

# Navigating Life after Imprisonment: The Experiences of Elderly Parolees Transitioning Back to Communities in eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality

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## Abstract

The study explored the perceptions and experiences of elderly parolees transitioning back to the community. The study sample comprised 15 elderly parolees selected through purposive sampling. In-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guides. The study was situated in Durban Community Corrections, a reintegration centre under the Durban Management Area in the KwaZulu-Natal province. The study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of elderly parolees' experiences of transitioning from prison to the community. This study reveals that even though participants experienced loss of independence, family ties and identity, chronic health problems, and discrimination, they were able to desist from criminal activities, received religious support, and obtained short-term employment opportunities. The study concludes by proffering recommendations for the Department of Correctional Services, programme developers, coordinators, planners, social workers, as well as managers of community correctional centres who are responsible for ensuring that parolees continue to receive effective services after release from a correctional centre.

**Keywords:** communities; elderly parolees; imprisonment; transitioning



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## Introduction

Studies suggest that prison structure and programmes tend to produce more favourable outcomes for younger offenders as opposed to middle-aged and elderly offenders (Grant 1999; Harrison 2006; HMIP 2004, 2008; Prison Reform Trust 2008; Trotter and Baidawi 2015). A plausible reason for this could be attributed to the use of a one-size-fits all approach to rehabilitation and a lack of attentiveness to the unique needs of elderly incarcerated offenders. Nevertheless, the Department of Correctional Services is presented with a growing population of elderly offenders. This is not surprising as it is predicted that by 2050 the general population of elderly citizens is expected to double to 2.1 billion globally, as it did in the year 2017 when the population of the people aged 60 years and older reached 962 million (Sciubba 2020). In terms of the White Paper on Corrections (2005), elderly individuals are considered a special category of offenders. Therefore, it is imperative that the helping professions understand the experiences of elderly parolees separately to those of their younger counterparts in order to facilitate positive transitioning.

Offenders released on parole experience several challenges as they attempt to reestablish post-institutional life, including struggles in housing, employment, finances, substance use, health, and family reunion as some examples (Langa and Masuku 2015). However, little is documented on elderly parolees' experiences of transitioning, which this article attempts to address.

According to Bezuidenhout and Booyens (2018, in Nduli and Mthembu 2022, 221), "South Africa in 2015, reported that there were 861 sentenced elderly offenders aged 61 years out of the total number of 161,984; of these elderly offenders, 822 were males and the remaining 39 were females." Elderly offenders released on parole comprise two subcategories before receiving parole: those incarcerated in their older years and those incarcerated when young and grew old in prison. Even though we know that the population of elderly offenders is increasing (Nduli and Mthembu 2022), the available literature on elderly parolees remains sparse. In Boston, Massachusetts, a research study conducted on offenders released from prison found that older offenders were the most materially disadvantaged and socially disconnected (Western et al. 2015). While releasing offenders is often perceived as an effortless process of resuming with life endeavours, this remains an assumption.

## Transition from Incarceration to Life Outside of Prison

In general, parolees appear to be confronted by several challenges during their transition to the community as correctional institutions are a form of social isolation. Parolees encounter transitional challenges associated with adapting to relatively new identities related to a change in status and roles which tend to vary greatly according to contexts (Noy and Taubman-Ben-Ari 2016). Re-entry into society is often challenging for elderly offenders who struggle with personal identity and meaning (Higgins and

Severson 2009). During the transitional phase, an elderly individual who experiences a feeling of hopelessness, depression, unresolved internal conflicts, and an unstable family relationship may be at risk of resorting to alcohol or substance abuse as a means of coping with the transition (Ray et al. 2009). The preconditions for successful transition from a correctional centre are to have “Ties to family, a stable residence, and a means of subsistence that allow full participation in community life and fulfilment of the socially valued roles of kin, citizen and worker” (Western et al. 2015, 22). Some of these conditions may be viewed as pivotal for elderly parolees compared to younger parolees who do not have to cope with the demands of ageing.

In Ireland, Chin and Dandurand (2012) reported that parolees and ex-offenders perceived the day of release as an unplanned event that did not represent the birth of freedom, but rather the beginning of a strained and difficult transition to life in the community due to fear of the unknown. Elderly parolees’ transition into society places restrictions on their freedom of movement as they require continued surveillance by correctional officials, which leads to isolation. This surveillance could be viewed as a barrier to the creation of social relationships, intimate relationships, and employment, which is defined as the “parole paradox” (Liem and Weggemans 2018). Furthermore, upon their release, elderly parolees have little or no income to afford private housing; thus, they face challenges in securing affordable housing which poses an additional barrier to their successful transition and reintegration into society (Baccile 2017). Elderly parolees’ return to society is also confronted by problems of adjusting to an unfamiliar environment. Often, the neighbourhoods are unsafe, and due to long-term incarceration, there is a poor relationship with the family and few financial resources available; a situation which often requires the intervention of social workers (Higgins and Severson 2009).

This research study explores the experiences of elderly parolees as they transition from prison life back into the community. This article reports on some of the findings of a larger master’s study which aimed:

1. to explore the positive and negative effects of old age on elderly parolees’ transition into society.
2. to explore the strategies elderly parolees use to adjust and assimilate into society.
3. to understand the views of elderly parolees regarding access to support structures that may sustain their economic and psychological well-being.

## Methodology

### Research Approach and Design

The study used a qualitative approach because it allowed the researchers to make sense of the participants’ subjective experiences (Funk and Kobayashi 2016). An exploratory research design was also used to understand the experiences of elderly parolees released

back into the community after incarceration. The reason for choosing an exploratory research design over investigative and descriptive design is because of the general lack of knowledge around the experiences of elderly offenders released on parole (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, and Painter 2006). There was a need to know more about elderly parolees so, based on the limited literature available, the study had to be exploratory in nature. Additionally, the exploratory research design leaves room for further research to be done, whereas other research designs are conclusive and leave no room for further questions to be raised (Salvador 2016).

### **Population and Sampling Methods**

The research population consisted of elderly parolees released from prison back into communities in eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality. The researchers utilised purposive sampling because it reduces the population to focus specifically on individuals who have the required information and experience needed to answer the research question (Davies 2007). The sample comprised 15 elderly parolees who were selected by means of purposive sampling. The following inclusion criteria was used to select the sample:

- The participant is placed under the supervision of community corrections in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality.
- The participant is on parole for more than six months.
- The participant is over the age of 60.
- The participant is still attending social work correctional programmes.

Elderly parolees were selected strictly by social workers because they were categorised as a vulnerable population according to the Older Persons Act 13 of 2006. They were contacted telephonically on behalf of the researchers. Although the social workers helped participants to complete the forms, the researchers meticulously went through the forms to confirm the participants' willingness to be part of the study. The researchers also assured the participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time during the interview. The researchers perceived data saturation between the tenth and fifteenth interviews when no new information was forthcoming (Hennink and Kaiser 2022). The researchers therefore ended at the fifteenth interview.

### **Data Management and Analysis**

Data analysis started with the transcribing process, where audio data was changed to word format. The researchers then read all the transcripts repeatedly and coded themes. After the coding process, the themes that emerged from the data were arranged according to the research questions informing the study. Qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to be immersed in the data; this is necessary because it assists the researcher in identifying the nuances that aptly clarify the essence of what is being studied. The research study used thematic content analysis as a means of analysing data.

Thematic content analysis is defined by Boyatzis (1998) as a process of encoding qualitative information.

### Limitations of the Study

This study, like many others, had limitations that could reduce the potential value of its findings. The existing studies pertaining to elderly parolees are dated and sparse, which limited the literature control of the findings. Another limitation was conducting the interviews in a venue aligned to the Department of Correctional Services which potentially could have impacted on the voluntary aspects pertaining to participation as well as compromising what participants had to say. The researchers emphasised the ethics around their privacy and explained what this entailed and how it would be ensured (see the section below).

### Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness of the data was ensured based on four strategies: credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. To ensure credibility of the findings, the researchers used member checking, which entailed returning transcripts to the participants for confirmation of veracity of transcript information. This was conducted at the end of the data collection phase. Considering that qualitative research is not generalisable, the researchers used purposive sampling and thick descriptions to achieve transferability of the research findings. Dependability was ensured by regularly reviewing the techniques used in the study and the overall research process. Lastly, all materials used by the researchers, including transcripts and audio tapes, were reviewed and interpreted in an objective manner with the assistance of another person to ensure confirmability.

### Ethical Considerations

Before commencement of the study, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (HSSREC/00000436/2019, 21 October 2019) and the Department of Correctional Services. The information below presents the ethical considerations that guided the study:

1. Voluntary participation: The researchers emphasised that participation was voluntary. Therefore, none of the participants were coerced to take part in the study or promised any incentives.
2. Informed consent: Each participant's right to decide what happens to them was respected. Participants received comprehensive explanations of the study's objectives, length, methods, and the trustworthiness of the researchers (letters and formal briefings).
3. Confidentiality and anonymity: All participants were informed that a research report would be produced from the study and that their identities would not be

used in any paperwork or presentations related to the research. Moreover, the interviews were conducted in a community correctional centre where, to a certain extent, the participants were guarded in their responses. During the interviews, participants were concerned about violating their parole conditions or saying something negative in the interview, which could compromise or undermine their parole position. Therefore, the study's findings were independently reviewed by the researchers to ensure that anonymity was maintained and that the findings would not reveal any information about their identity, as well as to ensure the trustworthiness of the data.

## Findings and Discussion

The findings contain the demographic profile of the participants, followed by the themes and subthemes. The identification information of the participants, such as names, was not included in this article, and their anonymity was strengthened by pseudonyms.

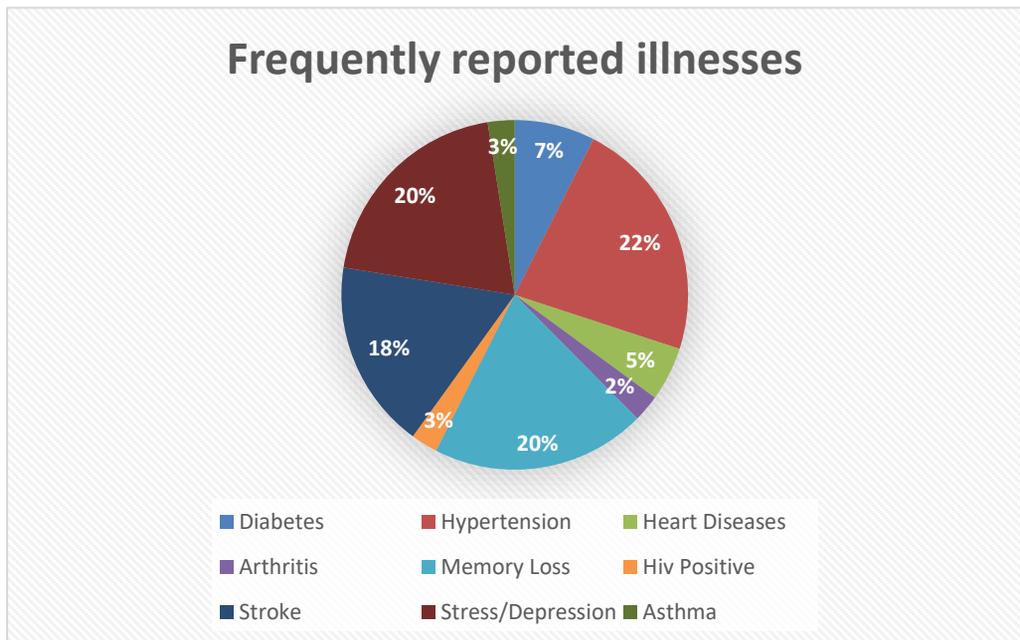
**Table 1:** Details of the elderly parolees that formed part of the sample interviews

Name	Gender	Race	Age	Level of education	Marital Status	Criminal offence	Years of imprisonment	Period served
Charles	Male	African	65	Grade 12	Single	Murder and two robberies	Life sentence and 32 years	22 years
Smith	Male	White	65	MBA	Single	Conspiracy to murder	7 years	4 years
Mfanozi	Male	African	65	None	Married	Robbery	24 years	12 years
Mjoli	Male	African	67	None	Married traditionally	Rape	20 years	10 years
Thulani	Male	African	68	None	Single	Murder and robbery	Life sentence and 25 years	19 years
Xulu	Male	African	68	None	Married (in the process of divorce)	Rape	16 years	08 years
Zodwa	Female	African	66	Caregiving certificate	Married (widow)	Murder	Life sentence	21 years
Marriam	Female	African	62	Bachelor of Education	Married (widow)	Attempted murder	10 years	5 years
Masinga	Male	African	70	Bachelor of Arts Law	Married	Attempted murder	5 years	3 years
Pravesh	Male	Indian	65	Grade 12	Single	Armed robbery and hijacking	14 years	7 years
Shange	Male	African	69	None	Married	Murder and attempted murder	75 years reduced to 50 years	19 years
Zakhele	Male	African	65	Police training	Married (polygamy)	Murder	Life sentence and 15 years	19 years
Robert	Male	African	66	None	Married	Possession of firearm	12 years	6 years
Qinisela	Male	African	67	None	Single	Murder	50 years	21 years
Khan	Male	Indian	65	Bachelor of Commerce	Divorced	Theft	10 years	5 years

The elderly parolees were interviewed independently and confidentially at the community corrections centre of the Department of Correctional Services. In terms of gender, the elderly parolees comprised 13 males and two females. The age distribution of the elderly parolees was from 60 years and older for all participants. Data were collected from 12 Black African participants, two Indian participants, and one White participant, as depicted in table 1. The duration of the participants spent in prison varied from three to 22 years. Murder was the most common criminal offence committed by the elderly parolees, followed by robbery and, lastly, rape. In terms of the marital status of the elderly parolees, nine were married, five were single, and one was divorced.

**Theme 1: Negative Factors Experienced by Elderly Parolees during Adjustment**

The transition process from prison to society often renders adjustment a difficult process. Re-entry into society was found to be a huge challenge for elderly offenders who often grappled with personal identity and the meaning of life (Higgins and Severson 2009). Elderly parolees reported living with one or more chronic health problems while in prison, which further complicated the adjustment process. Blower (2015) argues that chronic health problems often make it difficult for elderly parolees to perform essential daily activities; therefore, this restricts their ability to take care of themselves. Figure 1 shows the participants’ frequently reported illnesses.



**Figure 1:** Frequently reported conditions

The subthemes discussed below are linked to the negative factors experienced by elderly parolees upon their release from prison.

### *Subtheme 1.1: The Loss of Independence and Personal Space*

For the study participants, attainment of independence was synonymous with having their own houses. Independence is often associated with living in one's own home indefinitely (Hillcoat-Nallétamby 2014). Contrary to this perception, the study found that on their release, most elderly parolees had lost their homes and had little or no income to afford private housing. Moreover, finding secure and affordable housing was a challenge which resulted in the loss of independence and personal space, and this had a significant negative impact on their adjustment (Baccile 2017). The study found that elderly parolees prioritised securing good accommodation for their families because some of them had lost their homes during their imprisonment, as outlined in the quotations below:

When I came out of prison, I no longer had a house because it had been taken away from me by my in-laws who hated me for murdering my husband. So, in order to regain my independence, I must re-build my own home for my children. (Zodwa, 66 years old)

When I was released from prison, I was told that my house had been burnt. I went to the chief who gave me a letter to take to the municipality, but I have not been assisted till today. What hurts me the most is that my mother's wedding gift got burnt and all the other furniture in it. (Mfanozi, 65 years)

On their release, elderly parolees often found themselves homeless. The need to own their own homes was the most important thing for elderly parolees transitioning back into society. Most participants fell back on external social networks such as extended family for accommodation, and this often led to loss of independence and personal space:

I hope that I will have my own home one day. I need my own home because it is embarrassing to attain this age without my own shelter. I feel like I am crowding my sister's house. (Marriam, 62 years)

From these narratives, most elderly participants strongly desired to own their own houses and live independently from their relatives and children. Building their own homes was a crucial step towards regaining their lost dignity.

### *Subtheme 1.2: The Lack of Employment Opportunities*

Securing employment was synonymous with financial independence and stability for all the participants. Most elderly parolees left prison equipped with several skills and educational certificates acquired from programmes completed while in prison. However, these qualifications became irrelevant on return to their communities as they could not use them to generate income. Vocational training programmes are of little value to elderly people because of limited employment opportunities where these skills could be used (Dawes 2009). However, most elderly parolees continued to search for employment despite their advanced age and ill-health. The findings cited below

emphasise the role of employment after release as compared to attending social work programmes:

For elderly parolees like me, it is difficult to get employment because no one wants to employ anyone of my age. Equally, it is hard to live off your family which supported you while you were in prison. (Khan, 65 years)

It is difficult to find employment at my age. As I have indicated before, the standard of living is extremely high, and I must beg for things from others. (Nxasana, 62 years)

The participants perceived employment as a way of gaining financial stability so that they could be less financially dependent on their family members. Furthermore, financial independence gave the elderly parolees a sense of dignity and self-worth. The above narratives show that the participants were continuously seeking employment, suggesting they underestimated the challenges of seeking employment when they grew old. Being unemployed often led to despair and this bruised their egos and complicated their reintegration into daily social life.

### *Subtheme 1.3: Loss of Family Ties and Identity*

Studies suggest that strong family ties between offenders and their families have a lasting impact and often strengthen the chances of successful reintegration (Bales and Mears 2008). Nonetheless, the findings of this paper show that most elderly parolees had been cut off from their close friends and families. This was often caused by strained relations due to the offence. Lengthy incarceration often resulted in broken ties between elderly parolees and their families. The findings of this study are in line with Lee, Porter, and Comfort (2014), who show that parolees who were incarcerated experienced feelings of shame and stigmatisation among friends and family members.

The problem is that I lost all my friends and family. They still view me as a criminal because they know my case; hence, they ill-treat me for that. (Mjoli, 67 years).

The narrative cited above highlights a sense of belonging and recognition of change, both of which support successful reintegration. Developing strong ties with family members was important for the successful reintegration of elderly parolees. However, not all elderly parolees successfully rekindled strong relations with their families and this lack of social connectedness contributed to greater dissonance in the personal lives of the parolees as it became an additional obstacle to their re-entry into the community (Wakefield 2016).

The relationship between time and identity is intricate, as identity formation constantly changes with time. Identity is a synthesis of internal psychological development and socially integrated mechanisms. This is also known as personal and social identity (Schwartz 2005). Personal identity such as personal characteristics, attributes, goals, beliefs, and skills distinguish individuals from a group, whereas social identity relies on the presumed membership of a person in one or more groups such as those identified by

family roles, working world, or friendship networks (Schwartz 2005). Zelizer (2017) conceptualises loss of identity after imprisonment as being reactive rather than proactive. Reactive loss of identity refers to experiences that are “caused” by processes and events that are exogenous to the intentions and actions of family members. Conversely, proactive loss of identity is described as instances where persons lose their sense of self and purpose. This study revealed that the reactive loss of identity manifested itself when the elderly parolees were incarcerated at an early age and released after lengthy sentences; thus, their sense of loss was a consequential response to the time they spent in prison.

It is because of age and the experience of imprisonment that influences people to treat me in a very discriminative manner. This makes it difficult for me to ever view myself as an ordinary human being. (Mjoli, 67 years)

Elderly parolees faced difficulties in translating their experiences into concrete self-definition, which was often a painful and time-consuming process. They felt that their lives were meaningless and that they could hardly rewind time to correct some of their mistakes, which resulted in despair rather than a sense of integrity (Peacock and Theron 2007). Thus, the participants viewed lengthy prison terms as contributing immensely to their loss of identity and the impairment of their self-image in relation to society.

#### *Subtheme 1.4: Negotiating Bereavement and Loss*

Ageing is often associated with an increased risk of experiencing the death of a family member. Consequently, elderly parolees are likely to experience loss as well as grief and bereavement. The participants described death-related loss as one of their most stressful experiences (Lekalakala-Mokgele 2018). The reviewed literature also suggests that the intensity of the negative effects experienced after the first phase of grief raises the possibility of chronic, prolonged, or incomplete grief, which complicates the process (Shear and Shair 2005). This study revealed that elderly parolees lost important family members while serving their sentences. Therefore, they indicated that they had to cope and deal with these emotions upon their release from prison:

My life was not the same when I left prison. My mother had passed on. I was rejected by my family. My brother had problems raising his own children, though he also had to support me until I got my pension. (Thulani, 68 years)

There was an enormous difference. When I came back from prison, my mother had died... [crying], and my brother also died just prior to my release. (Qinisela, 67 years)

During the interviews, it was clear that, regardless of the time, the elderly parolees were still grieving. This type of loss impinged on their daily experiences and their health.

### *Subtheme 1.5: Death-Related Anxiety among Elderly Parolees*

As indicated above, ageing was linked to experiences of death in the family, and this also contributed to elderly parolees grappling with death-related anxiety. The elderly parolees perceived long prison sentences as time wasted and felt that they had not lived long enough. Specifically, they wished they could recover the time spent in prison. The participants feared death the most after their release.

Owing to old age, my worst fear is dying at this point and time, especially when everything is not okay. I will not rest in peace until I have sorted all my finances for the benefit of my children and grandchildren. (Masinga, 70 years)

As discussed in the literature review section, elderly offenders were preoccupied with thoughts and anxiety related to death, which often resulted in the deterioration of their health (Aday 2006; Deaton, Aday, and Wahidin 2010). One participant said:

I am always haunted by thoughts of death because most people of my age have died and I might die as well and leave my children homeless. (Mirriam, 62 years)

During the recruitment process, the recruited participants, specifically those who were released on medical parole, died before participating in the study, suggesting that elderly parolees released on medical parole had a shorter lifespan than those who were released on full parole. Elderly parolees who fell sick in the first year of their release were not as likely to live as long as those who received parole while still young.

### *Subtheme 1.6: Discrimination against Elderly Parolees*

The most common problems reported by the participants were abuse and discrimination, which the participants attributed to their age. Age-based discrimination was one of the significant challenges elderly offenders faced. Moreover, the treatment and rehabilitation services rendered by correctional staff were reflective of a high degree of ageism, an attitude which made elderly offenders more vulnerable to abuse perpetrated by both correctional staff and younger offenders (Higgins and Severson 2009; Porporino 2014). This study revealed that elderly parolees were ill-treated by both society and correctional service providers, as depicted by the utterances cited below:

When I was released from prison, correctional officials treated me differently from the younger offenders. Even when I came here, these officials had that mentality of treating me differently because of my age. (Zakhele, 65 years)

As discussed in the literature review, ageist assumptions were prevalent among the families and communities of the elderly parolees. These assumptions stemmed from a societal tendency of comparing elderly parolees with younger cohorts (Higgins and Severson 2009). Below are some aspects of ill-treatment experienced by elderly parolees in their families:

When I have cooked some food or brought some fruits or yogurt, the family members were not eating that food. It became exceedingly difficult for me. (Marriam, 62 years)

My brother and sister discriminated against me. They watched me; they kept watching me even when I carried children. I feel so bad that I felt like just staying indoors. The community members called me names. They called me 'old crook from jail.' So, I started isolating myself because I no longer had the power. I have become old and frail. (Pravesh, 65 years)

These findings are consistent with those of Dawes (2009), who claims that older persons are a vulnerable population due to a lack of access to quality and efficient healthcare and housing services. They continue to suffer the brunt of gender discrimination and abuse, with some being economically excluded. The findings show that elderly parolees are susceptible to ill-treatment at the hands of family members and correctional officials.

## **Theme 2: Positive Factors Experienced by Elderly Parolees during Adjustment**

While elderly parolees faced complex issues that stemmed from their transitioning from prison back to society. Ageing and maturation were viewed as positive attributes in terms of minimising the risks of re-offending. The subthemes discussed below are linked to the positive factors that fostered successful reintegration after incarceration.

### *Subtheme 2.1: Deterrence and Resistance from Criminal Activities*

The manner in which incarceration affects the worldview, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours of those who have been imprisoned is particularly important (Wood 2007). This study revealed that the elderly parolees who were incarcerated for prolonged periods dreaded the reality of being imprisoned again and vowed that they would never re-offend. The findings also implied that the length of incarceration and age of an individual parolee played a critical role in influencing deterrence and desistance among elderly parolees as depicted by the statements below:

I will never commit another crime. I stayed a long time in prison where I experienced excruciating pain. I was not guilty of the offences I was incarcerated for, but because of gangsterism, I ended up being imprisoned. (Charles, 65 years)

I would never go back to prison. That is why I go around telling other women to report if they have been abused by their husbands. (Zodwa, 66 years)

I would never commit another crime and I would not want any other person to suffer for such a long time. This is why I tell people not to commit crime. (Thulani, 68 years)

This study also established that elderly parolees desisted from criminal activities not only because of the fear of being imprisoned again but also because of maturation. As revealed in the literature review section, ageing was the only variable that emerged as a crucial factor in the reform process and that the gradual shift from crime was due to maturation (Sparkes and Day 2016).

These findings conform with Murphy, Bradford, and Jackson's (2016) views that compliance is instrumental in nature as it is motivated by fear of the penalties if caught violating the law. For others, law-abiding behaviour is driven by an intrinsic motivation to follow rules on the grounds that it is right to do so. Similarly, correctional service providers also indicated that elderly parolees were the only group of individuals that did not show inclination for re-offending. This attribute was apparently positive, confirming elderly parolees' elevated level of co-operation when interacting with correctional service providers.

### *Subtheme 2.2: Religious Assimilation*

Religious organisations within the community had a profound impact on elderly parolees during their reintegration into their families and society. As discussed in the literature review, religious education and teaching stimulated emotional healing and wholeness (hooks 2003). Elderly parolees indicated that attending church services facilitated their reintegration into their families and society and brought them a sense of hope:

The church helped me immensely after my release. We have church services every day. The church teaches us about the importance of bearing good fruit. (Charles, 65 years)

What makes me happy is being at church because it makes me feel that all my heavy baggage is being removed from me. The church makes me start believing that God is going to help me. (Mfanozi, 65 years)

While I was in prison, I joined the Shembe Church. So, when I was released, the church continued to assist me. (Qinisela, 67 years)

The narratives cited above resonate with the ecosystems theory, which states that religious organisations are at the meso-system level, defined as a set of interrelated systems including the parolees' micro-system. Various religious organisations assisted elderly parolees in easing the challenges associated with the transition process (Doherty 2014).

### *Subtheme 2.3: Economic Independence Based on Short-Term Employment*

Short-term employment was the main livelihood strategy that sustained elderly parolees and their families. This strategy was specifically useful to non-recipients of old age pensions. The intense desire by the elderly parolees to access employment despite old age and failing health was primarily driven by the need to secure economic independence. Elderly parolees often entered the job market informally through family relationships, friendships, and intimate partner relationships. Below are some of the utterances that depict elderly parolees' reliance on short-term employment:

Currently, I am not getting any pension. I am just relying on my job as a gardener. My sister found the job for me. (Robert, 66 years)

My friends I was released with helped me find a job. I am working as a security guard at a school. I am on night shift, but this affects me as I have a problem with my eyesight because I have not been sleeping. (Mfanozi, 65 years)

The findings of this study are in line with Flower's (2010) study, which found that employment can influence the process of desistance through the establishment of informal social bonds. This promoted the development of secure attachments to prop up the existing pro-social ones. Moreover, most elderly parolees depended on employment to sustain their households, and this resulted in the cessation of criminal behaviour.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that elderly parolees endure substantial negative experiences during reintegration. On their release, elderly parolees found themselves confronted by several losses, resulting in them struggling with adaptation. The findings suggest five major subthemes linked to negative experiences during reintegration: the loss of independence and personal space; lack of employment opportunities; loss of family ties and identity; negotiating bereavement and loss; death-related anxiety; and discrimination. The study findings underscore the awareness that elderly parolees need sufficient preparation for the management of the effects of loss after imprisonment. Elderly parolees preoccupied with thoughts of death and dying often became vulnerable to other opportunistic illnesses, further accelerating the deterioration of their health status. Therefore, they ought to talk about their feelings and concerns about death and dying in a counselling session to ease their anxiety during reintegration.

Even though elderly parolees experienced different types of challenges, including discrimination, there were positive factors linked to their reintegration. The findings of this study suggest three major positives aligned with theme 2, including that parolees were deterred from engaging in further criminal activities, they became assimilated into their religious beliefs, and they achieved some economic independence. The study concludes that obtaining employment after release is an important turning point for parolees as employment gave parolees a sense of purpose and responsibility, further motivating them to desist from re-offending.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study makes the following recommendations for the Department of Correctional Services to adopt in responding effectively to the needs of elderly parolees:

- Knowing how difficult it must be for parolees to be able to cover certain basic needs, it is recommended that the Department of Correctional Services considers allotting re-entry vouchers to elderly parolees in order to support them financially on their release from prison. This enables parolees to afford

transportation to attend social work programmes and to take care of their housing needs on their release. Moreover, re-entry vouchers could also assist elderly parolees who are still waiting for the South African Social Security Agency to approve their pension grants. Another recommendation is ongoing intervention (micro, mezzo, macro) programmes for parolees to assist with reintegration and feelings of loss and disconnection. It is important that parolees have a space to talk and have a cathartic outlet of their thoughts and feelings.

- To strengthen reintegration, it is recommended that community correctional centres consider spiritual aftercare programmes for elderly parolees as they could address the spiritual needs of offenders and strengthen adjustment. They could also enable adjusted parolees to act as mentors to help other parolees in their adjustments and reintegration. In order to promote positive social relationships and foster a sense of community, it is also recommended that the Department of Correctional Services grants day parole to elderly offenders who are eligible for parole, to help them adapt successfully when they are officially granted full parole. Day parole also assists elderly parolees to rekindle and strengthen their ties with their family, friends, and the community.

The above recommendations serve as a starting point of where the state can take responsibility for the reintegration of elderly parolees and also for private and community-based organisations for the inclusion of elderly parolees and the focus on their specific needs so that they do not feel forgotten and invisible.

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