

UGANDA PRISONS SERVICE



DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH, POLICY AND PROJECTS DEVELOPMENT

CAUSES OF STAFF DESERTION IN UPS



AN INDEPTH ANALYSIS 2013-2019

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH, JUNE 2019

Foreword

The focus of UPS is on a competent, motivated, professional, efficient and effective correctional staff. The service aims at strengthening professionalism and accountability in management processes to aid the achievement of targets and outcomes. To achieve this, the service needs to identify a proper management style to retain its staff as well as creating a high performance workforce that will drive institutional performance.

Uganda Prisons Service through the Research Department conducted an in-depth analysis of the causes of staff desertion. The study was undertaken to address the concern of the rising number of deserters in the Service. Despite an enabling law and open opportunity for them to resign officially; improved working, living conditions and pay rise for junior officers, statistics show that, desertion alone contributes to 32.6% of the overall attrition rate in the Service. This is among the factors that greatly affect the Service's mandate of safe custody of prisoners and rehabilitation of offenders and the assigned mandate of production. This situation needs to be addressed through management reforms.

The views obtained from the consultations informed the recommendations contained in this report. The stakeholders consulted include, among others, selected officers at Prisons headquarters, Officers-in-Charge, selected welfare officers, and the deserters.

I request all the stakeholders to support the recommendations. I hope the recommendations in this report will be of use to make informed decisions that will see a change in the management style that will better the management and administration of staff.

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Contributing to the development of this booklet were selected Officers-in-Charge, selected welfare officers, the Staff of UPS Research Department, Staff Registry and PPU.

Abstract

According to the Prisons Act (2006) Section 47, desertion by a prison officer from duty is a criminal offence. The Public Service Standing Orders (2010) also states that any officer who suddenly leaves without an explanation is legally responsible for absconding from duty.

Presently Uganda Prisons Service staffing level is 9,671(9,146 uniformed and 525 civilian) against 56,372 inmates. There is a shortage of 39,799 staff. Staff to inmate ratio stands at 1:7 (UPS record, 31st January 2019) against the ideal 1:3.

Despite the above, UPS continues to lose staff. The current staff turnover rate is high at 200 per annum (SIP IV, 2016/17-2019/20) amidst improved workings, living conditions and pay rise for junior officers. This is worsened by the increased number of staff who desert the service every year. According to the recent statistics 91 staff deserted in 2013/14, 45 in 2014/15, 55 in 2015/16, 79 in 2016/17, 95 in 2017/18 and by 31st Jan, 2018/19, 47 staff had deserted. Although UPS recruited 705 recruit warders/wardresses in 2017 to replace those who had left the service, only 695 were passed-out (PATS record, 2019). This number was still insufficient to replace those who had left the service. If the desertion rate remains like this in the next three years, desertion alone will contribute an average of 219 staff of the overall attrition in the Service.

This is among the factors that greatly affect the Service's mandate of safe custody of prisoners and rehabilitation of offenders and the assigned mandate of production because it increases the work load to the remaining staff in terms of escorting and supervising inmates. Staff retention is a big concern for UPS which may affect its target

of having staff to prisoners' ratio of 1:5 by the year 2020. If this is not worked upon, costs on training will increase, work overload will increase and controlling escapes will become difficult, work will become more stressful resulting into more desertions and it will give a negative image to the service. One way to understand desertion is by critically examining the characteristics of the deserters and conducting an in-depth analysis of the cause of desertion.

This study established why staff continue to desert despite having an enabling law and open opportunity for them to resign officially; improved working, living conditions and pay rise for junior officers. The study was an investigation of the concern of the rising number of deserters in the Service. The main purpose was to conduct an in-depth analysis of the causes of staff desertion and recommend appropriate policy measures to improve staff retention. The study focused on the characteristics of the deserters (who deserted, when and where); reasons for continuous staff desertion and the implications of desertion.

Objectives of the study

- i. To assess the characteristics of the deserters
- ii. To find out those who deserted, were re-instated and re-deserted
- iii. To conduct an in-depth analysis of the causes of staff desertion
- iv. To recommend informed policy measures

Methodology

The study focused case study design that employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to conduct an in-depth analysis on the causes of staff desertion.

83 Officers-in-charge were purposely interviewed and the selections were based on the Stations with the highest number of deserters.

03 administrators were also consulted specifically those whose responsibilities fall under staff administration.

64 deserters were traced by use of snowballing since they were scattered country wide.

Primary data was collected by use of telephones and face to face interviews; while secondary information was collected by the review of deserters' attestation papers (Aps) in the Archives and the Discharge book from Registry at Prisons headquarters.

This study covers the period between the Financial year 2013/14 to Jan. 31st 2019. This is the period between where the numbers of deserters were on the rise. It should also be noted that, this was a further research following a similar study conducted in 2013 which was covering a period of five (5) years.

Quantitative data was analyzed using Advanced Excel while qualitative data was analyzed manually; the results were presented inform of graphs, frequency table and verbatim.

Summary of the findings on the causes of staff desertion

Frustration of staff by the administration at station level in terms of failure to attend to their issues, intimidation, harassment and use of abusive language, denial of leave and sexual harassment is a major cause of staff desertion as indicated by 49(76.6%) of the deserters. This was further confirmed by 39(47%) of the Officers-in-charge.

Recruitment of young and ambitious staff, who are ignorant about the nature of the job and sometimes under influence pedaling is one of the key causes of staff desertion in UPS as cited by 64(77.1%) of the O/Cs. 402 records of deserters reviewed also confirmed that most of the staff who deserted 212(53%) were in the age group of 21-30 years, though the records reject the notion that, they were overqualified since the majority of deserters had UCE 211(52.5%) and only 74(18.4%) had UACE; certificate 51(12.7%); diplomas 30(7.5%) and graduates 20(5%).

Deployments to some stations due to their remoteness; condition of work; harsh weather; work overload; being far away from families; and not being deployed in area of profession cause staff to desert. Much as this was not strongly supported by the secondary data reviewed 3(0.8%) and the views of the deserters 14(21.9%), deployment that one thinks is not in his/her favor can be a serious cause of desertion as can be seen in the different stations that have high rate of desertion and the views of 49(58.5%) of the Officers-in-charge interviewed.

Staff desert due to denial of request for transfers; not happy with the transfers; refusal to be recommended for transfers and personal character. This situation was confirmed by 23(27.7%) of the Officers-in-charge and 15(23.4%) of the deserters who were not happy with the transfers. This was further confirmed from the information on the records of the deserters reviewed, where 30(7.5%) indicated issues with transfers such as the transfer itself; denial request for transfer; transferred and never reached the Stations. The different statistics imply that; staff transfer is also a contributing factor to staff desertion.

Conditions outside the service such as search for greener pasture, excessive persuasive advert by security companies and the social life style of an individual staff contributes to staff desertion as confirmed by 30(36.1%) of the Officers-in-charge interviewed. On the contrary, whereas 36.1% of the Officers-in-charge interviewed indicated that staff desert due to favorable conditions outside the Service, 25(39.1%) of deserters interviewed were found to be unemployed; 16(25%) are self-employed; 12(18.8%) re-instated; and only 11(17.2%) employed with government, and other private institutions. Equally out of the 64 deserters interviewed, 28(43.8%) are willing to be re-instated indicating that conditions outside the service contribute to staff desertion at a lesser extent.

Ignorance or limited knowledge of the discharge procedure by some of the deserters is another cause of desertion as indicated by 20(24.1%) of the Officers-in-charge. It should be noted that some of deserters who had applied to be discharged could not wait for the discharge letter. This is because they did not understand the procedure for discharge. This is confirmed by 11(17.2%) of the deserters who attested to this and the records of the deserters reviewed 10(2.5%) also affirmed.

Family responsibilities visa-vis remuneration is another cause of staff desertion. 19(29.7%) of the deserters indicated family responsibilities to include problems such as sick parents, death, land issues, unable to sustain the family due to multiple loans and having too many dependents. This was confirmed by 8(9.6%) of the Officers-in-charge interviewed. From the record of the deserters reviewed, 329(81.8%) were married and 64(15.9%) had loans including those who were denied discharge on grounds of

pending loans. This implies that remuneration may not be a direct factor contributing to desertion but embedded on it is a responsibilities aspect coupled with multiple loans by staff that renders salary inadequate.

Staff living conditions such as accommodation problems is one of the causes of staff desertion as indicated by 19(22.9%) of the Officers-in-charge although only 1(1.6%) of the deserters assented to it. The different statistics imply that staff living conditions is not a major contributing factor to staff desertion.

Lack of Promotion was linked to staff desertion as indicated by 8(9.6%) of the Officers-in-charge. This was affirmed by 6(9.4%) of the deserters who complained of failure to be short-listed for Cadet Position and favoritism in promotion. From the records of deserters reviewed, 325(81%) are warders/wardresses and majority 124(31%) had spent 6-10 years in the Service without promotion. The different statistics imply that; promotion seems to be a silent contributing factor to staff desertion.

Nature of training which does not prepare the trainees fully to fit into all situations of work was attributed to staff desertion as indicated by 5(6%) of the Officers-in-charge. Though this was cited as a cause of desertion by some Officers-in-charge, it wasn't an issue with deserters. However, this implies that some staff trained and posted in various Stations are not oriented fully to understand the operating environment and the job standards required of them that make them always dissatisfied with the working conditions.

Discipline related issues in form of multiple loans; individual indiscipline like planning escape, thuggery, conning prisoners' money and engaging in sexual indiscipline like defilement cases among others has contributed to desertion of some staff as indicated by 58(69.9%) of the Officers-in-charge. Although out of the 402 records of the deserters reviewed, 232(57.7%) had clean records, 99(24.6%) were at least charged with disciplinary offences; 64(15.9%) deserted with unpaid loans and 7(1.7%) had committed crime with pending court proceedings. This confirms the notion that some deserters had disciplinary related issues.

Procedure for declaring one a deserter is one of the causes of staff desertion as indicated by 3(4.7%) of the deserters who complained to have been declared erroneously while on leave, in Stations, or in Barracks. Though this complain could not be verified to ascertain its validity since none of the Officers-in-charge had an idea about it, if it is true, it means the procedure for declaring one a deserter was violated.

Other causes of desertion cited were absenteeism, peer pressure and the practice of witchcraft in some stations among others. The different statistics imply that the causes of desertion are multi-facet that one factor alone cannot be used to explain it. Each case must be studied on its own.

Recommendations

Administration at station level;

- Create a complaints desk at Prisons headquarters, Region and station level to handle staff complaints.

- Sanction officers-in-charge found to be unwilling to handle/attend to staff complaints to enhance their approachability by staff.
- O/Cs should put emphasis on staff mentoring through regular staff counseling and guidance, coaching and meetings while minimizing the use of charge sheet to nurture positive behavior in staff.
- All O/Cs should grant leave to staff through designing a flexible leave roster to enable staff attend to their issues/problems where required.
- Provide refresher courses to all O/Cs on counseling skills, handling staff complaints, procedures of declaring one a deserter, staff deployment, motivation and how to appreciate individual differences to enhance their leadership skills.

Staff Placement;

- Deployment of staff should consider interest and ability right from training school for quality performance by the staff.
- Develop a transfer policy to allow staff work in areas where they can easily access their family and home where applicable to enable staff attend to domestic issue as well as develop their homes easily.
- O/Cs should create a pool of staff through having rotational staff deployment to minimize over dependency on specific people and the complain of favoritism and denial of leave for smooth succession.
- Standardize work environment and appraisal system by enforcing uniform standard operating procedures to avoid cultural shock during transfers;
- Request for transfer to be considered after 3 years especially staff deployed in hard to reach areas for the purposes of balancing deployment.

- Staff including O/Cs should not be overstaying in Stations to avoid being native in a place in order for them to appreciate transfers.

Staff welfare and motivation;

- Lobby for salary enhancement from government in order to meet the cost of living;
- Enhance the initiation of projects in stations such as Stations SACCOs, staff canteen, food rations, Kibaruha, shambas, labor, teamwork and favorable deployment for those experiencing financial hardships to boost staff welfare and morale;
- Provide warm jackets to staff deployed in cold regions so as to improve on staff working condition.
- Construct low cost houses in some stations to address the issue of staff accommodation.

Promotion;

- Consider regular, comprehensive promotion which is inclusive of all regions to address the complaints of imbalance and favoritism in promotions.
- Consider promoting the in-service staff with the required qualifications to fill the existing human resource gaps so as to inform the recruitment needs

Recruitment;

- Adhere to the laid down standards of recruitment by being strict and principled including developing a verification system of academic documents with UNEB and other Tertiary institutions in order to get the right people for the Service,

- Recruit more counselors to handle staff issues;
- Consider clustering recruitment of staff according to the Service human resource needs to avoid misplacement of staff during deployment;
- Lobby government for recruitment of more staff to enhance manpower in Stations.

Training;

- Conduct training needs assessment before trainings to assess and review the training curriculum;
- Change the nature of training so as to nurture the knowledge, skills and attitude by giving more time to physical drills and practical lessons to train staff to fit in all situations of the job.
- Allocate more resources towards attachment of trainees in both reception centers and outside reception centers especially in hard to reach areas and design the attachment to be long enough to orient them fully in Prisons work;
- Identify trainers from within the trainees and nurture them through training of trainers' course which includes mastering of drills, imparting of knowledge and skills and attachment to penal institutions in-order to boost the capacity of trainers in the Training school.
- Organize sensitization of staff on financial discipline and merits of working in UPS so as to address the problem of acquisition of multiple loans by the staff and attrition rate.
- Organize refresher and continuous training at regional and district level to mentor and coach staff thereby getting them on truck;

- Empower the training school by granting it autonomy to identify indiscipline characters and dealing with them right away from training school to avert other characters and;
- Conduct post training evaluation to assess the impact of training on personality change and job performance.

Loan acquisition;

- Regulate access to loans by staff from Micro-finance institutions by ensuring all money lenders are cleared by Prisons headquarters as well as limiting giving them codes to minimize staff exploitation that make them highly indebted.

Procedural adherence;

- Ensure strict adherence to procedures by following the guidelines in the Prisons Act when considering one to have deserted to avoid erroneous declaration and;
- Arrest the deserters to serve as a deterrent to would be deserters.

Inspection of stations;

- Conduct regular in-depth inspections of Stations to listen to Staff complaints in the absence of O/Cs, Deputies and Orderlies;
- Strengthen the Office of the RPCs through facilitation and refresher courses to ensure regular supervision of Stations and reports made and submitted to Prisons Headquarters for actions.

Other recommendations include:

- Strengthen and empower the office of Staff Counseling and guidance by expanding the manpower to regional offices so as to make it easily accessible to staff.
- Set a committee at both Prisons headquarters and at the Regions to check and streamline the powers of the O/Cs;
- Bond staff with legal implication whether privately sponsored to ensure that staff pay for the period lost by the department when one is not effectively engaged at the place of work.
- Develop stringent policy to curb down sexual harassment.

