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Adaptation to the Worker Role: The Vocational Experience of South African Male Ex-Offenders

Mogammad Shaheed Soeker[*]

Occupational Therapy Department, University of the Western Cape, South Africa

[*]**Corresponding author:** Shaheed Soeker M, Occupational Therapy Department, University of the Western Cape, South Africa, Tel: 021 959 9339; Fax: 021 959 1259; E-mail: msoeker@uwc.ac.za

Abstract

Objectives: The study is aimed at exploring, describing and understanding the experiences and perceptions of male ex-offenders with regard to adapting to their worker roles after they have been released from prison.

Methods: The research methodology utilised was positioned in the qualitative research paradigm, specifically using the tradition of interpretivism. To gather data from the participants, focus groups and face to face interviews were conducted, consisting of broad questions followed by probes to gain an in-depth description of participants' experiences and perceptions.

Participants: Five males who were classified as being ex-offenders participated in the focus groups and one female (key informant) participated in two semi structured interviews.

Results: Four themes emerged that reflected the vocational experience of male ex- offenders: 1) A sense of distrust, 2) A sense of support: Giving back to the community through learning and doing, 3) A change in lifestyle and 4) Working towards change through capacity building. For the purpose of this article, Theme 3- A change in lifestyle, will be discussed in depth as it explored the adaptive process that male ex- offenders experienced when adapting to their worker roles post release from prison.

Conclusions: The findings of the study suggest that occupational therapy practitioners as well as correctional service personnel should utilise context specific vocational rehabilitation programmes that enhance the ex-offender's ability to find employment once they have been released from prison. Practitioners should be aware of both the internal and external adaptation strategies when planning vocational rehabilitation and community reintegration strategies.

Keywords: Occupational therapy; Occupational adaptation; Occupational deprivation; Vocational rehabilitation; Qualitative research; Male ex-offenders

Introduction

This research project was conducted as a result of the void in the literature, both locally and internationally, that focuses on the vocational experiences of male ex-offenders in a South African context. All of them came from low socio-economic suburbs in Cape Town, South Africa. By the end of 2008/2009 financial year, the Department of Correctional Service prison facilities were overcrowded by 43.3% [1]. Overcrowding in prisons has an impact on the provision of skills programmes, meaning that officials are not able to provide sufficient skills programmes to all prisoners. The manner in which the Department of Correctional Services manages overcrowding is through transferring offenders between centres and also releasing offenders [1]. Since acquiring and fulfilling the worker role in adulthood is a significant milestone, it would be beneficial to gain an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of male ex-offenders regarding the vocational training received in prison, and how it may be beneficial for their reintegration into society, more specifically the open-labour-market. There tends to be a general void in the literature internationally and in South Africa regarding the perceptions of ex-offenders about their reintegration into the community. The current

study will advance the knowledge about the challenges and adaptive process that ex-offenders experience when returning to work. There is need for knowledge that will enhance the development of vocational programmes that will improve the male ex-offenders ability to find employment. The current study therefore aims to explore the perceptions and experiences of ex-offenders with regard to returning to work from a South African perspective.

Literature Review

The following literature will focus on the experiences of male ex-offenders in relation to them acquiring employment as well as what facilitates this process or what barriers they experience. The literature review will also explore the relationship between adaptation and the worker role. Munnion [2] states that when offenders are released there is minimal support and they have difficulty finding jobs which contributes to them living on the streets. They are then left with the choice of resorting to crime and returning to prison. This is supported by an international report done by Petersilia as cited in [3]. which states that a large number of prisoners have been released without post-prison supervision and without services to assist them in finding

jobs, housing, and needed support services. Furthermore, these ex-offenders are often released into communities that are challenged by high unemployment and poverty rates, few job opportunities, crime, and gang activity [3]. As a result of the latter it could be argued that male ex- offenders who live in communities with poor socio economic status such as many communities in South Africa may engage in criminal activities in order to sustain themselves and their families. As stated by Wilcock cited in Whiteford [4], an external circumstance or influence that prevents someone from acquiring, using or enjoying something leads to the experience of occupational deprivation. It could be argued that the poor facilitation of skills development programmes in prison to aid ex-offenders in acquiring skills could be a form of occupational deprivation in that they would may not acquire meaningful employment with insufficient skills. The researchers of the current study therefore questioned whether or not the skills development programmes that the ex-offenders have participated in were meaningful as well as practically helpful and whether or not they have assisted the ex-offender in adapting to their worker role post release from prison and in obtaining meaningful employment. Research has shown that many inmates lack community living skills that are necessary for successful community reintegration [5]. A study by Graffam et al. [6] discussed the employability of the ex-offenders and prisoners. From their study it was found that the above mentioned population was less likely to obtain and maintain employment than other disadvantaged groups (example physically disabled). However, this study did not look at the lived experience of prisoners and their attitude toward skills development and finding employment once released.

According to [6] obtaining and maintaining employment is viewed as being very important for the successful re-integration of ex-offenders in communities [7], also state that one of the main problems ex-offenders faced when returning home was an inability to sustain stable employment or inadequate positive support systems. It could be argued that the resettlement process for ex-offenders into their communities is quite difficult as failure to find employment and any form of support from the community could result in ex-offenders struggling to adapt to their various occupational roles. Work programmes in prisons have been shown to benefit inmates, who have the opportunity to develop job specific skills and workplace habits while incarcerated, therefore addressing shortfalls in their pre-prison employment histories. Money earned from employment in prison may allow inmates to contribute financially to their families at home. The ability to make these financial contributions and participate in a productive work environment may benefit inmates emotionally and psychologically and create a positive sense of accomplishment as they are playing the role of the provider to their families taking the barriers into consideration [7]. Further research has found that inmates involved in employment programmes while incarcerated are less likely to be rearrested when released and more likely to obtain employment when they are eventually released from prison [8]. Therefore, work programmes enhance the ex- offender`s ability to adapt to their worker roles. One of the main problems ex-offenders faced when returning home was an inability to sustain stable employment or inadequate positive support systems [7]. In a study conducted in America it was found that involvement in meaningful occupation allowed offenders to develop adaptability and the ability to be effective in the adult role [9]. It could be argued that the fact that they were not able to find stable employment caused them to struggle to adapt to their worker roles. According to [10], work has both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for the person. Intrinsically the person engaging in

work is motivated by factors such as self-affirmation and self-confidence. Extrinsically they could be motivated by monetary rewards. Work and the worker role is important in any adult's life, however the failure of ex-offenders to resume this adult role may result in occupational deprivation [11]. Stated that there is a strong correlation between crime and the inability to obtain work that leads to success. It could be argued that it would be imperative that research be done to further explore this relationship. Since acquiring and fulfilling the worker role in adulthood is a significant milestone, it would be beneficial to gain an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of male ex-offenders regarding the vocational training received in prison, and how it may be beneficial for their reintegration into society, more specifically the open-labour-market.

Therefore, the current study addressed the following research question: 'What are the challenges that male ex-offenders experience in adapting to their worker roles after participation in vocational skills development programmes?'

Aim

The aim of the study was to:

Explore the challenges that male ex-offenders experience with regard to acquiring their worker roles after participation in a vocational skills development programme.

Explore and describe how ex-offenders adapt to their worker roles.

Methods

Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive and includes a description of the individual, setting, analysing data for themes and eventually drawing conclusions about its meaning [12]. Within the context of the current study an interpretivist approach was used as the researcher sought to understand the subjective experiences of ex-offenders when resuming their worker roles.

Sampling

Five participants and one key informant were selected through purposive sampling (See Table 1 which describes the participant`s demographics). The participants were recruited by an employee of the organization, Young in Prison which is a Non-Governmental Organization established in 2004. The organisation believes that children do not belong in prison and seeks to support them. The organisation runs programmes such as educational and art workshops as well as assisting participants to achieve their Matric (Grade 12) certificate. They also have a post release support network that helps ex-offenders with skills development in order to gain skills to enter the job market. A key informant who was a manager at the Young in Prison organization was also recruited from the organization Young in Prison in order to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study. Table 2 describes the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Participant code	Gender Education	Education	Age	Offender type	Type of work before going to prison	Type of work after released from prison
1	Male	High school	27	Violent	Gardening at residential houses	Part time gardening work

2	Male	High school	24	Violent	Unemployed	Part time general assistance work
3	Male	High school	36	Violent	None	Worked for an NGO in youth development, childcare and general social work. Facilitated workshops with prisoners and youth
4	Male	High school	18	Violent	None	Part time general assistance work
5	Male	High school	21	Violent	Worked as a machine operator	Part time general assistance work

Table 1: Demographic Information

General assistant: The term refers to general work (i.e. gardening, assisting with the removal of dirt on a building site, washing cars). As many of the participants in the study did not have any formal qualification, they were dependent on doing any type of work when it was available.

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
• Participants must be males between the ages of 18-55. • Participants from all race groups were included in this study. • The participants had to have been employed for at least 6 months after being released from prison as this would have provided a time period for them to have worked and therefore speak from experience.	•Individuals were excluded if they had additional psychiatric diagnosis according to the DSM IV.

Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Data Collection

Bloor, Frankland, Thomas and Robson [13] argued that the ideal size of a focus group should be between six to eight participants. Five participants participated in the first focus group and only two participants that participated in the first focus group participated in the second focus group. The questions differed between the two focus groups, the first focus group focused on the male ex-offenders experience of the vocational programmes used in prisons and obstacles that prevented them in finding employment (Please see Appendix 1).

Appendix 1

Questions for focus group 1

1. How did you experience the skills development programme you participated in while in prison?

2. What factors prevented (obstacles) you from finding employment when you were released from prison?

3. What factors or services aided you in finding employment after you were released from prison?

4. How appropriate were the skills provided in the skills development programme?

– If they were appropriate, how did they assist

you in finding employment?

5. What motivated you to get a job after you were released from prison?

– How did you change your lifestyle in order to find employment?

6. What recommendations would you make to health or prison officials with regard to the ideal programme that would assist the male ex-offenders in finding employment?

Questions for interview 1 with key informants

1. Based on your experience could you describe the programme that your organization uses in order to improve the work skills or life skills of exoffenders?

2. What is the success rate of the programme?

3. Did you experience any barriers or problems while running the programmes?

4. Are there any facilitatory factors that help you and your organization in running the programmes smoothly?

5. Do you have any support/ follow-up systems in place after the completion of the programme?

– If so, what does it entail?

6. What training do the staff members undergo and how often does this occur?

7. If you could make any changes to the programme to assist the ex-offenders in finding employment, what would they be?

The second focus group focused on information that emerged from the first interview, example, the effect of gangs on the ex-offenders life outside prison (Please see Appendix 2).

Appendix 2

Questions for Follow-up Focus group

1. Are the gangs inside prison different to the gangs outside of prison?

– If so, how does it impact your life?

2. What are the programmes run in the prisons?

– Technical programmes like carpentry, plumbing and metal work?

– Do you think the quality of the technical skills learnt in prison will/has assist(ed) in finding

employment?

– Do you think a formal qualification would be oh more help?

3. Has anyone had a job since being released?

– For long?

– How did you manage to maintain it?

4. What brought about the positive change in mind-set?

– How has this motivated you with regard to getting a job?

Questions for follow-up key informant interview

1. In your opinion, are the technical programmes in prison effective?

2. Could you elaborate on any other NGO's that you work with?

– What do these organisations do?

3. How do you go about placing an male ex-offender with the relevant NGO's/employer/training facility?

The second focus group was poorly attended as some of the participants struggled to travel to the interview venue and others had work related obligations. The participants were provided with R40 (equivalent to 4 American Dollars) in order to compensate for travelling costs and given a small snack in the form of a fruit pack. Two semi-structured interviews with a key informant, i.e. a staff member, were conducted to obtain information in order to complement the information gathered from the participants. Two 40-60 minute semi-structured interviews with a key informant were conducted after the focus groups at the Young in Prison Organization.

Data Analysis

In order to maintain objectivity during the process of data analysis the researcher utilised the process of bracketing. To bracket means to suspend or lay aside what is known about the experience being studied [14]. The researchers had regular discussions with their supervisor and a mentor (expert in qualitative research) about the project. This enabled the researchers to become aware of their own biases and perceptions about the project. Some of the biases included the fact that all criminals are dangerous and are lazy. The method of thematic content analysis as described by Morse and Field [15] were used in this study. The process involved the coding of information, thereafter the organisation of the codes into categories and then the grouping of the categories into themes. Strategies such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were used in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data [16]. Credibility was ensured by the dense description of the lived experience of the research participants. The descriptions of the lived experience of the participants were audio-recorded as they were talking and the audiotapes were transcribed verbatim to ensure that each participant's story was captured in their own narrative. Credibility was also ensured by means of member checking whereby a summary of the findings were reviewed by the participants in order to ensure its accuracy. Credibility was also enhanced by triangulation. Triangulation is described as a means of establishing different patterns of agreement based on more than one method of observation, information gathering or the use of more than one data source in order to establish credibility [17]. Within this study triangulation was ensured by the use of more than one method of collecting data, example, face to face interviews with the key informant and focus groups with the participants. Each piece of data, when added to the previous data, strengthened or confirmed previous findings thus reinforcing the triangulation of the data. Transferability was ensured by the detailed description of the research methods, contexts, detailed description of the participants and the lived experience of the participants. Dependability was ensured by means of dense descriptions, peer examination and triangulation. The study was

documented in such a manner that the readers could follow a decision trail. Confirmability was ensured by the process of reflexivity whereby the researcher's own biases or assumptions were made apparent by means of a reflexive journal. In the current study the research findings were purely from the perspective of the participants.

Ethics

Informants were telephonically contacted whereby the aim, purpose and process of the study were explained to them. The research project was ethically approved by the Occupational Therapy Department at the University of the Western Cape. The study was also conducted according to the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki [18]. The details with regard to the study together with the consent forms were fully disclosed to the participants on their arrival at the interview session. All the participants gave their written consent to participate in the study as well as to have the findings of the study published in journals.

Findings

The themes explored in this study explain how male ex-offenders adapt to their worker roles post release from prison.

Theme: Change in lifestyle

This theme focused on the adaptations that the ex-offenders had to make in order to successfully reintegrate into society and fulfil their worker role. These adaptations were viewed as being both extrinsic (external) and intrinsic (internal) factors that influenced their adaptation to their worker roles.

External Factors that Facilitate Adaptation

The category will be discussed in terms of support systems in place: Assistance in transitioning back into the community as well as gaining trust/proving oneself to potential employers as well as the community. These support systems served as extrinsic adaptation strategies that enabled the male ex- offenders to re integrate into the community.

Support Systems in Place: Assistance in Transitioning back into the Community

Supportive systems can facilitate the adaptation process. These include having a mentor, Non-governmental organization (NGO), family members, friends and spiritual leaders. Most of these support systems understand what the ex-offenders have been through and are able to identify their main needs and facilitate the process for successful transition back into the community. Each has a different role to play in the different aspects of the ex-offenders life whether it is personal, related to finding employment or being a role model. The quote below is indicative of the support a participant received from the NGO he was associated with. This highlights how support systems can contribute to the change in lifestyle that the ex-offender makes in his life. One participant said:

"Oh is is no is eh eh the people in Young in Prison is good for me eh because most

time, it helps for us you see and also give for us someone you see because also know

about eh us and the and the situation you see, in life you see, and also what I am doing

in Young in Prison you see, the thing is because I know, yes, Young in Prison has

helped me you see, has helped me and my family you see because now I change my

life you see (self- evaluation to become more positive). I'm doing the thing, right things (does not engage in criminal activity) for my family you see." (P1)

The participant talks about the life skills that were offered by the social worker and how they assisted the ex-offenders in breaking away from their negative habits. A participant said:

"…the (skills) social worker offered they are much more appropriate because those were the ones that starts to break you or start to allow you to break away from anger, fear, pain all those kind of a things…" (P3)

"like like like conflict management, conflict resolution er er anger management er the soft skills those kind of a things that is more personal, personal development stuff." (P3)

The quote below indicates that participants were not impressed with some of skills training programmes, they felt that it did not prepare them to find employment when they are released from prison. As one participant said:

"They (prison) actually have no other system that expose you to to job opportunities, prison don't have that, they don't have even if they promise you they don't have it." (P3)

The quote below illustrates how family acted as a support system when the participant was released from prison and went back home. One participant said:

"And then when I got home, I saw no, they (family) still love me." (P2)

Another large motivating aspect and source of support for the participants was allowing spirituality into their lives. The church would come into the prison environment to preach and teach the word of the lord. The church seemed to be the only ones to take a genuine interest in the lives of the offenders which had a positive effect on them as their mind-set started to change from those spiritual moments. They found hope and motivation through being spiritual and believed this made them believe that it is possible to make a change in their lives (self-evaluation). The two comments below both illustrate how many of the participants have become spiritual which has helped them to cope with daily situations and make their lives better in the long run. One participant said:

"I, I say for me myself eh thank you God forgive me for this opportunity." (P1)

"…thank you God, you see now I change." (P1)

Since the mind-set of the ex-offenders has changed, their behaviour and lifestyle has changed in a way that they are no longer focussing on doing negative activities, but rather making a more positive contribution to society. This quote illustrates how spiritual leaders take an interest in the prisoners' lives and motivate them to change and allow them to reflect on their lives.

"It was Christians who actually, they have an interest on my experiences, they always

have an interest on people experiences when you are in prison and those kind of a

stuff…" (P2)

Gaining trust/ Proving yourself to Potential Employers and the Community

Gaining trust in this sense relates to being determined to continue towards reaching the goals that the ex-offenders have set out for themselves. It also provides the ex-offenders with an opportunity to prove themselves, not only to potential employers, but also to the rest of society. This therefore assists them in adapting to their role as a worker as they are understood and supported by society. The quotation below illustrates that if the ex-offender

adapts their behaviour, this is then acknowledged by those within their context and creates a sense of positive reinforcement. This positive reinforcement perpetuates the cycle of change.

"The only people that support you is that when you get a good job, when you find out

that youre your your colleagues and your manager, if it's a good job, they understand your situation, your background and everything, then they start to become more supportive (they trust you) than the correctional service itself."(P2)

The participants felt that they gained the trust from the community by giving back to the community and preventing others especially the youth from making decisions that might affect them negatively, just as they did in the past. By aiding the youth in their communities they gained the trust from their communities where they lived. This quote below shows how one of the participants is giving back to the community by motivating the young people in his community to stay away from criminal activity. One participant said:

"I like the outside (community where he lives) I like keep the young to keep (prevent) the young people in doing negative things, about crime." (P1)

The quote below is where the participant highlights the importance of educating children about their rights (engagement in occupation). The participant views this as important, because he like they were robbed from his rights.

"No the thing that, the thing that struggles, uhm, the, the only thing, the only struggle for me I basically just uhm, uhm, to let the children know their rights, you know, because why we was robbed from our rights, in prison we get robbed from our rights you don't have rights although you know what rights is, you know your rights but that is the, the, saddest part of everything, just for the information man you know just to let every child, knows his right what is his right, you know, ja." (P3)

The quotes below are recommendations from the Key Informant of possible solutions in which the community can support the ex-offenders. The Key Informant speaks about community dialogue that needs to take place, if that is facilitated, a healing process could take place between the ex-offender and the community. The dialogue would be about the ex-offenders needing support and how the community could help them.

"I think if we had a lot more places where, uhm, community dialogue can take place, uhm, there's something in the, in the field that we work in called victim-offender-mediation…I think to facilitate that

kinda process a lot more with communities and to really, uhm, to, to pull a lot more resources into healing the community. …But if that healing process and that, that dialogue about how ex-offenders need support and they need the help of the community and this, this whole process of rehabilitation and stopping the cycle of crime is collaborative thing. It is not just offenders' responsibility. It is not just department of correctional services, it's not just social development. It's all of our responsibility." (K)

Internal Factors that Facilitate Adaptation

The category will be discussed in terms of having a Positive mind set: Ready for change as well as Change in self-concept: taking responsibility for one's own life.

Positive Mind Set: Ready for Change

Another topic that was prevalent in the focus groups was the change from a negative to a positive frame of mind. This was as a result of participation in programmes in prison that consumed most of their time and took their mind off negative thoughts. They felt the need to be respected and accepted back into the community and by one's family in order to fulfil the role of the supporter, provider and community member. For some they were tired of prison and wanted to make a change for themselves. This quote explains how programmes in prison contribute to this participant's change in mind set from negative to positive.

"Okay, to attend the programmes in prison, uh, the time I attend the programme, are

the times in, uh, okay, starting my minds to, to change (positively), you see." (P1)

The following quote below shows how staying away from negative influences in life will

help one maintain a positive outlook.

"No man, it's better for me to just stay away (from negative activity), understand, from everyone, you know, bad friends, people that judge me wrong, you know." (P2)

This intrinsic adaptation results in a change in external behaviour. The quote below shows that the offender realises that no one else can change him, change can only be brought about by himself.

"Yes, you can change your life you see and can show the people your life is changed you see, because no one know, you tell you inside (internal adaptation), you know how to change and then your minds is changed." (P1)

Change in Self-Concept: Taking Responsibility for One's Own Life

All the lessons learnt and assistance received by relevant people develops a more positive self-concept, thus filling a void of not knowing who you are. The following quote explains that once an ex-offender has a perspective about their situation and who they are, they are able to identify their strengths and weaknesses as well as their passion in life.

"It's those individuals who have come into prison and contributed whatever story they told, it captured you somewhere, but along the line you start to put all these pieces together (finding perspective) and

you will find there's a puzzle that should be completed. And you actually at that part where you have to put yourself into it (puzzle) to complete it."(P2)

Discussion

The adaptation strategies will be discussed in terms of internal and external adaptation strategies [19], state that occupational adaptation is an internal adaptation process that occurs through engaging in occupation and for occupation. This substantiates our findings that an internal change has to occur to prepare the participants for new occupations. The participant`s experience of changing their mind-set to a more positive one was viewed as an internal adaptation strategy. In terms of the model of occupational adaptation as described by Schultz and Schkade [20] this relates to the adaptation sub process of adaptive response evaluation in which the individual evaluates themselves. One of the areas of this self-evaluation is personal experience of efficiency which relates to use of time, energy and resources. This can be interpreted as the individual evaluating themselves in relation to what they hope to achieve and how they hope to achieve it. In the current study the participants introspected and made the conscious decision not to engage in criminal activity and to engage in activities that were beneficial to the community. Hocking as cited in Bryant and McKay [21], highlighted that engagement in occupation can generate new meanings at a personal level. In the current study engagement in occupation enabled the participants to intrinsically adapt when they participated in programmes (life skills programmes) within prison. These programmes would consume most of their time and took their minds off the negative thoughts that they continuously experienced. Occupational adaptation is further described as a dynamic process involving occupational identity and occupational competence [22]. Occupational identity is one's sense of present and future self in relation to one's history as an occupational being. Occupational competence refers to how well an individual fulfils expectations, maintains roles and responsibilities, and pursues life goals [22]. In the current study the ex-offenders occupational identity and competency improved after they were involved in the life skills programmes and work related tasks within the prison and upon release from prison. Individuals who did not engage in vocationally related programmes struggled to adapt to their worker roles upon discharge. The findings of the study suggest that ex-offenders have to go through a process of occupational adaptation in order to successfully reintegrate into society and for them to fulfil their worker role. They go through a period of change, especially a lifestyle change, where they abandon criminal activity and try to live a positive life e.g. through mentoring the youth and trying to obtain employment. In a study done by Stelter and Whisner [9] with offenders they deduced that meaningful occupation became the tool that provided the participants with the opportunity to develop their own adaptive ability and successfully fulfil a positive adult role. This process of adaptation and fulfilment of an adult role will only be possible if ex-offenders make an intrinsic decision to change. Support from external sources such as the community, NGO`s, family members and colleagues were seen as examples of external factors that facilitate adaptation [19], stated that occupational adaptation is an on-going process that emerges from the interaction between the person and their occupational environment. In this study the participants have related how they have received support from elements in their environment and how this has helped them overcome occupational challenges. As stated by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as cited in Wilcock [23] there has been a redirection in terms of health that focuses on

taking care of each other and community as well of the environment. They also state that health is created by and lived by people within their everyday lives and that in order to achieve a state of complete well-being the person has to be able to identify aspirations in order to satisfy needs and to change or cope with the environment, in other words adapt. Harley [24] stated that a stable family life, support from parole bodies, work and supportive communities contribute to a successful reintegration post-prison. A support system is an external factor which contributes to the lifestyle change which ex-offenders decide to make. The ex-offenders are on a constant journey where they are trying to prove themselves to society and potential employers in order to gain their trust, and this motivates them to continue to refrain from negative behaviour and to persist in adapting to a more positive lifestyle.

Implications

It needs to be acknowledged that assumptions could not be made from this small qualitative study, however the study highlighted that the participants (ex-offenders) in the study had undergone both internal and external adaptation strategies when reintegrating to their worker roles post release from prison. Due to the general void in the literature that focuses on the return to work process of male ex-offenders, this study revealed that internal strategies such as having a positive mind set, engagement in occupation (vocational rehabilitation or general programmes in prison), acceptance of one`s circumstances and lifestyle enabled ex-offenders to adapt to their worker roles. The above is of significance in that it highlights that occupational therapists and other professionals providing vocational rehabilitation services should focus on programmes that will change the offender`s internal motivation within prison and upon release from prison. These programmes should focus on community reintegration by decreasing the stigma related to being an ex-offender. The programmes should also be viewed as a form of supported employment whereby the offender is prepared or trained for a specific job while in prison and is supported in a job for a period of time after they have been released. The external strategies were seen as support from the individual`s community, family and colleagues (if employed). Occupational therapist as well as other professionals working in prisons should also strongly focus on programmes that facilitate life skills training such as conflict management.

Limitations of the Study

One major limitation that was identified in this study was the inability to generalise the findings of this study to the larger population due to the inherent nature of qualitative research and the limited number of study participants. Another limitation was the fact that only male participants participated in the study. Further research should be conducted with female participants in order to address these limitations.

Conclusion

In summary the study highlighted the intrinsic adaptation processes such as having a positive mind-set: ready for change, change in self-concept: taking responsibility for one's own life and spirituality. Extrinsic processes such as assistance in transitioning back into the community and gaining trust/ proving yourself to potential employers and the community were discussed. The findings of the study suggest that occupational therapy practitioners as well as correctional service personnel should utilise vocational rehabilitation programmes that enhance the ex-offender's ability to find employment once they have been released from prison. Practitioners should be aware of both the internal and external adaptation strategies when planning vocational rehabilitation and community reintegration strategies.

Acknowledgement

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