

Relationship between Locus of Control and Criminal Behaviour among Inmates at Thika Prison, Kenya

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Abstract

The rate of crime in the country is increasing tremendously. Most criminals relapse back to crime once they are released after serving their jail term. This trend only shows that there is need to make Kenya prisons a transformative environment for prisoners. The study was based on Rotter's Locus of Control model to identify Control orientation of prisoners. It is through such a process that a classification can be made of which prisoners have a disposition that is liable to transformation of attitudes and those who believe that what happens to them is not under their control. It is against this background that the present study was designed to explore the Locus of Control of male and female inmates at Thika Prison. A descriptive survey was adopted. The study sample comprised of 250 inmates (213 male and 37 female). Stratified random sampling was used to select participants. The survey was directed at identifying the Locus of Control of inmates using Locus of Control scale (I-E Scale). Data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings established that majority of inmates manifested an Internal Locus of Control, with the recidivists manifesting an external control orientation. Since Internals are people who believe they can introduce order in their lives and their destiny, it can be deduced that the prison has an inability to empower and support the positive direction of inmates. The prison may also have support services which are not strong enough to redirect psychological attitudes, beliefs of recidivists. In light of these, there is need to incorporate professional counselling to assist recidivists to redirect their beliefs and attitudes, as a result transform their control orientation.

Keywords: Criminal Behavior, Internal and External Orientation, Locus of Control, Recidivist

Introduction

Crime has been an exceptionally severe problem for the majority of the nations of the world. It has been a serious impediment to the harmonious development of individuals and communities. The United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (2010), reports that the number of people in prisons has increased over the last ten years in most countries, with a rise of 60-75 per cent worldwide. Prisons are overcrowded at all times with a daily increase of convictions and remandees brought in. The Kenya Police Annual Report (2010), states that the trend of crime and insecurity has been orchestrated by among others, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, inequitable distribution of resources,

organized crimes, high unemployment rate, drug and substance abuse, high illiteracy levels and sophistication of technology.

There are constantly changing ideas, perceptions and conceptions regarding what constitutes criminal behavior. According to White, Haines and Eisler (2012), crime can be defined as any act that violates criminal law. It is a social harm that involves offenses such as robbery, assault, battery, rape, murder, burglary, embezzlement and negligence. Each of these offenses attracts some sort of penalty. A growing body of literature suggests that prison itself is a debilitating experience; and doing nothing for offenders who are incarcerated will mean that they will leave prison more marginalized and more committed to offending than they were when they entered the system. Groups like sex offenders and those convicted of violent crimes, neglect and isolation in prison tend to reinforce earlier behavioral patterns (White *et al.*, 2012).

Human actions are best understood in terms of the meaning derived from the actors, rather than the pre-existing biological, psychological or social conditions. These meanings are to some extent created by the individual, but primarily they are derived from intimate personal interactions with other people. Psychology is clearly not the only contributor to explanations of criminal behaviour, although in the past it has tended to be viewed as a rather simplistic and conservative contributor. This may be due to its emphasis on individual neglect of social factors in the construction of criminal careers (Maguire *et al.*, 2007).

Locus of control refers to the degree to which an individual believes that his or her behaviour is under his or her personal control. It is grounded in expectancy value theory, which describes human behaviour as determined by the perceived likelihood of an event or outcome occurring contingent upon the behaviour in question, and the value placed on that event or outcome. Julian Rotter, the author of this theory teaches that there are two possible life orientations an individual can adopt in the course of personality development; these are two principle attitudes in life: Internal and External locus of control (Rotter, cited in Pal, 2011). Individuals with an internal Locus of Control adopt the attitude that becoming a success in life issues arises from talents and hard work. They experience more shame and guilt when they suffer defeat in their goals, and indulge in self correction and self criticism when they find themselves in error. Thus, individuals who have an internal control orientation are more likely to engage in social action for self improvement. They are more concerned with skill and achievement and are more resistant to social influence as opposed to the external control orientation (Pal, 2011). For these reasons, internals end up as hardy personalities and are emotionally healthier and have the tendency to show a lot of confidence in their work. They are more likely to be aware of the conditions that lead to good physical and emotional health and therefore, take positive steps to improve their health such as quitting smoking, avoiding substance abuse and engaging in regular exercise.

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Persons who adopt the attitude of external Locus of Control are influenced by the view that they have no control over the things that happen to them. They are manipulated by outside forces and believe that success comes through luck and fate. Externals tend to blame others for their mistakes and destiny. For these reasons they end up more depressive, anxious, and less capable of coping with stressful experiences. People with high external orientation may suffer from schizophrenia, neurosis and develop low self esteem (Lefcourt, cited in Majewski, 2008). They also appear to be more suspicious and dogmatic than internals. One would expect that the poor and the down trodden would feel comparatively powerless to change the environment and would therefore have high external scores. They are lacking in motivation to achieve difficult goals and have few aspirations since their efforts are seen as bearing little or no relationship to the outcome. They refuse to accept pain and are prone to low moods. Rotter, (1966) conducted a series of experimental studies designed to tell whether or not people learn tasks and perform differently when they see reinforcements as related or unrelated to their own behaviours. The results led him to develop the I-E Scale, a significant assessment tool that measures an individual's perception of Locus of Control. An individual may come to believe on the basis of the past experiences that the reinforcement received depend on certain behaviors or may come to believe that reinforcements are controlled by outside forces. Thus, internally oriented prison inmates know more about the institution and conditions affecting their parole and are more likely to be paroled (Rotter, 1966). They also make independent judgments and try harder to control the behaviour of others; they are more resistant to influences from other people.

Locus of control is a popular variable in social and behavioral science research and has been used extensively. In a study that examined the relationship between locus of control and reaction to threat, those individuals with an internal locus of control showed greater willingness to engage in remedial behaviors to confront their problems (Phares, cited in Ryckman, 2007).

Due to the closed nature of prisons, getting any information has been difficult. As a result, very few researches have been done in Kenyan prisons in relation to the psychological orientation of inmates, counseling and behaviour modification techniques as a means of rehabilitating prisoners. Maina, (2011) tested the psychological orientation of prisoners in Langata prison. The major purpose was to investigate Eyesenck's Introversion - Extraversion theory as a test of psychological orientation of prisoners in Langata and Thika prisons in Kenya. The study also aimed at finding out the percentage of Kenyan prisoners' score on psychotism scale and also the extent to which psychotism is related to gender. Results indicated that majority of the prisoners were extroverts and psychotics. Men were found to be extroverts and had high psychotism score. The implication of the study was for counseling to be effective and to be tailored to the needs of the clientele in this case to the prison inmates and for personal-social guidance.

The purpose of the current study was to determine the Locus of Control of inmates at Thika Prison and its relationship to criminal behavior. The following questions were

investigated: (i) What percentage of the inmates are Internals and Externals respectively? (ii) To what extent is it true that recidivists manifest an external Locus of Control? (iii) Do male and female inmates manifest the same Locus of Control? (iv) What is the relationship between the inmates' Locus of Control and their occupation and educational background?

Research Methodology

A descriptive survey was adopted in conducting the study. The study was carried out in Thika GK Prison in Thika District. Thika prison houses both male and female inmates at its different wings. For this reason, access to both male and female inmates was not a problem. The population of the study consisted of 500 inmates who had been convicted and are serving their jail term in Thika prison during the time of the study. A sample of 250 inmates was selected into the study through stratified random sampling. This constituted 213 male and 37 female inmates. The large sample size was considered for a better representation of the population due to the unequal distribution of the population in relation to their socio demographic characteristics.

The main unit of analysis was the Locus of Control of the inmates. Other units were the educational background, occupation and gender. The principal instrument was Rotter's I-E Scale, an inventory for studying the Locus of Control. A section was adapted to incorporate a preliminary questionnaire on the background of inmates. The I-E Scale containing 29 items, requiring 'Yes' or 'No' answer was used to detect the inmates with Internal and External Locus of Control respectively. A score of 23 and above indicates extreme externality while 0 score indicates extreme internality. The middle score which is 15 is interpreted to mean having neutral beliefs (Lefcourt, as cited in Majewski, 2008). Data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test relations at a significant level of 0.05.

Results and Discussion

A total of 250 questionnaires were administered to selected participants and 240 were returned with a response rate of 96%. Respondents' distribution was done by age, gender, education level, marital status and occupation (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of the Respondents

Demographic characteristics		Freq. (F)	Percentage
Gender	Males	210	87.5
	Females	30	12.5
Age Intervals (years)	18 – 22	38	15.8
	23 – 27	74	30.8
	28 – 32	98	40.9
	33 and above	30	12.5
Education level	Primary	162	67.5
	Secondary	71	29.6
	College	1	0.4
	uneducated	6	2.5
Occupation	Employed	0	0
	Self-employed		
	/business person	93	38.75
	Farmer	54	22.5
	Unemployed	93	38.75

Majority of the respondents were males (87.5%) while 12.5 % were females (table 1). Majority of the participants were between the age brackets of 28-32 years (40.9 %), followed by 23-27 years (30.8%), 18-22 years (15.8%) and the least being 33 years and above which was 12.5 % respectively. The survey established that a larger proportion of the respondents have attained primary level education. This comprised of 67.5% of the entire population, 29.6% had attained secondary level, 2.5% of the respondents are uneducated, while only 0.4% had attained college education level. The unemployed and self employed respondents had equal distribution (38.8%), which constituted the majority followed by farmers at 22.5% and none was employed.

Table 2: Percentage and frequency of participants' I-E score

Control Orientation	I-E Score	Frequency	Percentage
Internal	1-14	152	63.4
Neutral	15	16	6.7
External	16-29	72	29.9
TOTAL		240	100

These results showed that 152 (63.3%) which was the majority of the respondents scored between 0-14 indicating Internality, 72 (30%) scored between 16-29 which shows externality while 16 (6.7%) were neutral. Majority of the inmates both males and females were found to manifest an Internal Locus of Control (63.3%). Since internals are those who believe they can introduce order in their lives and can control their own destiny, it can be deduced that the prison has an inability to empower and support the positive direction of inmates. There is a significant relationship between the control orientations of the inmates ($r=0.58$, $p<0.05$).

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