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Records management practices to improve efficiency and service delivery at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities

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The management of records is an important function in correctional facilities as it improves accountability, safety, security and accessibility of records pertaining to offenders and the various programmes provided. The inadequate management of records however is a wide spread issue in most South African correctional facilities, as evidenced by maladministration and the loss of important offender records. This study was conducted to ascertain the records management practices of two correctional facilities in South Africa in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The research was conducted at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities with the purpose of finding out the types of records kept, the information system used for records management, the policies, procedures and guidelines governing records management, as well as the challenges hindering the effective management of records. The overall findings of the study suggest that records management is yet to be prioritized at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities, and this can be evidenced by the absence of records management policies, procedures and guidelines, lack of qualified personnel and proper training. The study also found that records are frequently lost or misplaced, despite the fact that both correctional facilities have an information system for managing records. The outcomes of this study can be used as a basis for future records management studies in correctional facilities. Moreover, the Department of Correctional Services can use these findings to improve records management practices across different correctional facilities in South Africa.

Keywords: records management, correctional facilities, Qalakabusha, Westville, records, South Africa

1. Introduction and background

The proper management of records is significant for facilities that accommodate a large number of offenders and provide other rehabilitation programs. As observed by the Handbook for prisoner file management (2008:23), information related to; classification and placement, discipline, rehabilitation, employment, health and wellbeing, inspections, belongings and visits, should be obtained and well recorded for offenders. Muntingh (2017:12) propounds that, recordkeeping is critical in correctional facilities to ensure that the correct individuals are admitted and discharged at the appropriate times. The importance of records management in correctional facilities can also be evidenced by the information systems that have been implemented by some correctional facilities for the effective management of offender records. However, correctional facilities are still plagued with a number of records management challenges, most of which can be attributed to the manual system of recordkeeping (Mbatha, Luthuli & Masenya, 2020).

The existence of policies and procedures for records management in correctional facilities has not been established, this may be the case because there have only been a few records management studies undertaken in this setting, particularly in South Africa. Drake (2014) is of the same view in that, the records and archives discipline has made little effort to study the management of records in the correctional facility setting. This could be one of the many reasons why there have been growing concerns with poor recordkeeping in correctional facilities, which have been described elaborately in the problem statement behind the present study.

Authors from other research disciplines have gone as far as to identify the necessity and importance of the records management function in correctional facilities. Luyt (1999) conducted a study on unit management and states that, proper documentation cannot be over emphasized because without proper record keeping and documentation it could be difficult to prove that human dignity has been upheld during incarceration and that real efforts have been made to equip offenders for a better life. If the necessary records are not properly kept, the result could easily be a total failure of the correctional role in the reduction of crime. Du Preez (2003) conducted a study on case management and asserts that, record keeping and documentation is of the utmost importance in the

successful sentence planning of an offender as it will ensure consistency in recording the progress of the offender throughout their sentence.

2. Problem statement

The fundamental issue that prompted this study is the maladministration and loss of records in correctional facilities, which demonstrates insufficient records management. This problem has been observed not only in South Africa, but also in other nations around the world, where it has resulted to unnecessary parole delays for offenders. In South African correctional facilities, poor recordkeeping and maladministration have resulted to delays in parole profile submissions for over 200 offenders, putting some at risk of being imprisoned for even longer (Arends, 2014). De Ruiter and Hardy (2018:2) also mention the loss of case files as some of the major issues concerning criminal Justice in South Africa, which greatly impacts offenders because their progress cannot be properly evaluated. According to Stephens (2018:168), the auditor general's report for the fiscal year 2015/16 revealed discrepancies with records pertaining to incarceration, rehabilitation, and other programs in South African correctional facilities. Stephens (2018:168) further states that lack of adequate recordkeeping in South African correction facilities shows non-compliance with the Nelson Mandela rules 7, 8, 9, and 10, and hence does not meet international standards.

3. Purpose & objectives of the study

The primary purpose of the study was to explore records management practices in the correctional facility setting, to establish the nature of records management at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities.

Objectives

- To determine the type of records kept at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities.
- To identify the information systems used for the management of records at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities.
- To find out about the policies, procedures and guidelines in place for records management at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities.

- To identify challenges hindering the effective management of records at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities.

4. Literature review

The Penal Reform International and the Association for the Prevention of Torture (2018) accentuates that proper management of prisoner files is essential for protecting human rights, ensuring good prison management and strategic planning, and building public faith in the correctional system. Similarly, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2011) propounds that keeping and managing records of persons held in prisons are not just sound correctional practices, but are also essential to protect the fundamental rights of detainees. For that reason, international human rights law regards them as vital measures that must be implemented with all due diligence and seriousness. Records management, according to the Association for the Prevention of Torture (2019) and McGuckin (2017), contributes to effective correctional institution management.

Types of records used in correctional facilities

Wahome (2011) conducted a study on assessing the information system used by the Kamiti maximum security correctional facility in Kenya. The results yielded by the study show that the correctional facility is heavily reliant on the traditional method of recordkeeping which is essentially using paper records. Wahome (2011) goes on to mention that the correctional facility has 3000 offenders and each and one of them have their own personal records that are mainly paper records.

Oye and Inuwa (2015:10) reveal that the Yola central prison in Nigeria uses paper records which are managed manually and kept in shelves, file jackets and file cabinets. Moreover, a large majority of prisons in Nigeria still rely on the traditional system of managing their records. Findings of the same nature were attained by Agomoh (2015), who laments on the large number of prisons in Nigeria that utilize paper records for their day to day activities. According to Ahishayike, Taremwa, and Omulo (2017:147), most developing countries still rely on paper records to manage their correctional facilities. The findings of their study reveal that the management of Uganda Prison Service (UPS)

is currently using paper files and manual filing systems to keep track of information, as a result work is delayed and time is wasted. Furthermore, because the process of managing offender records is entirely manual, the utilization of additional resources is required (Ahishayike, Taremwa & Omulo, 2017:147).

Amadi, Aguodoh and Amaugo (2017:483) also argue that the majority of Nigerian prisons are currently managed manually via paper records, and the manual process puts records at risk of being stolen, misplaced or damaged. Mbatha, Luthuli and Masenya (2020:55) observe that a majority of correctional facilities in countries such as South Africa are still using the traditional method of recordkeeping that relies on paper records, mostly because of financial constraints and lack of support from the government.

Information systems used for records management

The Integrated Jail Management System (IJMS) was implemented to address concerns with national prisoner monitoring in some of the major penal institutions in the Philippines. The Integrated Jail Management System keeps track of records for inmates that have been convicted of any crime and are being jailed in any of the Philippines' National Penitentiaries or Penal Institutions. The IJMS has different functions that allow the creation, editing and searching of inmate records concerning rehabilitation, educational attainment, occupation, religion, etc. (Bautista, 2014).

The Integrated Jail management System manages a large number of records and provides immediate and accurate information, ensuring satisfaction not only for the inmates and their families, but also for the jail administrators and personnel. Furthermore, the designed system is capable of transferring relevant information among the penal colonies by uploading and downloading data over a computer network (Bautista, 2014).

The Prison Management Information System (PMIS) automates prison records with the primary objective of increasing efficiency, transparency, and accountability in the prison administration. The PMIS is a sophisticated resource that allows prison administrators to tailor work flows and gain access to inmate demographic and biometric profiles,

criminal histories, court reports, parole, prison transfers, and health and medical records. The PMIS maximizes efficiency by providing rapid access to key information, such as inmate, administrative, and visitor data, while also providing automated tracking and generation of reports (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020).

The Integrated Inmate Management System (IIMS) provides consolidated data and information on all inmates and offenders at a glance to all DCS correctional facilities and community corrections offices. The IIMS records offender information from the time of admission to the time of release in the correctional institution, and increases efficiency in administration as well as productivity (Department of Correctional Services Annual report 2019/2020:44).

The Offender Management Information System (OMIS) of the Namibian Prison and correctional services is an electronic data management system which is accessible through the internet and helps corrections personnel to store and recover essential offender information electronically from the time they are admitted to the day they are released. The OMIS provides digital storage of relevant case management reports and records of involvement in programmes and other rehabilitative activities (Kathuria & Porporino, 2015:7).

Records management policies, procedures and guidelines in correctional facilities

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2011) states that it is critical for correctional facilities to implement mechanisms that would guide and supervise the management of records. Furthermore, the implementation of policies and guidelines is essential to ensure confidentiality and accessibility to the designated staff. The Hand book for prison leaders (2010:36) observes that correctional facility legal standards and policies are not always well aligned; they are often not well expressed, conveyed, or implemented. It is not uncommon to come across prisons where policies and regulations are insufficient to guide everyday decision making, poorly documented, in contradiction with each other, or even unlawful.

5. Theoretical framework

There are a variety of theories that are used in the records management and archival field, however the records life cycle and the records continuum are considered to be the two main contending models for the theoretical foundation of research studies. The study adopted the records continuum model as the theoretical foundation and it was seen to be more relevant when compared to the records life cycle model. According to Lemieux et al (2019), the life cycle model considers records as objects that, despite the “cycle” concept in its name, present a linear process view of records’ existence, with definite periods for creation, use and disposition. The continuum model however, suggests notions of the record in different dimensions through time and space without specific divisions or directions. Because some correctional facilities use both paper and electronic records, and the dynamic underlying how they are managed was unknown, the records continuum was deemed more appropriate. Lemieux et al (2019:38) assert that the continuum model takes a multidimensional view of the creation, capture, organization and pluralization of records. Luthuli (2017:19) further states that the records continuum model can be used as a theoretical foundation for studies dealing with the management of both paper and electronic records.

6. Research methodology

This research paper is a presentation of empirical findings from a study where the main focus was to explore the records management practices at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities. The study applied the qualitative research approach which is located within the interpretive research philosophy (Mosweu & Ngoepe, 2021:95). The reason behind the selection of qualitative research approach is that the study endeavoured to explore and obtain in-depth information with regard to the records management practices at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities. Moreover, it allowed the researcher to attain personal insights and interpretations from correctional officers that work with records in the correctional facilities. The study adopted the multiple case study research design since the study focused on two correctional facilities. The study adopted this design in order to enhance the validity of the research findings. Moreover, it involves the use of multiple data collection methods and analysis

techniques, and it allowed the researcher to triangulate data collection instruments in order to enhance the findings and conclusions of the study (Maree, 2016).

The study adopted snow ball sampling method because the social visibility of target population was limited which thus made it difficult for the researcher to have a sample frame to choose from beforehand. Three research participants (administration clerks) were interviewed at Qalakabusha Correctional facility and six were interviewed at Westville Correctional facility, and data was also collected via observation and document analysis. Data from Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities was analysed thematically and presented concurrently.

7. Research findings and discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion of the study as guided by the objectives of the study.

7.1 Type of records kept at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities

Dominant record format

The study revealed that at Qalakabusha correctional facility, a hybrid system is used that consists of both paper and electronic records. However, electronic records were found to be more dominant than paper records, as expressed by one of the participants:

“We use both paper and electronic records but mostly electronic records because the manual system is used as a backup”.

Observations revealed that there are some record classes that are only available in paper format such as registers that have to be signed manually and fingerprint records, since the monthly procedure of taking offender fingerprints is done manually with paper and ink.

The findings from Westville correctional facility revealed a similar hybrid system involving the use of both paper and electronic records, even though electronic records were discovered to be more dominantly used. It was also discovered through observation that the admission of an offender means an electronic record is created on the system and then created manually.

The above findings show that electronic records are the more dominant and commonly used record format when compared to paper records at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities. The dominance of electronic records in Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities is different however from what Oye and Inuwa (2015:11) and Amadi, Aguodoh and Amaugo (2017:483) found in other correctional facilities in Africa, whereby the reliance was solely on paper records. Ahishayike, Taremwa and Omulo (2017:146) also found that most correctional facilities in countries which are still developing are presently using the traditional system (pen and paper) to keep track of their records.

Records classification

With regard to the classification of records, the findings at Qalakabusha correctional facility revealed that records are classified by means of an alphanumeric system and subject classification system. Numbers, alphabets, abbreviations and prison numbers are used to identify, categorize and retrieve records.

Findings from Westville correctional facility revealed that records are classified by means of an alphanumeric system, shelve tags, prison numbers and also by years. This was expressed by one participant who stated that:

“Every shelve has a name tag which helps to keep files separate and the offender files in the strong room have prison numbers on them”.

It was also observed that some records had numbers that were preceded by alphabets as a means to classify them, such as “G 439” for reporting register and “G 4369” for parolee register.

The findings attained at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities show that records are mainly classified by means of alphanumeric classification, subject classification and alphabetical classification. Similar findings were attained by Luthuli (2017:125), who states that records were arranged in a numerical sequence according to years and months in the public and private hospitals. Even though the study focused on labour organisations, Kalusopa (2011:234) also discovered that records were

classified alphabetically and chronologically, and further states that the timely and accurate retrieval of records largely depends on how well organised and classified the records are.

Storage location of records

The findings from Qalakabusha correctional facility revealed that most paper records are kept in non-adjustable shelves, file holders and boxes, while offender docket files are stored inside and on top of steel cabinets in a strong room. It was discovered through observation that a lot of space is occupied by shelves, boxes and the file holders that are not conducive.

The participants from Westville correctional facility revealed that offender docket files are kept in a strong room designated for offender records inside and on top of lockable steel cabinets, while other records in the administration area are stored in wooden racks, shelves and boxes.

The findings of the study with regard to the storage location of manual records suggest that storing paper records in file cabinets, shelves and file holders is efficient for their proper management. Similar findings have been discovered by other researchers such as Oye and Inuwa (2015:11), who revealed that in Yola prison offender records were kept in file jackets, file cabinets and shelves, and Acham (2018), who conducted a study on the assessment of records management at Uganda prison service headquarter and found that they used the traditional method of storing files in shelves and cabinets.

7.2 Information systems used for the management of records

The study sought to discover more about the information systems used for records management at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities, as well as their advantages and disadvantages.

Information systems and management of electronic records

The information system used at Qalakabusha correctional facility is known as the Admission and Release (A&R) system, and it allows the creation, storage, access and

retrieval of offender records in an online database. Electronic records can be updated and traced on the system; as expressed by a participant who stated that:

“The Admission and Release (A&R) system that we use is networked and the electronic records are stored in an online data base where we can trace and open them if they are needed”.

The findings from Westville correctional facility with regard to the information system used were similar and revealed that an Admission and Release (A&R) system is used for the management of electronic records. The A&R system facilitates easy access and retrieval of offender records stored in an online database, while information about offenders in other correctional facilities is available via the Department of Correctional Service’s intranet.

Advantages and disadvantages of information system towards records management

The administration clerks interviewed at Qalakabusha correctional facility highlighted the main advantages of the A&R system as; easy retrieval and security of offender records. However, the disadvantage of the A&R system is that network disruptions force the participants to use the manual system. One administration clerk stated that:

“The advantage is that “the system almost never loses the records, and i don’t remember a time where we struggled to find records on the system. The disadvantage is that if there is a network problem the whole system is disrupted and we have to refer to the paper records which we must fetch from the strong room”.

The administration clerks from Westville correctional facility indicated that the A&R system simplifies the process of creating records and ensures the security of records while saving time and space. In addition, work is generally easier and there are a few errors. The disadvantages however, are that the A&R system is outdated, crashes for extended periods of time and is slow when there are network disruptions.

From the analysis of the findings it can be gathered that the Admission and Release (A&R) system plays a pivotal role on management of electronic records at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities, and its advantages greatly outweigh its

disadvantages in both correctional facilities. Although most African countries still rely on the manual system of records management, some countries have successfully implemented information systems in their correctional facilities (Mbatha, Luthuli & Masenya, 2020). Ahishayike, Taremwa and Omulo (2017:148) posit that the integrated prison management system (IPMS) has modernized the management and maintenance of prison records, and also facilitates efficient electronic processing of offender records at Kisoro prison in Uganda. Kathuria and Porporino (2015:7) reveal that the Namibian Correctional Service implemented an Offender Management System (OMIS) which is a web based electronic data management system that provides digital storage of records concerning admission, health management, rehabilitation and prison visits.

7.3 Records management policies, procedures and guidelines

The third objective of the study sought to discover whether there were policies, procedures and guidelines for records management at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities. Keokopa (2013:37) accentuates that the efficient management of records calls for clearly defined policies and procedures to guide the implementation of records management programmes.

Policies, procedures and guidelines governing records management

Study participants were asked if there were existing policies, procedures and guidelines that support the records management function. The participants at Qalakabusha correctional facility were not properly informed about policies, procedures and guidelines for records management. All the participants could not produce any documents that evidenced the existence of a records management policy, procedures and guidelines, claiming they were unsure of their whereabouts. One of the participants expressed the following remark:

“I think there are policies and procedures for recordkeeping, but all employees sign a form when they start to work in this section in the event that a record gets lost”.

The findings of the study at Westville correctional facility revealed that there are no policies, procedures and guidelines that govern records management even though most of the participants claimed otherwise. A participant stated that:

“I think there are some guidelines on the B orders which are on the system but we also use the act 111 of 1998”.

The analysis of “B orders” documents as well as the Correctional Services act 111 of 1998 revealed that there are no policies, procedures and guidelines for records management at Westville correctional facility.

The above findings suggest that policies, procedures and guidelines concerning records management are yet to exist at Qalabusha and Westville correctional facilities, and this can also be evidenced by records management personnel who are not properly informed. The hand book for prison leaders (2010:36) avers that it is not uncommon to come across prisons where policies and regulations are insufficient to guide everyday decision making, poorly documented, in contradiction with each other, or even unlawful. Chaterera (2013:100) and Marutha (2018:7) also attained findings of the same nature whereby records management personnel lacked the necessary guidelines and knowledge for managing records and were executing their responsibilities without any documented guidelines. The absence of records management policies, procedures and guidelines has serious implications on the entire records management function. Thanye, Kalusopa and Bwalya (2015:52) affirm that the absence of a records management policy may negatively affect the decision making process.

7.4 Challenges related to records management

The records management challenges identified by the participants at Qalabusha correctional facility can be summarized as; lack of training for staff, unfavorable environment for records storage, and the insecurity of records. The identified challenges from Westville correctional facility can be summarized as; insecurity of records, unfavorable environment for records storage, lack of training for staff and lack of space for records storage.

The above findings suggest that challenges related to records management are mostly associated with paper records at Qalabusha and Westville correctional facilities. Chinyemba and Ngulube (2005) state that keeping records in poorly controlled environmental conditions can lead to their deterioration and loss. Findings of the same

nature were revealed by authors such as Akpojaro and Omogbhemhe (2017:131), Wahome (2011:1), Brewer (2016) and the Joshua legacy enterprise research project (2019) in other correctional facilities.

The unavailability of proper training for records management personnel was also found to be a common challenge which may have serious implications. Marutha and Ngoepe (2017:6) assert that lack of training on records management may culminate into missing files as the officials may not have the skills to manage the records properly. Ngoepe and Makhubela (2015:300) identified the lack of skills and training on records management as some of the causes for missing records.

8. Recommendations

The study outlined useful recommendations as a catalyst to improve the management of records at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities. The recommendations of the study were put forth in view of the findings presented and discussed above.

8.1 Type of records kept at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities

With reference to the type of records that are kept at Qalakabusha and Westville Correctional Facilities, the following recommendations were put forth:

The the storage of records should be in a manner that protects them from unauthorized access, loss, damage and disasters. The strong rooms where offender records are kept as well the shelves, cabinets and wooden racks should be evaluated on a regular basis to identify potential risks. A well-structured classification scheme consisting of other ways to classify records such as chronological or subject classification should be implemented; this must be considered more especially for offender records as this would simplify their retrieval.

8.2 Information systems used for the management of records

With regard to the information systems used for the management of records at Qalakabusha and Westville Correctional Facilities, the following recommendations were put forth:

The Admission and Release (A&R) system must be updated to combine all the information from other sections into a summarized record for offenders; this can assist to document the entire journey of the offender from admission to release. The Admission and Release (A&R) system must be updated with software that will facilitate online backup of records. The Admission and Release (A&R) system should be configured and updated to work in offline mode when there are temporary network interruptions, which will allow information to be processed later on. The Admission and Release (A&R) system used at Westville Correctional Facility should be updated regularly to ensure that it doesn't crash and leave the staff with a lot of manual work that will later have to be processed on the A&R system.

8.3 Records management policies, procedures and guidelines

In view of the records management policies, procedures and guidelines that are non-existent at Qalakabusha and Westville Correctional Facilities, the study recommended that:

Records management policies that will be supported by procedures and more specific guidelines on the creation, capture and management of records must be developed and implemented. Monitoring and evaluation measures must also be in place to determine whether or not identified records requirements are being met, and if not, corrective action be taken where it is required.

8.4 Challenges related to records management

With regard to the challenges hindering the effective management of records, the study recommended that:

The storage room must be in an appropriate condition to house offender records, and there must be protective means to ensure that records are not at risk of being stolen or damaged at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities. Paper records that are kept in boxes must be efficiently organized, outsourcing the storage of semi-current records is also recommended at Qalakabusha and Westville Correctional Facilities. Records management personnel at Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities

assigned with responsibilities relating to the creation, capture and management of records should receive proper training to ensure competence in performing these tasks.

Conclusion

The study explored the records management practices in Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities, and from the above findings it can be concluded that records management is yet to be prioritized. The findings that have been attained by the current study can be useful and influential in shedding light on the importance of effective records management in Qalakabusha and Westville correctional facilities. As Ngoepe and Makhubela (2015:302) would attest, the effective management of records contributes to quick administration of justice as records provide information through which evidence is derived and decisions made. The Department of Correctional Services can use these findings as a basis to foster records management improvements across different correctional facilities in South Africa.

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