BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

A STUDY INTO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LONGER SENTENCES IN REDUCING RECIDIVISM. A case study of Chikurubi Maximum Prison 2010 – 2012]

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The study examined the effectiveness of longer sentences in reducing recidivism (repeat offenders). Longer sentences should supposedly be used as major deterrent measures against crimes and to those once convicted, that is, repeat offenders. In the Zimbabwean context, longer sentences are those sentences above 5 years. Despite the pain of longer sentences, prison population continued to rise through the period 2010 to 2012, and so were repeat offenders. The result was, obviously overpopulation in the prison with consequential problems, amongst them, disease outbreaks and increased costs of maintaining and managing prisons, hence necessitating this study to get a better understanding of the problem, and, to address it. Literature on the effects of longer incarceration, and alternatives to incarceration was reviewed. Of importance were the fascinating phenomenon of recidivism and the absence of effective solutions given for it. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used. One hundred and ten questionnaires were circulated, 60 were returned. Records review and interviews were done. Some quantitative analysis was done. Major findings of the research were that longer sentences have not been successful in deterring crimes, hence recidivism as well, thus, contributing to prison overpopulation. Rehabilitation has not been successful either, as evidenced by continued increase in recidivism. Though longer sentences have not been successful in deterring crimes, they have brought about positive benefits to some inmates as they have managed to sit for their Zimsec examinations during their long imprisonment. Recommendations made included the adequate staffing of Zimbabwe Prison Service and strengthening rehabilitation programmes to make ex-convicts more productive and self-reliant. The Ministry of Justice should adopt more use of alternatives to incarceration like fines, restitution, community service or an open prison system rather than longer sentences. Further research was recommended on the psycho-social impacts of longer sentences.