

# Inmates' and Warders' Perception of Prison Reforms in Kenya: A Case of Eldoret Gk Prison, in Eldoret, Kenya

Rita Abuyeka Owila  
Moi University, Department of Educational Psychology  
Email: [abuyekarita@gmail.com](mailto:abuyekarita@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Prison reforms in Kenyan prisons were introduced to address human rights issues in prisons and to turn Kenyan Prisons from punishment, torment and humiliation institutions to correctional and rehabilitation facilities. Prison reforms in Kenya started in the year 2003. This study sought to investigate the perception of inmates and warders on prison reforms at Eldoret GK prison, Kenya. The study intended to find out the perception of prison warders because they are the policy implementers on the ground. It was the author's observation that no one had attempted to find out how these two parties perceive the reforms and yet the success of these reforms depends on their perception. The study was based on Carl Rogers Self Theory (2000). The study adopted a quantitative method with Survey and causal comparative research designs. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 310 participants for the study. Data was collected by use of biographical form and questionnaires. Data was analyzed by both descriptive and inferential statistics by use of SPSS computer programme, Version 15.0. The study found that the inmates generally had a positive perception of prison reforms. Compared to the inmates, warders had a more positive perception of prison reforms. The study recommends that more is done on the reforms that target the inmates so as to improve the inmates' overall perception of the prison reforms.

**Keywords:** Inmates, Warders, Perception, Prison Reforms.

## INTRODUCTION

In Kenya, the prison reforms which started in 2003 saw concrete actions taken to remedy the conditions. New uniforms, mattresses and blankets, television sets and buses were bought to give inmates some comfort. The inmates were allowed for the first time to wear underwear and shoes, their diet was also improved by incorporation of sugar and rice, a special diet for the HIV positive inmates was also introduced. Female prisoners were provided with sanitary towels. The Kenya Prisons Service Strategic Plan 2005 - 2009, aims at turning prisons into proper correctional facilities with human considerations rather than places of torture and punishment (Njuguna et al, 2007).

The reforms aimed at improving the deplorable living conditions which include improved sanitation in living quarters, proper dressing for inmates, recreational activities for inmates such as beauty contest, cultural activities, guidance and counselling of staff and offenders, training staff on human rights issues, availability of appropriate programmes to meet the needs of prisoners, universally accepted standards of care and services, fair and just treatment of prisoners, access to rules and regulations governing their conduct, compatibility with other offenders, accessibility to their families and outside community, decongestion of prisons through revival of non-custodial means for non-serious offenders and inter prison transfers (Kenya Prison Service Charter, 2005-2009).

For reasons of health and self-respect prisoners must have clean and adequate clothing. Before the reforms, there were no sweaters or sandals for inmates during the cold season, with reforms came sacks of old police sweaters, socks and returned uniforms of retired or resigned officers, which are given to inmates serving long sentences (Ayodo, 2009). The rainy season was a nightmare for inmates. With reforms, the cell roofs were repaired. All roofs used to leak and inmates were rained on as part of punishment (Gitonga, 2008).

Amnesty international 2000 report on Kenyan deaths due to torture and cruel inhuman and degrading conditions indicated that there were as many as 50,000 people in Kenyan prisons, which were at the time designed for no more than 15,000. The report further indicated that an estimated 90 people were dying in prison each month as a result of harsh sanitary conditions, poor nutrition and health care, torture related injuries and communicable diseases such as cholera and HIV / AIDS. There were also frequent media

reports of inadequate clothing and shortages of bedding. The quality of food in Kenya prisons was extremely poor and the portions small. Lengthy water shortages were regularly reported. In these conditions, typhoid, tuberculosis, HIV / AIDS and other infectious diseases spread easily, the Amnesty report noted. In the case of female prisoners, conditions had been worsened by limited cell space, as the prisons set aside for women were strained beyond limits. (IRIN, posted: 2003, February 28).

The Kenya Prisons Service Strategic Plan 2005-2009 aimed at expanding medical facilities within the prison to hospital status, under the management of Prison's Director of Medical Services. It stated that additional doctors and other medical support staff were needed in the correctional facilities to deal with various health problems affecting inmates. Professionals such as psychologists, psychiatrists and criminologists would be

employed in prisons. The inmates would access VCT services within prisons.

The basic diet for the inmates was improved both in quality and quantity. Improved nutrition saw the introduction of sugar, rice and fruits in their diet, a departure from what Phombeah (2003) reported as: - breakfast being a mixture of boiled water and maize flour Preparations also receive special training in food hygiene. Prisoners who require specialized health care, such as dentistry are provided with such health care (Kenya Prisons Service 2008). Inmates can also undergo circumcision. Seventy five inmates at Naivasha prison underwent circumcision, a free operation organized by mission hospital in August 2009. In June, 55 others had undergone the operation. Before reforms it never happened (Akinyi, 2009).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out at Eldoret, GK prison. The prison was ideal for the study because it hosts both male and female inmates thus views from both sexes were gathered. The study employed a quantitative research method where survey and causal comparative (*Ex post facto*) design methods were used. The research population for this study comprised all inmates and warders at the Eldoret G.K Prison. The population comprised of 1,509 inmates of which 1,327 were male and 182 female. Of this number, the potential participants were stratified according to gender and whether they were in prison before and after prison reforms were initiated. Simple random sampling was done from each stratum according to their proportion in the population. A sample of 250 inmates was selected 220 being males and 30 females. In addition, 60 warders were randomly selected to participate in the study (30 males and 30 females) because they are the implementers on the ground. The research instruments used were a biographical form and a questionnaire. In this study, both descriptive (means and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (t-test and Pearson product moment correlation) were used in data analyses.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Perception of Inmates on Prison Reforms

The study aimed at establishing the perception of inmates and Warders on prison reforms. To answer this, the respondents were asked to respond to the items in the questionnaire; the responses were coded and the results presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Perception of Inmates on Prison Reforms**

Category	Perception			
	N	Range	Means	S.D
Inmates	250	80	54.84	18.5

The results of the descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicate that the mean of the responses on the perception of inmates on prison reforms was 54.84. The maximum score was 100 and the minimum score, 20. Therefore the range, that is, the difference between the highest score and lowest possible score was 80. The standard deviation was 18.5. From these results it was concluded that overall inmates had a positive perception of prison reforms. They felt that the reforms were generally good. This positive general perception is attributed to the fact that the prisoners feel that the general living conditions in the cells is somewhat similar to the living conditions outside the cells. For instance, in the cells the study has established that the prisoners have access to quality food, clean drinking water, better clothing and access to forms of leisure such as access to television, access to library and taking part in sports. These conditions are similar to those outside the cells (normal public life). When the basic living conditions in the cells are similar to those enjoyed by the public, the inmates are more likely to perceive the prison reforms positively. This agrees with the similarity attraction effect propounded by Byrne (1997). According to Byrne, the similarity attraction effect is a feeling in which feelings similar to another person's increases liking for that person, or the situation in which that person is. In this case, the inmates compare themselves with the other members of the community and if the conditions in the cells are similar to those enjoyed by other members of the community, then the reforms behind the similarity of living conditions will generally be positively perceived. The theories of similarity and attraction have complex effects on attitudes (Byrne, 1997). Thus prisoners' sense of feeling that prison conditions were comparable to home environment could have prompted them to have positive perception of prison which are in place in the country.

The general positive perception of prison reforms by inmates may have also been influenced by the global general trend to shift from a punitive and retributive penal system, to a reformatory and rehabilitative system where the welfare of inmates is given pride of place. Thus a major issue that affects the offenders' welfare is the respect for the rights of inmates despite their incarceration (Ikuteyijo & Agunblade, 2008). Moreover, the advocates of inmates' rights are of the opinion that inmates are always deprived of very basic rights (King, 2001). When these basic rights are provided for through provision reforms, then the general perception of these prison reforms by the inmates will be positive.

### Perception of Waders and Inmates on Prison Reforms

This objective was based on the null hypothesis that: There is no significant difference between inmates' and warders' perception of prison reforms. To test this hypothesis, the respondents (inmates and warders) were asked to respond to the items in the questionnaire measuring their perception of prison reforms. Their mean scores are presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 1: Inmates and Warders' Perception of Prison Reforms**

Status	N	Perception	
		Mean	SD
SD Inmates	250	54.8	18.5
Warders	60	80.5	13.0
Total	310	67.7	15.8

To test whether the two mean scores were significantly different, a t-test for independent samples was conducted. The result of the analysis showed that the mean scores obtained by inmates and warders were significantly different,  $t(308) = -10.14$ ,  $p < .05$ . It was then concluded that warders had a more positive perception of prison reforms than inmates.

### Comparison of Inmates' and Prison Warders' Perception of Prison Reforms

A comparison of inmates' and prison warders' perception of prison reforms revealed that the warders had a more positive perception (Mean = 80.5) as compared to inmates (Mean = 54.8). This more positive perception of prison reforms by warders could probably be attributed to the Kenyan government's trend to introduce specialists like psychologists, social workers and medical doctors as prison officers (Thomas, 1972; Hill, 1988; O'Brien, 1998). This trend is a significant symbolic and practical step underscoring the point that inmates are human beings in contrast to the policy of identifying inmates by the numbers (King, 2001). Consequently, the role of prison officers has changed from a guard to being a reformer and a change agent. The prison authorities have consequently changed their recruitment policies as the right people are employed to do the job. This trend in recruitment of prison warders coupled with their training in human rights issues could have influenced the more positive perception of prison reforms by warders compared to inmates.

The recruitment policies thus directly benefit the warders more than inmates, hence the perception trend reported in the findings attributed to the provision of essentials such as toiletries, sanitary towels, beauty contest, grooming among others. In addition, children were allowed to visit their mothers in prison.

### CONCLUSION

The paper gained an understanding on the perception of inmates on prison reforms. The study has established that the general perception of prison reforms by inmates is positive. This positive perception is influenced by the inmates' comparison of the living conditions in prison with those outside prison. The similarity of conditions is informed by the notions that people (inmates) feel more favourable towards similar others (those outside prison). This similarity attempts to change the prison reform attitudes from negative to more positive.

The study also concludes that the prison warders had a more positive perception of prison reforms compared to the inmates. This trend has been influenced by the government policy to introduce specialists like psychologists, social workers and medical doctors as prison officers. Besides, the prison officers were involved in the design and implementation of the prison reforms, hence their favourable perception of the reforms. Consequently, the role of prison officers has changed from being a guard to being a reformer and a change agent. To this extent, the prison warders had a more positive or favourable perception of prison reforms than the inmates.

### RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that workers should be encouraged to use their positive attitude towards prison reforms to boost morale of inmates.

Further studies may also be conducted on the perception of reforms that touch on warder's scheme of service.

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