Assessing Offenders’ Rehabilitation in Nigeria Prisons: Problems and Solutions

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ABSTRACT

There is a high rate of recidivism in Nigeria, and this is as a result of the faulty rehabilitation in the prisons. Rehabilitation services in Nigerian prisons therefore, should be aimed at increasing the educational and vocational skills of inmates, and their chances of success upon release. As a fall out, this study assessed prisoners’ rehabilitation in Nigeria with emphasis on the problems of the prison rehabilitation in Nigeria. The study also did a comprehensive literature review on prison rehabilitation. The various rehabilitation programmes in Nigerian prisons were enumerated. Recommendations were made on how to improve the rehabilitation of inmates in Nigeria.

KEY WORDS: Rehabilitation, Prison, Prisoner, Reintegration, Reformation, Assessing

INTRODUCTION

A prison can be sociologically defined as a confinement where socially and legally interned people who have wronged the society are kept for reformation, rehabilitation and possible reintegration. Ideally and as obtained in other developed climes, the prison is the last place for the transfiguration of those who the society dim unfit to cohabit with it owing to the fact that their continued stay in the society is inimical to the continued co-existence of the members of the society. Prisons are very important to the survival and continued existence of every society. Infact, the importance of prisons cannot be over-emphasised (Ugwuoke, 2015).

Prisons are designed to keep custody of the legally interned, and by doing so, it helps to make the society safe from misdemeanants and lawbreakers who disturbs the peace of the society. Many are oblivious of this fact. When criminals and other dangerous elements are locked up in the prison, the society is insulated...
from their nefarious activities, thereby making the society safe for habitation and cohabitation. Hence, the prison is a vital part of the security set up of every society (Ugwuoke, 2015).

Not only does prison keep custody of the legally interned, they go further to identify the causes of their anti-social behaviour. The prison is like a hospital where psychopathic deviates and people who are in conflict with the law are treated. Before treating a sick person, the doctor would first of all identify the cause(s) of the ill-health; in other words, there must be a diagnosis to know the causative factor before administering treatment. Ideally, every prison must have behavioural scientists like the psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, guidance and counselors, and so on. These professionals are very important and necessary in the operation of every prison, gaol, correctional facility or penitentiary. The psychologist is of paramount importance because he or she is a behavioural engineer or modifier. The psychologist employs psychological techniques using psychological tests and psychotherapy to indentify the real cause of the antisocial behaviour of the legally interned. There are factors that cause one to engage in social deviation and criminality. Some of them could be social, economic, and familial and so on. The psychologist and social worker among others are indispensible to the day-to-day operation of the prison (Ugwuoke, 2015).

The core function of the prison is to reform and rehabilitate prisoners. This is requisite for the prison to achieve its mandates. Rehabilitation entails the act and process of changing and improving the behaviour of the legally interned. The major aim of imprisonment is for rehabilitation. And it is achieved through the use of religion, psychology, counseling, vocational and skill training, medical, recreation and education. Most prisons have chaplains from different religious organisations who help to improve the spirituality of the legally interned. Again, psychologists, social workers and other behavioural scientists are employed in most prisons to provide psychological services to the inmates. Industries and workshops are basic features in the prison. Most prisons are equipped with workshops where inmates are trained in vocational techniques, entrepreneurship, and skills which will help them make a living after they have left the four walls of the prison. It is no news that many inmates, especially in Nigeria and elsewhere have acquired basic and higher education in the four walls of the prison. Many inmates have become graduates while in prison. This is the beauty of imprisonment. Therefore, the prison is a centre for rehabilitation of the socially deformed.

Rehabilitation is derived from the Latin word rehabilitare which literally means ‘making fit again’ (Wikipedia, 2015). In the prison context it means readying prisoners to rejoin society after
serving their jail terms, as useful, productive and law-abiding members of the wider community. Rehabilitation is of the assumption that crime is a behaviour which is causal. This means that crime is not as a result of the person’s freewill, but some factors which are as a result of nurture. The decision to commit a crime is determined, or at least heavily influenced, by the environment, psychological development, or biological makeup. People are not all the same—and thus free to express their will—but rather are different. These individual differences shape how people behave, including whether they are likely or not to commit crime. When people are characterized by various criminogenic risk factors—such as a lack of parental love and supervision, exposure to delinquent peers, the internalization of antisocial values, or an impulsive temperament—they are more likely to become involved in crime than people not having these experiences and traits (Wikipedia, 2015).

Rehabilitation is important on the assumption that criminal behavior is caused and not merely a freely willed, rational choice. If crime were a matter of free choices, then there would be nothing within particular individuals to be fixed or changed. But if involvement in crime is caused by various factors, then logically re-offending can be reduced if correctional interventions are able to alter these factors and how they have influenced offenders. For example, if associations with delinquent peers cause youths to internalize crime-causing beliefs, then diverting youths to other peer groups and changing these beliefs can inhibit their return to criminal behavior.

Sometimes rehabilitation is said to embrace a medical model. When people are physically ill, the causes of their illness are diagnosed and then treated. Each person’s medical problems may be different and the treatment will differ accordingly; that is, the medical intervention is individualized. Thus, people with the same illness may, depending on their personal conditions (e.g., age, prior health), receive different medicines and stay in the hospital different lengths of time.

Rehabilitation in prison shares the same logic: Causes are to be uncovered and treatments are to be individualized. This is why rehabilitation is also referred to as treatment (Crewe, Liebling and Hulley, 2011). Prison rehabilitation and medical treatment are alike in one other way: they assume that experts, scientifically trained in the relevant knowledge on how to treat their "clients," will guide the individualized treatment that would take place. In medicine, this commitment to training physicians in scientific expertise has been institutionalized, with doctors required to attend medical school. In prison rehabilitation, especially in Nigeria, however, such professionalization generally is absent or only partially accomplished (Ugwuoke, 2013).
The aims of imprisonment are for retribution, deterrence, protection of the society, and rehabilitation (Ugwuoke, 2013). The distinctiveness of rehabilitation can be seen by contrasting it with the three other aims of imprisonment. The first goal - retribution - is distinctive in its own right because it is non-utilitarian; that is, it is not a means to achieving some end, which in this case is the reduction of crime; but rather is seen as an end in and of itself. The purpose for retribution is thus to inflict punishment on the offender so that the harm the offender has caused will be paid back and the scales of justice balanced. In this case, punishment which is aim at inflicting pain on the offender is seen as justified because the individual used his or her free will to choose to break the law.

The second goal, deterrence, is utilitarian and asserts that punishing offenders will cause them not to return to crime because they will have been taught that crime does not pay. This can also cause other people in the society to refrain from crime because they witness offenders' punishment and fear suffering a similar fate. Finally, the third aim of imprisonment, protection of the society, makes no assumption about offenders and why they committed crimes. Instead, it seeks to achieve the utilitarian goal of reducing crime by "caging" or incarcerating offenders. If behind bars and thus incapacitated, crime will be impossible because the offender is not free in society where innocent citizens can be criminally victimized (Otodo and Ugwuoke, 2015).

In comparison, rehabilitation differs from retribution, but is similar to deterrence and protection of the society, in that it is a utilitarian goal, with the utility or benefit for society being the reduction of crime. It fundamentally differs from the other three perspectives, however, because these other goals make no attempt to change or otherwise improve offenders. Instead, they inflict pain or punishment on offenders either for a reason (retribution in order to "get even" or deterrence in order to "scare people straight") or as a consequence of the penalty. In contrast, rehabilitation seeks to assist both offenders and society. By treating offenders, they hope to give them the attitudes and skills to avoid crime and live a productive life. At times, this attempt to help offenders exposes rehabilitation to the charge that it coddles offenders. This view is shortsighted, however, because prison rehabilitation's focus is not simply on lawbreakers but also on protecting society, by making offenders less criminal, fewer people will be victimized and society will, as a result, be safer.

Many rehabilitation services for prison inmates are widely available around the world (Asokhia and Agbonluae, 2013). Each of these rehabilitation services targets specific groups of people with specific needs for reform. A
rehabilitation service provides education in prison about various aspects of life. These are useful for getting inmates prepared for life outside the prison system. The place of rehabilitation services in the reformation and transformation of prison inmates have continued to be on the front burner of public discourse in recent time (Tanimu, 2010). Leading this discourse are professionals like adult educators, counsellors, social workers, psychologists and medical doctors. These professionals seem to be at a consensus that rehabilitation programmes or services in prisons will help prison inmates acquire the much needed social skills, vocational training, attitudinal and behavioural changes, and education to be more useful to themselves and the society upon release. To achieve the above, rehabilitation services in Nigerian prisons have been defined as services provided for prison inmates in order to restore them to fullest physical, mental, psychological, social, vocational and economic usefulness which they are capable (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1989). According to the Nigerian Prison Service Manual (2011), the realization of one of the major objectives of the prisons service - the reformation and rehabilitation of convicts are to be done through a complicated set of mechanisms consisting among others: conscientization, group work, case work session, recreational activities, religious services and adult and remedial education programmes, educational development project, skills acquisition programme, mid-range industrial production, agricultural service and after-care service programme. The prison’s services providers should not only identify the causes of the prisons’ inmates anti-social behavior but also endeavours to set them on the road to reform through induced self-rediscovery and eventual change for the better. According to Federal Government of Nigeria (1989), some of the specific objectives of rehabilitation services in Nigerian prisons are to: ensure effective management of crisis situation of the prison inmates; ensure an appropriate training for the prison inmates in order to reduce dependency; and to promote the provision of adequate and accessible recreational and sporting facilities for the prison inmates.

THE ROLE OF PRISON REHABILITATION

Prisons have long experienced tensions between two main missions of protecting public safety and rehabilitating offenders (Kolind, Frank and Dahl, 2010). Indeed, research indicates that the paradox of the punishment and correctional approaches for behaviour change is as old as the correctional facilities globally. In the early 1900s, the correctional field started using treatment approaches after many years of dehumanizing and brutal prison conditions. The correctional officers had been for a long time been referred to as guards to reflect the security
and punitive approaches used in prisons. Farkas (1995) asserts that prior to 1956 the role of a guard was clearly defined; maintaining security and internal order. Indeed, the term “guard” suggests a custodial identity and function indeed, the change of the title to “correctional officer” reflects the introduction of the rehabilitative philosophy to the field of corrections (Gatotoh, Omulema and Dankitt, 2011).

In the mid-1970s there was move towards use of punishment to rehabilitate inmates indeed rehabilitation oriented policies were blamed for causing trouble in prison. Literature in the 1970s suggested “nothing worked” in offender treatment (Lipton, Martinson, and Wilks, 1975; Martinson, 1974). Then the sentencing landscape changed to “get tough” laws, and community corrections followed suit by moving back to surveillance and punishment models. In the 1990s there was another paradigm shift in inmate rehabilitation in response to new research findings. A new way of summarizing studies, a meta-analysis, gave researchers a better look at rehabilitation outcomes (Cullen and Gendreau, 2000). Research pointed out that the 1970s approach could not have been realistic. Many treatment models reduced recidivism with most punishment-oriented approaches not being effective in fact, some punishment-oriented programs that lacked a treatment component actually increased recidivism (Taxman, 2000).

Recent studies urge probation and parole officers to shelve the conviction that confrontational approaches are necessary in behaviour change in correctional facilities. Stohr and Zupan (1992), argue that the role of the correctional officer as a service provider is likely to solidify, rather than dissipate in the correctional facilities of the 1990s and beyond. This assertion is supported by recent studies which have shown that most correctional facilities across the globe have followed the aforementioned shift correctional approaches (Gatotoh, Omulema and Dankitt, 2011).

Studies have shown that correctional facilities in Asia, America and Europe are rapidly reforming their prisons so as to offer inmate rehabilitation, correctional counselling and treatment services as opposed to punishment (Kolind, 2010). This however, has not been without challenges, as (Kolind, Frank and Dahl, 2010) notes, the availability of prison based drug treatment has increased markedly throughout Europe over the last 15 years in terms of both volume and programme diversity. However, prison drug treatment faces problems and challenges because of the tension between ideologies of rehabilitation and punishment. Kolind et al (2010) indicate that the correctional goal in South Korea has recently changed from the straightforward punishment of inmates to rehabilitation. Emphasis is being placed on
education, counselling, and other treatment programs. These changes have consequently begun to also change the correctional officers’ roles from a purely custodial role to a human service role, in which officers are expected to manage rehabilitation and treatment programs. The same trend is reported in China in a study by Zhang, Liang and Zhou (2009). Correctional facilities in Africa are also moving towards behaviour change approaches for inmate rehabilitations. Indeed some correctional facilities in Africa have incorporated correctional counselling in inmate rehabilitation programmes (Gatotoh, Omulema and Dankitt, 2011).

The degree of success in implementing behaviour change approaches in these correctional facilities however wants. Tenibiaje (2010), argues that in spite of the fact that prisons are supposed to be a place for transformation and rehabilitation, Nigerian Prisons have become training ground for inmates to become hardened criminals. This raises the question as to whether correctional officers have the requisite attitudes to match the paradigm shift in correctional facilities (Gatotoh, Omulema and Dankitt, 2011).

Lariviere, (2001) argues that, because of their number and influence, correctional officers are ideally placed to rehabilitate and influence the inmates positively. This can mainly be done during their frequent interaction. It is important, therefore, to gain insight into their attitudes, particularly as these attitudes relate to inmates and the prison system. The findings by Lariviere, (2001) indicate that correctional officers’ attitudes towards inmates would be associated with better work adjustment. In a study conducted by Farkas (1999), the orientation of correctional officers towards inmates was examined. The study indicated that despite the punitive sentiment among the public and policymakers, correctional officers still do not express a punitive attitude toward inmates and generally support rehabilitation programs for inmates.

The study also looked at the impact of several individual characteristics and work variables on officer attitudes. Results showed work variables are strongly associated with attitudes among correctional officers. Reising & Lovrich, (1998) found out that individual attitudes, positional characteristics and managerial practices had an effect on correctional officers’ job attitudes. Furthermore, researchers have found some problematic associations between the rigid, paramilitary structure employed by many prisons and personnel affected attitudes towards their work (Jurik and Musheno, 1986). Problems occur in prison when prison personnel are unsure of which roles can be relaxed and under what set of conditions. Furthermore the negative effects of role problems on job attitudes have
been consistently reported in prison personnel literature (Hepburn 1987; Poole & Regoli, 1980). Among individual characteristics, age, gender, and education have been the most frequently examined as determinants of correctional orientation. Several studies that examined the relationship between the level of education and officers’ correctional orientation found no significant relationship between them (Farkas, 1999), whereas other studies (Poole & Regoli, 1980; Lariviere, 2001) found a positive relationship between level of education and support for rehabilitation.

REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES IN NIGERIAN PRISONS

Nigerian prisons have the following rehabilitation programmes and services:

1. Welfare/Counselling Services: The welfare unit in Nigerian prisons is involved in linking the incarcerated inmates with their families. The unit comprised of social workers, guidance and counsellors, occupational therapists and other professionals who serve as links between the inmates and the outside world. Their functions are varied. They help to facilitate inmates’ visits and also make purchases for them. They also provide phone call services to the inmates. The welfare unit has phones where inmates can make phone calls to their relatives and legal representatives. They also facilitate legal services by linking the inmates with their attorneys. The welfare unit also is involved in the counselling of inmates and their families. The unit also organizes and oversees recreational activities in the prisons.

2. Psychological Services: Most prisons in Nigeria have psychological services unit which are ineffective, and where functional, tend to inmates psychological needs. The unit is responsible for drug dependence treatment, psychotherapy and other psychological services. They identify the causes of inmates’ antisocial behaviours, and employ psychological techniques to resolve them. They also make referrals to psychiatrists where necessary. They engage in the assessment and treatment of psychopathology among the inmates. The unit is comprised of general, clinical, prisons and counselling psychologists.

3. Medical Services: Nigerian prisons are also equipped with clinics and sick bays where inmates receive medical services. The clinics are involved in the treatment of physical ailments of the inmates. They also provide laboratory and testing
services. There are myriads of health professionals in the prisons who help to rehabilitate the inmates medically and health-wise.

4. Chaplaincy services: There are also chaplaincy services where the inmates are rehabilitated spiritually. Most prisons in Nigeria are provided with Christian and Muslim chaplains who coordinate religious activities in prisons. Also prisons liaise with religious organisations in their locale to preach to the inmates and also provide for their spiritual needs.

5. Skills Acquisition programmes: Prisons in Nigeria are equipped with workshops and industries in various aspects of skills acquisition such as in carpentry, metal, shoe-making, soap making, tailoring, salon, barbing, foot-mat and so on. Inmates are trained in various skills so that by the end of their jail terms, they will have something to fall back to that will be a source of livelihood for them.

6. Aftercare services: Nigerian prisons have aftercare units that do follow up services of inmates who have served their terms. The aftercare unit is responsible for resettling the discharged inmates, and also provides them with funds and materials to start up new trades which they have learnt in prison. The unit’s personnel visit the ex-offenders from time to time to assess their level of reintegration. The unit is also responsible for the orientation of the ex-offender’s family on their responsibilities towards him or her.

7. Educational services: There are also educational services in the prisons. The prisons are equipped with schools where inmates are taught how to read and write. They are also taught various subjects. Most prisons have primary, secondary and even university educations. There are study centres of the National Open University in some prisons such as Port-Harcourt, Enugu, Kirikiri, and Agodi prisons.

8. Recreational services: Most prisons in Nigeria have recreational facilities which help to ameliorate the pains of imprisonment among the inmates. Such recreational facilities include football pitches, volleyball, tennis, chess, scrabble and other sporting facilities which help to occupy the inmates. These facilities help to keep the inmates physically and mentally fit.

PROBLEMS BEDEVILING PRISONERS’ REHABILITATION IN NIGERIA
The researchers have observed the following problems bugging down the effective rehabilitation of inmates in Nigerian prisons:

1. **Poor funding:** Nigerian prisons are poorly funded. There is little or no funding for the rehabilitation of inmates in Nigerian prisons. This is evident in the lack of facilities for rehabilitation of inmates. The equipments are obsolete, while there are no provisions for some vital facilities that will help in the rehabilitation process of the inmates.

2. **Dearth of rehabilitation professionals:** There is a serious shortfall in the number of professionals that are needed in the proper rehabilitation of inmates in Nigerian prisons. Most prisons in Nigeria have no qualified medical personnel like medical doctors, nurses, pharmacists and so on. There are no psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, and technicians to handle the various workshops in the prisons.

3. **Obsolete facilities:** The facilities meant for rehabilitation in Nigerian prisons are archaic, decayed and obsolete. Most of the workshops have packed up and are no longer functional. This has seriously hampered the rehabilitation of inmates in the prisons.

4. **Lack of constant training and retraining of prison officials:** Prison officials do not get efficient and sufficient training that will help them to provide effective rehabilitation services. Infact, Nigerian prisons officials need rehabilitation themselves. Most of them are not even trained before they are deployed to the various prison yards. Those that are given basic training do not get to go for refresher courses. This has contributed substantially to the poor rehabilitation of inmates in Nigerian prisons.

5. **Misplacement of priority:** The prison authority in Nigeria place less emphasis on rehabilitation of inmates. More emphasis is placed on security of the prison yards than on the reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates. Rather than prioritize the rehabilitation of inmates, the prison authority dispense more energy in inmates’ feeding, security and personal gains. This has contributed grossly to the poor rehabilitation of inmates in Nigeria.

**CONCLUSION**

Rehabilitation programmes and services in Nigerian prisons have not lived up to its
mandates of increasing the educational and vocational skills of inmates, and their chances of success upon release. In order to accomplish the mandate of reformation, reintegration and reintegration of prisoners, prison officials should encourage the inmates to participate in rehabilitation programmes made available to them while in prison. This is crucial for prison inmates especially because many of them entered the prisons more socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged. The key to success in a free society for many of these socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged prison inmates is rehabilitation. There is no better way to help prison inmates re-enter the larger society successfully and break the in-and-out of jail cycle than provide them with skills that they need to succeed in the outside world. It is disheartening to see that a crucial aspect of identifying inmates’ needs is grossly neglected in Nigeria. This is the crux of the matter. For rehabilitation services to help prisons’ inmates to develop social and vocational skills, keep them meaningfully busy, change their attitudes and behaviour so that they will have better understanding of themselves and the society, their felt needs must be addressed so as to enable them get employment and advance more educationally after serving their terms.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This study proposes the following as solutions to the present state of prison rehabilitation in Nigeria:

1. The Nigerian Prisons Service should be sufficiently funded to be able to meet up with its mandates. Funding options should not only come from the federal government alone. The state and local governments should also be compelled to fund the prisons. This will help a great deal in making funds available for the service in the rehabilitation process.

2. Training and retraining of prison officials should be placed on the front burner. The status quo where staff are not sufficiently and efficiently trained should be changed. They should be sent on refreshers courses, seminars, conferences and workshops to broaden their horizon and also improve their professionalism.

3. The aftercare unit which at present is moribund should be reactivated. The unit should be properly funded, and aftercare personnel recruited. This will go a long way in improving the quality of rehabilitation in Nigerian prisons.

4. Schools in the prisons should be properly funded to meet up with the quality elsewhere. In addition, they should be made centres for public
examinations like WAEC, NECO, NABTEB and JAMB. Also, the Nigerian Prisons Service should liaise with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) to establish a study in all the maximum security prisons across the country.

5. Skills acquisition workshops in prisons should be revitalized. This will go a long way in providing a platform where inmates will be trained in various handicrafts and skills so that they can lead crime free lives when they are discharged from prison.

REFERENCE


