

VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS FOR COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION IN AKWA IBOM STATE.

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Abstract

This study examined the vocational training and mental health needs for community reintegration in Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives of the study were to determine the Vocational training and mental health needs for community reintegration. The needs assessment research design was used for the study. The population of the study consisted of 313 second time inmates in four correctional facilities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The sample size for this study was 244 second time offenders selected using multistage sampling procedure involving purposive sampling and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a researcher developed instrument named, "Vocational Training and Mental Health Needs and Community Reintegration Checklist" (VTMHNCR). The instrument was subjected to face validity by three experts. The reliability of the VTMHNCR was .86, determined using Cronbach Alpha Reliability Statistics. The instrument was considered reliable for the study. The research questions were answered using percentage and Bar chart statistics. The findings of the study revealed that second time offender inmates in correctional facilities have vocational training needs, and mental health needs for community reintegration. It was concluded based on the findings that second time offender inmates in correctional facilities in Akwa Ibom State have multiple and interconnected needs that must be addressed for successful community reintegration. It was recommended among others that Government should ensure every correctional facility has a mental health counselling unit providing trauma-informed care to heal the psychological wounds driving offending behaviour.

Keywords: Vocational training needs, Mental health needs, Second time offender inmates, Community reintegration and correctional facilities.

Introduction

Community is an intricate web of relationships and social systems designed to uphold the values of coexistence social order, and collective well-being. Within a thriving society, individuals interact through networks that support education, employment, housing, family structures, and justice systems. However, the stability of a community can be threatened by criminal activities and the incarceration of its members (Bouffard, 2020). When individuals are in correctional centres, they are often excluded from the social and economic fabric of the community. Upon their release, they return to an environment that may have changed significantly and may no longer offer

the same support or opportunities. The reintegration of recidivism inmates into such communities thus presents a significant challenge (Umoh, 2021). Without proper support structures, these individuals face stigmatization, marginalization, and the risk of recidivism.

Community reintegration refers to the process through which formerly incarcerated individuals re-establish themselves as functional and accepted members of society. It involves the social, psychological, and economic inclusion of recidivism inmates, aimed at preventing reoffending and promoting public safety. Successful reintegration is contingent upon a variety of interconnected factors that address both the individual needs of the recidivism inmates and the community's readiness to accept them (Ali, 2020). Reintegration is not merely about physical return but about meaningful participation in society through employment, social relationships, and access to services (Joseph, 2021). Moreso, community reintegration could depend on the needs for recidivism inmates such as vocational training needs and mental health needs.

Vocational training needs refer to structured educational programmes and practical instruction in specific trades or occupations, tailored to prepare recidivism inmates for the workforce. These programmes address one of the major barriers to reintegration, lack of marketable skills caused by limited access to quality education and prolonged periods of incarceration. By providing hands-on training in areas such as carpentry, plumbing, automotive repair, tailoring, or culinary arts, vocational programmes enhance employability and create sustainable pathways to legal income (James, 2023). Furthermore, these programmes often incorporate soft skills development, such as teamwork, communication, and time management, which are vital for workplace success. Vocational training not only boosts self-confidence and personal development but also reduces the temptation to return to criminal behaviour. It fosters a sense of self-worth and redefines the identity of ex-offenders as skilled and productive members of society. Programmes offered during incarceration and continued post-release have proven to be particularly effective. Bouffard (2020) emphasized that vocational education is a critical investment in breaking the cycle of recidivism and promoting long-term reintegration. Another recidivism inmates' needs is mental health needs.

Mental health needs refer to the psychological and emotional support requirements that recidivism inmates must address to achieve stability and successfully reintegrate into the community after release. The role of mental health services in the reintegration process is indispensable, as it serves as the foundation for emotional regulation, self-esteem, and the ability to cope with the challenges of reentry. Mental health support offers individuals access to counseling, therapy, medication management, and crisis intervention when necessary (Bassey, 2021). This support enhances recidivism inmates' ability to manage stress, process trauma, and maintain the motivation required to pursue employment and rebuild relationships. When mental health needs are adequately addressed, individuals experience improved emotional stability, reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety, and greater capacity to handle setbacks without resorting to substance abuse or criminal behavior. The presence of consistent mental health care can mitigate feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and despair that often accompany the transition from incarceration to community life. According to Maruna (2021), successful reintegration is tied to building a new identity and belief in one's own ability to change, which requires sound mental health. Information dissemination needs also play a vital role in facilitating community reintegration.

Empirically, the study conducted by Akinyemi (2019) utilized a descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of 1,050 ex-offenders who had completed at least six months of correlational centres-based vocational training and were released between 2015 and

2018. A sample of 320 participants was selected using stratified random sampling, ensuring representation from various trades including tailoring, carpentry, welding, and catering. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Vocational Training and Reintegration Inventory" (VTRI), developed by the researcher to measure the dimensions of skill acquisition, employment, and community acceptance. The instrument was validated by three experts and its reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding a coefficient of 0.87. Data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics, particularly linear regression. The findings revealed that vocational training significantly enhanced the community reintegration of ex-offenders. The previous study was conducted in Lagos State while the present study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria though with the same aim.

The study conducted by Bassey (2019) titled "Mental Health Challenges and Reintegration Success among Ex-Offenders in Cross River State" employed a mixed methods research design combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The target population consisted of 1643 ex-offenders who had been released from correctional facilities in Cross River State within the previous five years. Two hundred and fifty participants were selected using convenience sampling technique. The research instrument titled "Ex Offender Mental Health and Reintegration Inventory" (EOMHRI) was validated by clinical psychologists and tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha, which returned a coefficient of 0.88. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings revealed that untreated mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder significantly impeded participants ability to secure employment, maintain family relationships, and achieve stable community reintegration. The previous study adopted a mixed methods research design while the present study was adopted a need assessment research design though with the same aim. Hence, the need for the present study.

Previous studies by Akinyemi (2019) and Bassey (2019) examined vocational training and mental health challenges separately in Lagos and Cross River States, but no study has conducted a comprehensive needs assessment of recidivism inmates in Akwa Ibom State focusing simultaneously on vocational training needs and mental health needs. The present study addresses this gap by assessing these two critical needs collectively to provide a holistic understanding of what recidivism inmates require for successful community reintegration in Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

In an ideal situation, community reintegration is envisioned as a seamless and supportive process through which recidivism inmates are welcomed back into their communities with dignity, equipped with the necessary tools to lead productive, law-abiding lives. This process should involve collaborative efforts between families, communities, institutions, and professional counsellors who ensure that ex-offenders have access to housing, employment, education, and emotional support. Reintegration, in its ideal form, promotes public safety, social cohesion, and the full restoration of citizenship rights, leaving no room for stigmatization or exclusion.

However, the reality of community reintegration for recidivism inmates in many societies sharply contrasts with this ideal. In practice, many ex-offenders face immediate rejection from their families, are denied job opportunities, lack access to stable housing, and are burdened by the stigma of their past. They return to environments plagued by poverty, crime, and poor social services, with minimal institutional support. Although counsellors are positioned to play a crucial role in bridging these gaps, many recidivism inmates still spiral back into criminal activity due to unaddressed psychological trauma, lack of vocational skills, and feelings of hopelessness.

Communities, often driven by fear or prejudice, hesitate to reintegrate these individuals, further complicating their rehabilitation journey.

Despite the presence of daily life changing programmes such as discussion of words of God, reintegration strategies remain ineffective due to systemic constraints. Most sessions are superficial, lacking follow-up or consideration of the socio-economic and cultural challenges inmates face on post-release. Critical needs like family support, empowerment, and community awareness are often neglected. Vocational and empowerment programmes rarely align with real market demands. Consequently, many ex-inmates re-enter society unprepared, unsupported, and disillusioned. This disconnect frequently leads them back into criminal behaviour. It is based on this problem that this study seeks to address that gap by determining the recidivism inmates' needs such as empowerment needs, family acceptance needs, counselling service's needs, halfway housing needs, orientation service's needs, information dissemination needs, placement service's needs, vocational training needs for community reintegration in Akwa Ibom State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the recidivism needs for community reintegration in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the objectives of the study is to determine the:

- i. Vocational training needs for community reintegration.
- ii. Mental health needs for community reintegration.

Research Questions

In line with the stated objectives, the study provided answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the vocational training needs for community reintegration?
2. What are the mental health needs for community reintegration?

Research Method

The research design adopted for this study was a needs assessment research design. A needs assessment research design is a systematic process of gathering and analyzing information to identify, understand, and prioritize the gaps between the current condition of a specific population and the desired condition or outcome. It involves collecting data directly from the target group to determine what resources, services, or support they lack and what they require to achieve successful outcomes (Joseph, 2016). This design is used in a study that determines the influence of recidivism needs on community reintegration because it allows the researcher to identify the specific rehabilitation and support requirements of former inmates that must be addressed to reduce reoffending and facilitate their successful return to society. By conducting a needs assessment, the researcher can pinpoint which needs are most critical for this population, and then examine how the presence or absence of these needs affects their ability to reintegrate into the community. This research was carried out in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The researcher conducted the study in this state because of observed high level of poor community reintegration of second times inmates.

The population of this study comprises of 313 second time inmates in four correctional facilities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (Office of Correctional Service Controller, 2025). The sample for the study was 244 second time offender inmates making it approximately 78 percent of the total population. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used in selecting the sample for the study. At the first stage, three correctional facilities were selected using purposively selected using purposive sampling technique. This technique was used because the researcher wanted correctional facilities with at least 20 and above second time offender inmates. From the correctional facilities selected, the researcher adopted simple random sampling technique to select 80 percent of the second time offender inmates from each of the correctional facilities. To do this, all the second time offender inmates were given identification numbers and were written

individually on slips of paper, which was then folded and placed inside a container. The container was thoroughly shaken to mix the slips, and 50 percent slips were randomly drawn without replacement. The second time offender inmates whose identification number appeared on the selected slips were chosen.

A researcher made instrument titled: Vocational Training and Mental Health Needs and Community Reintegration Checklist (VTMHNCR). The VTMHNCR assessed the 16 items on vocational training and mental health needs. Each of these needs contained eight (8) items. All items in the instrument were developed using a YES and No rating scale. The items were positively worded. The research instrument was validated by three experts. Among the three experts, one was from the Department of Guidance and Counselling while two of the experts were from the Department of Psychological Foundations of Education, Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, Uyo. The purpose of the study and the research questions as well as the hypotheses were made available to them at the time of validation. During instrument validation, the experts ensured that the instruments are clear, relevant, and capable of accurately measuring the intended variables. All their comments were incorporated in the final copy of the instrument that was used to collect data for the study.

To determine the internal consistency of the instrument, the researcher randomly selected 35 second time offender inmates in the correctional facility in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria who was not part of the study sample to respond to the instrument. Data generated were subjected to Cronbach Alpha Reliability Statistics for determination of the reliability coefficients. Reliability coefficient of VTMHNCR obtained was .88. The instrument was considered reliable and suitable to be used for the study since the reliability coefficients are above .70. The researcher made use of four research assistants in administering the instrument. The research assistants were briefed of the purpose of the study and the modalities to employ in assisting the respondents to fill the instrument correctly. Both the researcher and the research assistants visited the correctional facilities in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria to administer the instrument. On arrival at each institution, a letter of introduction collected from the department of Guidance and Counselling for permission to conduct the study was given to the officer in charge of the correctional facilities for approval. The purpose of the study was explained to the respondents. The researcher and assistants took time to explain the items in the questionnaires to the inmates so as to get accurate responses and also because some of the inmates were not able to read the items. The instrument was administered and collected in two weeks. 98 percent (239) out of 100 percent (313) of the filled instrument was accurately responded and retrieved from the respondents. The data was collated for analysis. Data collected was analysed using percentage and Bar chart statistics. The research questions were answered using percentage and Bar chart statistics.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the vocational training services needs for community reintegration?

Table 1: Summary of Percentages on vocational training needs for community reintegration Responses (n=239)

Vocational training needs	Percentages (%)	
	Yes	No
I would have needed		
Training in agricultural production.	86	14
Training in technology.	100	0
To learn how to bake.	43	57
To be taught how to repair phones.	59	41
To learn barbing.	42	58
To learn cosmetology.	65	35
Training in tailoring.	72	28
Training in metal work.	56	44

Source: Researcher’s survey (2026)

Table 1 shows that 86 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need training in agricultural production while 14 percent of them disagreed; 100 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need training in tech while none of them disagreed; 43 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need to learn how to bake while 57 percent of them disagreed; 59 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need to be taught how to repair phones while 41 percent of them disagreed; 42 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need to learn barbing while 58 percent of them disagreed; 65 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need to learn cosmetology while 35 percent of them disagreed; 72 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need training in tailoring while 28 percent of them disagreed; 56 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need training in metal work while 44 percent of them disagreed. Thus, second time offender inmates in correctional facilities have vocational training needs for community reintegration. The above interpretation is shown using a bar chart in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Bar chart showing vocational training needs for community reintegration

Research Question 2

What are the mental health needs for community reintegration?

Table 2: Summary of Percentages on mental health needs for community reintegration Responses (n=239)

Mental health needs	Percentages (%)	
	Yes	No
I would have needed		
A programme that could have addressed repeated offenders.	96	4
A professional counsellor to talk to.	76	24
How to access proper medication when i am mentally disturbed.	89	11
To learn ways to calm my mind to prevent impulsive reactions.	86	14
Help on core issues leading to my repeated offences.	94	6
To heal from past trauma that contributes to my cycle of behaviour.	90	10
Help on basic stress strategies for high-risk situations.	67	33
To build mental stability that can comply with the societal moral standard.	93	7

Source: Researcher's survey (2026)

Table 2 shows that 96 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need a programme that could have addressed repeated offenders while 4 percent of them disagreed; 76 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need a professional counsellor to talk to while 24 percent of them disagreed; 89 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need to know how to access proper medication when they are mentally disturbed while 11 percent of them disagreed; 86 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need to learn ways to calm their mind to prevent impulsive reactions while 14 percent of them disagreed; 94 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need help on core issues leading to their repeated offences while 6 percent of them disagreed; 90 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need to heal from past trauma that contributes to their cycle of behaviour while 10 percent of them disagreed; 67 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need help on basic stress strategies for high-risk situations while 33 percent of them disagreed; 93 percent of the second time offender inmates agreed that they need to build mental stability that can comply with the societal moral standard while 7 percent of them disagreed. Thus, second time offender inmates in correctional facilities have mental health needs for community reintegration. The above interpretation is shown using a bar chart in Figure 2.

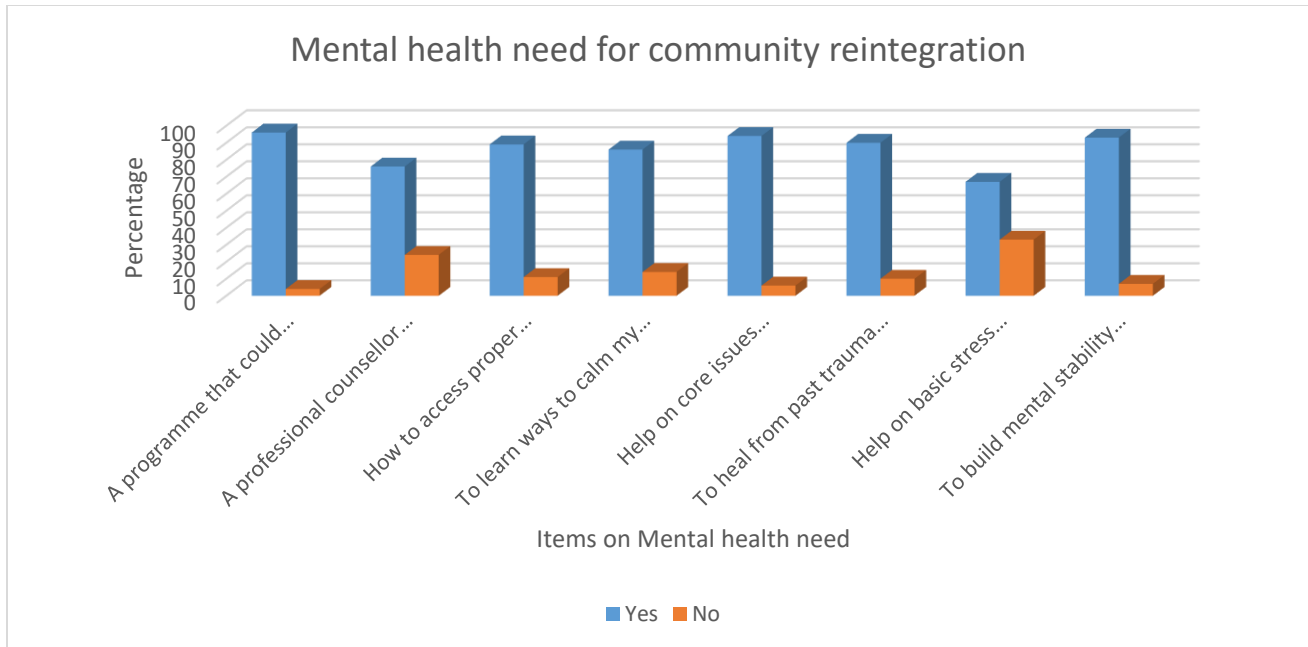


Figure 2: Bar chart showing mental health needs for community reintegration
Discussion of Findings

The findings from research question eight revealed that second time offender inmates in correctional facilities have vocational training needs for community reintegration. The high percentages recorded for training in technology and agricultural production, alongside lower percentages for some traditional trades like baking and barbing, demonstrate that these inmates have clear ideas about what kinds of training will actually help them find work. The finding of this study agrees with the study by Akinyemi (2019), which revealed that vocational training significantly enhanced the community reintegration of ex-offenders in Lagos State. The finding also supports the work of Ibrahim (2020), who found that participants with vocational training were significantly more likely to gain employment, start small businesses, and receive community support than those who did not acquire such skills.

The result may be due to the fact that a job provides more than income. It provides structure, purpose, and identity. It fills the hours that might otherwise be empty. It connects the individual to a community of coworkers. It offers opportunities for positive recognition and achievement. For someone leaving incarceration, a job can be the anchor that keeps them from drifting back into old patterns. But finding employment is extremely difficult without marketable skills. Many inmates enter correctional facilities with limited education and no vocational training. They leave with the same deficits, only now they also carry the burden of a criminal record. Vocational training addresses this by providing tangible skills that employers actually need. When an inmate completes a training programme and earns a certification, they have something concrete to offer. They are not just an ex-offender asking for a chance. They are a trained welder, a certified electrician, a skilled programmer. This shift in identity is as important as the skills themselves.

Mental Health Needs for Community Reintegration

The findings from research question two revealed that second time offender inmates in correctional facilities have mental health needs for community reintegration. The high percentages recorded across items, particularly the need for a programme that could have addressed repeated offenders, the need for help on core issues leading to repeated offences, and the need to build mental stability that can comply with societal moral standards, demonstrate that these inmates

recognise the deep psychological roots of their behaviour. The finding of this study agrees with the study by Bassey (2019), which revealed that untreated mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder significantly impeded participants' ability to secure employment, maintain family relationships, and achieve stable community reintegration.

The result may be assigned to the high prevalence of mental health conditions among incarcerated populations. Numerous studies have documented that rates of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health conditions are significantly higher in prisons than in the general population. Many of these conditions predate incarceration and may have contributed to the behaviours that led to incarceration. Others develop or worsen during incarceration as a result of the trauma of imprisonment itself. Regardless of origin, these conditions do not simply disappear upon release. They continue to affect how the individual thinks, feels, and behaves. A person struggling with untreated depression may lack the motivation to search for work. A person carrying unprocessed trauma may react with explosive anger to perceived threats. A person with untreated anxiety may avoid the very situations that could lead to positive connections. Without mental health treatment, these individuals are set up to fail, not because they lack skills or motivation but because their brains are working against them.

Conclusion

It was concluded based on the findings that second time offender inmates in correctional facilities in Akwa Ibom State have multiple and interconnected needs that must be addressed for successful community reintegration. Vocational training address economic foundations. Mental health needs reveal the psychological roots of offending. Thus, these needs are vital for community reintegration.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Correctional facilities should employ vocational counsellors to connect inmates with training in technology and digital skills where job opportunities are growing rapidly.
2. Government should ensure every correctional facility has a mental health counselling unit providing trauma-informed care to heal the psychological wounds driving offending behaviour.

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