

Roles, Opportunities, and Challenges of Social Workers in Three Selected Correction Settings of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia

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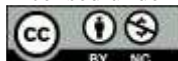
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Abstract: The involvement of social workers in the criminal justice system in general and correction setting in particular is one of the pressing demands of the time. At the heart of rehabilitation, social workers are the vanguards who provide sustainable psychosocial support for the individuals in need. With this in mind, this study explored the roles, opportunities, and challenges of social workers in three selected correction settings of the Oromia region. Qualitative research approach with case study design was employed to answer the research questions. Accordingly, 12 key informant interviews, 10 in-depth interviews, observation and document review were utilized to collect data. Purposive sampling technique was used to select participants. Thematic analysis was made to extract meanings out of the data. The result showed that social workers were playing tremendous roles in the areas of counselling, linking clients with resources and mediating conflicts. The research highlighted increasing demand for social work interventions, changing narratives of correction philosophy, and the availability of NGOs supporting social work initiatives as the opportunities for correction social workers. While playing these roles, social workers encountered numerous challenges in relation to misunderstood role of correction social worker, unsafe workplace, lack of interest to work in the correction settings, financial constraints, and emerging challenges. The findings are very encouraging and inspiring for researchers who would like to carry out further research in the criminal justice in general, and correction settings, in particular. It is implied that strengthening social work practice in the correction facility is very pivotal.

Keywords: Challenges; Correction settings; Opportunities; Roles; Social workers

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1. Introduction

Crime is one of a rampant social pathology that has been increasing dramatically and affecting a number of people in many different ways. More than 10.35 million people are incarcerated worldwide (World Prison Brief [WPB], 2019).

In Ethiopia, prior to the 20th century, it was difficult to find out evidence as to how and when the correction system was introduced. Andargatchew (2004) indicated that the first real prison was built in Addis Ababa around 1924. It was popularly known as ‘alem-bekagn’, literally meaning —the end of the world or —I have enough of the world. It is a sort of maximum-security section of the prison where prisoners of high risk are detained. After 1925, the numbers of prisoners and prisons in Ethiopia have shown dramatic increase. Regarding Oromia Regional State, Tadesse (2011) infers that there is no separate document showing the emergence, development, condition and number of prisons.

In the early days, torture and executions were the order of the day and prisons were not characterized as correction. Harsh, fast and severe punishments were the dominant punishment philosophy of those days (Andargatchew, 2004). Despite the failures and abuses of the past, a revitalized concept of rehabilitation represents a creative opening in the repetitive mechanisms of a merely punitive system. According to DuBois and Miley (2019), the rehabilitation of criminal prisoners offers the criminal justice system a unique avenue of improvement.

Roy (2018) found that the most publicly visible form of punishment in the modern era is the prison and the new goal of prison punishments is to offer criminals a chance to be rehabilitated. Van Voorhis and Salisbury (2016) depicted that the definition of rehabilitation will underpin the understanding of the role of social work in relation to rehabilitation. Since then social work has been occupying an important position in the total process of rehabilitation which includes assisting people who have violated the law, to be reformed and rehabilitated (Shakil, 2015).

Nowadays, social work practice carries out direct practice tasks, including intake, engagement, psychosocial assessment, and counselling in collaboration with psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychiatric nurses (Gibelman, 1995). However, in Ethiopia, very little attention is given to social and psychological treatment of prisoners (Andargatchew, 2004).

Correction social workers are needed to provide services to inmates, develop and evaluate new interventions, and collaborate with criminal justice and other community systems to create policies and programs that maximize the chances that individuals involved in the criminal justice system can live successfully in the community. However, relatively few professional social workers are working in this field of practice. The 2007 National Association of Social Work (NASW) membership workforce survey found that of the 3,653 social worker respondents, only 1% identified criminal justice as their primary area of practice (Whitaker and Arrington, 2008). This lack of social work involvement with criminal justice is concerning, particularly given that the incarcerated population continues to grow in the United States (Reamer, 2004; Trusts, 2009).

Recent changes suggest that social work is beginning modestly to refocus attention on criminal justice. Evidence showed that there are several new texts in social work and criminal justice (Maschi, Bradley and Ward, 2009). The growth of forensic social work, the formation of the National Association of Forensic Social Workers and the establishment of a new NASW practice section on social work and the courts are the indicators of how the attention is shifted (Assembly, 2008). However, it is unclear whether social work education is making a similar shift in attention.

Gradually, although social work has grown in the field of corrections, many social workers experienced difficulties in performing the social work roles to their full of potential. A significant obstacle to carrying out a social work function was that some social workers were employed with such titles as “classification officer, institutional parole officer, treatment worker, diagnostic clinic worker, or supervisor of cottage life” (Studd, 1959: 11-12) rather than social worker.

Toi and Mogro-Wilson (2015) reviewed the relevant literature on social work and paid special attention to incarcerated people with mental illness and/or substance use disorders. According to the review, there are many core professional roles played by social workers. However, very little is

known about what social workers have reported; especially when working with inmates with mental illness and/or substance use disorders.

Bereda (2017) found that the challenges faced by the social workers at the different agencies within the criminal justice system are limited trained manpower, limited resources, lack of standard manuals, failure to follow guidelines and procedures, low salary rate and unfriendly institutional structure. Lack of coordination among different institutions is also another challenge overshadowed on social work practice in correctional administration. This lack of coordination not only affected law enforcement, prosecution, court and correction but also denied a social worker to discharge his/her responsibilities.

In general, the purpose of social work is: enhancing problem solving and coping capacities of people, linking people with the systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities, promoting the effective and humane operation of these systems, and contributing to the development and improvement of social policy (Higham, 2006). However, these purposes have never been understood in different social work practice settings. The case in the correctional setting is quite different and prisons are complicated and challenging environments for social workers (Roy, 2018).

In spite of the long history between social work and corrections, limited literature is available about the more recent delivery of social work services in the field of corrections (Brownell and Roberts, 2002). Moreover, though the application of social work in the correction settings is an important area of practice, except few of aforementioned studies, there is a shortage of social work research on the roles, opportunities and challenges of social workers in the context of correction. Moreover, though professional social workers have a strong commitment of working for social justice, academic studies conducted to inform social work practices in the criminal justice systems including correction settings is scant, and there is a limited knowledge on what roles social workers play, opportunities they have and challenges they encounter in the correction settings of the study area. Thus, the main objective of this study was to explore the roles, opportunities and challenges of social workers in three selected correction settings of Oromia Regional State, Ethiopia. Specifically, it aimed to identify the role of correction social workers, explore the opportunities of correction social workers, and investigate the major challenges of correction social workers.

Theoretical framework

The strength perspective is intimately interconnected with the examined topic roles, possibilities, and difficulties of social workers in correction settings since it is built on five notable philosophical assumptions. First, every person, group, family, and community is thought to have strengths and resources. The strength perspective is a positive attribute approach that looks at individuals, families, and communities to their abilities, talents, skills, prospects, values, and aspirations, rather than the pathologies connected with their existing circumstances (Saleebey, 1996).

Second while disease, trauma, abuse, and a variety of life crises can be painful, depressing, and exhausting, they can also provide opportunities for growth and challenge. People are the experts in their own life ups and downs, and they have the potential to recreate their reality based on their strengths, even in the face of or in response to problems, according to the strengths perspective, which reflects a postmodern/constructivist worldview (Gray, 2011; Saleebey, 1996; Saleebey, 2008). Third, no one knows what the maximum capacity for growth and change is. It is also assumed that the theory helps to reduce any assumptions about a client's ability to learn, evolve, and make desired adjustments, while also taking into account any aspirations and dreams the client may have.

Fourth, teamwork will benefit clients the most. One of the main concepts that social workers committed to was the importance of human interactions and the creation of a collaborative atmosphere. So they can build positive relationships with convicts, correctional staff, and the general public. Fifth, there are abundant resources in every environment. As a result, correctional facilities have a surplus of resources that have never been used (Saleebey, 2008). Social workers can effectively fulfill their responsibilities by using strength perspective adjustment to transform

stumbling blocks into stepping stones and cultivate chances for personal and professional development.

2. Research Methods

2.1. Design

The design of this study was case study. It allowed the researchers to gather extremely rich, detailed, and in-depth information about social work practice in correctional settings (Berg, 2001). Since the unit of analysis of this research was social workers role and the case unit of this case was correction setting, multiple case study designs were appropriated. Multiple case study designs were used to collect data from each correction setting and identified the similarities as well as the differences among social workers role, opportunities and challenges across the selected correction settings of Oromia regional state.

2.2. Study Setting

This study was conducted in West Arsi (Shashamene), East Shewa (Adama), and Jimma zone correction centers. These centers were selected because of the effort they made to enhance the social work practice in their correction centers. West Arsi (Shashemene) zone correction center was established in late 2007 G.C. It has been rehabilitating 2504 inmates. East shewa zone correction center was opened in the late 1995 G. C. The center has been rehabilitating 2700 inmates. Jimma zone correction center was established in the 1902 G.C. 2400 inmates have been rehabilitating in the center.

2.3. Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Key informant interview, in depth interview and document review were used as methods of data collection. As an instrument of data collection, the interview guide was prepared for both key informants and in-depth interview participants. The interview guide was prepared in English language and translated into Amharic and Afan Oromo to get the participants idea and opinion accurately about the issue of the investigation.

2.3.1. Key informant interview

In order to gather pertinent information about the role, opportunities, and challenges of correction social workers, key informant interviews were used. They were held with individuals whose position allows them know more about the issue under investigation. These individuals were 3 correction officials, 6 police officers and 3 legal experts. By asking relevant questions which yield valid and reliable information from resourceful individuals the researchers gathered detailed qualitative data from the participants.

2.3.2. In-depth interview

In depth interviews were employed with social workers and inmates in order to collect rich data on the role, opportunities and challenges of correction social workers. In-depth interviews permit the collection of intensive qualitative data from few participants. It also helps for the in-depth investigations of subjective perceptions, beliefs, opinions, and experiences which are relevant to a particular research topic. Accordingly, 4 social workers and 6 inmates were participated in the in depth interview.

2.3.3. Document review

Since document review is a way of collecting data by reviewing existing documents, pertinent published and unpublished materials that are related with the issues are thoroughly and systematically reviewed. Documents related to the correction social worker's role, opportunities and challenges such as reports, brochures, articles, books and minutes were used to support the findings of the study.

These documents are internal to a program and the organization which (the social work services and correction center), or may be external (the stakeholders or individuals who are closely working with correction centers).

2.4. Sampling and Sample Size

The target population of this study was social workers who were working in the correctional settings, and inmates who were under custody in the selected correctional institutions. In order to enrich the data higher prison officials and experts participated as key informants. Purposive sampling technique was employed to get the appropriate respondents. By using such technique, participants and sites were selected (Creswell, 2009). Since this research was qualitative in its nature, pertinent data was collected using qualitative data collection methods until the data reached saturation level. Totally, 22 individuals participated (10 were in depth interview participants and the rest were key informants).

2.5. Procedures of Data Analysis

Note taking and audio recording techniques were used to gather data from key informants and in-depth interview participants. The data collected through audio recording was transcribed to written notes and the data collected via not taking was also arranged to manageable notes. In order to extract the findings from the data, we worked on discovering the patterns, themes and categories or the central idea in the data. The textual materials were read repeatedly before moving to the categorical aggregation process. Code was developed to identify each key informant's and in-depth interview participant's idea. On the basis of similarity of ideas and in light of the objectives and research question, each data from key informants, in depth interview participants, and document review was classified into different general categories. Then, themes such as the role of correction social workers, the opportunities of correction social workers and the challenges of correction social workers were generated from the data. These themes are selected because they fit to the objectives and research questions.

2.6. Ethical Consideration

This study was conducted under strict guidelines of research ethics. The guideline covers four main procedures which guided the entire process of the research. These procedures were informed consent, minimizing threat of harm to the participants, fair selection of participants, and assuring confidentiality. To this end, we obtained ethical clearance from the University Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. After gaining a letter of cooperation from the university, we went to the participants in order to get their consent. After having obtained consent, we collected data from the participants who understood the purpose and nature of the research. The researchers assessed the harms, risks and benefits of the research and tried to minimize any physical, psychological, social, economic, legal, and dignitary harm to the participants. Selection of participants was also another ethical issue which required the careful attention. Since the sampling technique was purposive, those individuals who met the selection criteria were included on the basis of their eligibility. In order to assure the confidentiality, pseudo names were given to the participants. By no means, the clandestine of the participants would be disclosed to the third party. From the very beginning to the end, participants' identity had never been disclosed to unnecessary purposes.

2.7. Quality Assurance

In order to assure the trustworthiness of this study, different quality assurance techniques were used. Among these, member checking was the one and the most critical technique for establishing credibility. It involved taking data, analysis, interpretation and conclusions back to participants in the correction settings so that anyone can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account. The second technique was peer review or debriefing. Peers, one from sociology and one from anthropology departments, reviewed the draft research to provide an external check of the research process. They

provided critical comments on the objectives and the finding part; specifically on the role of correction social workers. The last quality assurance technique was triangulation, and we triangulated all data collected from multiple sources by using multiple case study methods.

3. Results and Discussions

In this section, the role, the opportunities and the challenge of correction social worker are thoroughly analysed and discussed.

3.1. The Role of Correction Social Workers

In the correction centers where this research was carried out, counsellor, linkage/referral, enabler and mediator roles are usually played by the social workers.

3.1.1. Role of the counsellor

Evidence obtained from the key informants showed that social workers play counsellors' role while working in the correctional settings. However, the way counselling service has been provided differs from one correction to the other. Individual as well as group counselling were there for inmates as per the intensity of the problem.

According to one of the in-depth interview participants from Jimma Zone Correction centre, "social work services are provided and limited to counselling, which was permitted by the region's government" (*KICO1*).

An in-depth interview participant from the Jimma Zone correction center testified the support of social workers as follows:

When we become anxious about our sentence, social workers frequently reassure us that tomorrow will be a new day. They are always willing to assist any convict. If they are able to provide a remedy, they do so, and if it is beyond their capabilities, they report to the concerned higher official (*IIPIN3*).

The above contradictory views infer the absence of common understanding about counseling service provided by social workers. Those who had got the chance testify the effectiveness of the counseling service and the rest considered it dysfunctional.

In the West Arsi Zone correction centre, the previous counselling service was reported to have been better than the current. One of the key informants substantiated this claim by saying: "Counselling services are not provided now like in the past. In those days, no inmate would get admitted without getting proper counselling" (*KIPO6*).

As counsellors, social workers counsel inmates individually as well as in small groups. The size of the groups and other important functions were stipulated by the rule. An in-depth interview participant, a social worker from Jimma zone correction centre, explained the overall aspects of the rule as:

The guideline stipulated that a single social worker shall provide group counselling once or twice a week and proceed until three weeks. The service delivered weekly for about 50 minutes to 1 hour and tried to observe whether the intended behavioural change was achieved or not. It proceeded up to three months by looking into how individuals get behavioural change on a particular problem. A social worker could provide three to four group counselling services quarterly. Upon the completion of the first group's counselling, another team would be created for the second- round counselling (*IIPSW2*).

A social worker who was an in-depth interview participant from Jimma zone correction center added that 10 to 12 inmates were teamed up for group counselling on the basis of the type of crime they committed, the age groups they belong to, and their religious affiliations. Organizing inmates into groups and providing appropriate counselling is an expected role from a social worker. The formula of bringing together inmates who share similar backgrounds is a wonderful strategy designed to help inmates.

In the West Arsi (Shashemene) zone correction center, there was a 1 to 10 teaming up system. Through these networks, inmates would get group counselling service. Those individuals who had the same problems and belong to the same age group were brought together for group counselling.

As a correction social worker, providing individual counselling is distinguished as the preeminent social work service. Individual counselling starts upon the arrival of a convicted individual. There was an intake division, which directly referred the convicted individual to a social worker or counsellor. After an inmate got proper counselling, s/he would join with other inmates. In East Shewa correction centre, individual counselling would be provided for an inmate on the basis of the depth and breadth of his/her problem. On individual counselling, Jimma zone correction centre planned to counsel 769 inmates per year, but due to internal and external challenges only 70% of the plan was executed. This time was allotted by the commission, as to how much time was needed for a single individual counselling.

The evidence we found fairly well with Shakil's (2015) finding which stated that recently, social workers have expanded their roles to provide counselling and other services for prison inmates. Our finding is also consistent with (World Prison Brief, 2017) code of ethics, social work services encompass all aspects of social work practice, including psychotherapy; individual, family, or group counselling.

The findings of this research have a number of similarities with the findings by Matejkowski, Johnson, and Severson (2014) regarding the role of correction social worker. The findings of these scholars suggest that social workers actively engage in the criminal justice settings by inducting new arrivals to the prison, developing treatment and support plans for inmates, providing individual therapy and psychosocial educational support groups, and monitoring the progress and compliance of inmates in treatment.

3.1.2. Linkage/referral role

Among the different roles played by a correction social worker, linkage or referral is the one which is devoted to address the pressing need of the clients. Social workers link inmates to the needed services. A correction official from East Shewa zone clearly stated how social workers play a referral role: "When inmates need services the social workers directly link them to the needed services" (KICO2). An in-depth interview participant, a social worker from West Arsi zone correction centre, explained how social workers link inmates to health care services:

If an inmate needs medical service and couldn't access because of bottlenecks, or if s/he doesn't have money to buy medicine, we intervene to solve these instant needs. If an inmate doesn't get medicine and the office sends him/her with a prescription, we will directly intervene to help him/her to easily access the needed services (IIPSW3).

An official who was a key informant from Jimma zone correction centre hoped that the linkage role played by social workers will bear better fruit in the near future. He said: "If things go alright, I'm sure these social workers can achieve remarkable success. I understood how they could reduce medical costs" (KICO1).

An inmate who provided information from East Shewa zone correction centre witnessed how social workers play the linkage/referral role: "Most of the time, social workers facilitate medical services. If the cost of medication is not affordable, it will be covered by the correction center through social workers facilitation" (IIPIN6).

An exemplary linkage role was played by West Arsi zone correction centre social worker. It was explained by a social worker who participated in an in-depth interview;

We are trying to fulfill the psychosocial needs of prisoners. First of all, we prepare proposals to find supporting agencies. Exceedingly, we are doing multiple works on women and children. There were children of incarcerated mothers who have spent their time in prisons without any access to education. However, through relentless efforts, they got a chance to learn going outside of the prison centre. After having a thorough discussion with Catholic Church, I was able to send 8 children to private schools (IIPSW3).

For those inmates who are interested in using bank service, East Shewa correction centre social workers play a vital role in linking clients with the needed service. KIPO2 who was one of the key informants of this study from this centre indicated that all banks in Ethiopia are closely working with

correction settings currently. Every Friday, bankers come to correction centres to provide bank services for inmates. They save and withdraw money. These and other services have been facilitated by social workers. The linkage/referral role played in the studied correction centers showed a remarkable beginning. However, it is required that the services be expanded to other sectors in order to make inmates beneficiaries of the overall correction social work services.

Our finding well substantiated by DuBois and Miley (2019) correctional social work services includes linkage between incarcerated individuals and their community ties. This kind of service may be provided for the benefit of the prisoners themselves or their families.

3.1.3. Enabler role

A social worker together with correction staff conducts a need assessment to team up inmates on the basis of their work inclination. Social workers conduct need assessments and identify who needs what. If the social worker properly plays his role of organizer, he can create a vibrant team. This helps an inmate to earn money, feel free, share experiences and learn different skills. All key informants, officials, and police officers from three correction centers unanimously said they were organizing inmates to be productive. They mentioned that they organize inmates to engage in different income generating activities. For instance, they have an industry zone in which inmates produce different sculptures like bed, buffet and dining tables” (KICO1, KICO2, KICO3, KIPO1, KIPO3, KIPO4 and KIPO5). A key informant police officer from Jimma zone correction centre added, “There are inmates who engage in metal work, costume design, tea and coffee services, retails, and recreation” (KIPO3).

The organization of inmates into different working groups has different functions: first, it saves them from depression; and second, it helps them to generate income. According to KICO3, one of the key informants, a commander from East Shewa zone correction centre, inmates having a heavy verdict had already been teamed up and got the chance to support their families and even saved money and bought houses and cars. Along with the change of the punishment philosophy, correction centers are the places where inmates are rehabilitated. As part of the rehabilitation process, social workers play a decisive role by creating different teams. Through these organized teams, inmates work together and earn money to support themselves and their families.

Our study provides considerable insights into social worker’s enabler role. Toi and Mogro-Wilson (2015) identified the core social work enabler roles as: assessment, advocacy, program development/evaluation, follow-up, education and skills training, screening, crisis intervention, and assisting families of inmates.

3.1.4. Mediator role

Social workers usually play a mediator role. As mediators, they try to solve conflict or misunderstanding between two parties. Sometimes, there are conflicts between inmates, police and inmates, and officials and police. An in-depth interview participant social worker from Jimma zone correction centre mentioned how he plays a mediator role; “When inmates and police officers quarrel, we mediate them. We try to change inmates’ attitude towards police. Some inmates think that it is the police who detain them. This is not true; it is the law that detains a criminal, not a police officer” (IIPSW2).”

By a mediator role played by social workers, the interaction between police and inmates has positively changed. IIPIN5 one of the in-depth interview participants, an inmate from East Shewa zone correction centre attested that the early relation between police and inmates was like ‘a cat chasing rat’. Now, this is absolutely changed and it is only to count inmates that a police officer enters into the cells.

This finding confirmed with (WPB, 2017) code of ethics, social workers have the duty and responsibility to advocate for many forms of healthy conflict resolution such as mediation to fulfil the ethical duty of service provision to clients and to recognize the importance of human relationships.

3.2. Opportunities for Correction Social Workers

The presence of social workers in the correction settings would have a great opportunity for the correction population. Social workers are there not only to help inmates but also the staff too. Moreover, expansion of social work education and research in the country can be an opportunity for the consolidation of correctional social work services. The major opportunities for correctional social work practice include demands for social workers intervention, changing narratives of correction philosophy, and availability of NGOs supporting social work practices.

3.2.1. Demand for social workers interventions

From time to time the importance of social work has been increasing. Among different sectors, the criminal justice system is the one that requires the involvement of social workers. According to one of the in-depth interview participants, a social worker from West Arsi zone correction centre, “nowadays, correction is going to be the potential area for social work intervention” (IIPSW3).

Another participant, a social worker from East Shewa zone correction centre said, “social work will have a bright future, and the upcoming years are the years of social work, because social work always struggles to promote human rights and social justice” (IIPSW4).

The above quotes indicate how the demand for social work is increasing ever than before. And also, social work has a chance to expand throughout the criminal justice system and become the discipline that is devoted to promoting social justice.

The acceptance of social workers in some correction centers shows how social work will bear fruit in the near future. An inmate in-depth interview participant from Jimma Zone correction centre said, “When you feel loneliness and see yourself as useless, a social worker helps and tells you how useful you are” (IIPIN4).

According to the above quote, the way an inmate explained the social worker's status is really so encouraging that it gives strength for further commitment. The complication of problems within correction and the expansion of crimes outside correction make social workers vital professionals in the criminal justice arena. A key informant commander from West Arsi concluded that “the expanding problems within and outside prison needs the attention of government, policy makers and social workers” (KICO3). This suggests the attention needed to minimize crime and modify the rehabilitation practice. Above all, social workers together with the concerned bodies can bring change if they work in line with the demand of their intervention.

Though it is debatable, the existence of innumerable social, economic and environmental problems within correction centers could be explained as opportunities by the participants of the study. Some individuals may ask how we could take a problem as an opportunity. In fact, what would social workers do there if there were a just way of treatment, and equal access to services without problems? From its onset to advancement, social work remains as a supportive profession. So, social workers are there to help individuals in need. Mostly, social workers are the advocates of the vulnerable, disadvantaged, unprivileged, victims, marginalized and abandoned individuals and groups. Inmates belong to the neglected part of the society, thus they need unremitting support from the social workers.

Our finding is consistent with that of Muraskin (2005) which suggested that effective correction social workers role influences the functioning of the society and the smooth operation of the criminal justice system. Through the process of assessment, guidance, and effective intervention and treatment of offender's correction, social workers help clients to function well in prison and balance their mental state and interpersonal relationship. Any individual improvement in social-cognitive capacity, thinking, motivation, emotions and behaviour will benefit the family, community and society at large. This in return opens up various opportunities and acceptance for correction social workers.

3.2.2. Changing narratives of correction philosophy

Early prison philosophy directly related to retributions. Whatever crime an individual committed, the punishment was harsh and severe. Regarding this, an inmate who was a participant of the study from Jimma zone correction centre said, “Previously there was assault and shackles; now it has totally changed. There was no social work service before. It was a military house and everything was militarized” (IIPIN3).

...An in-depth interview participant inmate from West Arsi zone correction centre remembered the physical punishment he had seen and known;

The major problem that I had seen in this correction center was the inmate's assault. At the time of punishment, water was splashed over their body and coldly flogged. This was the existing fact. I myself faced the same outrage (IIPIN1).

Similarly, an inmate from East Shewa zone correction centre stated;

I have been here for 2 years. I came here at the time of the transition. Previously there was a rod and inmates were flogged. Now there is neither rod nor flog. The role of police is completely transformed. Police have been doing nothing other than counting inmates (IIPIN5).

In-depth interview participant inmate from Jimma zone correction centre explained how corporal punishment was abolished, “four years ago this heinous corporal punishment was solved. The newly assigned commander prohibited rod and gave due emphasis on law and order. Now, no one would deserve to be punished at our correction center” (IIPIN4). The name change from prison to correction shifted the mission from retribution to rehabilitation. This in turn paves the way for the implementation of social work practice in correctional settings.

Regarding opportunities of social work in the criminal justice system our finding is strongly supported by (Maschi *et al.*, 2009) finding, recent changes suggest that social work is beginning modestly to refocus attention on criminal justice. This is because of the changing of correction philosophy which has been transferred from punishment to rehabilitation. Moreover, Gibelman (1995) finding depicted that the definition of rehabilitation will underpin the understanding of the role of social work in relation to rehabilitation.

3.2.3. Availability of NGOs supporting social work practice

From the inception to the gradual development of correction social work services, NGOs have contributed a lot. A social worker from West Arsi zone correction centre elaborates the support the inmates get from NGOs saying, “By the aid of Prison Fellowship we have opened a women’s beauty salon. The salon was built and furnished by Catholic Church and all the rest of the equipment was fulfilled by Prison Fellowship” (IIPSW3).

Prison Fellowship which is a nongovernmental organization constructed rooms for social workers and legal experts at Jimma zone correction centre. A social worker from Jimma zone correction center said, “Prison fellowship is always by our side, now they are building a block that includes a separate office for social workers; in the upcoming time we will provide better psychosocial support for our clients” (IIPSW2).

IIPSW3, a social worker from West Arsi zone correction centre testified that Prison Fellowship is the only organization that provides annual training for social workers. According to this participant, Prison Fellowship organizes one workshop for social workers on the roles, responsibilities and contemporary social work issue annually. A commander from East Shewa zone correction centre said that “Justice for All is a nongovernmental organization that provides moral and material support for the center in general and training service for social workers in particular” (KICO2).

The evidence obtained from participants substantiates the work done by Prison Fellowship, Catholic Church and Justice for all for different correction centers to enhance correctional social work service. The involvement of NGOs in humanistic services adds strength for social workers to capitalize on what they have been doing. A research conducted by Higham (2006) further reinforced our finding, the participation of different stakeholders in the criminal justice system; enhance the problem solving and coping capacities of people, link people with the systems that provide them with resources,

services, and opportunities, promote the effective and humane operation of these systems, and contributing to the development and improvement of social policy.

3.3. Challenges of Correction Social Workers

The results extracted from the findings of the study indicated that correction social workers are facing different challenges. Some of these challenges are; misunderstood role of correction social worker, unsafe working place, inmates' lack of interest, staff turnover, financial constraints and emerging challenges.

3.3.1. Misunderstood the role of correction social worker

In order to provide efficient and proficient services, a social worker is expected to be competent in any practice setting s/he is working. The work done by a professional would be known by the staff as well as the client. But because of lack of knowledge about the importance of social workers role in the correction setting, it has been continuously attacked and defended. IIPSW3, a social worker who was a participant of this study from East Shewa Zone correction centre corroborated that "due to lack of awareness about the role of correction social workers some officials, staff, and inmates undermine social works' significance." As per the observation of the researchers, the witness of correction officials and the documents the social workers had, almost all of them, were para-social workers. There was only one social work graduate officer in the Jimma zone correction centre. The rest were psychologists, sociologists and even other social science field graduates. They thought that everyone could play a social worker's role. Social work as a profession demands a social worker who has the knowledge and skills of correction social work practices.

A key informant police officer from West Arsi zone correction centre showed how officials devalued correction social workers role;

In the West Arsi zone correction centre, we don't have sufficient social workers. Even the existing social worker is placed under women and children affairs. Officials and division heads perceive that there is no work under social work. I think this is the reason why correction social work practice remained less functional (KIPO6).

In fact, there is a huge knowledge gap about social work practice among some officials in the three studied correction centers. IIPSW1, an in-depth interview participant, a social worker from the Jimma zone correction centre, told us that some of the officials don't know what roles have been played by social workers. Another participant, social worker from the East Shewa zone correction centre, added: "I don't think the management knows how social work services could be delivered. If they get orders from higher officials, they will hire social workers" (IIPSW4). The problem here was that officials do not understand what social workers really do. Criminal justice is one of the intervention areas of correction social work and social workers are expected to be well equipped with the knowledge, skill and attitude to bring significant change in the correction settings.

IIPSW2, an in-depth interview participant, social worker from Jimma zone correction centre, said that the subordinate staff didn't understand what correction social works do. They consider it as insignificant and sometimes ask social workers why they are there and what tangible results they have achieved. They didn't recognize the psychosocial support provided by social workers and they usually expect a short-term outcome. Since behavioral change requires continuous efforts, the results wouldn't be observed in a short period of time.

Due to lack of knowledge about social workers role, some inmates equate social work with other vocational trainings. This fact is corroborated by an inmate from West Arsi zone correction centre who says, "there are different activities undertaken to help inmates in our correction center. These are; wood work, social work and metal work" (IIPIN2). Of course, as part of vocational training, wood work and metal work are incorporated into the rehabilitation practice. The nature of social work is completely different; it focuses on the psychosocial aspect of the rehabilitation practice. But, inmates understood social work just as wood work and metal work. There is a big difference between social

work and other vocational trainings. Thus, social workers are expected to refine the obscurity and shine their actual role.

Correction social work practice has been challenged by officials' attitude. Some officials believed that inmates are less eligible individuals. Thus, any service given to them can be performed by anyone. Andargatchew (2004) attested that authorities do not encourage the employment of professional social workers because of the prevailing philosophy of less eligibility which dictates that prisoners should be treated with the least privilege even compared to the most underprivileged law abiding citizens. This directly emanates from lack of cognizance about the significance of social work practice in correction settings.

3.3.2. Unsafe workplace

Working in a secure environment has its own advantages. It can enhance productivity; achieve goals; improve results; and maximize opportunities. As a work setting, correction could be taken as a turbulent environment. There are felons, misdemeanants and others incarcerated for the crime they committed. So, correction is perceived as a place where dangerous individuals are aggregated. This thinking by itself leads to insecurity. According to IIPSW2, one of the in-depth interview participants, a social worker from the Jimma zone correction centre, correction is a place surrounded by criminals of all types and firearms. So, how could one feel secured amid the major criminals (felons) and the weapons?

According to the social worker who participated in this study, any turmoil fuelled outside, immediately reaches the correction center; there is a venture to attack, and firing guns starts. Whatever the case may be, the police officers are devoted to saving social workers' lives. IIPSW2, an in-depth interview participant social worker testified that sometimes when there is insecurity or inmates show anomalous behavior, police officers do a lot of things to save social workers. If the problem went above the limit, social workers would be obliged to stay home until the problems are settled. KICO1, a key informant official from Jimma zone correction stated that there are places where social workers would never go because of fear of violence in their correction centre.

While working in correction centers, social workers could encounter security related challenges. Here, an in-depth interview participant social worker from Jimma zone correction centre emotionally reflected on what happened to his ex-social worker:

A social worker, whom I succeeded, was wounded by a bullet while he was working in this correction centre.' He added explanation, 'while he was working here insurrection rose up; and then, he was shot by the fired gun. After he got medical treatment, he left the centre once and for all (IIPSW2).

The above participants showed the insecurity they felt and the challenges they encountered. Both the feeling and the accident become a source of insecurity for anyone who is working in correction settings.

Correction setting is also one of the unsafe working environments for female social workers. It is perceived that being a female social worker in a correction setting is challenging. Especially, if her clients are male inmates, the likelihood of the challenge will be increased. A female social worker who was an in-depth interview participant from Jimma Zone correction centre substantiated this idea;

When I was trying to help them professionally, they were taking it the other way. They told me as they fell in love with me. This exerts much influence over my work as well as my life. The question comes from both inmates and police. Even sometimes, they fight over me. This is the major challenge that I'm still experiencing (IIPSW1).

Even though such kinds of challenges are expected, devising a mechanism that could protect female social workers from any kind of harassment is the mandate of all correction centers.

Unsafe work place is one of the challenges that social workers encounter while working in the correction setting. Roy (2018) corroborated that prisons are the challenging places for social workers. Of course, the finding confirmed that working in the corrections is very challenging for social workers in general, and female social workers, in particular. Female social workers working with male inmates

are exposed to different harassments. Nevertheless, still female social workers never refrained from providing psychosocial support for the inmates who need that.

3.3.3. Inmates' lack of interest to utilize correction social work service

All individuals are not permissive; some easily accept while the rest firmly resist. Among the different challenges that the social workers faced, unwillingness to accept counseling was the serious one. An in-depth interview participant, a social worker from Jimma Zone correction centre said: "When we call them, they ask, 'what will we get from you? What we want is vindication, but you haven't the power to vindicate us. Again, we want to shorten our term of imprisonment'" (IIPSW2). This is what they think. It is the court that would sentence and vindicate them, not the social workers.

A key informant correction administrator from the same centre expressed how the inmate's mutiny made social workers' efforts futile by saying, "there are aberrant inmates who lack interest to receive social work services (KICO1). Another official who was one of the key informants from the West Arsi zone correction centre stressed how the inmate's interest was discouraging:

Whatever it is, backing inmates to the right track is really important. During every interaction you have to tell them facts; when you try to do so, of course, some would accept and others refuse. Because there are individuals who would struggle to meet their own selfish needs (KICO3).

Two key informants; KIPO1 and KIPO2 and one in-depth interview participant IIPSW1 from East Shewa and Jimma zone correction centres respectively reflected the difficulty of bringing mutinous inmates into conformity because, they came with changed mentality and addictive behaviour. Thus, it is extremely difficult to bring them back to conformity. Of course, it is highly demanding to change abnormal minds into normal and take them back to the right track.

A key informant, a legal officer from East Shewa zone correction centre, depicted the negligence of inmates in the following way: "I know there are many stubborn individuals; whatever action you take, whatever amount of money you spend and whatever advice you give them it is difficult to change them. It is like spilling water over a stone" (KILE3).

Unwillingness or mutiny to accept social work services has played an overwhelming role on the correction social work practices. At any cost social workers are expected to change individual behavior by undertaking different intervention techniques.

3.3.4. Social workers' lack of interest

Interest to work would be affected by a number of factors. Workload, uncomfortable environment and underpayment are some of the factors. An in-depth interview participant, a social worker from West Arsi zone correction center bitterly said: "I lost interest in work, look! I'm underpaid, my university mates employed in different organizations earn better money than I do" (IIPSW3).

Another in-depth interview participant, a social worker from the Jimma zone correction centre reflected the reason for lack of interest as, "I'm working in a filthy office without inputs; unless you haven't a chance to go, how could you stay? That is the reason why I'm here" (IIPSW2). The researchers observed the discomfort of the social workers' offices in the three studied correction centers. They were neither attractive nor conducive. Furthermore, another in-depth interview participant social worker from the same center substantiated that there is a bias against civil staff which could lead to lack of interest:

There is medical insurance for the police, but a social worker doesn't have it. This is biased. If a policeman is shot or faced any accident, he would be guaranteed. However, a social worker is considered a civil servant and he isn't entitled to any privileges. Simply I can say there is nothing that attracts a social worker to do in correction (IIPSW1).

An in-depth interviewee from the Jimma zone correction centre desperately said, "Nothing attracts me to stay here. If I get a chance, I will leave as soon as possible. I'm looking for a new job" (IIPSW2). In fact, correction is not a comfortable work environment for social workers because of the underlying social, economic, environmental and political factors.

An inmate to social worker ratio was also another cause for lack of interest. A correction center rehabilitating more than 2500 inmates did have only 1 social worker. There is a workload which didn't get recognition from the government. A key informant commander from East Shewa zone correction centre said, "I don't have confidence to say the social worker is providing appropriate service which is tantamount to the number of inmates; their presence is a kind of something better than nothing" (KICO2).

Underpayment, bias against social workers, unattractive work environment and the inmate social workers ratio are some of the factors that instigate social workers to lose interest to work in the criminal justice system in general and correction setting in particular. This finding is similar with what Roy (2018) found, the case in correctional setting is quite different and prisons are complicated and challenging environments for social work practitioners.

3.3.5. Financial constraints

Budget inadequacy is one of the major challenges of correction social work practice. An in-depth interview participant, a social worker from Jimma zone correction centre, stressed on its seriousness saying, "there is no budget allocated to execute social work practice, even to print out a single page". (IIPSW2). A police officer who was a key informant of this study corroborated the above finding, and said: "there is no independent budget allocated for correction social work practice" (KIPO3).

Social workers from the three studied correction settings attested that they were suffering because of budget inadequacy. They were struggling for the allocation of an exclusive budget for correction social work practices. Till now, they didn't get any answer from the concerned bodies. Whatever the response would be, they decided to confront. The administrators also confirmed that the budget allocated for the entire correction facility didn't take into account the current market price.

It is difficult to execute any work without a budget. Budget is the life blood of any activity, thus allocating sufficient budget motivates social workers to discharge their responsibilities and contribute immensely to the amelioration of the rehabilitation practice. Similar to this, Bereda (2017) found that having limited resources in the criminal justice system is one of the factors that overshadow on the provision of correctional social work services.

3.3.6. Emerging challenge

COVID 19 is a pandemic that affected all walks of life. As part of the society, social workers were also the victims of the pandemic. It heavily hit inmates as well as social workers. One of the in-depth interview participants, an inmate from East Shewa zone correction centre elaborated this point as:

The outbreak of COVID 19 was the most challenging. At its outbreak some of the inmates tested positive, while the rest were waiting for the results of the test. It was said that those inmates tested positive should go to treatment centers, and this threatened all inmates. What made COVID 19 difficult was that it was pandemic and threatening (IIPIN6).

Another in-depth interview participant IIPIN2, inmate from West Arsi zone correction centre complemented that the inmates were under stress after the outbreak of COVID-19. Since then, life has been traumatic in the correction centre.

IIPSW2, a social worker who participated in this research from Jimma zone correction centre revealed that the group counseling was interrupted because of the pandemic. Since there were restrictions like social and physical distancing, it was impossible to hold inmates together for group counseling. Hence, their plan remained just a plan unlikely to be executed.

Despite the rapid prevalence of COVID 19, the researchers observed that COVID 19 protocol was not enforced in the observed correction centres. All inmates and almost all correction staff abandoned wearing face masks and taking all safety measures. In times of crises, social workers face a plethora of challenges. The corona virus pandemic has put social workers in challenging situations by testing the traditional social work conceptions of education, research and practice. It has undermined the importance attached to human relationships and in-person services (Udah and Francis, 2021).

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the research, the following conclusion was drawn. It is concluded that social workers are playing counsellor, referral, enabler and mediator roles. However, the social workers of the three studied zonal correction centers lag behind from playing these roles effectively.

Our work has led us to conclude that correction centers are the challenging work environments for social workers. Besides there is high turnover and even those who are working in correction centers don't have interest to stay. There was no attractive remuneration for correction social workers. The offices are shabby; the environment is turbulent; and the place given to social work is very small. Inmate's mutiny to accept social work services had been presented as one of the challenges of correction social workers. Due to lack of knowledge about social work services, blind judgment and wrong perceptions, inmates refrain from using different psychosocial supports.

The findings of this study concluded that correction social work services have also been affected by the negative attitudes of the inmates, police officers and some officials. Each of them perceives social work differently. For instance, some inmates perceive social work services as a service designed to treat only mentally challenged individuals and inferiors. Police officers perceive social work as a soft profession that stands against the tough approach used to control inmates. Besides this, officials would have positive as well as negative attitudes; those who accept it positively try to help social workers to carry out their roles effectively, while those who have negative attitudes think social work as something with impractical results.

The study has highlighted different opportunities that could help the consolidation of correction social work practices. Demands for social work intervention; changing narratives of correction philosophy; and availability of NGOs supporting social work practices have been taken as the major opportunities.

The findings suggested several courses of action in order to solve the overall challenges of correction social work practices. The results so far have been very encouraging and inspiring to carry out further research in criminal justice in general, and correctional settings, in particular. The findings of this research could eventually lead to the improvement of social work practices in correctional settings.

5. Implications of the Study

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations were forwarded in order to improve correction social work practices.

Local as well as federal government should give recognition for social work practice in general, and correction social work services, in particular. In addition, an adequate budget should be allocated in order to promote correction social work practices.

First of all, social workers should be loyal to themselves and to their profession. They have to be free from any ethical dilemma and work in accordance with the guidelines and the priority they set. In order to retain social workers, salary revision and attractive work environment that consider the capacity of the country is very essential. If the work is too much, the payment should be equivalent to it. It is really difficult to work under an uncomfortable work environment. Thus, the workplace should be rearranged; the salary should be revised; the workload must be well modified; and benefits must be fulfilled.

The universities that have been training social workers should equip their trainees with the necessary knowledge and skills that could benefit the social workers as well as the country. In order to fill the knowledge and skills gaps at the work place, the school of social work should support correction centers by providing continuous trainings. Since correction setting is one of the intervention areas of social work, the school should give special attention to any activities undertaken within correction centers.

There is no sufficient research conducted in the criminal justice system in general and correction setting in particular. This research could serve as a reference for the upcoming researchers. Even

though this research tried to explore roles, opportunities and challenges of social workers in three selected correction settings of Oromia Region, it has limited methodological and geographical coverage. Thus, this study recommends a thorough investigation of the social work practice in the criminal justice system in general and correction setting in particular.

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