

INCARCERATION AND THE WELL-BEING OF PRISON INMATES IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: *This study INVESTIGATED the influence of incarceration on the well-being of prison inmates in Nigeria. The study was carried out in Port Harcourt Prison in Rivers State, Nigeria. The population of inmates in this prison at the time of study was 2,997 while the sample of study was 250 inmates. The design of study was ex-post facto design. Five null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and data for their investigation were collected through the administration of copies of a questionnaire tagged “influence of incarceration on prison inmates (ICPI) the reliability co-efficient of the five sub-sections of the instrument were 0.79; 0.80; 0.80; 0.80 and 0.80 while the overall reliability co-efficient was 0.80. The hypotheses were tested with t-test of independent means and the results show that nature of incarceration does not influence the physical and vocational well-being of prison inmates however, it influences their psychological, social and educational well-being. These results were discussed and some recommendations were also made. One of the recommendations is that psychological and counselling services designed for inmates who are depressed, filled with anxiety, fear and hopelessness should be improved and intensified.*

KEYWORDS: Prison, Inmate, Well-being, Incarceration, Counselling Service, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

As civilization grew and population increased, the need for governance arose, hence the advent of Prison. Incarceration and prison are as old as the state/government. Crimes or offences are the key variables that lead one to be incarcerated. Crime is one of the earliest problems with humanity and can only end with the end of all human race on earth.

Siegal cited in Agbakwuru (2012:110) defined crime as “a violation of societal values of behaviour as interpreted and expressed by the criminal law which reflects public opinion, traditional values and the view point of people currently holding social and political power”. It is a felony or offence against the state and it is punishable by law through incarceration or imprisonment or payment of fine or both. In other words, it is any activity that involves breaking of the law that governs a state.

“People are most commonly incarcerated as a result of suspicion or conviction for committing a crime, and different jurisdictions have differing laws governing the function of incarceration within a larger system of justice” (<http://doclecture.net/1-894.html>). “Incarceration services four essential purposes with regards to criminals:

- To isolate criminals to prevent them from committing more crimes
- To punish criminals for committing crimes
- To deter others from committing crimes

- To rehabilitate criminals
(<http://www.kamus.net/term.php?term=incarceration>)

Other reasons for incarceration according to Agbakwuru (2012) include the need to protect the life of the incarcerated person, to safeguard public interest, or when the bail conditions have not yet been satisfied. “That a person is incarcerated does not necessarily mean that he is guilty of a crime” (<http://www.wisegeek.com>). In other words, a person may be detained before he is charged with a crime or while awaiting trial.

Incarceration goes along side with ill treatment given to the individuals. Such ill treatment can be described as torture be it physical, mental or emotional infliction. “Torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (other ill treatment) are violations of human rights, condemned by the international community as an offence to human dignity and prohibited in all circumstances under international law” (<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/campaigns/sec>), yet they occur daily across the globe in our prisons.

Prison is the medium in which crime rate is controlled. A modern society without prison service cannot function effectively and efficiently. Wikipedia free encyclopedia cited in Alao, (2009:1) described prison “as a place in which individuals are physically confined or interred and usually deprived of a range of personal freedom”. In other words, it is a place where incarcerated individuals are kept away from the society as a punishment for offence committed.

Ogundipe (2006:35) emphasized that the “prison service is a barometer for measuring the success or failure of the judicial process”. He also noted that the system is not functioning effectively in Nigeria, hence the large concentration of awaiting trial persons in our prison.

Prison has a strategic role in the promotion and protection of security of a country. There are different categories of persons incarcerated in Nigeria prisons. They are as follows:

- i) Awaiting Trial Persons (ATPs).
- ii) Convicted persons: Short term, Long term, Lifer, Condemned Convicts (CC) and debtors.
- iii) Detainees
- iv) Lodgers prisoners and
- v) Juvenile prisoners.

There are also different types or categories of prison in Nigerian prison system. Omu (2008:7) listed ten of them thus: satellite prison, prison camp (open prison), lock-ups, divisional/provincial prison, medium security prison, convict prison, maximum security prison, Borstal institution, female prisons and prison farm center. Each performs different functions and serves different purposes. The Nigeria prison service is in charge of prisoners and its vision and mission is to protect the society, reform the prisoners and transform them into law abiding citizens with a view to returning them back into the society.

Prisoners are also classified into categories based on their age, status, types of offence and previous records. According to Omu (2008:27), “classification is the separation of prisoners on the basis of defined criteria such as age, sex, criminal record, training needs and legal reasons”. The purpose of this classification is to minimize the risk of bad influence from hardened criminals on others and to facilitate the prisoner’s rehabilitation and re-integration into society. It is also for security, reformation and training purpose.

Incarceration serves punitive, deterrence and reformatory purposes for the individual. Punitive refers to the specific period of time the individual will spend in prison “as a punishment for his/her felony or crime against the state” (Agbakwuru, 2012:111). Deterrence is the consequences incarceration will pose on others, to stop them from committing crime or felony. While reformation is “the process or task of modifying or changing the anti-social behaviour of the incarcerated person into socially desirable behaviours” (Agbakwuru, 2012:112).

Incarceration should however be seen from the perspective of reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration rather than punishment. Reformation is the process of transforming the inmate into a better person. While rehabilitation is the process of preparing the inmates by equipping them with the necessary vocational/educational training in order to help them fit back into the society upon discharge/release. In a related way, reintegration is the process of preparing inmates in a reformed and rehabilitated manner back to the society. This is achieved by engaging inmates in useful programmes like educational/vocational programmes, and psychological/psychiatric programmes.

Regrettably, Nigerian prisons mainly operate as a punitive institution as presently remand persons live in the most terrible conditions, occupying the most crowded cells. This can be attributed to the long and endless period spent Awaiting Trial. Previous studies carried out according to Ehonwa (1996) stipulated that many ATPs are known to have stayed in prison without trial for period ranging from one to ten years. Presently, the lists of those Awaiting Trials in Nigeria prisons are enormous. Furthermore, the plight of the un-convicted inmates who are not enjoying the so called “benefits” which convict status bestow makes them suffer great agonies of incarceration.

Sadly, there is an apparent lack of research report which has investigated the influence of incarceration on the overall well-being of prisoners in Nigeria. Well-being in this sense refers to the sum total of wellness of an individual in terms of biological and physical health emotional and psychological wellness, mental and social states, etc. It connotes lack of depression or anxiety. This state of the mind is important as it determines the general health and well-being of an individual. This study was carried out to fill this gap in knowledge. Therefore, the problem of the study posed as a research question is, what is the influence of incarceration on the overall well being of prison inmates in Nigeria?

The study is guided by the following null hypotheses:

- 1) There is no significant influence of nature of incarceration on the physical well-being of the inmates.
- 2) Nature of incarceration does not significantly influence the psychological well-being of the inmates.
- 3) Nature of incarceration does not significantly influence the social well-being of the inmates.
- 4) Nature of incarceration does not significantly influence the vocational well-being of the inmates.
- 5) Nature of incarceration does not significantly influence the educational well-being of the inmates.

METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Port Harcourt prison in Port Harcourt City Council Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The area has a total land mass of 109 square kilometers (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/port/harcourt>). This study was considered appropriate in Port Harcourt prison because the prison has one of the highest population of inmates in Nigerian prisons hence adequate population is assured. The design for the study was ex-post factor. This design was considered appropriate for the study because the inmates are already incarcerated. The population consisted of all prison inmates in Port Harcourt prison. Data collected from Port Harcourt prison records at the time of this study (24/04/2014) show that there were 2,997 inmates in Port Harcourt prison. This number consisted of 2,633 awaiting trial males (ATM), 38 awaiting trial females (ATF), 78 convicted males, 7 convicted females, 18 lifers, 208 condemned male prisoners, 9 condemned female prisoners and 6 male lodgers. The sample of the study consisted of two hundred and fifty inmates drawn from Port Harcourt Prison using the stratified random sampling technique. Out of this number, 172 were awaiting trial males, 28 were awaiting trial females, 20 were convicted males and 6 were convicted females. Eleven others were condemned males, 5 were condemned females, 2 were male lifers and the remaining 6 were male lodgers. The adoption of stratified random sampling technique for composing the sample of this study was considered most appropriate because there were different categories of incarcerated persons in Port Harcourt prison. This sampling technique thus ensured that all the categories of prison inmates are reflected in the study.

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers' tagged "influence of incarceration on prison inmates" (ICPI). It was divided into five sections (A-E) corresponding with the five variables under investigation. Each of the 5 sub-sections of the instrument contains 10 items thus giving a total of 50 items. The items were developed in the pattern of a modified 4-point Likert-type questionnaire. The questionnaire was subjected to pilot testing using 40 inmates of Ahoada prison who were not part of the main study. The reliability co-efficient was determined through Cronbach alpha and it was 0.79, 0.80, 0.80, 0.80 and 0.80 for sub-sections a, b, c, d and e respectively. The overall reliability coefficient was 0.80 which was obtained by getting the mean of the five co-efficients. Copies of the questionnaire were indirectly administered on the prison inmates through the prison officials. This measure was taken because of the high security nature of the prison. Copies of the instrument were retrieved from the respondents immediately after they have given their responses. The five null hypotheses were tested with t-test of independent means.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis are presented in the following tables:

Table 1: t-test analysis of influence of nature of incarceration on the physical well-being of inmates

Nature of incarceration	N	\bar{X}	S.D	df	t-value	Sig.
ATPs	200	26.49	4.12	248	0.294	0.769
CPS	50	26.68	3.94			

Significant at 0.05 level

The result on table one shows that at 248 degree of freedom, the calculated t-value of 0.294 is less than the t-critical of 0.769. In the light of this, the null hypothesis was retained. The conclusion which can be drawn from this result is that as far as the physical well-being of prison inmates is concerned, nature of incarceration has no significant influence on it.

Table 2: t-test analysis of influence of nature of incarceration on psychological well-being of inmates

Nature of incarceration	N	\bar{X}	S.D	df	t-value	Sig.
ATPs	200	27.43	5.10	248	1.45	0.146
CPS	50	28.60	5.26			

Significant at 0.05 level

The result on table 2 shows that the t-calculated of 1.45 is greater than the t-critical of 0.149 at 248 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. In the light of this result, null hypothesis was rejected. The conclusion which can be drawn from this result is that nature of incarceration significantly influences the well being of prison inmates.

Table 3: T-test analysis of influence of nature of incarceration on social well-being of inmates

Nature of incarceration	N	\bar{X}	S.D	df	t-value	Sig.
ATPs	200	27.78	3.29	248	1.460	0.146
CPS	50	28.56	3.82			

Significant at 0.05 level

The information on table 3 shows that at 0.05 alpha level and 248 degree of freedom, the t-calculated value of 1.460 is greater than the t-critical of 0.146 hence the null hypothesis was rejected. The conclusion which can be drawn from this result is that nature of incarceration significantly influences the social well-being of inmates.

Table 4: t-test analysis of influence of nature of incarceration on the vocational well-being of inmates.

Nature of incarceration	N	\bar{X}	S.D	df	t-value	Sig.
ATPs	200	20.13	6.62	248	0.137	0.891
CPS	50	20.26	7.35			

Significant at 0.05 level

The result on table 4 shows that the t-calculated value of 0.137 is less than the t-critical of 0.891 at 248 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. In the light of the result, the null hypothesis was retained. The conclusion which can be drawn from this result is that nature of incarceration does not significantly influence the vocational well-being of inmates.

Table 5: t-test analysis of the influence of nature of incarceration on the educational well-being of inmates

Nature of incarceration	N	\bar{X}	S.D	df	t-value	Sig.
ATPs	200	25.51	5.28	248	1.56	0.121
CPS	50	24.12	6.92			

Significant at 0.05 level

The result on table 5 shows that t-calculated value of 1.56 is greater than the t-critical of 0.121 at 248 degree of freedom and 0.05 alpha level. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected. The conclusion which can be drawn from this result is that nature of incarceration significantly influences the educational well-being of inmates.

Discussion of Findings

The result of hypothesis 1 shows that the mean and standard deviation scores of CPS was higher than that of the ATPs. The mean difference was not significant when tested with independent t-test. This shows that nature of incarceration does not significantly influence the physical well-being of the inmates. This finding disagrees with that of Awopetu (2004) who discovered that psychological well-being of inmates was significantly associated with category of prison and interpersonal space. The disparity is not unconnected with the fact that the previous study was based on the influence of prison crowding and demographic variables on psychological well-being of prison inmates while the present study is on the influence of incarceration on the physical well-being of inmates.

On the other hand, the mean and standard deviation scores of the inmates on the influence of nature of incarceration on psychological well-being of the inmates revealed that CPS had higher mean score than the ATPs. The mean difference was significant when tested with an independent t-test. This shows that nature of incarceration significantly influence psychological well-being of the inmates. This finding is not surprising due to the fact that presently, remand prisoners live in the most terrible conditions, occupying the most crowded cells. This can be attributed to the long and endless period spent awaiting trial. The finding collaborates that of Roguski and Chavvel (2009) who found out that most prisoners had no history of mental illness prior to their incarceration however, due to the combination of prison environment and culture, they reported developing insomnia, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, anger and violent tendencies.

In a related way, the result of statistical test of hypothesis 3 shows that the mean score of the CPS was higher than that of the ATPS and when this was subjected to t-test analysis, a significant difference was seen. This shows that nature of incarceration has a significant influence in the social well-being of inmates. This result is also attributed to the better treatment and greater freedom which convicted inmates enjoy over awaiting trial inmates.

Furthermore, the result of the statistical analysis of hypothesis 4 shows that nature of incarceration has no significant influence on the vocational well-being of inmates. However, CPS has higher mean score than ATPS. This finding is not surprising because those who are already sentenced (CPS) take the training more seriously knowing that they are already tagged, know their sentence periods and are hopeful that they will eventually gain their freedom someday.

Finally, the result of the statistical investigation of hypothesis 5 shows that nature of incarceration significantly influences the educational well-being of inmates in favour of the ATPS. This result is probably because the awaiting trials have not been tagged and believe that they will regain their freedom and make use of the prison educational opportunities to advance their post prison educational well being. In addition, during the long period of awaiting trail, they use the prison educational opportunity to improve their self-confidence, self-esteem, effect a change in their attitude towards life, and break the monotony of prison life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the results of this study, it is recommended that:

- Programmes and policies that will increase the well-being of prison inmates should be embraced as these will improve the lives of the inmates and facilitate the reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of prison inmates back to the society.
- Psychological and counseling services designed for inmates who are depressed, filled with anxiety, fear and hopelessness should be improved and intensified.
- Recreational facilities in prisons should be improved to enhance the physical, psychological and social well being of inmates.
- Prison educational service should be improved to enable inmates obtain educational training.
- Adequate vocational workshops should be provided in prisons to enable inmates acquire relevant vocational skills while in incarceration.

CONCLUSION

Incarceration is a dislocating and distressing experience. In fact, life in incarceration is stressful. This creates physical, psychological, social, educational and vocational challenges to the incarcerated. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance the rehabilitation of incarcerated persons through educational and vocational training.

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