







recommends that assistance be given to the exitee in form of suitable residence, employment, clothing, and sufficient means to maintain himself or herself upon release in order to facilitate successful reintegration, and until they re-establish themselves in the community.

The data collected from the COs and managers was analyzed thematically and yielded rich information that generated the process of exiting a child, and the seven steps of exiting a child from a rehabilitation institution. The following are the findings presented in order of occurrence of steps.

### **Step 1: A child is informed on Expiry of Committal Order**

The research established that a child exits from a rehabilitation institution under three conditions. These conditions include when:

- A committal order is expired,
- Rehabilitation officers agree that a particular child's rehabilitation objectives have been achieved,
- A child completes class 8, passes the KCPE examination, and joins a secondary school.

Regardless of the condition occasioning the exit from rehabilitation institution, a child is prepared for life outside the school. The name for this preparation is exit strategy. Customarily, according to one manager, exit strategies begin immediately after admission to the rehabilitation institution. The committal period and the date of expiry of the committal order, is disclosed to the child during admission. They are therefore always aware of their time to exit from the rehabilitation institution.

### **Step 2: A Child as Provided with Vocational Course(s)**

According to one CO, as part of exit strategy, soon after admission to a rehabilitation institution, every child is encouraged to take at least one vocational course and sit for government trade test for which a child acquires a certificate. This equips the child with skills for employment or self-employment in post-institutional lives.

### **Step 3: Keeping in Touch with Family during Rehabilitation**

The child is also encouraged to keep in touch with their home continually where possible through calling or writing to people at home. This ensures maintenance of that a positive relationship between the child and the family during committal period.

### **Step 4: Environmental Adjustment Report**

The actual exit and preparation for reintegration into the society begins when the rehabilitation institution sends a child's Environmental Adjustment Report (GoK, 2008)[27] to the committing officer. The committing officer or an authorized agent traces the home of the child and assesses the suitability of the home for reintegration of the child. A Welfare Officer visits the child's home from the school, 3-4 months ahead of exiting a child. This home visit prepares the

family for the child's return. It also ensures favourability/habitability of the home environment for the child. A child's behaviour change is communication to the family (based on review of the social progress report in the individualized treatment plan). This home environment preparation involves the people (family members/guardian/adopting parents) who are likely to stay with the exited child. Finally, family group decision is made on the future of the child.

### **Step 5: The Child Counselling for Exit and Reintegration**

At the same time, the child is prepared for exit and reintegration through counselling. This is meant to prepare the child for post-institutional life and pro-active community life. Upon completion of the counselling sessions, the child is given a two weeks leave of absence to visit home and test/experience life at home/society and bring back report to the rehabilitation institutions on the conduciveness of the home.

### **Step 6: Seeking Authority to Release the Child**

When a home is found to be conducive and the child is ready to exit, the rehabilitation institution seeks the authority of the committing court of law in writing through the director of children to release the child. At this point the court of law can either consent to the release or transact another order based on the report from the CO/district children's officer.

### **Step 7: Release and Reintegration of the Child**

When a committing court consents to the child's release, the parent picks the child. Alternatively, a CO or a welfare staff member takes the child home. This marks the end of the work of the rehabilitation institutions. The institutions are not mandated to follow-up their graduates after release. This implies lack of follow-up as a part of the rehabilitation process. The rehabilitation institutions handover the duty of following-up exitees to the field officer (district children's officer); who is supposed to pick it up from there and supervise the exitee for a period of at least two years. However, one CO and two managers reported that the post-institutional supervision is almost non-existence due to inadequate work force and resources.

## **5. Conclusion**

Based on the children's responses the researcher concluded that the children undergoing rehabilitation desire a better future and have plans for bettering their lives. It can also be concluded that the rehabilitation programmes may present impediments to the children whose projections are to pursue higher education in view of the fact that a child in secondary school who is committed to rehabilitation institutions is forced to go back to primary school for three years or to forego secondary education and pursue vocational courses. Furthermore, this creates a special needs case within the rehabilitation institutions classrooms where a child is bored with what subject content, because it is below their capabilities. Such scenario may cause frustration and behaviour disorders at school.

The rehabilitation institutions have a labelling aspect, such that few Kenyans privy to the child's background will offer them employment. For instance, most people will shy away from children who have just been 'released' from rehabilitation after committal due to prostitution, possessing an illegal fire arm or raping another child. This implies that most children will find themselves jobless unless the rehabilitation institutions is involved in attaching them to an employer, employment bureau, and offer to supervise them for the two years as required by the Children Act (GoK, 2001)[28] section 54, part 2. It states that a child committed to rehabilitation shall, at the expiration of prescribed stay be under supervision for two years or until they attain 21 years of age whichever shall be shorter.

Otherwise, children may become despondent and become recidivists in post-institutional phase of rehabilitation. This implies a serious need for post-institutional follow-up and job attachment where possible to ensure the children lead proactive post-institutional lives. Okumba, Mwangi, & Ndungu, (2005)[29] and Munyao, (2006)[30] supports these findings; he highlighted various weaknesses in the exit strategies. For instance, he observed that the grade tests three offered to children at rehabilitation institutions cannot allow them to compete favourably in the labour market. Thus, the exited child is often jobless and frustrated. In view of this background, the researcher sought to establish how the children are prepared to exit from the rehabilitation institutions and to find out whether the preparations cater for the concerns derived in this discussion.

Based on the research findings, it emerged that:

1. A child can exit from a rehabilitation school under three conditions which include;
  - When a committal order expires,
  - When the teachers and welfare officers agree that a particular child's rehabilitation objectives have been achieved,
  - When a child completes standard 8, passes the KCPE well and is to join a secondary school.
  - This is violation of section 53 of the Children Act (2001)[31] which implies that a child committing order shall remain in force unless the court orders otherwise.
2. The third scenario is not provided for in the Children Act (2001)[32]. It implies that rehabilitation school do exit children whose behaviour modification objectives are yet to be achieved, just because the child has completed primary education. The exit strategies in this case may be responsible for unsuccessful rehabilitation outcomes.
3. The children negotiating life at rehabilitation school had grand life projections for their post-institutional lives, including, pursuing higher education, looking for employment and starting a business, as show earlier.
4. The exit strategies involve counselling the child and informing the child's family of the child's behaviour change, equipping the child with a vocational skill, and taking the child back to their home at the expiry of the committal order.
5. The exited child is supposed to be under the supervision of the county children's officer for two years or until they are 21 years old. However, this supposed post-institutional supervision was almost none-existent. This may be attributed to lack of funds for the necessary logistics.

6. At exit, the exited child is labelled and may find it difficult to get employed even with the acquired vocational skill.
7. The exited child is left at home after release without resources to start a business, besides, many of them may not pursue further education due to lack of funds and sponsorship.
8. There are no government provisions for a child whose family is not ready to accept them back, or to a child who is not ready to return to an unwelcoming home. These situation leads to despondence and high likelihoods for recidivism.

Furthermore, a child who excels in KCPE exits rehabilitation to attend secondary education before achievement of rehabilitation objectives. A child can also exit when a committal order expires. Based on these findings the exit strategies were found to be weak and unable to deter a child from reoffending. Furthermore, there are no aftercare services for graduates of rehabilitation schools.

## 6. Recommendations

- a) The study recommended that soon after the achievement of rehabilitation goals, a child should be exited and post-institutional services offered by reintegration agents such as employment bureaus and non-governmental organizations.
- b) In addition, the exitees should be linked to government programmes such as 'Kazi kwa Vijana' or 'Youth Development Fund' available to Kenyans (GoK, 2014)[33], to acquire employment or funds to start own employment for those with vocational training.
- c) The study also recommended that the government facilitate post-institutional phase of rehabilitation through adequate funding and provision of necessary personnel.
- d) Other recommendations to the Ministry through the County Children's Officer include:
- e) Provide rehabilitation graduates with resources that enable them to become self-reliant, by introducing them to agencies of government funds for youth and employment bureau to reduce recidivism.
- f) Recommendations for further study
- g) In view of the lack of follow-up and weak exit strategies, there is need for a tracer study to establish the post-institutional life trajectories of graduates of rehabilitation institutions, with an aim of establishing the successful stories, and the push factors for recidivism.

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