

## **The effect of a visitation program on the rehabilitation of youth offenders in South Africa**

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### **Abstract**

Maintaining family ties during imprisonment has been found to serve important functions for inmates, their family members, and the community as a whole. A number of criminological theories have been cited to explain the possible reasons for such positive effects of maintain family contact. The primary aim of this study is to evaluate the effect of visitation programme on the rehabilitation of youth offenders. A sample of 75 respondents, comprising 50 youth offenders and 25 visitors, was drawn from Kroonstad Correctional Centre. The selected respondents completed two different research questionnaires instrument. These were quantitatively analysed as bar charts and frequency tables, as indicated in this study. This study measured the levels of inmates' and visitors understanding and satisfaction with visitation policies in the Department of Correctional Services (DCS). Data from this study revealed that, to meet the needs of visitors, attention should be given to methods of visiting and visitation policies. By addressing these issues, problems that visitors encounter while visiting inmates may be lessened and inmates may receive visitors frequently.

**Keywords:** Correctional Centre, Department of Correctional Services, Inmate, Inmates' visitor, Rehabilitation, Visitation programme, Youth Development Centre.

### **Introduction**

The number of criminal activities and sentenced inmates' population rise yearly in South Africa. As compared to other countries, South Africa has a high rate of violent crimes such as murder and rape. In other words, the majority of sentenced inmates are serving long sentences for violent crimes, DCS (2009: 3). As indicated, crime does not only affect society negatively. Increasing criminal activities also result into high incarceration rate. Currently, there are 241 correctional centers in South Africa with the total capacity of 118 154 sentenced offenders and awaiting trial detainees. In the case of youth incarceration, there are 13 youth development correctional centres in South Africa, namely, Leeuwkop, Emthonjeni and Boksburg, Rustenburg, Ekuseni and Westville, Hawequa, Drakenstein and Pollsmoor, Kroonstad and Groenpunt and Barbeton (Matshaba, 2011: 6). These youth development centers are located in various provinces of South Africa.

Even though there has been a great deal of research conducted in South African correctional centers, few research studies have focused on the relationship between incarcerated youth offenders and their family members, friends and other community organizations. Furthermore, little has also been written on visitation programme and the policies that encourage the contact between incarcerated youth offenders and their families in many criminal justice systems around the world (Sturges and Al-Khattar, 2009: 71). Many research studies conducted in youth development centers or on incarcerated youth are largely focusing on treatment and development (Christian, 2005: 27). A visitation by families, friends and spouse is regarded as one of the most important programme in the correctional environment.

According to Connor and Tewksbury, (2015: 160), visitation programme encourages inmates to establish and maintain social support and connection with the outside world. Schafer (1994: 67) also points out that there is a positive relationship between successful reintegration and parole on inmates with supportive families. He further outlines that visitations are also beneficial as they furnish inmates with a reminder of the outside world and a venue to practice role continuance, that into successful releases (Schafer, 1994: 67). Some of the advantages of receiving visits during incarceration include among others, successful reintegration, reduction of recidivism and less disciplinary infraction during incarceration (Casey-Acevedo & Bakken, 2002: 42). Carlson (2015: 412) also has a similar view by indicating that visitation also encourages a good behaviour and inmates' re-entry is critical to successful community reintegration. Therefore, this study intended to explore the outcomes of the visitation programme at selected youth development centers of South Africa, focusing on inmates' views on the contextual factors related to visiting and the general perception of inmates toward visitation programme. Since advent of the new democratic governance of the Republic of South Africa in 1994, the legislators of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 have seen a need to create a human rights perspective in the treatment of offenders incarcerated in the South African Correctional Services system. Due to this significant transformation in the legislative framework, the DCS has, through the Correctional Services Act (No. 111 of 1998), Section 13 re-set its mandate on visitations in the Correctional Institutions by family members of the inmate.

### **Problem formulation**

Despite the shift from punishment to rehabilitation of incarcerated offenders, the DCS encouraged the continued contact during incarceration between inmates, their families and friends with the purpose of ensuring smooth transition of inmates back to the community. The (DCS Act, 1998, DCS, 2009; and DCS, 2005) highlight that the correctional staff and multi-disciplinary staff members must encourage inmates to make contact with the community and enable them to stay abreast of current affairs. Moreover, the DCS must give inmates an opportunity of being visited by at least their spouses, parents and next of kin. Based on their privilege groups, specific minimum period must be allowed for visits each month. In the case that an inmate is not able to

receive visits from parents, spouses or next of kin, the inmate is entitled to be visited by any other person each month. To ensure the continued relationship between inmates and their family members, during admission and after transfer to another correctional centre, an inmate must notify his/ her next of kin that he/she is being detained in a particular correctional centre. If next of kin are unknown, the inmate may notify any other relative as stipulated in Correctional Services Act [No. 111 of 1998] (Republic of South Africa, 1998:14).

The contact with the communities and families could be the starting point for the development of deeper bonds and attachments that facilitate the inmate's integration into the family unit while incarcerated. This provides the basis for a strong support system fostering successful re-entry into the family and community upon release (Visser & Travis, 2003: 309). Families are an important influence on many aspects of inmate's lives. Family and parenting variables are key predictors of criminal behaviour through the life course (Liebling & Maruna, 2005: 442). Loss of outside relationships is considered the most painful aspect of confinement for inmates. Family contact is associated with lower rates of self-harm while inside the correctional institution. Families are one of the most important factors affecting inmate's rehabilitation after release (Liebling & Maruna, 2005: 442). Unfortunately, little research has been done on inmate's families in their own right. The effects of imprisonment on families of inmates are almost entirely neglected in academic research, correctional service's statistics, public policy, and media coverage. However, researchers can infer from inmate's backgrounds that families are a highly vulnerable group. To date, limited research suggests that imprisonment can have devastating consequences for families (Liebling & Maruna, 2005: 442).

Although a visitation programme provides positive results and strengthen family relationship, inmates' families still experience challenges such as transportation services, to families in at least one facility in their jurisdiction. Moreover, the absence of visits could be caused by practical difficulties. These may include travelling costs, distance between correctional centre and home, and visiting times, since most of the youth developmental centres are based in urban areas (Liebling & Maruna, 2005: 454). Therefore, the researchers conducted this study with the aim of finding the effect of visitation programme on the rehabilitation of youth offenders. The purpose of the research is to compare the inmate's views and their families on the effect of visitation programme. Visitation programmes restore family ties that were broken due to incarceration of the offenders (O'Toole & Eyland, 2005: 183).

### **Methods and materials**

As stated by Sarantakos (2002: 193) and De Vos (2002: 132), the applied case study research design in this study offered means on how to research this subject, as guided by the research questions. The quantitative research approach was used, Burns and Grove (2003: 56) state that quantitative research design provides a systematic process for producing facts about the world and making plans to gain more information about the research phenomenon. This approach was also adopted due to lower costs and savings in labour as many respondents can be surveyed as compared to personal

interviews, Van Lill and Visser (1998: 12). This study was confined to the Kroonstad correctional centre. A sample size of 50 respondents drawn from Kroonstad Youth Development Centre can be easily generalized but cannot be as truly representative of the entire population. In other words, the study comprises 50 youth offenders. Demarcation and scope of the study implies that the investigation will only focus on sentenced youth offenders who received frequent visits in the correctional center (Silverman, 2000:88)

The non-probability: Purposive sampling was used in this study. This sampling procedures do not employ the rules of probability theory, and they also do not claim representativeness, and are usually used for qualitative analysis (Maluleke, 2016; and Maluleke, 2014). The researchers used a purposive/judgmental sampling method for this study and a sample of 50 inmates were selected. The following procedures were used to select the respondents: Only inmates who are sentenced and receives frequent visitors since admitted at Kroonstad correctional centre. in the case of selecting the respondents, the researchers administered the visitation programme register with the assistant of the head of correctional centre to select the respondents, Champion (2000: 197) (Maxfield & Babbie, 2008: 234) and (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006: 139).

For data collections; the literature review and questionnaire were; the former assisted the researchers to define what information is essential and seminal and which studies has been conducted on the area on which he/she will be conducting the research (Maluleke, 2020, Mokwena & Maluleke; and Mokwena, Motsepe, Maluleke & Shandu, 2020). Bless and Higson-Smith, (1995: 23) illustrate that the main purpose of the literature review is to acquaint the researchers with the latest development in the area of the research, to identify the gaps in knowledge or weaknesses of the previous studies and to sharpen the theoretic framework of the research. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fourche and Delpont (2005: 263), demonstrates the underlying assumption of the chosen research questions and it also displays the paradigm that underpins the study, among others.

This was coupled with the distributions of questionnaires. Questionnaires can be defined as a set of questions on a form which is completed by the respondents in respect of a research project (The New Dictionary of Social Work, 1995: 51). According to De Vos (2002: 166), the basic objective of the questionnaire is to obtain facts and opinions about a phenomenon from people who are well informed about that particular issue. For this study, a questionnaire was used to collect data from various respondents in addition to the literature review. For the researchers to obtain the desired information, closed-ended questions were used. Closed-ended questions offer the respondents the same opportunity to answer each question. In other words, each section within the questionnaires must be answered according to the instructions provided by the researchers. Moreover, closed questions are valuable as the researchers can collect large samples. Furthermore, closed questionnaires are advantageous as they are easy to analyse and the result of the investigations are available fairly quickly.

For data analysis; the data gathered were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). According to Alston and Bowles (2003: 14), analysis of data brings about order, structure and meaning to the mass of data collected. In-depth

data analysis will involve using appropriate techniques such as mind-mapping to reduce the data, and organizing it into themes (Explain each objective), patterns (Percentages), trends, and relationships that are easier to understand. Data analysis is a mechanism for reducing and organising data to produce findings that require interpretation by the researchers. In addition, data analysis is a challenging and a creative process characterised by an intimate relationship of the researchers with the respondents and the data generated (De Vos, 2002: 339).

### **Preliminary literature review**

#### **The effects of visitation programme**

Correctional agencies, inmates, visitors, and community in general can all benefit from the efficient, humane, and secure visiting programme. Regular contact with visitors significantly enhances an inmates' quality of life and establishes a lifeline with the free community. Ties with family members, friends, and other loved ones are critical to inmates' successful return to the community, and visitations help inmates maintain these important relationships. Nowadays forward-thinking correctional agencies recognise that returning an offender to the community prepared to begin a productive life is a hallmark of successful corrections. The seamless support of family and friends is crucial to that success (Carlson & Garrett, 2008: 388).

#### **The effects of visitation on youth offenders**

Visitation programme promotes the family bonds that are essential for successful reintegration into the community life and it also helps individuals maintain ties with their parents while incarcerated. Maintenance of family bonds, especially with parents, often is an incentive for an inmate's good behaviour while incarcerated. Duwe and Clack (2015: 14) found that visits from siblings, in-laws, and fathers were the most beneficial in reducing the risk of recidivism. The findings suggest that revising correctional institutional visitation policies to make them more "visitor friendly" could yield public safety benefits by helping young offenders establish a continuum of social support from a correctional institution to the community.

#### **The effects of visitation on families of youth offenders**

Correctional institutional visits may bring feelings of excitement, anticipation, joy, and yet sadness (Christian, 2005: 33). Correctional institution experience becomes an integral part of life for the inmate's visitors and that incarceration affects the family at many levels. Christian (2005: 33-34), in his research, found that if an inmate has been abusive to his family members, incarceration is likely to be beneficial.

#### **The effects of visitation programme on the communities of youth offenders**

Criminologists have been interested in uncovering the dynamics associated with the spatial distribution of crime in an effort to understand this phenomenon and how community context affects the lives of people living in those neighbourhoods. One vein of research has drawn on social disorganization theory, focusing on ecological characteristics such as rates of poverty, residential mobility, and single parent families. Community agencies and businesses may be involved in the visiting process in various ways. Specialised bus companies offer regular charters to correctional

institutions from large cities, helping to alleviate the problems caused by long distances. Local businesses such as motels, restaurants, and gas stations benefit from visitors who patronise these establishments. In many communities, volunteer visitors offer friendship to inmates providing guidance and support while the individual is incarcerated and assistance with finding employment and a place to live after release (Carlson & Garrett, 2008: 388).

### **The effects of imprisonment**

As the number of inmates in the correctional institution continues to rise, so have concerns risen about the damaging short-term and long-term effects this has on inmates, families and on the community. This study brings together a group of leading authorities in this field, both academics and practitioners, to address the complex issues this has raised, to assess the implications and results of research in this field, and to suggest ways of mitigating the often devastating personal and psychological consequences of incarceration. Below is the discussion of how imprisonment affects the inmates, their families and the communities.

#### **The effects of imprisonment on youth offenders**

The most obvious concern is that the effects of imprisonment damage the human and social capital of those who are incarcerated, their families, and the communities (Hagan & Dinwitzer, 1999: 122; and Steinberg, 2004: 73). Equally; the following effects are discussed in this study:

- **Stigma**

Being involved in the criminal justice system is a negative social status. The consequences of stigma are far reaching, as stigma damages both human and social capital. Ex-offenders find it difficult to get good jobs, and their non-criminal neighbours and associates are often suspicious and loathe interacting with them. Integrating into the community and networks that provide informal social control is made problematic for ex-offenders when many community members react with distrust. The stigma also is frequently transferred to the ex-offender's family and community. Families often feel publicly embarrassed for the actions of their loved ones.

- **Emotional and social issues**

Inmates and their families experience a tremendous sense of loss when incarceration occurs and that loss is compounded when children are involved. Guilt and a sense of relief that a troublesome relative has finally been sent away are also among the emotions experienced by inmates' kin. Difficulties in adjusting to separation and loss have led to depression and other mental health problems among inmates and their families (Lanier, 1993: 23).

- **The effects of imprisonment on families of youth offenders**

Christian, (2005: 34) concluded that incarceration's negative consequences reach far beyond the inmate and that their family members suffer as much as, if not more, than the incarcerated individual does. These researchers discovered that the stigma related to incarceration was so great that many family members isolated themselves from the people in their lives who could help from a support system.

Carlson and Cervera (1992) and Christian (2005: 33) found that wives of incarcerated

men experience a great deal of strain, including feelings of guilt and stress because of pressure to fulfil the multiple roles of the incarcerated man. Some of the problems children behavioural problems at home and in school, difficulty sleeping, mistrust, and fear of abandonment. In addition, children without family members to take care of them are placed in foster care, further disrupting their lives. Raising children alone and dealing with financial problems are two of the most prominent problems. In addition to the hardships related to incarceration, planning for visits to the correctional center and trying to maintain a relationship with the incarcerated individual become integral part of life and coping mechanisms are often developed. Correctional institutional visits may bring feelings of excitement, anticipation, joy, and yet sadness. The literature suggests that the correctional institutional experience becomes integral part of life for the views and girlfriends of offenders and that incarceration affects the family at many levels. Guilt and a sense of relief that a troublesome relative has finally been sent away are also among the emotions experienced by inmates' next of kin. Difficulties in adjusting to separation and loss have led depression and other mental health problems among inmates and their families (Lanier, 1993: 23).

- The effects of imprisonment on the communities of youth offenders Skogan (1990) and Hoffmann (2011: 98) share that another important issue is the impact of delinquency on communities. For example, suppose that a well-kept, yet poor neighbourhood finds itself overrun, perhaps because of a police crackdown in an adjacent neighbourhood, with rival gangs that are trying to control the city's cocaine and methamphetamine trade. The neighbourhood is an area that the police and city officials tend to ignore, perhaps because it has few politically active residents or business owners. Over time, the gang gains a foothold. How will the residents react? Maybe some and these will probably be the better-off residents, will move to more organized areas of the city or to the suburbs. Others may become fearful of crime and shelter themselves in their homes, coming out only when necessary. Greater fear of crime may feed a decrease in neighbourhood satisfaction, trust, and social cohesion.

This type of 'spiral decay' (Skogan, 1990; and Hoffmann, 2011: 98) has been shown to lead to more poverty, a depressed housing market, a lack of new business, racial segregation, social isolation, and less collective efficacy. In general, then, it is likely that crime and delinquency are reciprocally related to declining community conditions. When crime and delinquency increase, more social disorganization tends to result. This is followed by conditions in a community, such as low social cohesion and less informal control, which foster an environment conducive to more crime and delinquency (Hoffmann, 2011: 98).

## Data presentations and discussions

### Contextual factors related to visiting

The questionnaire consists of the views from the youth offenders on the visitation programme and how it contributes to their rehabilitation, this was guided by the following posed questions:

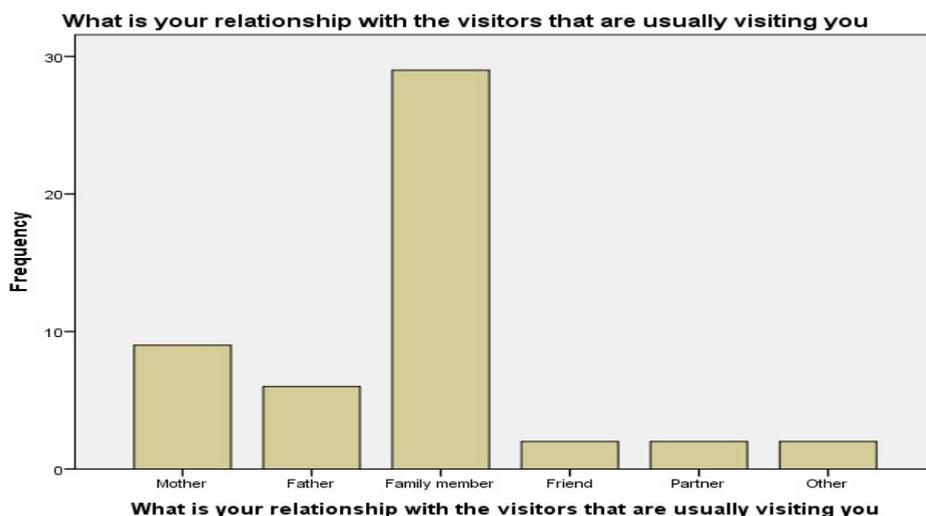
**What is your relationship with the visitors that are usually visiting you?**

**Table 1:** The relationship with the visitors that are usually visit the correctional centre

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	C u m u l a t i v e Percent
Mother	9	18.0	18.0	18.0
Father	6	12.0	12.0	30.0
Family member	29	58.0	58.0	88.0
Partner	2	4.0	4.0	92.0
Other	2	4.0	4.0	96.0
Total	2	4.0	4.0	100.0
	50	100.0	100.0	

Source: Researchers illustrations

**Bar chart 1:** The relationship with the visitors that usual visit the correctional centre



Source: Researchers illustrations

The relations of the offenders to the visitors were grouped in five categories, namely, mother, father, family member, friend, and partner. Eighteen percent (n=9) of the offenders were visited by their mothers. Twelve percent (12%) (n=6) of the offenders were visited by their fathers. Fifty-eight percent (58%) (n=29) of offenders were visited by their family member; these were grandparents, brothers, sisters and cousins. Individuals most likely to visit inmates are family members, mothers, and fathers. Four percent (n=2) of offenders were visited by their friends and another four percent (n=2) were visited by their partners. Those who highlighted “other” they specified

that pastors from their church also visit them. The majority of visitors are the family members, which it makes it easier for the inmates to have a family once they are released from the correctional centre.

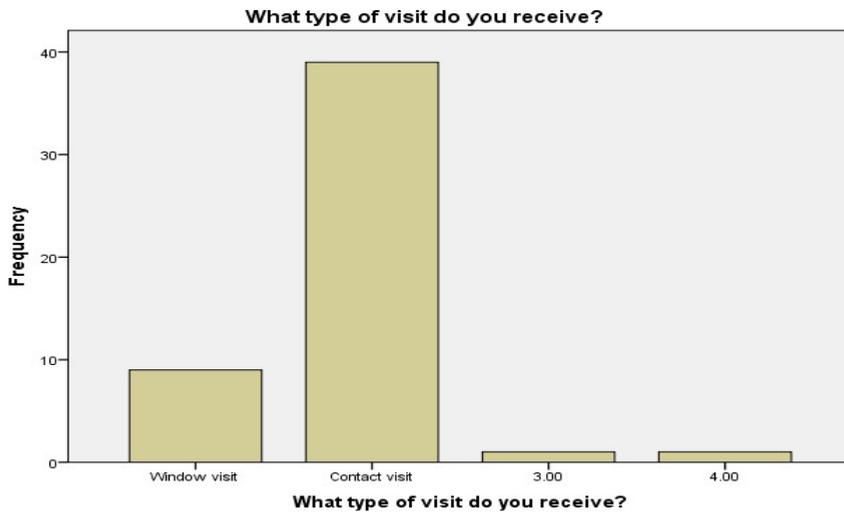
**What type of visit do you receive?**

**Table 2:** Types of visitations received

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Window visit	9	18.0	18.0	18.0
Contact visit	39	78.0	78.0	96.0
Valid 3.00	1	2.0	2.0	98.0
4.00	1	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Source: Researchers illustration

**Bar chart 2:** Types of visitations received



Source: Researchers illustrations

This study only focused on two types of visits, namely, window visits and contacts visits. The type of visit the youth offenders received was divided into those two types of visits. Eighteen percent (18%) (n=9) of offenders were receiving window visits. Seventy eight percent (78%) (n=39) of offenders were receiving contact visit. Most of the offenders received the contact visit of which that highlights a good behaviour of the inmates. The respondents that highlighted other on the questionnaire mentioned the telephone calls and receiving letters as part of the contact with their families as

well. When the inmate is incarcerated, they do not receive visitors at all, and owing to a good behaviour in the correctional centre, they first receive a window visit and if that good behaviour continues, the inmates will receive contact visits.

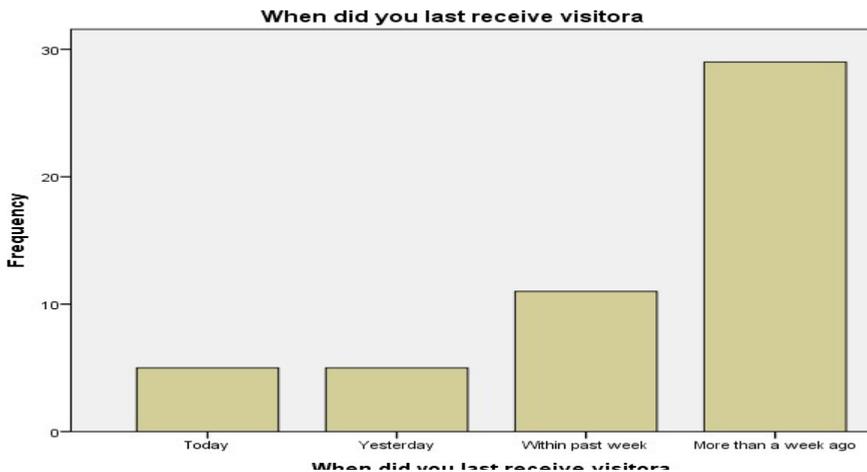
**When did you last receive a visitor?**

**Table 3:** Last time of receiving a visitor

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		10.0		10.0
Today	5		10.0	
Yesterday	5	10.0	10.0	20.0
Within past week	11		22.0	
		22.0		42.0
More than a week ago	29	58.0	58.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Source: Researchers illustrations

**Bar chart 3:** Last time of receiving a visitor



Source: Researchers illustrations

According to the DCS policy, the inmates are entitled to get four visits a month. During this study, offenders were asked when the last time they received visitors was. Ten percent (10) (n=5) of the offenders received the visitors exactly on the day they were interviewed. Another ten percent (10) (n=5) of offenders also received visitors on the day before interviews took place. Twenty-two percent (22%) (n=11) of offenders received visitors within the past week. Fifty-eight percent (58%) (n=29) of offenders received the visitors more than a week ago. The majority of the young

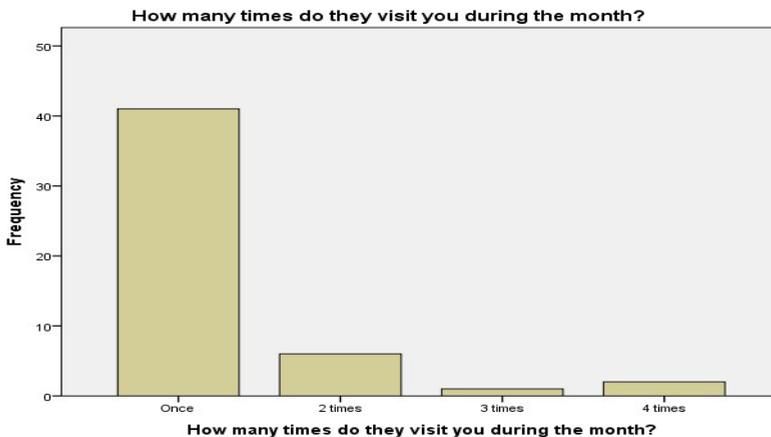
offenders received the visits for a period of more than a week. The visitors that are visiting the inmates mentioned the long distances when travelling to the correctional centre and that makes them not to visit regularly. General strain theory can also assist to explain the positive effect of visitation on the rehabilitation of offenders. Arguing that offending behaviour is affected by the type and extent of coping resources and social supports individuals possess, general strain suggests that released inmates with more social ties are more likely to have more acceptable coping strategies and support networks to assist them in better managing the challenges faced in their reintegration to community life (Bales & Mears, 2008:292).

**How many times do they visit you during the month?**

**Table 4:** Number of visitations per month

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Once	41	82.0	82.0	82.0
	2 times	6	12.0	12.0	94.0
	3 times	1	2.0	2.0	96.0
	4 times	2	4.0	4.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

**Bar chart 4:** Number of visitations per month



Source: Researchers illustrations

As it is stated above that according to the DCS policy, the inmates are entitled to get four visits a month; this section is also divided into four sections on how many times to do the visitors visits a month. Eighty-two (82%) percent (n=41) of the inmates get a visit once a month. Twelve percent (12%) (n=6) of the inmates get visits two times a month. Two percent (2%) (n=1) of inmates mentioned that they get visits three times

a month and four percent (4%) (n=2) get visits four times a month. The majority of offenders get visits once a month. According to Hairston (2001; 64), the presence of social visits protects an offender from a variety of stressful stimuli, impacting positively on the offenders' ability to handle stress in the correctional centre and foster his personal adjustment.

**How are your feelings when you know you will be visited?**

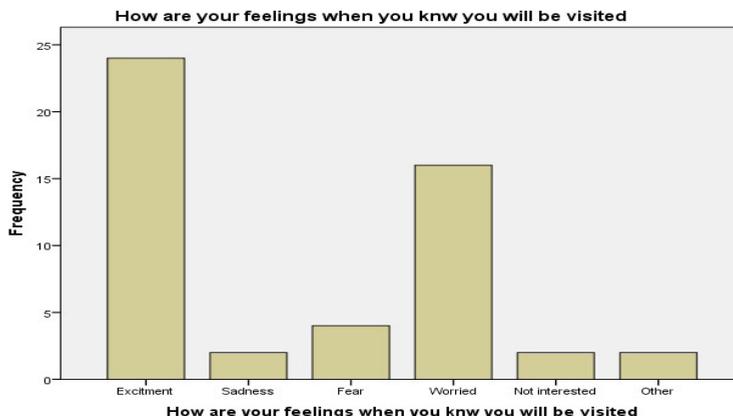
**Table 5:** The feelings of know that you will be visited

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Excitement	24	48.0	48.0	48.0
Sadness	2	4.0	4.0	52.0
Fear	4	8.0	8.0	60.0
Worried	16	32.0	32.0	92.0
Not interested	2	4.0	4.0	96.0
Other	2	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Source: Researchers illustrations

Bar chart 5: The feelings of know that you will be visited

Source: Researchers illustrations



Offenders were asked how do they feel when they know they will have visitors. Forty-eight (48%) (n=24) of offenders mentioned that they feel excited. Four percent (n=2) of offenders mentioned that they feel sad when they know that they will be visited. Furthermore, eight percent (n=4) of offenders mentioned that they had fear. Thirty-two percent (32) (n=16) of offenders said they become worried when they know that

they will have visits. Four percent (n=2) of offenders mentioned that they were not even interested in having visitors. The last four percent (n=2) of offenders mentioned that they feel happy when they know that they will be visited in the correctional centre. The majority of inmates feel excited when they have visitors. That shows the positive attitude of the young offenders towards visitation programme.

### Conclusions and recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of visitation programme on the rehabilitation of youth offenders. By means of SPSS analysis, from the youth offenders' views, this study identified that rehabilitation of youth offenders will be more effective if inmates' families provide support through continuous visits. It can be concluded that the more inmates receive support from their families and friends, the better they will become law-abiding citizens after release. Future studies need to explore the relationship between behaviour and rehabilitation outcomes and the quality of visits, the relationship between the youth and the visitor, as well as the timing of the visits. Although frequent visitation suggests improved behaviour, it is likely that incarcerated youth exhibit problematic behaviour as a result of externalizing feelings of anger, sadness, and separation anxiety following a visit. Furthermore, the following recommendations are shared in this study:

- Transfer of inmates to the nearest correctional centre

Owing to the fact that visitors travel many kilometers to the correctional centers and spend a large amount of funds to visit their family members, it is therefore recommended that inmates be transferred to the correctional center that is closer to their relatives. Many offenders are detained far away from their loved ones, who often do not have enough money or time to make the long journey. But the DCS says it is limited in what it can do to place inmates near their homes and it does not provide funds for family visits.

- **The inmates' security classification**

The minimum, medium or maximum often determines where the offender will be detained. Sometimes the nearest relevant correctional center is far from the offender's home town, but the offender can be transferred in a province where their families resides. A sentenced offender must be housed at the correctional center closest to the place where he or she is to reside after release, with due regard to the availability of accommodation and facilities to meet his or her security requirements and with reference to the availability of programmed (Correctional Services Act, 1998, Section 43).

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