

A Qualitative Exploration of the Coping Strategies of Female Offenders in Nigerian Prisons

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Abstract

Deprivation and importation theories propose that the experience and adjustment of inmates to prison life is dependent on the restrictive prison milieu and their pre-prison experiences and orientation. This implies that prison's sub-culture mediate the relationship between demographic characteristics and adjustment to prison life. Although this core assumption underlies both theories, few researchers have attempted to test its validity, while those that does have largely focused on male offenders. Guided by an integration of the two theories, this current study explored the specific gender-related challenges that female inmates of Nigerian prisons are confronted with and the adjustment measures adopted by female prisoners. Qualitative, in-depth oral interviews were employed to gather information from 32 purposively selected female inmates and six prison officials of Ijebu-Ode and Old Abeokuta prisons. There are evidential supports for the integrative/alliance theory as key findings of this study confirm determinants of adjustability of the inmates to prison life as including age, level of religious commitment, years of incarceration, prison history, and pre-prison experience like socioeconomic, marital (especially those with children) and educational status. Various strategies used to adjust to prison life by the inmates included self-withdrawal, indulgence and some level of social reclusion (asceticism); forging cordial relationships with fellow inmates and staff; and participating very actively in the religious programmes within the prisons. The study suggests that both government and nongovernmental organisations should intervene and develop social supports that recognise the biogenic peculiarities of female inmates in order for the prisons to meet the two objectives of rehabilitating and reforming the female offenders.

Introduction

Indeed, it is imperative that the nature of influence of prison sentence on offender's behaviour and adaptation should be one of the basic questions in criminological and penological research and theory. This is especially necessary in the case of imprisoned women who research have shown have higher levels of mental disorders and depression than male prisoners (Weissman, DeLamater, & Lovejoy, 2013), with increasing women prisoners often reporting depression, stress, mental illness, sleep disorder and generalized anxiety (Boxer, Middlemass, & Delorenzo, 2009). Bastick & Townhead (2012) posited that

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women in prison are particularly vulnerable and have multiple and complex needs. They have higher rates of suicide and self-harm than men. Similarly, a report published by the Justice Select Committee (2013) found that ‘the extent of needs (among women in the criminal justice system) is frequently greater than amongst male offenders and vulnerabilities are more widespread’. Prison can indeed be a distressing experience for women. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2010) found that the imprisonment of women ‘generates new mental health problems or exacerbates existing ones’. Similarly, Corston (2007: 26) stated

Women recounted the stress that came from newly encountering the prison environment. Crowding, noise and the threatening atmosphere were the immediate factors. They recounted their alarm and concern at finding themselves sharing cells with women with mental health problems and who self-harmed; being frightened and unprepared when confronted with women who were suffering severe drug withdrawal or seizures...A number of other women reportedly witnessed incidents where suicides had occurred.

Current research have equally shown that the poor state of prisons in Nigeria makes the women in particular to be vulnerable to serious health conditions (Otu, Otu, & Eteng, 2013; Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014). Agbaegbu (2011) stated that the conditions of the prisons in the country are characterised by several physical and psychological deprivations. The feeding and healthcare system of the prisons have been questioned and adjudged to be grossly inadequate and unbecoming of even condemned criminals (Aduba, 2013). This has largely been attributed to corruption in high places within the prison system as contractors in collaboration with prison officials divert funds and materials meant for the improvement of the living standards of inmates to personal use (Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014). As a result, it is a common sight for prisoners to look starved and unkempt while some have literally turned into living skeletons. In addition, mentions have been made about the deplorable sanitary conditions of the cells which leads to frequent illnesses and deaths of inmates (Aduba, 2013). These avalanche of problems have put the entire criminal justice system of the country into the spotlight and the capacity of the prison to live up to its main objective of reformation of inmates have been questioned (Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014).

Though there is appreciable studies devoted into exposing the unfavourable conditions of the Nigerian prisons and violation of health and human rights that emanate therefrom, there is however limited gender specific studies that focuses on the plight of the women, especially in respect of how they cope with the ‘pains of imprisonment’. Hence, this present study intends to investigate the problems that female prisoners are confronted with and bring to the fore their responses and coping strategies in the culturally-distinct Nigerian prison system.

Women in Nigerian Prisons: The Problem Statement

Prisons are single sex, coercive institutions designed to hold men in a secure environment (Weissman, DeLamater, & Lovejoy, 2013). According to Weissman *et al.*, Women’s prisons are a poor adaptation of this model. Women’s experience of the criminal justice system, including prison, is significantly different from men’s so it is important that the regimes under which women are held respond to women’s specific needs. Although women are a minority of the prison population, they should have equal access to services and facilities. The health status of prisoners is generally lower than that of the general population and women’s health needs may be seriously neglected in a male-dominated prison system (Bastick & Townhead, 2012). Apparently, the various prisons in Nigeria are overwhelmed with the problem of turning out maladjusted releases (Obioha, 2011).

One of the first problems that come to mind about the Nigerian Prison system which will have dire consequences on the health of women is that of overcrowding (Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014). This is becoming a strong problem for the female wing of the prison system due to the growing rate of female prison population coupled with the limited number of women’s prison in the country. The

consequences of this include women being held at a greater distance from their communities and families—a particular hardship for women with children (Corston, 2007; Penal Reform International, 2008). Many women prisoners have a background of physical and sexual abuse or of alcohol and drug dependency and have not had adequate health care prior to their incarceration (Hassan, 2010). Mental illness is often both a cause and a consequence of imprisonment: the rates of self-harm and suicide are often greater among female than male prisoners and both are higher than in the outside community (Durosaro, 2002). Van Voorhis, Wright, Salisbury, & Bauman (2010) in their research results indicated that victimized women, those who reported substance abuse and mental health problems, and those with problematic intimate relationships adapted poorly to the prison environment. That is, women who had been abused; who were depressed, anxious, or angry; who suffered from psychosis or abused substances; or who were engaged in criminal and unresponsive romantic relationships were more likely to incur serious misconduct violations within their first year of incarceration than women who did not display such characteristics.

As a result of their limited numbers, a women's prison may house women convicted of a wide range of offences and those awaiting trials together but the overall regime will be determined by the maximum security requirement. Indeed, overall security requirements are designed for the male prison population and as such discriminate against women prisoners who are mostly imprisoned for non-violent offences (Boxer, Middlemass, & Delorenzo, 2009). Furthermore, the inappropriate classification of inmates impacts negatively on their access to a wide range of facilities including educational and medical services (Obioha, 2011).

Apart from health challenges, women in Nigerian prisons are confronted with the problems of sexual harassment and abuse which further compound their adjustment to prison life (Durosaro, 2002). The risk of pregnancy as the result of a sexual assault is, of course, a concern for many survivors due to their incarceration. Furthermore, obtaining emergency contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancy that could emanate from such abuse becomes more difficult for the incarcerated women. Hence, the pregnancy and birth of such unwanted babies are made worse by their health problems in the form of insomnia, depression and related illnesses (Ramsbortham, 2004; Solanski, 2004). Parkinson (2003) pointed out that one major thing that terrifies female prisoners the most is to have to go through the process of labour alone with little or no support system. He went further to state that such situation often lead to both psychological and emotional trauma for the pregnant prisoner, coupled with the misgivings and uncertainty about whether they can keep their babies.

In respect of the hygiene of the female prisoners, Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi (2014) pointed out that most of the toiletries used by the inmates are provided by nongovernmental and religious organisations. They went further to state that most of the female prisoners in Nigeria are poor, uneducated, and held in filthy prison environments that is devoid of the basic sanitary products such as sanitary towels, toiletries, and soaps. This could be a serious concern for the female prisoners, some of who might be nursing mothers, with Hassan (2010) stating that the government has failed to provide welfare for inmates, as without the support of nongovernmental and religious organisation in the provision of free counselling, foods, clothing, and other basic sanitary needs for inmates, the situation would have been worse. The situation of unsafe prison environment without basic needs is in particular a great impact on the maladjustment of female prisoners as women are never used to such predicaments within or outside the prison walls (Solanski, 2004). Salisbury, Van Voorhis, & Spiropoulos (2009) and Van Voorhis *et al.* (2010) further corroborated this by stating that women's needs actually function as risk factors for their misconduct while in prison.

Finally, In relation to social infrastructure, there are no good recreational facilities and other amenities in most prisons in Nigeria (Obioha, 2011). The Nigerian prison environment with regard to amenities have been characterized as “uncheerful” (Awolowo, 1985), “dehumanising” (Soyinka, 1972), and “a hell” by Abubakar Rimi after his life experience as a political prisoner in Nigeria at the termination of the second republic (Obioha, 2011). This lack of social amenities accounts for the culture of fragility and explosive social violence that is recurrent and descriptive of Nigerian prison community over the years (Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014). Physical infrastructure and housing facility could better be described as uncivilized. The rooms and cells are not good for human habitation, while the beddings are

in most cases absent as many prison inmates in Nigeria sleep on bare floor (Aduba, 2013). Even though some male inmates are exposed to the same or similar predicament, the dilemmas of female prisoners are unique and differ significantly in terms of its impact on their adjustment to prison life. It is against this background that this current study is aimed at exploring the specific gender-related challenges that female inmates of Nigeria prisons are confronted with and the adjustment measures adopted by female prisoners. This is in order to advance the need for gender-sensitive measures to be accorded greater prominence in the treatment of the offender in the country's justice system.

Theoretical Orientation

There are a couple of theories that compete to explain the experience and adjustments of inmates to prison life. Some of these theories include deprivation (sub-cultural theory), importation and integrated (alliance) models. These two theories have been credited with their abilities and dominance in penal or correctional literature. The deprivation model is based on the classic work of Clemmer (1940), Sykes (1958), and Goffman (1961), and holds that mal-adaptation to prison (e.g., violence, aggression, anxiety, depression, distress, and suicide) is a product of the restrictive prison milieu. That is, depriving conditions of the prison produce aggressive or self-destructive behaviour. Sykes (1958) coined the phrase "pains of imprisonment" to describe these conditions. These deprivations have to do with the inmate's liberty, goods and services, sexual relations, security and contact with friends and family. He identified five specific deprivations and suggested that inmates successfully adapt to these pains through inmate solidarity and a system of inmate social roles. Clemmer (1940) described this process of adaptation as "prisonization." Goffman (1961) referred to the prison as a "total institution" and detailed how inmates adapt to life in the total institution following a process of mortification or changing of the self.

An inmate's adjustment pattern is therefore a function of the deprivations inherent in the prison; so that the inmate's pre-prison experiences are far less significant and play only a tangential role. Furthermore, the perspective of the theory informed that the prohibitive and coercive nature of the prison, along with the shared pains of incarceration, significantly influences inmate responses to prison life (Sykes, 1958). A type of deprivation model, the 'situational functionalist model' explains that an inmate's response and subsequent adjustment pattern are apparently a direct function of the institutional characteristics such as the kind of disciplinary measures in place, size and physical layout, or objectives of the organization.

The second dominant theory of inmate adjustment adopted for this study is the importation model, which is the opposite of deprivations. In contrast to the deprivation perspective, the importation model attributes mal-adaptation to the characteristics of inmates rather than features specific to the prison environment. Proponents of the importation hypothesis (Irwin & Cressey, 1962) criticize the deprivation model as being overly narrow and ignoring the characteristics of inmates, which largely determine behaviour in prison. According to Irwin and Cressey (1962:145) "a clear understanding of inmate conduct cannot be obtained simply by viewing 'prison culture' or 'inmate culture' as an isolated system springing solely from the conditions of imprisonment."

Proponents of this model (Irwin, 1970; Irwin and Cressey, 1962; Cline & Wheeler, 1968) contend that an inmate's responses, coping techniques, experiences and adjustment in prison are shaped by their pre-prison experiences and orientation, which originate, and are sustained, by the norms and values (subcultures) outside of prison. Irwin and Cressey (1962) view inmates as doing considerably more than simply responding to immediate, prison-specific problems. Cultural elements, they argued, are imported into the prisons from the outside world. Bastick & Townhead (2012) observed that researchers have empirically tested both models, and in most cases found that both theoretical perspectives offer convincing explanations for what accounts for inmate experiences and adjustment to prison. These explanatory models have become significant in studies of women's experiences and adjustment to prisons especially in the 1960s and 1970s (Kruttschnitt, Gartner, & Milner, 2000), with some of the scholars carefully integrating the two models together. Giallombardo's (1966) study showed that inmates

developed an elaborate kinship system, which is often based on the traditional gender identities that inmates bring into the institution, but is reinforced by the domestic regime and therapeutic orientation of women's prisons.

In the present study, the researcher is guided by an integration of the two models. This is premised on the understanding that gender role is neither monolithic nor inflexible, and that there is considerable diversity in women's life experiences both in and out of prisons. The choice of integrating these models is also due to an understanding of the capacity of human beings to manipulate and manoeuvre situations, endure circumstances and reflect on past experiences and future events.

Methods and Materials

Settings for the Study

The research setting for this study includes two purposively selected prisons in Ogun State that have provisions for female prisoners; Ijebu-Ode and Old Abeokuta Prisons. Ijebu-Ode prison was established in 1925 with a capacity for 322 inmates. As at the time of visit of the researcher (24th March- 12th April, 2015), there were 316 (male: 298 and female: 18) inmates in the prison with 267 (male 257 and female: 10) of them awaiting trial while convicted inmates were 49 (male 41; female 8). Meanwhile, the Old Abeokuta Prison was established in 1900 to house a capacity of 900 inmates. As at the time of the researcher's visit, the total inmate population was 771 (male: 741; female: 30). The awaiting trial inmates were 521 (male: 509; female 21) while those already convicted were 250 (male: 241; female: 9).

A qualitative, in-depth oral interview was employed to gather information from the respondents. The interview guide was validated by an experienced researcher in the Sociology department of University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The reliability of the guide was confirmed by the test-retest technique, with a reliability coefficient of 0.74 obtained by the Pearson Product Moment-Correlation. The study designed an In-depth Interview Guide (IDI) that consisted of two sections of ten (10) questions which sought to elicit responses about female prisoners' perception of their stay in the prison, challenges, how they cope with the 'pains of imprisonment', and the methods they use in adjusting to prison life. In addition, the instrument included a series of questions used to gather social and demographic data. In addition, a Key-Informant Interview (KII) Guide was designed to elicit information from prisons officials based on their job experience as correctional officers.

Measures

Apart from the overall aim of the study that sought to conduct a qualitative exploration of the coping measures adopted by female inmates of prisons, the available number of female inmates of the two prison facilities that makes up the study population does not portend the use of quantitative techniques. Therefore, the pre-test of the prisons carried out affirmed the appropriateness of the use of qualitative technique for the study. In all, the study engaged 32 female inmates of Ijebu-Ode and Old Abeokuta prisons that freely consented to being part of the study, as well as six prison officials in both prisons (three apiece).

Sampling Procedure

Consequent upon the approval given by the prison authorities for the conduct of the study and involvement of the inmates in the research, the researcher solicited for participation of the inmates. Prison officials who volunteered to assist the research were requested to inform and invite the participation of the inmates for the study. As a result of the low number of female inmates in the two prisons purposively selected for the study, a specific sampling frame could not be drawn for the study; rather, selection was based on consent for participation. Out of the 36 inmates that expressed their willingness to be part of the

study, five of them were dropped as three of them have not stayed in the prison long enough to offer useful information for the study, while the other two were not in a proper mental state to be positively engaged in the study. The criteria set by the researcher for respondents' participation is for them to have stayed at least six months in incarceration. The 32 purposively selected female inmates were thereafter engaged in face-to-face interviews with the aid of two research assistants that are students of sociology and social work who were both adequately trained before the exercise.

Administration of the Instruments and methods of Data Analysis

Approvals for the study were obtained from the Ethics Committee of Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State. The respondents were duly informed about the purpose of the study and other rights as respondents of the study including confidentiality. Data collected from the field was analysed in order to meet with the research objectives and answer the research questions raised. Information from in-depth interview collected with electronic tapes and notes were transcribed, synthesized and organised under thematic headings using software for qualitative analysis.

Research Findings

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

As evident in Table 1, the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents were quite diverse. The table shows that the respondents were relatively young as at the time of incarceration with majority of them imprisoned before they attained 30 years (25, 78.1%). This is also reflective of their current age as about half of them (16, 50%) are still below 30 years of age. The seemingly youthfulness of the female inmates population may not be unconnected with the frequent granting of amnesty to elderly prisoners, the possibility that the elderly have served out their time and an alignment with theories that posits that younger people commit more crime than older ones.

Table 1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

<i>Variable</i>		<i>N=32</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Age (in years)	<20	1	3.1
	21-25	7	21.85
	26-30	8	25
	31-35	3	9.4
	36-40	2	6.25
	41-45	3	9.4
	46-50	3	9.4
	51-55	1	3.1
	56-60	2	6.25
	>60	2	6.25
	Total	32	100
Age (at the time of incarceration)	<20	6	18.75
	21-25	8	25
	26-30	11	34.4
	31-35	2	6.25
	36-40	2	6.25
	41-45	1	3.1
	>45	2	6.25
Total	32	100	
Status in the Prison	Awaiting Trial Prisoners	26	81.25
	Convicted Prisoners	5	15.63
	Condemned Prisoners	1	3.12
	Total	32	100
Prison facilities	Ijebu-Ode Prison	11	34.38
	Old Abeokuta Prison	21	65.62
	Total	32	100
State of family residence	Ogun	13	40.63
	Lagos	9	28.12
	Other South Western States	4	12.5
	Outside the South West	6	18.75
	Total	32	100
Marital Status	Married	11	34.38
	Divorced	3	9.4
	Separated	7	21.85
	Widow	2	6.25
	Single (Never married)	9	28.12
	Total	32	100

In respect of the status of the respondents in their various prisons, majority of them (26, 81.25%) are still awaiting trials while only six (18.75%) of them have their cases concluded. In order to determine the proximity level of the prisoners to their home base, their states of residence were solicited. Majority of them 13 (40.63%) resides within Ogun state while only a few of them reside outside the South-western States (6, 18.75%). The married ones among them are in the majority (11, 34.38%). This may have some implications on the adjustment patterns of the women to prison life. The interviews were conducted in both Pidgin English and Yoruba to sooth the preferred means of communication of the respondents and to engender proper understanding of the questions asked.

Inmates' Perception of their Imprisonmen

The views of the prisoners in respect of their stay in prison is very imperative and has been idntified as one of the critical determinants to their adjustment to prison experience (Boxer, Middlemass, & Delorenzo, 2009). It is in this light that the researcher sought the assessment of the respondents on their imprisonment. In response to the enquiry, the respondents holds both negative and positive views of their prison experience. In expressing the negative aspect of her prison experience, one of the inmates stated

...it is what is expected of a normal prison life which is supposed to be a punishment for the crime committed. However, what makes it bad is that not all of us are guilty of the offence (charges against us), therefore, the treatment and life we are being exposed to should have been made a lot easier...look at those of us still going to court, what if we are declared innocent despite all the punishments we have suffered here?...

Respondent A/IDI/Ijebu-Ode Prison

Majority of the respondents (28, 87.5%) spoke about the massive denials that pervades life in the prisons as responsible for negative perception they have towards their stay in prison. In the words of one of them that was very detailed

...if not for the assiatance of NGOs (non-governmental organisations), we would have died out of total lack...the government is only interested in putting us here without catering for our needs...the food we get from the kitchen are usually without soup, it is left for us to make our own soup by ourselves. We rely on the clothing brought by Churches everytime, it is as if the government stopped providing all these things because they know the Churches will supply them...

Respondent B/IDI/Ijebu-Ode Prison

In the words of another inmate

...the environment is not very friendly too, it is only those that have money that have the chance of enjoying their stay here, and those whose family visit them often...the rest of us are at the mercy of what the Churches and other NGOs have to offer...

Respondent C/IDI/Ijebu-Ode Prison

In respect of those that equally shared positive opnions about their prison experience, they premised their views on the friendly nature of relationship that exist between them and the prison officials. One of the respondents volunteered

...they are the ones that doesn't make us feel neglected. Sometimes they provide for our needs and make us feel like normal human beings. In most cases, they play the roles of the family that we do not have here...they even counsel, console and guide us...

Respondent A/IDI/Ijebu-Ode Prison

This opinion is shared by 29 out of the 32 inmates interviewed. This indicates that there is a good measure of cordiality between the prison officials and inmates. The good nature of relationship helped a lot to inform the positive impressions that the inmates have about their prison experience. This was equally observed by the researchers as the friendly rapport between the officials and inmates were particularly visible in the way they address one another, the banter and jokes they shared. The researcher particularly saw some female prison officials playing board games with female inmates during the visit.

Gender-Specific Challenges Faced by Female Inmates

The general problems and challenges that are faced by prisoners in Nigeria's correctional facilities are commonplace and well documented (Obioha, 2011; Aduba, 2013), however, the study moved beyond this to explore the gender specific problems that female inmates are confronted with in the prisons. The respondents were asked to provide specific information about the challenges they have as women in prison. The responses they offered mainly centred around toileteries, clothings, cosmetics and other personal effects

...I know how much I used to spend in maintaining good skin when I was outside, but here, there is no provision for such, we do not enjoy any support towards maintaining our beauty at all. Sometimes, I find it difficult to see myself as a woman...

Respondent C/IDI/Ijebu-Ode Prison

...my main concern is that they don't provide sanitary things for us...I have to often make do with handkerchief and other pieces of clothings that are not proper sanitary pads when I am in my period (monthly menstrual cycle)...we are totally ignored as women...maybe the government thinks that all prisoners are men...(she laughs)

Respondent C/IDI/Ijebu-Ode Prison

Another inmate who spoke in Yoruba language has this to say

... (as interpreted) there is a big difference between being a woman outside and being a woman inside prison. Inside prison, you are almost ignorant of your womanhood as there is no provisions to maintain what makes us see ourselves like women...even there is no sex which will make us feel like women...these are all part of the punishments, but they affect us so much...

Respondent E/IDI/Ijebu-Ode Prison

The expression of their gender-specific denials as a result of their incarceration was done with some measures of emotions which shows how strongly they feel about the lack. All the respondents particularly mentioned the lack of provision of sanitary materials which is a basic monthly need for females as the strongest need that they lack. Further enquiries made by the researcher reveal that there is no official provisions made for such materials and female inmates have to rely on the inadequate and irregular supplies that comes from NGOs and religious bodies for items like bathing soaps, tissue papers, disinfectants, sanitary pads, towels, toothbrushes and so on. This has health implications as the inmates may be exposed to transmittable diseases as a result of this.

Mechanisms Adopted to Cope with the 'Pains of Imprisonment'

In the face of the enormous denials of materials, financial and affections in the prisons, the inmates were requested to state how they coped in their first few weeks of arrival into the prison facility and how they have adjusted thus far. Generally, the various responses of the inmates and key information obtained from the officials indicated that the key determinants of adjustments include socioeconomic class, level of

religious participation, marital status, age and time spent in prison. Some of them (8, 25%) were not conscious of the mechanism that they used to cope with the sharp contrast between their lives outside and inside prison. However, 18 (56.3%) were quite conscious of their early period experience and how they coped with the new life and the 'pains of losing their freedom'. Meanwhile, 6 (18.75%) of them expressed that they are yet to come to terms with life in the prisons in spite of their over 12 months stay in incarceration. One of them expressed

...I can never get adjusted to life in the prison, that is not my portion in Jesus name. This is just an experience for a short time that will soon pass away...

Respondent D/IDI/Ijebu-Ode Prison

...I cannot cope with the poor conditions of the prison environment...I can only endure and hope that it will change soon...I hold strong belief in God that I will soon be out of here and back to my normal life...

Respondent C/IDI/Abeokuta Prison

One of the key informants of the study who is a prison official with 11 years experience offered

...most of those that are married that have husbands that cared about them and visit them with their children cope very fast and adjust more to prison life than those that are neglected. The spirit of rejection is very grave and prolong the adjustment process of the prisoners...

Prison Official A /KII/Abeokuta Prison

Another key informant volunteered

...the religious bodies that comes are very effective in enhancing their adjustment process as they give them spiritual counselling that soothes their nerves. The religious beliefs of the inmates therefore counts a lot..

Prison Official B /KII/Abeokuta Prison

...some of them that are so used to luxury outside the prison often struggle a lot to cope as they experience sharp lack of those material things they are used to...this is especially the case if the relatives fails to support them materially while they are here...

Prison Official B /KII/Ijebu-Ode

...a good number of them make friends among themselves as a way of coping with life in prison. This is one of the most effective way of adjusting to life in prison as they help themselves to relief the burden of prison life...

Prison Official C /KII/Ijebu-Ode Prison

The researcher found mixed outcomes in inmates' social relationships as both a coping strategy and an adjustment pattern. Meanwhile, an official volunteered description of the common symptoms expressed by the inmates that adjust badly to prison life

...they are mostly withdrawn from their colleagues, they keep to themselves, some of them are even difficult to deal with by the staff, they find rules and regulations guiding their stay very difficult to keep to...some don't eat, some don't clean up properly or do their laundries...a lot of them talk to themselves and easily break down in tears at slightest provocation while some engage in fights...

Prison Official A /KII/Abeokuta

Another official added

...irrespective of whether they will adjust well or not, once they are first brought here, they experience shock, disillusion and restlessness due to the differences in the internal structure, settings and operations of the prison as compared to the outside world that they are coming from...

Prison Official C /KII/Abeokuta

One official mentioned something quite important

...sometimes, their adjustment is dependent on their experience with the Police before they are brought to the Prison...some of them may have been brutalised, dehumanised and treated so badly by the police that they will still remain in shock and trauma for a long time after getting here...

Prison Official B /KII/Abeokuta

Ultimately, adjustment to prison life has more to do with what inmates found to be unique characteristics of prison, and what life experiences inmates brought into the prisons (deprivation and importation models).

Discussion of Findings

Critical to the concept of imprisonment, the findings of this study confirms the applicability of theoretical constructs in correctional research across various cultural contexts. In addition, the key findings of this study confirm the positions of extant literature on the variations of adaption and responses of inmates to prison life in substandard environment. There are equally evidential support for the integrative/alliance theory, which was previously described as embodying traditional importation, deprivation, mature coping and respite models of prison adjustment (Kruttschnitt, Gartner, & Milner, 2000; Ramsbortham, 2004; Otu, Otu, & Eteng, 2013).

Though the inmates hold both positive and negative views about their prison experience, however, they all expressed concern over the enormous denials and deprivations that pervade the prison environment. In agreement with Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi (2014), the study found that there is extreme lack of the basic sanitary products such as sanitary towels, toiletries, and soaps. The situation of unsafe prison environment without basic needs is in particular a great impact on the maladjustment of female prisoners as women are never used to such predicaments within or outside the prison walls (Solanski, 2004).

However, as against the position of several reviewed literature (Obioha, 2011; Aduba, 2013; Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014), the study found that the problem of overcrowding isn't very pronounced in the visited correctional homes. Though the study found that there is the problem of inappropriate classification of inmates as the convicted women are made to share rooms with those awaiting trials which may have dire consequences on their access to facilities and services (Obioha, 2011). Meanwhile, the findings of this study agree with scholars that identified poor services and facilities as a recurrent problem of Nigeria prisons (Otu, Otu, & Eteng, 2013).

This study is equally in opposition to the assertions of some scholars that female inmates in Nigeria's correctional facilities suffer from sexual harassment and abuse (Durosaro, 2002). The study found that the structure of service delivery in the facilities visited is made in such a way that female prison officials are the only one granted access to the female wing of the prison. In addition, none of the inmates spoke about ever experiencing such harassment within the period of their stay. Furthermore, the researcher observed appreciable cordiality in the pattern of interaction between the inmates and the officials.

The poor and inhumane condition of the prisons is a main factor that has made the process of adjusting to the reality of prison life a herculean task irrespective of their pre-prison experience. The

study found that the pre-prison experience is a very important determinant of adjustment to prison life. In alignment with the importation perspective, the study was able to establish that those who were married and had children experienced more excruciating “prison pain” than those that are unmarried and without children. Harris (2013) explained that female inmates’ values are generally traditional because as a group, they are children-centred, family-centred and relationship-oriented.

The pre-prison experience in relation to the inmates’ socioeconomic status is also able to impact on the adjustment pattern. Those that were from the low and middle-lower classes were able to adjust better than those of the middle-upper and upper classes. This may be as a result of the pre-prison harsh conditions that the lower class subjects were exposed to and their seemingly good sense of social networking. This is in agreement with the postulation of Durosaro (2002), who asserted that the wealthy inmates find it more difficult to adjust because of the sharp contrast between the affluent life they were exposed to and the harsh deprivations of the prison life.

The study equally found that participation in religious activities is a very strong determinant of adjustment to prison life among the female inmates. Bastick & Townhead (2012), observed that throughout the history of penal practice, religion has been a major force that has shaped the ways offenders adjust and cope both within and outside the prisons. Meanwhile, unofficial reports on the gender-religion ratio in Nigeria suggests that females show more commitment to practicing religion than men. The study found that those that are well involved in religious practice have a high sense of perseverance than those that are not well involved.

There are other variables that the study found to have some measure of significance in the adjustment patterns of the female inmates which include age, years in incarceration, prison history, and state of mental health. Concisely, the older inmates were found to show more commitment to persevere in the prison and adjust to prison life than the younger ones. Meanwhile, the study found that these older inmates (both by years of incarceration and age) described their early years in prison as particularly hard and usually characterised by depression or rebellion, but they have now learnt how to “do their own time” and “not let their time do them.”

Conclusions

This study utilised qualitative methods to examine and evaluate the experiences, prison perception, coping strategies and adjustment patterns of women in prisons from the alliance model perspective. Though the study is limited to the unrepresentativeness of the sample drawn to examine prison experiences of female offenders in Nigeria, the analyses of the responses, and the subsequent discussions that followed, demonstrated a high level of consistency with extant literature and also with the prediction of the researchers' integrated deprivation and importation models of adaptations to prison.

The analyses from this study showed that the perception of the inmates towards their prison life is largely negative as a result of the immense deprivations that comes with incarceration in Nigeria. However, the receptiveness of the prison officials have been a major factor in mitigating the harsh prison experience of the inmates. This is in disagreement with earlier literature that posits that prison inmates suffer various kinds of sexual and physical harassment in the hands of prison officials.

As a result of the inadequacies and deprivations of Nigeria prisons, various strategies used to adjust to prison life by the inmates include; self-withdrawal, indulgence and some level of social reclusion (asceticism); forging cordial relationships with fellow inmates and staff; and participating very actively in the religious programmes within the prisons. The use of these strategies is very significant to the inmates in view of the harsh realities of prison life. Meanwhile, specific variables that determines adjustability of the inmates to prison life include; age, level of religious commitment, years of incarceration, prison history, and pre-prison experience like socioeconomic, marital (especially those with children) and educational status. Specific attributes of the inmates that show their effective adjustment to prison life include adhering to rules and regulations guiding prison inmates, commitment to practicing pre-prison job-related skills, and increasing commitment to educational programmes within the prison. Though all

female inmates experience certain difficulties, such as the one that result from being disconnected from families and relatives while in prison, the level of these difficulties and how they adjust to them somewhat varies.

The government has failed to provide welfare for inmates, as without the support of nongovernmental and religious organisation in the provision of free counselling, foods, clothing, and other basic sanitary needs for inmates, the situation would have been worse. The situation of unsafe prison environment without basic needs is in particular a great impact on the maladjustment of female prisoners as women are never used to such predicaments within or outside the prison walls.

Recommendations

Considering the findings and conclusions drawn in this study, the author is of the view that there is an urgent need for both the government and nongovernmental organisation to intervene and develop social supports that recognise the biogenic peculiarities of female inmates. It is evident that the limited number of female inmates has been a factor that led to insensitiveness of the government to the specific needs of female prisoners in correctional facilities across the country. However, the needed social support that will be put in place will be gender-specific and targeted towards alleviating the excruciating 'pains of imprisonments' and enhancing their adjustment to prison life. It is only when this is done with a good sense of purpose that the real objective of incarceration as a process of the criminal justice system can be achieved. In the light of this, more funding of the prison facilities is needed to afford the inmates their basic rights to proper care and treatment as specified by the constitution and different treaties that Nigeria is a signatory to. The positive consideration of these suggestions and operationalisation of effective support system for the prison inmates will enable both Ijebu-Ode and Abeokuta prisons to be able to meet two key objectives of rehabilitating and reforming the female inmates under their care.

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