



Effectiveness of the Probation System in Reducing Recidivism: A Case Study of Faisalabad, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The probation system is an important component of community-based corrections that aims to rehabilitate offenders while allowing them to remain within their families and communities. Effective probation supervision may contribute to behavioral change, social reintegration, and the reduction of repeated offending. This study examines the effectiveness of the probation system in reducing recidivism in Faisalabad, Pakistan. The study focuses on the experiences of probationers and explores the role of probation officers, counselling, rehabilitation opportunities, family support, vocational training, social stigma, peer influence, and community reintegration. A qualitative research approach was adopted, and data were collected through interviews with 20 probationers. Thematic analysis was used to identify major patterns and themes emerging from the participants' experiences. The findings indicate that effective supervision, counselling, family support, rehabilitation opportunities, and positive social relationships can facilitate successful reintegration. However, limited employment opportunities, social stigma, financial difficulties, negative peer influence, and weaknesses in rehabilitation services may create barriers to reintegration and increase the risk of reoffending. The study concludes that probation can play a significant role in reducing recidivism when supervision is combined with meaningful rehabilitation and social support. Strengthening probation services, improving vocational opportunities, and developing community-based reintegration programmes are recommended.



1. Introduction

Crime and recidivism remain important social issues because repeated offending affects individuals, families, communities, and the wider criminal justice system. Traditional imprisonment focuses primarily on punishment and incapacitation; however, contemporary correctional approaches increasingly emphasize rehabilitation and the successful reintegration of offenders into society. Probation is one such community-based correctional mechanism through which offenders may receive supervision and support while remaining in the community.

The basic purpose of probation is not only to monitor offenders but also to encourage positive behavioural change and reduce the likelihood of future offending. Probation officers may provide supervision, counselling, guidance, and referrals to rehabilitation services. The effectiveness of these services can be influenced by the personal, economic, family, and social circumstances of probationers. Employment opportunities, family relationships, social acceptance, and access to rehabilitation can particularly affect the process of reintegration.

In Pakistan, the probation system has an important role within the criminal justice framework. The system provides an alternative to imprisonment for eligible offenders and seeks to facilitate their rehabilitation within the community. Previous research in Punjab has indicated that probation officers' assistance and supervision can contribute to the rehabilitation of offenders. However, challenges related to resources, rehabilitation facilities, employment, social stigma, and community acceptance may limit the effectiveness of probation services.

Recidivism refers to the tendency of an individual to return to criminal behaviour after previous involvement with the criminal justice system. Reducing recidivism is therefore one of the major indicators of successful correctional intervention. A probation system that provides regular supervision together with counselling, rehabilitation, family support, and opportunities for productive employment may help probationers develop more stable and socially acceptable lives.

Faisalabad provides an important context for examining probation because of its large and diverse population and its social and economic characteristics. Understanding the experiences of probationers in this context can provide useful insight into the strengths and weaknesses of community-based correction in Pakistan.

Therefore, this study examines the effectiveness of the probation system in reducing recidivism among probationers in Faisalabad. Rather than examining individual probationers separately, the study identifies common patterns and themes across the experiences of 20 participants. Particular attention is given to rehabilitation, counselling, probation officer supervision, family support, vocational opportunities, social stigma, peer influence, and reintegration.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study was conducted with the following objectives:

1. To examine the socio-economic characteristics of probationers in Faisalabad.
2. To explore the role of counselling, vocational training, and rehabilitation services in reducing recidivism.
3. To identify the social factors, including family support, peer influence, and social stigma, affecting the reintegration of probationers.
4. To examine how the frequency and quality of probation officer supervision and visits influence probationers' outcomes.

5. To suggest policy and practical measures for improving the probation system and reducing recidivism.

3. Literature Review

Probation is widely considered an important form of community-based correction because it provides offenders with an opportunity to remain in society while being supervised by correctional authorities. Its effectiveness depends on the extent to which supervision is combined with rehabilitation and social support.

Khokhar, Abbasi, and Jafri (2015) examined the association between the effectiveness of the probation system and rehabilitation of offenders in Punjab, Pakistan. The study involved probationers from different districts of Punjab and found a positive relationship between probation services and rehabilitation. The researchers highlighted the role of probation officers in providing assistance and supervision to probationers. The study is particularly relevant to the present research because it demonstrates the importance of probation services in supporting offenders' rehabilitation.

Research on probation in Pakistan also suggests that community-based correction can provide opportunities for offenders to rebuild their social lives without the negative consequences associated with prolonged imprisonment. Effective supervision may help probationers develop responsible behaviour, maintain family relationships, and participate in productive activities.

However, rehabilitation does not depend exclusively on probation officers. Family support and community acceptance are also important factors in successful reintegration. Probationers who experience rejection, stigma, unemployment, poverty, or association with negative peer groups may face difficulties in maintaining positive behavioural changes. Social stigma can reduce employment opportunities and weaken social relationships, thereby creating circumstances that may contribute to further offending.

Employment and vocational training are particularly important components of rehabilitation. Productive employment can provide financial stability, improve self-esteem, and reduce dependence on negative social networks. In contrast, unemployment and economic insecurity may increase stress and vulnerability to criminal behaviour.

The existing literature therefore indicates that the effectiveness of probation should be understood through a broader social perspective. Supervision, rehabilitation, family support, employment, and community acceptance operate together in influencing reintegration outcomes. The present study contributes to this literature by examining these factors through the experiences of probationers in Faisalabad.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore the experiences and perceptions of probationers regarding the effectiveness of the probation system. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand the social and personal factors influencing rehabilitation and reintegration.

4.2 Study Population and Sample

The study focused on probationers in Faisalabad, Pakistan. A sample of 20 probationers was selected for the study. Participants represented different socio-economic and personal backgrounds, allowing the research to identify common experiences and patterns related to probation and rehabilitation.

4.3 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through interviews with the selected probationers. The interviews focused on probation supervision, counselling, rehabilitation services, family relationships, employment and vocational opportunities, social stigma, peer influence, and experiences of reintegration.

4.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed through thematic analysis. Responses were reviewed and organized into major themes and sub-themes. Instead of presenting individual case histories, the experiences of all 20 participants were analysed collectively to identify common patterns and significant findings.

Table 1. General Socio-Demographic Profile of Participants (n = 20)

Variable	Categories Observed
Age	Different age groups
Marital Status	Married and unmarried
Family Structure	Joint and nuclear families
Residence	Rural and urban
Education	Different educational levels
Occupation	Formal/informal employment and unemployment
Economic Status	Mainly low and moderate-income backgrounds
Number of Children	Varied among participants
Type of Offence	Different offences
Additional Issues	Personal, family, and social difficulties

The socio-demographic information showed that participants came from different social and economic backgrounds. Despite these differences, several common concerns were identified, particularly financial difficulties, employment-related problems, family circumstances, and challenges associated with social acceptance.

5. Findings and Discussion

Table 2. Major Themes Identified from Interviews (n = 20)

Major Theme	Main Issues Identified	Overall Interpretation
Probation officer supervision	Visits, monitoring, guidance and interaction	Supportive supervision can encourage responsible behaviour
Counselling and rehabilitation	Guidance and behavioural improvement	Counselling can support positive change
Vocational training and employment	Skills, unemployment and financial problems	Economic stability supports reintegration
Family support	Acceptance, encouragement and family problems	Supportive families facilitate rehabilitation
Social stigma	Negative attitudes and community rejection	Stigma can restrict reintegration
Peer influence	Positive and negative peer relationships	Negative peer groups may increase behavioural risks
Community reintegration	Social acceptance, employment and participation	Reintegration requires both individual and community support

Risk of reoffending	Social, economic and behavioural difficulties	Continuing problems may increase vulnerability to recidivism
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5.1 Role of Probation Officers

The interviews highlighted the importance of probation officers in monitoring and guiding probationers. Regular interaction can provide a sense of accountability and direction. Supportive supervision may encourage compliance with probation conditions and positive behavioural change.

However, the quality of interaction is also important. Supervision that includes guidance and counselling can be more meaningful than monitoring that focuses only on formal compliance.

5.2 Counselling and Rehabilitation

Counselling emerged as an important aspect of rehabilitation. Probationers may experience personal, behavioural, and social difficulties following their involvement with the criminal justice system. Appropriate counselling can help them understand their situation and develop more constructive ways of dealing with problems.

5.3 Vocational Training and Employment

Employment was closely connected with successful reintegration. Participants' experiences indicated that unemployment and financial difficulties can make rehabilitation more difficult. Vocational training and opportunities for productive work can provide probationers with skills, financial independence, and greater stability.

5.4 Family Support

Family relationships were another important part of the rehabilitation process. Supportive families can provide emotional encouragement and help probationers maintain positive behaviour. Conversely, family conflict or limited support can create additional difficulties during reintegration.

5.5 Social Stigma and Community Acceptance

Social stigma can become a major barrier after involvement with the criminal justice system. Negative attitudes may affect employment, social relationships, and community participation. Greater community acceptance is therefore important for allowing rehabilitated individuals to establish positive social identities.

5.6 Peer Influence

Peer relationships can either support or undermine rehabilitation. Positive social networks may encourage constructive behaviour, whereas continued association with negative or criminally involved peers may create risks for behavioural relapse.

5.7 Supervision and Reintegration

Overall, the interviews suggest that probation is more meaningful when supervision is combined with practical support. Regular contact can allow probation officers to identify difficulties and provide guidance. Successful probation should therefore be considered not only in terms of completing the probation period but also in terms of behavioural change, employment, family stability, and community reintegration.

6. Conclusion

The study concludes that probation has the potential to contribute to rehabilitation, social reintegration, and the reduction of recidivism. The experiences of the 20 probationers show that rehabilitation is influenced by several interconnected factors rather than by probation supervision alone.

Counselling, family support, employment, positive social relationships, and effective probation officer supervision can facilitate reintegration. In contrast, unemployment, financial difficulties, social stigma, and negative peer influence can create barriers.

A stronger probation system should therefore combine supervision with meaningful rehabilitation and social support. Such an approach can improve the chances of successful reintegration and potentially reduce repeated offending.

7. Recommendations

1. Probation officers should receive regular training in counselling, rehabilitation, and case management.
2. Regular and meaningful interaction between probation officers and probationers should be strengthened.
3. Vocational training and employment opportunities should be developed for probationers.
4. Counselling services should be incorporated into probation programmes.
5. Families should be involved, where appropriate, in rehabilitation and reintegration.
6. Community awareness programmes should be introduced to reduce stigma.
7. Probationers should be encouraged to develop positive social networks.
8. Government institutions should strengthen resources available to probation services.
9. Rehabilitation should continue throughout the probation period rather than focusing only on legal compliance.
10. Long-term monitoring mechanisms should be developed to assess outcomes related to recidivism.

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