsing is very high....” (Rick). Focused interventions can improve support for prison reform (Harney, 2023).

Supporting offenders is important to the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. Employees of DCS believe that released inmates should be provided with assistance. The DCS has an Integrated Support System to assist formerly incarcerated individuals upon their return to the community. The social environment to which prisoners return places them at risk for recidivism. Community reintegration aims to provide and facilitate support systems for the reintegration of offenders into society (DCS, Annual report, 2020/2021, p.117). The White Paper on Corrections (DCS, 2015) asserts that providing an Integrated Support System will assist in combating recidivism in South Africa.

The DCS employees recognised that the community context is influential, and some spoke of building relationships with communities to manage recidivism: “We must be more community involved due to our core business. Community corrections is a societal responsibility, we need to move closer to the community and market our product effectively” (Bernard); “If the external factors can be addressed like unemployment, poverty, the inequality, the state of the economy and can be as good as it was before, then recidivism can be managed” (Thandi). According to the findings of Zungu and Mtshengu’s (2023) study, an unanticipated increase in inequality and unemployment has had a substantial beneficial effect on crime in countries. Thus, crime, inequality, and unemployment are not unique to South Africa but are universal struggles. Another participant pointed out:

“There is also the need for the department to strengthen relations with the civil society organisations and the society in general, because it is not only a Departmental problem, but society also has a role to play. I think there is a need for a holistic approach and a joint response to this or a joint programme” (Khosi).

The purpose of community reintegration is to provide and facilitate support systems for reintegrating offenders into society (DCS, 2020/2021). Another issue the DCS employees identified as necessary to manage recidivism was to intervene holistically, meaning that all departments should be appropriately involved:

“We need to develop a system which speaks to the identification of the offenders. Then you need to look at your programmes, but if you don’t look at the offender in a holistic manner and address all those, you cannot only address one area of the offender. We are working in silos; the framework should start within the cluster” (Hyatt).

To manage recidivism, you need to have some sort of linkage between the clusters within the justice system. The police are arresting, Justice is sentencing, and Correctional Services are incarcerating and releasing that within that cycle, there should be continuity in terms of systems being linked to one another (Isaac). The Department of Correctional Services White Paper on Corrections in South Africa (2015, p.177) postulates, “*No correctional system can achieve its objective if it does not have a range of healthy partnerships.*”

It was mentioned that the various government departments work independently, and services should be coordinated. The Justice Crime Prevention Security Cluster departments should be appropriately involved in managing recidivism. A holistic intervention approach is required in dealing with parolees and probationers within the community.

“...There should come a point where people, in terms of the times that they re-offend, should be prejudiced by that and at some stage, should a sinking/stop be placed on placing people on parole. For instance, if you commit a crime for a third time, there should be situations where instead of doing half of your sentence then, you should do 75% or 80%. We should look at something to address the reoccurrence or recommitting of crime instead of saying that we are overpopulated and people are being held by high cost, so we should look at ways and means to place them out on parole” (Danie).

The perception was also expressed that research is needed and statistics should be kept, as explained in the following storylines:

“...if we do more research to come up with definite elements that will pin down to say these are the elements that would put us in a position to qualify or quantify recidivism in Correctional Services, that will be the best” (Jerry). Studies by Gaum et al. (2006) and Schoeman (2010) attest to the need for scientific research on recidivism in South Africa, as statistical data is mostly estimated.

Another participant reiterated: “Once you have to measure; two, you have to get the reasons why the person re-offends and once you have that you can tailor make your programmes” (Michael); “...establish a proper database for offenders” (Norman).

Sub-theme 2.2: external stakeholders’ perceptions of how recidivism can be managed effectively

The external stakeholders were also asked to share their perceptions of managing recidivism. Several participants referred to the need for specific programmes, from early prevention programmes to skills development programmes, as expressed in the following storylines.

“I think deterrence works in the sense that if there are in the newspapers more articles of the type of sentences that are being handed down. And I think it will be a good way if it is being exposed in media or in TV programmes, what happens in correctional facilities” (Andrew).

In support of early prevention, Carol said:

“If you want to make a difference, do it early. So, in terms of recidivism...it’s really coming to the party very late, and there are very few programmes that have been shown to make a noticeable difference. And those that have been effective or more effective were typically cognitive behavioural programmes and those are expensive and time-consuming; it’s not a mass production line”

(Carol). This was also the findings of the research of DCS employees through a consensus workshop on cognitive behavioural intervention (Samuels, 2023). A study conducted on CBT, concluded that CBT, in its various forms, is an effective treatment modality for preventing recidivism among sexual offenders (Mpfu et al., 2018).

Bernard also mentioned the need to look at the programmes being implemented in other countries:

“I also think you must get the latest recidivism programme from other countries. I happened to visit all the prisons in the UK, as part of my training. It was quite an experience. Because inside their prisons, their offenders have access to computers, so that they were able to make applications for jobs prior to being released. They could do hard skills training; they could do motor mechanics and there are so many different courses and training opportunities. I think you need to marry international opportunities and learn from international expertise what’s happening in other prisons. You must know scientifically that your programme works” (Bernard).

According to Geary and Zeleznikow (2015), prisoners should only have limited access to the Internet for things like education, staying in touch with their families, and using information sources that might be situated outside of their institutions. The need for programmes that address the needs of recidivistic offenders should be explored. The DCS in South Africa has numerous correctional, educational, and therapeutic programmes, but none specifically address recidivistic behaviour. Skills development training programmes can assist with the employability of offenders. Section 41 (1) of the South African Correctional Services Act (Act 111 of 1998) mandates that all offenders’ rehabilitation centres operated by the DCS provide programs and activities that address offenders’ rehabilitation needs (South African Government, 1998).

Participants also mentioned the need for a coordinated approach amongst the various role players and stakeholders:

“I’ve always talked about coordinated approaches so for one we need a good strategy. I think when I’ve asked DCS, they do say that there is a reintegration strategy, but it’s not something I’ve seen, and recently we formed a network, and we’re busy developing a strategy although it’s from Civil Society side. We will eventually consult DCS on it, but we kind of tried to draft what will be in a strategy, what could be in a strategy and where the gaps and whoever role players. We’re going to develop a database really trying to organise ourselves in this field” (Larisa).

“...it is to become involved and the role clarity is there, because we cannot overstep blurred lines. But to become involved there must be one holistic local plan of action. Where each and every department knows what their role is... what role they need to do, and how they need to step in when they are called upon to assist” (Frank).

Implementing professional assessments and targeted programmes for re-offenders were perceived as ways to manage recidivism more effectively: “I still feel the Correctional Services has got too much focus on security and too little focus on rehabilitation and development. The Offender Rehabilitation Path from the get-go, right, is professional assessment, proper assessment done by behavioural scientists...” (Carol). She supported this statement further by stating that “Behavioural scientists should do assessments, programmes and then monitor their programme once in a community corrections kind of environment” (Carol). Similarly, Evan spoke of targeted programmes to address offenders’ psych-social needs:

“That 90% of men and women right across the world come from broken homes is extremely challenging. So, we need to address their own brokenness, their own anger and bitterness and hurting, people hurt people. We can’t ignore them. Like across the world, 95% of men in prison, no loving father figure role model. Australia said... more than 95% of our offenders had no loving father figure. There’s a fatherless generation behind bars, so that needs to be addressed”. (Evan). A study conducted by Farrington (2005) on childhood origin and antisocial behaviour suggests that globally, the main early risk factors for antisocial behaviour are impulsivity, low intelligence and school achievement, poor parental supervision, child abuse, harsh or inconsistent discipline, a cold parental attitude, parental conflict, disrupted families, antisocial parents, large families, low family income, antisocial peers, high delinquency-rate schools, and high crime areas. Adverse childhood experiences (ACE’s) within the context of antisocial, delinquent behaviours are linked to criminal behaviour (Hesselink, 2023). This antisocial behaviour leads to incarceration and recidivism. These factors are similar to factors experienced by offenders in the South African context (Samuels, 2011).

In the final sentences of the storylines above, Evan spoke of a multi-disciplinary team, and Carol mentioned the importance of assessing and profiling offenders within the DCS. According to Prinsloo’s (2016) research, little is known about the characteristics and types of female offenders housed in South African correctional facilities. According to the White Paper on Corrections (DCS, 2015), profiling will aid in formulating a sentence plan to identify what intervention and treatment programs the offender must participate in while incarcerated. Offenders need to be assessed and profiled in the DCS to determine the offender being dealt with.

This is included here as a significant perception in managing recidivism and applies to various personnel in the DCS and people serving on parole boards. The following storylines are cited here: “...it’s separating the security staff from the professional staff. And not conflating the two not using security staff to do professional staff work and that includes everything” (Carol).

“Correctional Services doesn’t distinguish yet between professional staff and security staff. So, what we’re finding is that security staff are used to do professional work. Work that professional people should be doing and that’s not...it just can never work. It’s not optimal...is not just the impact that programmes are supposed to have on reducing recidivism. But just the absolute quality of the programmes and the transmission of them, the sharing of them with offenders

is not optimal at all, it's not good. And, for reasons such as DCS has a one size fits all approach to programme...which is incorrect" (Carol).

"...our parole boards are made up of priests and teachers...they need to be people with, again, behavioural science degrees, medical degrees, certainly psychological degrees. They need to be those and criminologists; people that understand the people, who are going to be able to see that person sitting in front of them is lying or look at his history... all they do is look at a profile; you have all these programmes and bye, bye" (Carol).

The roles and functions of security staff and professional staff, such as social workers and psychologists, should be clearly defined. The professional staff is responsible for therapeutic interventions, and security personnel are responsible for security and non-therapeutic correctional programmes (Department of Correctional Services, n.d.). Like DCS employees' opinions, the external stakeholders indicated that therapeutic and non-therapeutic programmes are needed for offenders with recidivistic behaviour. The Risk Needs and Responsivity (RNR) model is utilised internationally, and its application can help with recidivism management. This model was proven useful for determining an offender's risk and needs and their responsiveness to the identified risks and needs to reduce recidivism. This RNR approach recommends a more intense intervention to treat offending behaviour in offenders who are more likely to re-offend (Scott et al., 2015, p. 276–277). The RNR is a model used internationally that might be useful for the DCS to explore.

Theme 3: existing policies and procedures for the management of recidivism

The third theme from the transcripts was participants' explanations of the existing policies and procedures for managing recidivism. Participants were asked to describe policies, procedures, and frameworks for managing recidivism in the DCS and the Justice Crime Prevention and Security Cluster (JPCS). Their responses are given under two sub-themes, with those of the DCS employees and the external stakeholders given separately.

Sub-theme 3.1: DCS employees' explanations of existing policies and procedures for the management of recidivism

The DCS employees' responses were all virtually the same, to the effect that no policies, procedures, or framework exists for the management of recidivism. This is reflected in the following storylines:

"I am not knowledgeable of any policies strictly speaking to recidivism directly, but there are mechanisms in place to manage recidivism. Because our focus is mainly on rehabilitation, so rehabilitation is also a tool we're currently using to manage people coming back into our system" (Ayanda).

“There are no policies. Our policies refer to rehabilitation of offenders and the safe keeping of offenders. There we imply that our methods to rehabilitate via correctional programmes or behavioral programmes whether it be therapeutic or normal programmes, skills programmes. That is our attempt to reduce the level of repeating the crime cycle. There is no specific policy in place on recidivism in DCS” (Qwynn).

DCS employees all agreed that there are no policies, procedures, or frameworks to manage recidivism in the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa.

Sub-theme 3.2: external stakeholders’ explanations of existing policies and procedures for the management of recidivism

The external stakeholders, like the DCS employees, responded to this question; there are no policies, procedures, etc., for managing recidivism. The storylines below reflect this:

“...not that I’m aware of. The only document of DCS is that, I think it’s a 60-page document for pre-release...but not the kind of a policy for recidivism” (Evan); “... in SAPS I’m not aware of such policies, there might be. But I’m not aware of it, or it might not be a priority at our level currently...” (Frank); and, “No, I don’t know of any” (Andrew 100).

In response to a question about the policies and procedures of the DCS in South Africa, nearly all the department’s employees stated that there are no policies, processes, or structures to combat recidivism (Ayanda, Gwynn, Jerry and Rick). One participant, Lucas, stated, “There are no specific guidelines regarding recidivism” in the South African Department of Correctional Services. External stakeholders responded to this issue similarly to DCS employees, namely that no policies, procedures, or other tools exist to manage recidivism. The Correctional Service Act 111 of 1998 and the White Paper on Corrections (DCS, 2005) are two legislative mandates that underpin the rehabilitative method used in South African correctional facilities. The primary responsibility of the DCS is to address criminal behaviour in a secure, safe, and humane setting to facilitate rehabilitation and prevent recidivism (White Paper on Corrections, 2005). According to the White Paper on Corrections (DCS, 2005), the DCS’s high recidivism rate indicates historical and current organisational culture flaws that should be addressed. Although the White Paper on Corrections (DCS, 2005) alludes to recidivism, the current study found that no specific policies or procedures exist to address recidivism in the Department of Correctional Services in South Africa. Following the White Paper on Corrections, recidivism policies, procedures, and guidelines must be in place to prevent recidivism (DCS, 2005). The DCS in South Africa should prioritise recidivism as a phenomenon.

It is critical in research to address the generalisability of findings based on a sample from the Western Cape to the full country of South Africa. While the sample area may raise concerns about the extent to which findings can be extended nationally, there are approaches to discuss the findings’ possible application beyond the specific region studied. Correctional Population and Demographics: Compare the demographic

composition of the Western Cape correctional population to that of the country as a whole, which was found to be similar (DCS annual report, 2021/2022). The Western Cape's correctional population is similar to the national population in terms of demographics (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity), which suggests that findings linked to recidivism management may be more universally applicable (DCS annual report, 2021/2022). On March 31, 2022, there were 47 020 Remand Detainees in correctional facilities around the country, with males accounting for 97.05% (45 633) and females accounting for 2.95% (1 387) of the total Remand Detainee population. The Gauteng and Western Cape regions have the highest number of Remand Detainees, owing to, among other things, challenges with the various courts under Section 49G, where courts either do not provide feedback or confirmation on the continued detention of Remand Detainees who have been in detention for more than two years, poor responses from courts on applications to fix bail and for reduction of already fixed bail, and an increase in SAPS arrests (DCS annual report, 2021/2022). The Gauteng and Western Cape regions have more challenges implementing policies because of the high incarceration rates. Crime Rates and Types: The Western Cape's crime rates and types are comparable to those in other provinces. The Western Cape has comparable patterns of criminal activity as other regions, and this could add credibility to the notion that the study's findings can be transferable. Correctional Practices: The Western Cape's approaches to recidivism management and correctional practices are similar to those in other provinces. The similarities in rehabilitation programs, reintegration efforts, and challenges encountered, as indicated by Samuels (2011), the study's findings could have a far-reaching impact as the management of recidivism is needed throughout the South African Correctional Services. Socioeconomic Factors: Considering that the Western Cape has similar socioeconomic characteristics to other provinces, findings may be applicable on a national basis in South Africa.

Significant themes or issues connected to recidivism that have been emphasised in the available literature include problems such as a lack of rehabilitation programs, socioeconomic inequality, and a lack of reintegration assistance (Bosomprah, 2023; Jawaid, 2017; Serghiou et al., 2016). These challenges are not unique to the South African environment, but they also represent a broader worldwide effort to reduce recidivism (Maranville, 2023; Rodriguez & Usman, 2023).

Recommendations

- While the findings from the Western Cape may be useful for recidivism management, more studies, including a broader range of provinces, would be required to provide a full knowledge of the national landscape.
- The Department of Correctional Services should implement a system of having one inmate number for each person, such as the Information Integrated Management System (IIMS).
- Recidivism should be defined by the Department of Correctional Services in the South African context.
- The National Commissioner of the Department of Correctional Services should create a task team to craft and develop a policy and policy that speaks explicitly

to recidivism.

- Cognitive behaviour programmes are needed to deal with recidivistic inmates.
- It was mentioned that the various government departments work independently, and services should be coordinated. The Justice Crime Prevention Security Cluster departments should be appropriately involved in managing recidivism.
- Role players such as NGOs, CBOs, FBOs, the family, judicial partners and the broader community should foster stronger relations in building an Integrated Support System.
- All departments in the Justice Crime Prevention Security cluster, South African Police Services, National Prosecuting Authority, Department of Constitutional Development and Correctional Services, and Department of Home Affairs must be electronically linked to one system through a centralised database.
- Additional research into the scant prior literature on recidivism as a phenomenon.

Conclusion

Globally, recidivism has received considerable attention, but in South Africa, relatively little research has been conducted on the topic. A study on the management of recidivism in the DCS in the Western Cape, South Africa, included staff and external stakeholders collaborating with the DCS. The study's findings support the contention that the DCS of South Africa lacks a defined policy, guidelines, processes, or structure for addressing recidivism. From the responses of the study's participants, it can be deduced that there is a disconnect between the system for collecting offender data and the departments working independently within the Criminal Justice Crime Prevention Cluster. Recidivism in the DCS is poorly managed, and there is a need for collaboration between government departments such as the South African Police Services, the National Prosecuting Authority, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, and the Department of Home Affairs to address the management of recidivism. This will result in the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders, and if the offender population decreases, the financial burden on South African taxpayers will be reduced. DCS's manual and electronic systems should be updated to ensure data integrity.

In addition, it is suggested that the systems of the Judicial Cluster Departments be integrated to manage the recidivism of individuals dealt with by all departments. This will create an offender profile that all departments can monitor. To ensure the management of recidivism, participants suggested the implementation of the following: a framework or set of guidelines for DCS and their stakeholders; the identification and targeting of repeat offenders; the provision of support after release; the development of relationships with communities; the need for holistic intervention by all departments; the use of a fingerprint or criminal record number to detect repeat offenders; and the more effective use of parole and supervision. It is suggested that South Africa's Department of Correctional Services conduct coherent research on managing offenders' recidivism. Furthermore, the findings underscore the need for additional research into the scant prior literature on recidivism as a phenomenon.

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Declarations

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