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Criminal Recidivistic Tendencies And The Effectiveness Of Reformatory Programmes Of Correctional Institutions In Nigeria

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Abstract

In the light of seemingly increasing recidivism rates amongst inmates, this study investigates the effectiveness of reformatory programmes in correctional institutions and the trigger factors of recidivistic tendencies amongst ex-convicts in South-South, Nigeria. The study adopts the descriptive survey design, where the purposive and snowball sampling techniques were further adopted in the administration of the research instruments to the relevant respondents for the study. It draws from Robert Agnew's general strain theory to present an explanation of the act of recidivism amongst ex-convicts. An in-depth interview guide was adopted to serve as the research instruments for eliciting relevant information from the respondents. Forty-three (43) ex-convicts were utilized as respondents for the study. Findings from the study suggests that although the reformatory programmes of correctional institutions in South-South Nigeria were well designed and structured to achieve criminal reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration; however, factors such as endemic prison subculture, reintegration labelling effects, and employability redundancy of ex-convicts were significantly implicated as the primary causative factors of criminal recidivistic tendencies. Consequently, the study recommends intensive community sensitization and re-orientation via awareness campaigns to facilitate acceptability and reintegration; the creation of enabling environment for the actualization ex-convicts acquired entrepreneurial skills; and the adoption of non-custodial sentences as an alternative to criminal incarceration.

Keywords: Recidivism, Reformatory Programmes, Correctional Institutions, Ex-convict.

Introduction

Generally, correctional institutions are charged with the responsibility of playing custodial roles of persons who are legally detained and the reformation or rehabilitation of convicted criminals. In

Nigeria, correctional institutions are classified based on the types of offenders and the degree of the offense committed. The purpose of this classification is to avoid an erroneous mix of inmates and to guarantee an effective reformation process and the custodial of Legally Detained Persons (LDP). Convicted criminals are often required to undergo some reformatory processes while serving their sentences or jail term. This is primarily to deter them from future involvement in acts of crime and to facilitate a seamless reintegration into the society (Matt, 2005).

Despite the existence of several reformatory programmes in correctional institutions, studies have indicated that some convicted individuals resort to recidivism after serving their sentences or jail terms. Recidivism is a criminological term utilized to imply the tendency of an ex-convict to consciously or deliberately re-offend in order to be re-incarcerated to continue with prison life. Recidivists take pleasure in committing the same degree or worse of crime responsible for their initial incarceration, thereby, subjecting members of the society to loss of trust for reformatory programmes administered to convicted criminals by correctional institutions (Zamble&Vernon, 2001).

Recidivists pose a huge risk to members of the society and correctional institutions (Mark, and John, 2000). Unfortunately, the trend of recidivism has received little or no attention from criminologists and scholars in Nigeria. Incidences of recidivism tend to defile the principles of reformation, rehabilitation and re-integration of ex-convicts into the society. It places a dent in the quality and integrity of the reformatory programmes administered to inmates by correctional institutions. The types of reformatory programmes administered to convicted individuals by correctional institutions may have a direct correlation to the incidences of recidivism (McGuire, 2002). The incidence of recidivism in Nigeria is becoming worrisome. Cases abound where ex-convicts either deliberately choose to re-offend in order to be charged to resume prison life; or embark on a revenge mission without minding the consequences of being sentenced to prison. Consequently, members of the society have been exposed to the harm of recidivists due to the failure of correctional institutions to reform and rehabilitate convicted individuals for seamless reintegration.

According to a 2019 report by the International Centre for Prison Studies, the average recidivism rate for the world's 10 largest prison systems is around 46%. This means that nearly half of all prisoners released return to prison within three years of their release. In the United States, the recidivism rate is estimated to be around 67% within three years of being released from prison, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Some specific sub-populations have even higher rates of recidivism, such as those with a history of drug abuse or violent offenders. In Europe, recidivism rates vary widely by country, but some estimates suggest that the rate is around 50% on average. However, there are some countries with notably lower rates, such as Norway, which has a recidivism rate of around 30%, attributed in part to its focus on rehabilitation and reintegration programs. According to a report published in 2015 by the National Bureau of Statistics, the recidivism rate in Nigeria was 69.7%. This implies that almost 7 out of every 10 inmates released from correctional facilities in Nigeria get rearrested and end up back in prison. The report also highlighted the need for a comprehensive overhaul of the criminal justice system in the country to reduce the high rate of recidivism and improve the chances of successful reintegration of former inmates into society. It is important to note that recidivism rates can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as the quality of rehabilitation programme, the availability of social and employment

support, and the severity and nature of the crime committed. Acts of recidivists often lead to property loss, injuries and even death of the victims. Besides, recidivists mount pressure on the economic cost of correctional institution management and discourage the processes of criminal reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration. Therefore, this study is essentially designed to x-ray the possible trigger factors of recidivism and to examine the effectiveness of reformatory programmes administered to convicted persons or inmates by correctional institutions in curbing the rate of recidivism in Nigeria. It attempts to proffer explanations to the following probing questions: what are the trigger factors of recidivism in correctional institutions of South-South Nigeria? To what extent do reformatory programmes deter acts of recidivism in correctional institutions of South-South Nigeria? and in what ways can the trend of recidivism be reversed in correctional institutions of South-South Nigeria?

Conceptual Justification

Recidivism: This implies the deliberate act of an ex-convict to re-offend or repeat a criminal act with the ultimate aim of re-incarceration. The concept is utilized to explain a situation where individuals commit similar crimes shortly after being released from a correctional institution. It is a situation of criminal relapse especially to similar offenses.

Recidivistic Tendencies: This expresses the inclination of an ex-convict to re-offend in order to return to prison life. The desire for re-incarceration are hinged on various factors, which varies across correctional centres. The concept is utilized to represent the anticipation or consideration given by ex-convicts for a relapse into previously committed crimes, in order to be re-incarcerated.

Reformatory Programmes: Most convicts, especially minors and first offenders are taken into custody by correctional institutions for purposes of reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration. This is realized via the administration of reformatory programmes. Reformatory or Correctional programmes are essentially designed to treat criminal offenders taken into custody by correctional institutions.

Correctional Institutions: This concept has recently gained relevance in criminal justice administration. The concept of prisons has long been used in its stead. However, recently the concept of correctional institution has been widely adopted to reflect the essence of its establishment and existence. Correctional institutions serves as custodial centres to convicted individuals throughout their jail term. They are responsible for the administration of reformatory or correctional programmes targeted at the rehabilitation, reformation and reintegration of convicted individuals back to the society.

2.0 Literature Reviews

Otu (2015) held that the rate of recidivism in Nigeria is getting worrisome. The situation of which is a challenge on the type and quality of reformatory programmes administered by correctional institutions. The author reviewed existing literature on the causes of criminal recidivism and found that societal discrimination and stigmatization against ex-convicts, the lack or poor aftercare services, familial, peer influence and substance abuse are responsible for ex-convicts to relapse into criminality.

According to Tenibiaje (2013), both societal and prison factors are responsible for relapse to criminal life. These factors includes but not limited to: familial, personal, cultural, structural, economic and situational. This implies that the tendency for ex-convicts to recidivate is heavily dependent on the nature of society and the existing subcultures in correctional institutions. The tendency to recidivate is therefore based on the attraction of societal and factors of prisonization.

Skeem and Peterson (2010) identified the limited chances of ex-convicts to be engaged educationally and their absorption into gainful employment as some of the possible risk factors for individual relapse into criminality. The absence or delay of post correctional interventions measures pose a fertile ground for recidivism. This is substantiated by the fact that an idleness could prone individuals who have completed their correctional terms into relapse in order to make a living in the society.

The abuse of substances has also been severely implicated as a predictor of individual's recidivistic tendencies. McKean and Ransford (2004) relates the misuse of drugs and alcohol as trigger factors to crime and the tendency for individuals to recidivate. Dawkins (1997) and Siegel (2008) buttress this position by maintaining that drug users are better prone to violence than non-drug users or abusers. Additionally, Ssekamatte, Nalugya, Mugambe, Wagaba, Nakalembe, Mutebi, Bagonza, Tigaiza, Kansiime, Ssempala, Wafula, Isunju and Buregyeya (2023) investigated the prevalence and predictors of sex under the influence of psychoactive substances among young people in informal settlements in Kampala, Uganda and found that aggressive sexual behaviours are significantly positively correlated to the use of psychoactive substances.

Leschied, Chiodo, Nowicki and Rodger (2008) Suggest that familial issues also constitute a facilitating factor for criminal relapse by ex-convicts. Supported by Otu (2015), on the grounds that the absence of family support and care is an impediment to post-prison rehabilitation, integration and adaptation. The family is considered the basic and most significant agent of socialization. That means, it is significant in the role of reintegrating ex-convicts into the society. Where this post-prison support and acceptance are lacking from family, the ex-convict will have a feeling of immediate rejection and may relapse to crime.

Adelola (1988) opined that existing inmate subculture precipitates the tendency to recidivate. This is exacerbated by the non-acceptability and labelling of ex-offenders by members of their immediate society. Consequently, the choice of re-integration to the prison or correctional institution where the ex-offenders will be accepted by other inmates with free food, water, clothing, housing, medicals, etc.; is preferable to being subjected to societal rejection and the responsibilities to live and survive in an uncertain society.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Strain Theory

Robert Agnew's general strain theory as amplified by Ackerman and Sacks (2012) was considered the most suitable theory for the study, because it underpins the problem of recidivism in correctional institutions. Developed in 1992, the general strain theory holds that the act of crime is a product of the strain and stress that members of the society encounter in their struggle for existence. The strain and stress constitute negative life experiences that could emanate from such social problems as poverty, discrimination, criminal labelling or stigmatization, unemployment, etc. Agnew maintained that these strains can predispose individuals to exert negative emotions

leading to anger, despair and frustration; which further has a high propensity of leading the individual to criminality.

According to Agnew, strain is responsible for maladaptive coping strategies of individuals in the society. Therefore, when individuals are strained, they are exposed to loss of positive stimuli, while imposing negative stimuli and may show the absolute lack of ability to achieve their goals. Since strain produces negative emotions, it is a precipitating factor for individuals to commit crime. Ashibi, Andrew and Okpiliya (2020) substantiated the positive relationship between strain and the tendency for individuals to commit crime in their study on the correlates of unemployment, poverty and street crimes.

Agnew's general strain theory is relevant to the extent that recidivism is a product of strain that ex-convicts experience as reintegrated members of the society. It underpins the tendency of re-offending because when ex-convicts suffer strain from situations of unemployment, stigmatization, poverty, and general rejection from members of their immediate communities, they are prone to re-offending with the ultimate aim of getting a new sentence to return to correctional institution where he/she will find consensus with other inmates.

3.0 Methodology

This tracer study is purely qualitative and was conducted among a sample of 43 convicted individuals who were selected for the study. Their sentences ranged between 3 to 6 months only. They were studied while in correctional custody and later traced and re-studied after serving their sentences. The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study, with the utilization of an in-depth interview guide as the major instrument of data collection from the respondents. The purposive and snowball sampling techniques was employed in the administration of the research questionnaires to the inmates based on the condition of their jail terms not exceeding 6 months and not less than 3 months. The essence of the choice of this duration was to ensure the convicts acquaint themselves with prison life and to allow for a completion of the research process within a reasonable time frame. Data were collated from the respondents via face-to-face and on telephone especially when their location after being released from incarceration was considered cost intensive. The data gathered were analyzed thematically and presented systematically to reveal patterns and commonalities among the respondents.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	38	88.4
Female	05	11.6
Total	43	100.0

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 18 years	00	00
18 – 23 years	04	9.3
24 – 28 years	12	27.9
29 – 33 years	14	32.5

34 – 38 years	08	18.6
39 – 43 years	02	4.7
44 – 48 years	02	4.7
49 years and above	01	2.3
Total	43	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

The demographic characteristics of the respondents for the study are indicated in table 1 above. The categorization of the respondents according to their sex revealed that male respondents (38) constituted 88.4 percent while female respondents (05) constituted 11.6 percent. This clearly implies that male offenders/ex-convicts dominated the study. Additionally, it revealed that there were more male offenders than females, which negates the possibility of gender balance for the study.

Based on the distribution of the respondents according to their age, the table further revealed that young adults within the age brackets of 24 – 33 years constituting a total of 60.4 percent, dominated the study. The implication is that young people of youthful ages were found to be in the majority of crime commission.

Effectiveness of Correctional Programmes

At the instance of correctional custody, the respondents were interviewed in order to determine their interest in correctional programmes that were administered while they were in custody. The nature of correctional programmes found in the correctional institution includes but not limited to formal education in different subject areas and vocational studies in specialties like: carpentry, shoe making, laundry, hair dressing, welding, tailoring, technician, mason, agriculture (poultry, fish farming, etc). These programmes are designed to enrich the capacity of the inmates in order to keep them gainfully productive when they are eventually released and re-integrated to the society. The suitability of these programmes was tested among the respondents for the study via the in-depth interview guides and majority of the responses revealed that the correctional programmes offered by correctional institutions are invaluable. Some of the responses are presented below:

Response from a 28 years old male inmate

For me, I have learnt a lot since I was sent here. Before, I could not do anything for myself to earn money. But since they taught me how to sew clothes through the tailoring programme that I joined, I am very happy that when I leave this place, I am going to be a better person in the society.

Response from a 32 years old male inmate

I think this prison is a blessing to me. I thought I was coming here to suffer. But by the time I went through a training programme on how to run a barbershop, I was very happy about the skills I have gained while being a prisoner. God willing, I will not waste time to open my barbing salon when I am out of this place.

Response from a 42 years old male inmate

I came here with believing that life has ended for me. The first week was not easy for me. I was always feeling like I am under punishment, until one certain day when we were all called to pick interest on skill acquisition programmes. I quickly picked the carpentry one because I love the job so much. After the training, I can now produce common furniture by myself. With this one, by the grace of God, I can make a living for my family and myself if I am released.

The responses above clearly indicate that convicted individuals appreciate the nature of correctional programmes administered by correctional institutions. It further reveals their willingness and interest to engage in gainful self-employed jobs by utilizing the knowledge and skills gained from correctional programmes. Therefore, it would be appropriate to re-affirm the effectiveness of correctional programmes in the rehabilitation of convicted persons.

Post-custodial Impediments to the Utilization of Correctional Skills

Correctional skills are vital for the survival and existence of inmates who have completed their sentences. The skills acquired are considered vital for the ex-convict to establish himself/herself and live a normal life while fending for other dependents. However, certain factors were identified as challenges for the operationalization of such skills. Some of the qualitative responses to this effect are presented thus:

Response from a 26 years old male ex-convict

Let me tell you. I left the prison as a professional barber. I was happy that I will be able to setup my own business. But when I came home, I could not raise the capital to buy the required start-up equipment like electricity generators, etc. I made efforts to get a loan but it has been really hard. So, for now I am managing with one of my friends in his salon to see if I can raise the money to start my own.

Response from a 39 years old female ex-convict

Sincerely, I left prison with so much hopes of becoming a better person. While I was in prison, I learned how to make dresses (Tailoring). I took the training seriously and even graduated as one of the best. But by the time I was released, it has not been easy. I have been struggling to sustain my little business. Most customers avoid me, probably because I am an ex-convict.

Response from a 29 years old male ex-convict

I was taught welding while I was still in prison. In fact, I used to handle most of the welding jobs for them. I know everything about welding. But when I was released, it was really hard for me to start-up my own business

because of the money involved in buying the equipment. I wish government could give me loan to buy the equipment and pay them back.

From the above responses, it is clear that ex-convicts face socio-economic challenges in their attempts to re-integrate to the society. Relevant skills acquired during correctional custody are hardly operationalized due to factors such as the lack of start-up capital, stigmatization from members of the immediate community, and the high cost or epileptic electricity supply.

Causes of Recidivism

A relapse to crime is quite a strange phenomenon. The question raised is why would any normal individual want to commit a similar crime that once got him/her into incarceration? This phenomenon has remained a dilemma and raises concerns among scholar. An investigation of the respondents elicited the following responses:

Response from a 42 years old male ex-convict

Listen to me, life in the prison is even better than life out here. How can somebody survive without a job. There is no meaningful employment anywhere. See me now, I have a skill that I learned from the prison, but I don't have the money to start the business. Even the government cannot give us loans to start something for ourselves and our families. If I were to be in the prison, by now, I will enjoy whatever comes in with other inmates.

Response from a 38 years old female ex-convict

I wish I remained in the prison. At least, I was free there and lived a free life. Anyhow, we were all free with ourselves knowing that we all might have done something wrong to be there. But, since I regained my freedom, nobody wants to associate with me. They still see me as a criminal and would not want to have anything to do with me. They gather to talk about me and laugh at me whenever they see me passing by. The stigmatization is just too much.

Response from a 46 years old male ex-convict

You see, life in the prison was a very interesting one for me. During my time in the prison, I was like a Governor. I commanded respect and shared roles and responsibilities to other inmates. Whatever comes in must be brought to me for sharing. In fact, I was in-charge. When people give gifts to us, it lands on my table. I used to be the one to share the items to everyone in my cell. But since I was released, everyone looks at me like a common human being. There is no regard for me. Instead, I suffer a lot before I can eat food every day. This is not nice at all. I wish I just remained in the prison.

From the responses above, it could be deduced that ex-convicts suffer the lack of post correctional interventions, which could culminate to an attraction to prison life. Additionally, ex-convicts who

suffer from poverty because of unemployment or who suffer from derogation and stigmatization may feel uncomfortable and would not mind risking the chance of a criminal relapse. Furthermore, prison subculture has been implicated as precipitating factor for offenders to re-offender in order to return to prison life. violence

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examines recidivism among criminal offenders and the effectiveness of reformatory programmes in correctional institutions. The tendency to recidivate is facilitated by various socio-economic factors. The study revealed that reformatory programmes offered by correctional institutions are positively impactful on the inmates. While in custody, most inmates internalize the concepts of skill acquisition to learn different skills for capacity building. Conversely, the skills acquired are impeded by socio-economic factors such as unemployment, poverty, stigmatization or labelling, among others. These factors are capable of influencing individual ex-convicts into criminal relapse. Additionally, the absence of post correctional interventions makes the society less attractive to ex-convicts who may prefer prison life to being a member of the society. This could predispose individuals to re-offend with the ultimate aim of getting back to correctional custody.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

- i. Correctional institutions should develop post correctional intervention measures that will help both the ex-convict and members of their immediate communities live harmoniously.
- ii. The national orientation agency should embark on regular intensive community sensitization and re-orientation via awareness campaigns to facilitate acceptability and reintegration of ex-convicts;
- iii. Government should prioritize the immediate provision of enabling environment or facilitation of gainful employment opportunities for ex-convicts based on their acquired correctional entrepreneurial skills;
- iv. Correctional institutions should consider the adoption of non-custodial sentences as an alternative to criminal incarceration.

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