

ADJUSTMENT CHALLENGES AND COUNSELLING NEEDS OF PRISON INMATES IN SULEJA AND LAPAI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF NIGER STATE, NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

BY

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Abstract

This study investigated adjustment challenges and counselling needs of prison inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons in Niger State, Nigeria. Two null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 levels of significance. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. A sample of one hundred and sixty-one (161) prison inmates from the two selected prisons was considered using the simple random and the proportionate sampling techniques. The instrument for data collection was Adjustment Challenges and Counselling Needs Questionnaire (ACCNQ). The ACCNQ was validated through content validity and a test retest method for determining its reliability was employed which had an index of 0.82. The data collected were analyzed using the chi-square statistics. The study found that there was no significant difference in adjustment challenges of the prison inmates in respect of gender but there was a significant difference in counselling needs of male and female prison inmates in both Suleja and Lapai prisons. Based on the findings, the study recommends that government at all levels, NGOs, and individuals should rejuvenate the Suleja and Lapai prisons by supplying them with the necessary tools, equipment and raw materials as well as providing improved infrastructural facilities and effective vocational training programmes to address their adjustment challenges. It is also recommended that prison authorities should establish a counselling unit where prison inmates could enjoy appropriate counselling programmes/activities and a degree of privacy during the counselling sessions to cater for their needs.

Keywords: *Adjustment challenges, Counselling needs and Prison inmates*

Introduction

Every country has rules and regulations guiding its corporate existence. Societies and communities, alike, have a set of guiding principles to which their members are expected to respect and abide by them so that they could live and behave responsibly according to established and acceptable norms. These laid down rules and regulations are for everybody (including the rich, the poor, young and old, male and female) and some specific punishments are fashioned out and attached to offences committed. In this regard, prison is considered as a place of confinement or a place where criminals are kept regardless of their gender or social class (Ajagbe, 1996). Merriam-Webster (2004) defines prison as a building usually with cells where convicted criminals or offenders are confined or held while awaiting trial for rehabilitation and reformation. The prisoners or convicted offenders, called inmates are sent to prisons by the law court for various terms of imprisonment; thereby separating them from the society. These inmates are usually convicted for one crime or the other. Confinement of prison inmates in prison yards is aimed at providing some sort of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes or

services that will meet adjustment challenges and needs of the prison inmates (Harrison & Beck, 2005).

The Nigerian Prison Service under the supervision and control of the Federal Ministry of Interior and Civil Defence, Immigration and Prison Board derives its operational power from Cap 361 Law of Federation 1990. The functions of prison include:

1. Taking into lawful custody of those certified to be kept by court of competent jurisdiction.
2. Producing suspect(s) to court as and when due.
3. Identifying the causes of their anti-social dispositions.
4. Setting in motion, mechanisms for the treatment and training for the reintegration of inmates into the society as law abiding citizens after they are discharged.
5. Administering prison farm and industries as a source of generating revenue for the government.

Against this background, prisons are supposed to be places of reformation and rehabilitation where adjustment needs of the convicted inmates would be addressed through government programmes or relevant counseling services before the end of their sentence terms (Bohm & Haley, 2005). Sentences given to prison inmates are meant to serve as correcting and reform measures to enable them fit into the society after their period of conviction. However, it is worrisome to state that all the policies and programmes designed for reintegration and rehabilitation of inmates are just mere statements read in newspapers. Certainly, the actions are not seen with positive impact rather they create further adjustment challenges and counselling needs which require a research output in this direction.

Also, there are basic needs for inmates to adjust their challenges and to bear in mind that they can be useful to themselves both in the prison and outside the prison (Loucks, 2002). Consequently, prison inmates require counselling in order to help them adjust to prison life. Vocational guidance has been encouraged, maintained and is operational in most prisons and secondary schools in an attempt to meet the vocational needs (Oliagba 2015). In this case, counselling services are designed to provide support and assistance to help prison inmates to understand themselves. Besides, prison inmates who have serious problems need the intervention of a counselor to assist them in reducing or managing their emotional tensions and anxiety disorders (Anagbogu, 2004). During the counselling process, dialogue is employed which may lead to positive reorientation and assertiveness that will go a long way in helping the prison inmates adjust their challenges.

The term adjustment therefore, is defined in this study as a positive relationship between an individual and his/her environment. Adjustment is a complex and multi-faceted concept; which refers to a reaction to the demands and pressures of social environment imposed upon an individual. Adjustment challenges, hence, are a psycho-emotional response to an identifiable life situation or stressor that causes clinically significant distress or malfunctioning in a person's ability to fulfill other important life roles (Abednego & Plangan, 2019; Aborisade & Fayemi, 2016). There are several types of adjustment disorders which may include adjustment to depressed moods, adjustment with anxiety and disturbance of conduct and interactions. Prison

inmates are forced to undergo increasingly harsh policies and conditions of confinement in order to survive in the prison. These prolonged adaptations to deprivations and frustrations of life inside prison lead to certain psychological changes (Day, 2007). The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2003) reported that more than half of all prisoners and jail inmates have series of adjustment challenges. To Otaru and Fakokunde (2019), the prison inmates who suffer acute pains of imprisonment manifest symptoms of psychological disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder or other forms of adjustment challenges as a result of diminished sense of self-worth and personal value. Consequent upon this, adapting to imprisonment is almost and always difficult and at times creates a sense of dysfunctional thinking, habits and actions (Coyle, 2009). Yet, the psychological effects of life in the prison vary from individual to individual. According to Aborisade and Fayemi (2016), prison inmates are characterized by elevated adjustment challenges that include mental and physical changes; with varying coping strategies in respect of gender and it forms part of the basis of this study.

Thus, prison inmates are seen as outcasts and mere objects of ridicule (Ajagbe, 1996). Durosaro (2002) emphasized that prison inmates are subjected to all forms of abuse and embarrassment from their counterparts and prison wardens. For example, some hardened criminals wickedly beat up the new or junior inmates on daily basis while the female among them were lured into sexual abuse by even the prison officials leading to unwanted pregnancy which eventually creates more complicated adjustment challenges to the existing challenges which the prison inmates face. Although some female prison inmates become pregnant before conviction, some do get pregnant while in prison (Gaes & Goldberg, 2004).

Consequently, inmates serving various terms of sentences are faced with numerous adjustment challenges to new life in prison which are not the same as life outside the prison. According to Sambo (2008) and Holtfreter and Morash (2003), inmates feel a loss of contact with families, friends and well-wishers which causes the inmates to adjust to reality of life in custody. There is also a challenge of poor tastes and insufficient nutritional foods, a challenges of unhealthy and congested environment that may lead to contagious infections without immediate medical care, unusual labour work, and there is a challenge of facing brutality from the senior prison inmates (Freudenberg, Daniels, Crum, Perkins & Richie, 2005; O'Looney, 2005). In view of decrease in social support from the family and relatives, inmates may experience feelings of discrimination which in turn may decrease or reduce their self-esteem, gradually affecting their social adjustment process (Tenibiaje, 2010). Beside the intrapersonal distress, threat from old inmates, mistrust and perceived hatred are among the most prevailing psychological adjustment difficulties for new inmates that require necessary intervention through counseling (Corey & Corey, 2011).

Hence, counseling, in this context, is described as a professional relationship between trained counselors and clients who face socio-personal challenges. This relationship is usually on a person to person basis which is designed to help clients to understand and clarify their lives, and to learn to reach their self-determined goals through meaningful, well-informed choices and resolution of problems. The benefits of counselling in addressing challenges of prison inmates include the following, among others (Otaru & Fakokunde, 2019; Aborisade & Fayemi, 2016; Anagbogu, 2004):

- i. Making them adjust to the situation in which they find themselves;
- ii. Providing a change in the way inmates will handle their affairs or challenges;
- iii. Improving the ability of inmates to handle their own affairs or challenges;
- iv. Making prison inmates to develop worthwhile plan for their lives through skill acquisition and capacity building;
- v. Changing the negative attitudes of inmates toward the society and giving them a sense of belonging; and
- vi. Giving inmates a room for general behaviour modification for the betterment of their life after serving their convicted terms in the prison.

From the foregoing, it is a fact that the general attitudes of the public towards prison inmates make them subjects of ridicule in the society and, therefore, compound their problems which need counselling as intervention. Counselling, as a service therefore, helps to correct, rehabilitate, and reform individuals to adjust their social problems. It is on this basis that this study examined those adjustment challenges and counselling needs of inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons in Niger state. Findings of the study would go a long way to assist the Nigerian Correctional Centers to adopt the appropriate guidance and counselling programmes that would facilitate reformation and reintegration of prison inmates into the society. When the adjustment challenges and counselling needs of inmates are met, it would help to unearth their potentials and prepare them to live normal lives after serving their jail terms.

Statement of the Problem

Prison inmates possess some counselling needs that will help them to adjust to the prison environment and to make them survive their sentence terms in the prison and life after the prison. However, it is indicative that inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons have often been subjected to different forms of ill-treatment during the process of their rehabilitation and reformation which lead to adjustment challenges. In particular, inmates have been separated from their families, their loved ones, their works, their relations, and even their religion. This separation and other ill treatment meted out to them make their adjustment to prison life very difficult. This happens as a result of lack of counselors and counselling services to cater for their needs and address their challenges since most of them were experiencing the jail terms for the first time. In view of this, therefore, this study investigated these adjustment challenges faced by inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons and their counseling needs.

Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out the difference in adjustment challenges of male and female inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons in Niger State.
2. Determine the difference in counselling needs of male and female inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons in Niger State.

Research Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. H_{01} : There is no significant difference in adjustment challenges of male and female inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons in Niger State.

2. H₀₂: There is no significant difference in counselling needs of male and female inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons in Niger State.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. This design is useful and appropriate to collect data from a sample of a large population of inmates from Suleja and Lapai prisons in order to generalize the findings on the entire population. The target population comprised of two hundred and fifty-nine (259) prison inmates (Suleja-173 inmates and Lapai-87 inmates). The sample size used was 161 inmates. This selection was made through the proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The variables of the study were adjustment challenges and counselling needs. Thus, gender was used to measure adjustment challenges and counselling needs of the inmates which involved 140 male prison inmates and 21 female prison inmates.

A research instrument tagged “Adjustment Challenges and Counselling Needs Questionnaire” (ACCNQ) was used for data collection. The instrument has sections A, B and C respectively. Section A sought information on demographic data of the inmates. Section B dealt with statements relating to adjustment challenges of inmates in the prison which contains ten (10) items and Section C with eight (8) items elicited information on counselling needs of prison inmates. The ACCNQ was structured on a four-point modified Likert-scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) which were rated 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

The ACCNQ was given to two experts in the Department of Counselling Psychology, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University Lapai and two prison officers from the Maximum Prison, Minna, Niger State to ascertain its validity. Comments and suggestions of the experts were taken into considerations via the research objectives to ensure that the instrument achieve content validity. Similarly, the test retest method for determining test reliability was used. The instrument was administered on 40 inmates in Minna prison facility with an interval of two weeks. The responses collected were subjected to the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient analysis and a reliability index of 0.82 was obtained which was considered significant for use in this study.

The data collection in this study was done by the researchers. The ACCNQ was administered on the inmates in their various prisons. In doing so, the researchers explained what the inmates needed to know about the instrument after which it was given to them to respond to the questions appropriately. The inmates were converged at a hall and administration of the instrument was done by group method. The analysis of the data collected was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version twenty (20) and the chi-square statistics was used to test the null hypotheses which measured difference in adjustment challenges and counselling needs of male and female prison inmates.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in adjustment challenges of male and female inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons.

Table 1: Showing a χ^2 Analysis of Adjustment Challenges of Male and Female Inmates in Suleja and Lapai Prisons

Group	df	χ^2 - cal	χ^2 - critical	Significance
Male inmates				
Female inmates	16	16.42	26.30	0.05

Table 1 shows the analysis of adjustment challenges of male and female inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons. The finding indicates that the χ^2 -calculated value of 16.42 is less than the χ^2 -critical value of 26.30. This reveals that there is no significance gender difference in adjustment challenges of male and female inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons; thus the hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant gender difference in Counselling needs of male and female inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons

Table 2: Shows the χ^2 Analysis on Counselling Needs of Male and Female Inmates in Suleja and Lapai Prisons

Group	df	χ^2 - cal.	χ^2 - critical	Significance
Female inmates				
Male inmates	25	64.18	37.65	0.05

Table 2 shows that the χ^2 -calculated value of 64.18 is greater than the χ^2 -critical value of 37.65; thus the null hypothesis was rejected. The finding revealed that there is a significant gender difference regarding counselling needs of male and female inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons.

Discussions of Findings

The finding of this study affirms the assertions of Abednego and Plangan (2019) and Ladan (2011) which stated that prison inmates irrespective of gender often experience adjustment challenges and injustice. Similarly, Sambo (2008) and Holtfreter and Morash (2003) observed that prison inmates faced numerous adjustment challenges to new life in prison which were not the same as life outside the prison. Thus, inmates encounter psychological adjustment challenges such as unhealthy and congested environment and low self-esteem and self-worth (Corey &

Corey, 2011 & Tenibiaje, 2010). The circumstances surrounding the nature and management of prison facilities and the treatment/services provided suffice to justify the finding of this study that no preference is given to gender. This means that both male and female inmates pass through all adjustment difficulties that are inherent at correctional centers in Suleja and Lapai.

The finding on gender difference in counselling needs at both Suleja and Lapai prisons corroborates outcomes of the studies by Otaru and Fakokunde (2019), O’Looney (2005) and Gaes and Goldberg (2004) which found gender as a factor accounting for sexual abuses, cases of rape, and occupational stressors prevailing at prisons among both inmates and prison’s officials. Also, it is seemingly clear that with regards to prison facilities, there are vocational and physical challenges (e.g., labour work, punishment) with varying coping strategies in respect of gender ((Abednego & Plangnan, 2019 & Aborisade & Fayemi, 2016). This means that there were preferences in vocational needs, hard work, privacy, as well as differences in disturbance of conduct and interactions based on gender. Hence, bias which forms the basis for a significant gender difference in counselling needs of male and female inmates in both Suleja and Lapai prisons was undermined in terms of rolling out policies and programmes that were designed for reintegration and rehabilitation of prison inmates.

Conclusion

Though the scope of this study could be expanded to involve many more correctional centres in Niger state, it is concluded from the findings of this study that there is no gender difference in adjustment challenges of male and female inmates in Suleja and Lapai prisons. However, a significant difference was found in their counselling needs. This, therefore, made the study significant by creating avenues for tackling adjustment challenges and counselling needs of prison inmates in the affected correctional centres.

Counselling Implications

Prison inmates require positive adjustment psychologically and behaviorally by means of involving them in different life processes in areas like education, interpersonal relationship, games and sports, vocations, as well as recreational and physical activities in the correctional centres. Thus, the counselling implication of this study suggests that psychosocial services and counselling techniques such as supportive group counselling, individual counselling for survival of trauma, family therapy and counselling, group counselling for victims of abuses, arts therapy, and recreational programmes should be mounted at correctional centres to provide inmates with opportunities to modify their thought processes so as to forget the past and think positively for a more productive future life.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Governments at all levels (federal, state and local government areas), NGOs, religious groups and other philanthropic institutions and individuals should help to rejuvenate infrastructure and vocational training centres at both Suleja and Lapai correctional centres. This could be done by supplying the correctional centres with necessary tools and equipment as well as providing contractual support to ensure improved infrastructural facilities and

effective vocational training programmes for commercialization of services of inmates and their upkeep and to ensure easy adjustment through the period of their confinement.

2. Counselling units should be established at all correctional centres and be made to coordinate the counselling services of government programmes, NGO's, religious groups, and individuals to ensure provision of well-organized counselling sessions in order to meet individual or gender needs of inmates .

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