An Aetiological Study of Criminal Recidivism in Nigeria
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Abstract
Recidivism is generally used for describing repetitious criminal activity, and a recidivist offender is an individual who engages in such activity. Every year, a large number of prisoners are released from prisons in Nigeria. A large chunk of these released persons return to prison before two years. Hence, this study investigates the etiological factors of recidivism in Nigeria. The study concentrates on the causes of recidivism as it relates to the lapses in the Nigerian prison circle. The rehabilitative model in the Nigerian prison system is faulty, therefore attempt to equip prisoners with the necessary skills in order to try to reintegrate society and consequently prevent recidivism, are not efficient and sufficient. Some of the obstacles to successful re-integration in Nigeria arise from the lapses in the Nigerian prison system, such as the poor rehabilitation model. There have been no or few rigorous studies done on the rehabilitation model in Nigeria; hence this study. The causes of recidivism as it relates to the lapses in the Nigeria prison system were discussed and remedies to reduce it were rendered.

Key Words: Recidivism, recidivist, rehabilitation, prison, causes, aetiology, crime

Introduction
The major mandates of the Nigerian Prisons Service is the safe custody of the legally interned; apart from that, it is to ensure that the legally interned are reformed, rehabilitated and effectively reintegrated back to the society. The major failure of the Nigerian prison system is the poor reintegration of released inmates into the society. The Nigerian Prisons Service, being the department of the federal government responsible for the management of prisons in Nigeria, has failed in this regards. This is as a result of the neglect of the punitive system, poor funding, lack of professionals...
in various segments of the prison, and numerous other problems bugging down the prison system in Nigeria. These problems have translated to poor rehabilitation, reformation and resettlement of the legally interned. As a result, ex-prisoners keep finding their ways to prison again and again.

According to Ahmed and Ahmad (2015), the re-integration of the released inmates into the society from the prison is a challenge to almost all societies globally and breeds the phenomenon of recidivism. This is because the rate of recidivism of a particular jurisdiction can be used to measure the effectiveness of the prison’s rehabilitation model. Therefore, a high recidivist rate translates to poor efficiency of the rehabilitation model; conversely, a low recidivist rate translates to high efficiency of the rehabilitation model.

Defining Recidivism

There has been ambiguity in the definition and measurement of recidivism. Recidivism can simply be defined as reoffending. In broad terms, it is defined as reengaging in criminal behavior after been punished or rehabilitated for a previous crime (Elderbroon & King, 2014). According to Payne (2007) recidivism refers to repetitious criminal activity and is synonymous with terms such as “repeat offending” and “re-offending”. It is normally determined as a rate or percentage of prisoners released in a particular jurisdiction in a particular year who meet certain criteria like getting a new conviction in a defined amount of time (Ruggero, Dougherty and Klofas, 2015). Recidivism can be measured in diverse ways as there is no specific measure of it. These methods of measuring recidivism have different criteria for labeling a person as a recidivist. The widely used measure of labelling one a recidivist is if the person returns to prison within a given span of time usually, two or three years (Ruggero et al., 2015).

Reconviction, re-incarceration, imprisonment, re-arrest, and re-arraignment are other measures of labelling a person a recidivist. Reconviction can be defined as a situation where a court determines the individual has committed a
new crime, with or without imprisonment (Ruggero et al., 2015). Re-incarceration can be defined as an arrest that resulted in the person being sent to prison or jail. Imprisonment is defined as an arrest resulting in a prison sentence (Cooper, Durose, & Snyder, 2014). Re-arrest recidivism is only used when there is no conviction disposition information available, as an arrest does not yet mean that a person has been found guilty of a new crime or violation. Finally, re-arraignment is defined as any court appearances within the criminal court system (LoBuglio & Lyman, 2006).

The Prevalence of Recidivism

Globally, recidivism has become a very serious challenge to communities, societies and governments. Report has it that recidivism among released prisoners in 30 American states is high. In a study carried out by Durose, Cooper and Snyder (2014) in the United States of America, it was found out that over 67.8% of the 404,638 prisoners released in 2005 were re-arrested within 3 years while 76.6% were arrested within five years. In Norway, it was discovered that recidivism rate ranged from 14% to 42% depending on whether the sample included arrested, convicted or imprisoned (Anderson and Skardhamar, 2014); while in Sweden, a 2-year reconviction rate amongst prisoners was 43% (Graunbol, Kielstrup, Müllevuori, Tyni and Baldursson, 2010). England and Wales recorded a recidivism rate of 59% (Ministry of Justice, 2012).

According to Osayi (2013), recidivism has increased tremendously in Sub-Saharan Africa, and also has become a major social problem affecting the society, governments, multinationals, humanitarian organisations the world over. Abrifor, Atere and Muoghalu (2012) posits that recidivism has become very high and a common phenomenon among Nigerian subjects, both the male and female prisoners in the Nigerian prison custody. Soyombo (2009) in his study found out that the prevalence rate of criminal recidivism in Nigeria in 2005 was 37.3%. This statistic is high comparing it with other countries which have less than 10 percent. In 2010, Abrifor, et al., (2012) found out that the estimated prevalence of recidivism in Nigeria prisons was 52.4%. It
has also been reported that 81% of male offenders and 45% of female offenders in Nigeria were re-arrested within 36 months of release from the prison custody (Wilson, 2009).

Scholars in Nigeria such as Igbo and Ugwuoke (2010), Osayi (2013) and Soyombo (2009) have supported that there is an increase in the rate of reoffending and that male offenders have greater propensity to reoffend. Studies done by researchers have offered explanation on factors that could be responsible for the increase in the rate of recidivism. Some of the factors that could be responsible for an increase in the rate of recidivism among male ex-prisoners could be the harsh prison conditions and negative attitude of the public towards ex-convicts (Igbo and Ugwuoke, 2003). Others include stigmatization of prisonisation, defective prison system which promotes the dissemination and exchange of criminal influences and ideas (Ugwuoke, 2010), as well as alcohol and substance abuse (Chenube, 2011), poor educational attainment and peer group influence (Temibiaje, 2013). Other predisposing factors which increase recidivism among male recidivists in Nigeria are marital status, number of siblings/children, socio-economic status, ethnicity, family background, imprisonment terms and type of crime (Abrifor et al. 2012).

Studies that have been done on recidivism have linked its high prevalence to factors such as gender difference (Abrifor et al., 2012), poor resettlement of ex-prisoners after release (Ugwuoke, 2013), lack of jobs after discharge (Meyers, 1984), low education attainment and unstable work history (Eisenberg, 1985), and the discharge environment (Abrifor, et al., 2012). Also, studies have equally indicated that post-release job training positively influence the prevalence rate of recidivism (Jengeleski, 1981).

Theoretical Background
Life-course theory is the basis on which this paper is premised. The theory explains how an individual's life history and early events influence future decisions and events such as engagement in criminal lifestyle (Wikipedia, 2015). By implication, the theory provides an explanation for understanding why offenders stay away
from committing additional crimes; it also suggests that positive social bonds decrease the likelihood of further crimes, while negative social bond increases the propensity to commit crime again and again (Sampson & Laub, 1990; 1993). Research studies have affirmed that events such as marriage and full-time employment have a pronounced effect on criminality (Sampson and Laub, 1993). It suggests that the quality of social bond from spouses, children and colleagues decreases the propensity of an individual to recidivate. Also, this theory propounds that bonding with families, colleague at work, and neighbours in communities decreases criminal behavior over the life course regardless of delinquent and antisocial backgrounds. The Life-course theorists also agrees that early childhood experiences, such as a lack of appropriate attachment to family members, increases the likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior (Laub and Sampson, 1993); though, transitions such as marriage and employment can act as turning points in an individual’s criminal livelihood (Sampson & Laub, 1990). Moreover, Laub and Sampson (1993) argue that persistence in crime is due to a lack of social bonds and a subsequent lack of structure, routine activities, and healthy human relationships.

Although there have been a lot of researches on the causes of recidivism among Nigerian subjects, much has not been done on the lapses in the Nigerian prisons structure, and how they lead to recidivism. The problems and inefficiency in the Nigerian prison system is a major culprit in the high rate of recidivism in Nigeria. Hence, this study intends to investigate the shortcomings in the Nigerian prison circle that contributes to the high rate of reoffending in Nigeria. Furthermore, there is shortage of information on recidivism, even with its observed skyrocketing rate. The dearth of information on this impending problem has not helped in exposing it to the public, thus making the Nigerian society of sit on a keg of gunpowder which may explode at anytime. These identified gaps in research as regards the causes of recidivism in Nigeria is what this paper intend to provide answers to.

**Methodology**

This research paper adopted the multidimensional approach of research.
Hence, the research made use of the ethnographic research survey which involves participant observation and historical methods. The observational technique provides the researchers with the ability to perceive events as they occur in an experiential manner. Again, this approach provides the researchers with the chance to accurately summarize; systematize and simplify the discourse at hand.

The historical approach on the other hand enables the researchers to engage in critical analysis and scrutiny of the events and developments in the aetiology of recidivism in Nigeria across time and space. It evaluates the trends of recidivism in Nigeria and allows the researchers to chart a better course forward. It is in this context that the participant observation and the historical approaches are adopted as appropriate tools and instruments for appraising recidivism in Nigeria (Berger, 2000).

The Aims of Imprisonment

A prison is also a total institution and a place for the reformation and rehabilitation of those who have committed crime (Ugwuoke and Otodo, 2015). It is expected that a convict would undergo a rehabilitation and reformatory process when incarcerated. The rehabilitation process involves the identification of the causes of the inmate’s antisocial behaviour and putting in motion mechanisms for the treatment of such anti-social behaviours. This involves the use of counseling, psychotherapy and other psychological techniques of behaviour modification (Ugwuoke and Otodo, 2015). After imprisonment, the ex-convict is expected to stay away from crime and lead a law abiding life.

The aims of imprisonment are enormous. One of them is deterrence such as the deliberate deprivation of leisure time (Ugwuoke and Otodo, 2015). By so doing, the offender is kept off the general society so that he or she would not have the leverage to commit crime. When such offenders are locked up in prison, they are deterred from committing such crime, so to say.

Another reason for imprisonment is for retribution. Retribution is punishment for a
crime committed. The general notion is that any crime committed is an aberration on the society. This means that the society suffers, in one way or the other, when a crime is committed. Hence, the person who committed crime should pay back through imprisonment. When criminals are punished, the society strikes equilibrium and gets a pound of flesh of the damages done to it.

Again, imprisonment aims at protecting the society from dangerous criminals. By locking criminals away in prison, the society is protected from the terror of felons. In communities that are prone to violent crimes, drug trafficking and other crimes that hampers its peace and well being, imprisonment would help to curtail insulate them from these criminals.

Another is rehabilitation. If this means anything, it means the creation of situations where social learning occur; A process that should lead to greater maturity, better self-control, a lesser proneness to steal or cheat or to become violent.

Finally, another emerging aim of imprisonment is that the state has no choice than imprisonment having looked at the criminal records of a habitual offender, especially one who has been offered opportunities for rehabilitation in the past but continues to offend and makes a decision to imprison him or her because there is nothing else the court can do for him or her (Ugwuoke and Otodo, 2015).

Causes of Recidivism

The causes of imprisonment are enormous. Many of them have been enumerated here. But the onus of this study is to highlight the causes of recidivism in Nigeria as it relates to the challenges in the Nigerian prisons system. Some of the causes are as follows:

1. Skewed Ideology of Prisonization in Nigeria: The ideology of the Nigerian prisons system is still hinged on brutality and vengeance. The ideology is premised on punishment than rehabilitation, reformation and resettlement. In Nigeria, offenders are sent to prison to atone for the wrongs they have committed, instead of for treatment like is obtainable in other climes. Hence, ex-offenders are not properly
prepared for life after imprisonment, and this contributes to the seemingly high rate of reoffending in Nigeria.

2. Poor Rehabilitation Model of the Nigerian Prison System: The major aim of any prison is to rehabilitate those who are in conflict with the law. Prisons in Nigeria have failed in their attempts to fulfil their aim of rehabilitate criminals and make them better citizens. This is because the Nigerian prison system has a very poor rehabilitation model which has lived out its relevance in this present age. The rehabilitative model of the Nigerian prisons system is a continuation of the colonial model; little or no change has been made since the introduction of conventional imprisonment in Nigeria.

Again, the rehabilitation facilities in Nigerian prisons are archaic, comatose and non-functional. This has become an impediment in the rehabilitation model in our prisons.

Infact, as it stands now, there is little or no rehabilitation in Nigerian prisons as the facilities for rehabilitation are not there. There is also dearth of professionals such as psychologists, social workers, counsellors etc, in our prisons. This has led to poorly rehabilitated inmates. Infact, the inmates are deformed in prison instead of being reformed.

3. Poorly Funded Aftercare Programme
The major objective of the Aftercare programme is in the counselling and rehabilitation of released prisoners to assist them to integrate back into the society. The Aftercare unit of the Nigerian prisons system is poorly managed cum funded. Ideally, the Aftercare unit is to follow up on released inmates, supervising them in the resettlement process so as to ensure efficient reintegration back to the society. In Nigeria, the resettlement of offenders is poorly coordinated and fails to address social exclusion issues such as
housing, employment and drug addiction problems that could lead people back into crime. Most prisoners often are released from prison ill prepared to live and work in the community, and without having addressed their offending behaviour. This causes them to relapse to criminal livelihood as soon as they are outside the prison gate.

4. **Poorly trained staff of the Nigerian Prison system:** This is one of the major causes of recidivism in Nigeria. The quality of the staff in the Nigerian prison system is very poor. Staff are recruited without recourse to their antecedents, crime history or medical history. Recruitment into the Nigerian Prisons Service is based on biases and sentiments; hence, at the end, criminals and all manners of misfits find their ways into the payroll of the Nigerian prisons Service. Asides that, the quality of training given to these staff is grossly inadequate. Most staff are recruited and deployed to the prison without being effectively trained; while those that find their ways into the training schools are not properly trained in contemporary issue on prison management. These staff that are poorly trained are later deployed to the prisons to reform, rehabilitate and reintegrate prisoners. The result in the long run can only be imagined than experienced.

5. **Trafficking by staff:** This is a fall out of the poor training gotten by the staff in the training schools. Staff are not properly trained, thereby engaging in unwholesome acts like trafficking in contraband such as hard drugs with the inmates they are meant to reform. Trafficking is one of the major causes of recidivism in Nigeria. Through trafficking, drug offenders get access to drugs and still continue to depend on them. Hence, making mockery of the little rehabilitation training they get.
6. **Lack of Facilities in Nigerian Prisons:**

Nigerian prisons are bereft of facilities for rehabilitation and reformation of inmates. Facilities such as workshops for the training of inmates are not provided. Such workshops usually are used for the training of inmates in handcrafts so that they can fall back to them when they are discharged. Such workshops are not present in the prisons, and where they are provided, they are comatose. Other facilities such as recreational grounds are not also provided. This is one of the causes of the high rate of recidivism in Nigeria.

7. **Lack of proper classification of inmates:** This is another cause of recidivism in Nigeria. Different classes of inmates are lumped together in prison cells. First time offenders and recidivists are locked up in the same cells thereby giving room for first offenders to learn criminal way of life from the recidivists.

**Remedies to these Problems**

The following remedies are proffered to address the lapses inherent in the Nigerian prisons system that leads to the high rate of recidivism in Nigeria.

1. The Aftercare unit of the Nigerian prison system should be overhauled to provide spiritual and rehabilitative counselling to inmates, and also to study the needs of inmates while in prison. The unit should be strengthened to provide link between the prisoners and their families if the need arises, and assist inmates in finding meaningful employment upon release from custody as well as do follow up counselling for prisoners after being released.

2. The Nigerian Prisons Service should be funded to provide adequate service. Also the officers and men of the service should be sponsored for courses, workshops and seminars to broaden their knowledge on contemporary issues in prisoners’ rehabilitation.
3. The Nigerian Prisons Service should collaborate with the National Orientation Agency and other media organisations to change the mindset of the public that prison is for rehabilitation and not for punishment. This will go a long way in improving the quality of inmates that are churned out of our prisons.

4. Staff recruitment into the Nigerian prisons Service should follow due process. The status quo where recruitments are based on sentiments and horse-trading should not be allowed. Proper recruitment process should be spelt-out and followed in appointment of staff into the service. This will ensure that the right people find their ways into the service, and that will improve inmates’ rehabilitation. Hence reducing recidivism.

5. The Nigerian Prisons Service should understudy the rehabilitative models of other climes like the United States of America, the Netherlands and Australia. The rehabilitation models of these countries have provided results, hence leading to low rates of recidivism. The Nigerian Prisons authority can understudy these countries’ rehabilitation models and adopt them.

6. The Nigerian prisons should be properly funded. Workshops and other facilities which will aid smooth rehabilitation should be provided.

7. The Nigerian prison system should ensure the proper classification of inmates which will hinder the corruption of first offenders, thereby reducing recidivism.

Conclusion
Recidivism as a concept is a fairly simple idea which can be understood as a situation where some people will reoffend after they have been convicted, treated, and/or punished for a crime. The rate of recidivism
in Nigeria is becoming worrisome; therefore the need to speak out so that the various agencies of government responsible can curtail it before it assumes a national danger. Researchers have documented the extent of reoffending throughout the country, while various theoretical perspectives have demonstrated that it is a vital component to understanding criminal justice. However, determining why people reoffend and measuring how often they do so proves to be much more difficult. Further, the politicizing of the causes and implications of recidivism has led to even more confusion on how to reduce or eliminate this problem. Until these issues are rectified or somehow resolved, high rates of recidivism will continue in Nigeria. Therefore, this present study engaged in finding out the causes of recidivism which are due to the lapses inherent in the Nigeria prisons system.

References


[http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/Lyman_LoBuglio_Recidivism.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/Lyman_LoBuglio_Recidivism.pdf)


