The Plight of Women Inmates in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study investigated the main challenges experienced by women inmates in Rivers State of Nigeria. A sample of 51 women inmates randomly selected from three prison locations in Port Harcourt, Degema and Ahoada areas participated in the study. The sample consisted of pregnant, non-pregnant and nursing inmates. The study sought to ascertain the problems of the inmates on the basis of age (length of time spent in prison) and status (pregnant/non-pregnant/nursing). A researcher-designed instrument titled 'Women Inmates' Prison Questionnaire' (WIPQ) was used to generate data for the study. The responses were analyzed using mean scores, standard deviation, t-test and ANOVA statistics. Results showed that the women inmates' main challenges were in the area of physical care, emotional/health, vocational and lastly social. It further indicated that old and young inmates were significantly different in their perceptions of the problems they encountered (p>0.05). Furthermore, they were not significantly different in their perceptions on the basis of status (pregnant/non-pregnant/nursing, p<0.05). Based on the findings, some recommendations made amongst others, were that government should assist women inmates in order to alleviate their problems by establishing prison counseling centers with trained counselors to provide services, provision of good clothes, health services, good accommodation and increasing prison budgetary allocation; as well as the role of NGOs in providing clothes, food, training in vocations, etc.

Keywords: Women inmates; Pregnant; Non-pregnant; Nursing problems; Counseling

I. Introduction
The plight of prisoners all over the world has been a subject for discourse due to the inhuman treatment meted out to them, ranging from poor conditions of the cells to gross abuses especially in developing countries. Imprisonment is socially degrading and signifies total separation from family members and loved ones; and prisoners are said to go through ‘one of the worst periods of neglect in Nigeria’s nationhood’ (Durosaro, 2002). This is because the prison is seen as an enclosed environment operating outside normal controls and processes (Owers, 2003). It is believed that society is less interested in what happens behind their walls, probably due to the way prisoners are perceived. Prisoners and their officials are also noted to receive less attention in comparison with schools and hospitals (Odebode, 2008). Although some of the women detained for various offences were pregnant before their incarceration, many are victims of sexual abuse by male counterparts and warders, resulting into pregnancy (Durosaro, 2002). Some women inmates have stayed long in prison awaiting trial and even delivered babies.
in the process. Similarly, Hassan (2010) an ex-convict who was released from prison noted that most prisoners were violated and have no money to employ the services of lawyers.

In Nigeria, it was observed that essential facilities are obsolete or not available; and since about 80% of Nigerians depend on primary healthcare which local governments have the least capacity to handle, it is therefore a critical situation for women inmates who might be pregnant or nursing babies. Unfortunately, available information by prison officials suggest that only churches and a few NGOs provide toiletries for inmates who are nursing babies. Hassan (2010) corroborating this view noted that even the government has done little or nothing as far as the welfare of prisoners are concerned except for the kind intervention of NGOs who offer counselling, food, clothes etc to the prisoners in addition to conducting religious activities. The case is much different in the developed countries where pregnant inmates receive adequate support especially in Holloway prisons, the largest in Europe. This is to the extent of allowing a friend of the female inmate’s choice to stay with her (Solanski, 2004). It further reported that the United Kingdom has 60 percent of women inmates with young children, and adequate provision is made available to them by government (Solanski, 2004).

a. Literature Review

Literature maintains that women inmates are increasing in number and offences for which they were incarcerated included child abuse, aiding and abetting crime as well as murder, especially of their spouses. Other offences included kidnapping, robbery, theft, counterfeiting, Obtaining By Trick (OBT) or 419 amongst others (National Point Online Editorial, 2010). Available records in the year 2008 showed that there were a total of 710 female inmates in about 240 female prisons in Nigeria out of which some were pregnant when sentenced (Agbaegbu, 2011). Statistics further shows that the pregnant inmates gave birth in the prison yard, with a total of 19 women in prison with their babies (Agbaegbu, 2011). In Kirikiri prison, Lagos, a total of 211 women with children were admitted between 1980-1986, out of which 21 were pregnant, 13 delivered their babies in the prison clinic and 8 in hospitals outside the prison (Aduba, 1993).

Nigeria was reported to have a total of 228 prisons housing 478,815 inmates out of which 745 were for those already convicted, with additional 83 satellite prison camps. The Port Harcourt prisons for example, were highly congested because they were initially built to accommodate about 804 inmates as against about 3,000 inmates accommodated at present (Egba, 2011). Hassan (2010) buttressed this claim by observing that female prisoners especially the pregnant women and nursing mothers with children between 3weeks and 2years are not left out of this congestion. Ogundana (2011) also reiterated that inmates in Port Harcourt prisons are almost 4,000 in number. They are kept in unhealthy environment with no medical attention, over populated. He reported that there was infrastructural decay, lack of materials for skills acquisition reform, discrimination and neglect. It was also emphasized that prison inmates in Port Harcourt among other things lack opportunities for education, leisure or vocational training, even though provided with fairly better facilities (UN Commissioner for Human Rights, 2007).

In terms of abusive human treatment, over 905 inmates were yet to face trial for their alleged crimes and slept in unimaginable conditions even to the extent of sleeping amongst their own faeces, with no medical attention when ill (Stake Holders Democracy
of Nigeria, 2010). This is probably explains the reason for the sudden death of prisoners no sooner than they were convicted. It was observed that most of them are kept for minor offences which prison officials blame on slow judicial procedures. (Egba, 2011). In spite of the overcrowded cells, only 31 convicts were allowed to go home as a result of old age and ill health notably HIV/AIDS and Asthma (Onah, 2010). Unfortunately, the state of the prisoners who are crammed in small cells built by British Colonial rulers in 1918 was blamed on lack of funds (Egba, 2011). These cells were also used by prison officials as infirmary, workshops and offices (Stake Holders Democracy of Nigeria, 2010). Of a sad note is the report that 2, 663 male and female inmates are awaiting trial in Nigeria, with 331 convicted and 7 regarded as lodgers (Agbaegbu, 2011). One other offensive complaint despite the agony of inmates in Nigerian prisons was the issue of corruption, which prisoners were said to have made against prison officials who took various sums of money to secure their release on bail, which ranged from Fifty to One Hundred Naira (Onah, 2010).

b. Statement of the Problem

Women inmates suffer a lot of deprivation due to their inability to exercise freedom as much as possible, especially in a country where they are regarded as second class citizens. This situation is compounded by the total restriction and sexual abuse they suffer in the hands of male warders as identified in literature. Durosaro (2002) reported that 30 percent of the female population are in prison. This figure is alarming especially because some of them give birth in prison; and children of female prisoners were reported to be withdrawn, depressed, experienced difficulty in sleeping and became physically ill (Ramsbotham, 2004). On the contrary, Parkinson (2003) was of the view that there can be nothing more terrifying than going through labour alone with no-one to turn to for support. The situation creates psychological and emotional trauma for a female pregnant inmate and the uncertainty about whether she will be allowed to keep her baby makes her switch off emotionally from the pregnancy into a state of grieving (Kitzinger, 2003). Women prisoners were reported to remain in their cells for longer periods which was stressful because prison is a very difficult place for a mother to bring up a baby (Narey, 2000). In view of the foregoing, this study investigated the plight of women prisoners in Port Harcourt Municipality, Rivers State of Nigeria. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the main problems encountered by women inmates?
2. Is there any difference in the problems encountered by women inmates on the basis of the length of time spent in prison?
3. Is there any difference in the problems encountered by women inmates on the basis of their status (i.e. pregnant, non-pregnant and nursing)?

c. Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between young and old women inmates in the problems encountered by them.
2. There is no significant difference among pregnant, non-pregnant and nursing inmates in the problems encountered by them.
II. Materials and Methods

The design of the study was the descriptive survey. This method was deemed necessary for the study because survey research is one in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group (Nworgu, 1991).

The population of the study consisted of all women inmates in Rivers State of Nigeria. The exact number could not be ascertained due to unavailability of the record as at the time of this research.

a. Sample and Sampling Technique

Port Harcourt prison is noted to be one of the largest in West Africa. The sample comprised 51 women inmates (detained temporarily for minor offences requiring a bail and those who have been there for a long time, due to more serious crimes). They were randomly selected from three prison centres in Port Harcourt, Degema and Ahoada Local Government Areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. The selected sample was stratified on the basis of the inmates’ length of incarceration. Thus, inmates who have been in prison below one year were regarded as young and those who have been there for over one year, as old inmates. Therefore, the young inmates were 28 in number and the old inmates were 23. The sample was also stratified on the basis of their status, which consisted of 37 non-pregnant, 5 pregnant and 9 nursing inmates.

b. Instrument

A researcher-designed instrument named ‘Women Inmates’ Prison Questionnaire (WIPQ), which is an adapted version of Prison Ministration Need Manual (PMNM) developed by Anifowose (1992) was used to generate data for the study after studying the manual and modifying the content to suit the purpose of the present research. The instrument is in two parts. Part A sought information on the respondents’ demographic data such as age, length of time spent in prison and their status in terms of whether they were pregnant, non-pregnant and nursing inmates. Part B comprised 20 items divided into four sub-sections, each having 5 items which elicited information on problems which the inmates were experiencing in terms of physical care (related to personal clothes to change, sanitary issues, etc), emotional/health (related to concern for family left behind, spouses and children, while health issues included services rendered when sick, depressive conditions, etc); social (related to outings, friends to interact with, etc) and vocational problems such as- learning a trade that will sustain them, working for a living just to mention a few. Each of the four sub-sections in the questionnaire were identified as typical problems prisoners were faced with.

c. Validation of the Instrument

The instrument was vetted by two senior prison officials and a sociologist who have knowledge of prisoners’ problems. On the basis of their corrections, the instrument was modified and adjudged to have face and content validity. A concurrent validity was carried out by administering WIPQ side by side with Anifowose’s PMNM (1992) instrument on 20 women prison inmates. The reliability of the adapted version of PMNM was carried out, yielding a cronbach alpha of 0.84. The pattern of response used was Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The instrument was administered on the respondents through the assistance of three female warders in charge of the women inmates in the three areas within Port Harcourt.
L.G.A., since the researcher was not allowed to interact with the inmates personally. The female warders interpreted and ticked the responses of women inmates according to their main problems after which the questionnaire forms were returned. In analyzing the data, means and standard deviations were used for the research questions, as well as t-test and ANOVA for the hypotheses.

**Table 1 Mean and Standard Deviation scores of problems encountered by women inmates (N=51)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No.</th>
<th>Type of Problem</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>25.22</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Emotional/Health</td>
<td>23.58</td>
<td>4.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>22.87</td>
<td>4.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>19.36</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2 t-test analysis of differences between young and old women inmates’ problems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of imprisonment</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Cal.t</th>
<th>Crit.t</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Old (above 1yr)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6.87*</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young (below 1yr)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P&gt;0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3 ANOVA of differences on women inmates’ problems by basis of status (pregnant, non-pregnant and nursing (N=51))**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of variation</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F-cal</th>
<th>F-Table</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>15.33</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.41</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>8634.26</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>118.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8649.59</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>P&lt;0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**d. Data Presentation**

**Research Question 1: What are the main problems encountered by women inmates?**

Table 1 shows that in order of the most pressing problems of women inmates were Physical problems, having the highest mean score of (25.22), followed by emotional/health (23.58), vocational (22.87) and social (19.36). This shows that majority of the inmates indicated lack in terms of clothing and expressed worries about their children, spouses and health matters. Furthermore, they were not pleased with their inability to learn a trade in prison and not being permitted to engage in social activities in terms of entertaining friends, etc, even though the last two needs were not as important as the previous ones which attracted higher mean scores.
Hypothesis 1
There is no significant difference between young and old women inmates in the problems encountered by them. Table 2 shows that the cal.t (6.87) is higher than the crit.t (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicated that significant difference existed between the young and old inmates in their perceptions of the problems they experienced in prison. In other words, the length of period spent in prison had a significant effect on their perceptions depending on the problems that they encountered at the time.

Hypothesis 2
There is no significant difference among pregnant, non-pregnant and nursing inmates in the problems encountered by them. Table 3 shows that the calculated F-value of (0.14) is not significant when compared with the Table F-value of (2.73). Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted. This shows that pregnant, non-pregnant and nursing inmates were not significantly different in their perceptions of their problems. In other words, their perceptions concerning the problems that they experienced were the same irrespective of their status.

III. Results and Discussion
Within the limits imposed by sampling the opinion of women inmates in three prison centres located in Rivers State of Nigeria, this research clearly shows a negative disposition of women inmates to their condition. The finding is contrary to reports in the literature which indicated that women inmates were fairly well looked after when compared with the men (Aduba, 1993). The situation could be different now since Aduba’s research was carried out eight years ago. Table 1 shows that women inmates’ problems in order of priority included physical, with the highest mean score of (25.22), followed by emotional/health (23.58), vocational (22.87) and lastly social (19.36). The finding is not surprising because women generally have a flare for aesthetic quality which significantly adds value to their relationship with others. Thus, they become uncomfortable when their need is not fulfilled in this regard. This is probably because their physical appearance increases their confidence. Moreover, the average Nigerian woman appreciates her looks. Therefore, irrespective of their condition in the cells, women inmates need some personal effects such as clothes to change, toiletries etc.

In terms of emotional/health indices, imprisonment is capable of causing emotional and health instability for women more especially in the absence of their children and spouses. Little wonder this study corroborates previous findings by Durosaro (2002) that apart from separation of prisoners from their loved ones and family members, they go through the ‘worst period of neglect in Nigeria’s nationhood’. The study further confirms the claims made by Ogundana (2011) that inmates in Port Harcourt prisons were suffering from lack of medical attention among other things. Hence, it is probably a traumatic period for the women inmates since literature reported that some were taking medications for an emotional disorder. In terms of vocational and social problems, the inmates were not too keen on them. The inmates might not be interested in both indices because of the submission which indicated that prisoners lacked opportunities for education and leisure, and that vocational education in prison were limited to only condemned prisoners (United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, 2007; Ogundana, 2011). A possible explanation for this could be because the women inmates have to be alive and well before venturing into such areas that they considered to
be less important at this period. In consonance with this finding, it was observed that educational and vocational programmes were in short supply and female prisoners were offered fewer opportunities of the programmes as compared with their male counterparts (Free Encyclopedia, 2011).

Significant difference was observed between the young and old women inmates in their perceptions concerning the problems they were facing in the prison. Table 2 shows that the older inmates who have spent one year and above have a higher mean score than the younger ones. This could be because they have spent a longer time in prison and witnessed more problems than those who had just joined them. It is expected that the older ones would have been used to certain problems and conditioned themselves. However, the reverse was the case probably because many of them have been through various degrees of torture and illnesses. One inference that might be drawn from this finding is that irrespective of the cell condition, younger prisoners might still have some neat clothes at their disposal unlike the dirty and torn uniforms which the older ones had. On the other hand, the younger prisoners might still have some period of grace whereby family members visited them more often than those of the older inmates whose family members may have reduced their period of visits or forgotten about them completely.

The question of whether differences existed among pregnant, non-pregnant and nursing inmates in their perceptions of the problems encountered by them showed that there was no significant difference among the three groups. Table 3 showed that the calculated F-value (0.14) is less than the critical F-value (2.73). Variations were not observed probably due to the unequal sample used in this study, arising from inability to obtain equal number of pregnant and nursing inmates. However, the finding is justified in that prisoners have been reported to be neglected and they go through abusive treatments. This is as reported in previous studies, that 90% of inmates were yet to face trial for their offences; and slept amongst their own faeces without any form of medical care (Stake Holders Democracy of Nigeria, 2010). Also, corroborating this view point, another study found that the maltreatment of inmates by keeping them for too long even with minor offences contributed to their early death (Egba, 2011). Similarly, literature reported that many women prisoners suffered from mental health conditions simply because the system could not cope with their complex needs in the United Kingdom (Bissell, 2004). In the same vein, O’Hara (2011) remarked that 70% of women in prison suffered from two or more mental health conditions. It is not also surprising that pregnant inmates were reported to lack prenatal and postnatal care, as well as inadequate education regarding parenting, childcare, etc (O’Hara, 2011)

IV. Conclusion
This study has shown that imprisonment had a negative effect on women inmates due to their poor condition in terms of physical appearance, emotional and health problems which the respondents indicated as the most important challenges they were facing. Furthermore, the young and old women inmates were different in their perceptions of their predicament while no difference was observed among the pregnant, non-pregnant and nursing inmates. These findings call for more extensive study in this area and a change in the way prisoners who are yet to be tried are treated.
V. Implications
The study has implications for psychological counseling. Counselors are expected to counsel prison officials on the need to provide better conditions particularly in terms of women inmates’ problems. This means that counsellors should visit the inmates regularly to conduct both individual and group counseling programmes. The purpose is to give the inmates the opportunity to share their concerns so that they will not feel emotionally downcast and in the process develop serious health conditions. The observed problems of the women prisoners points to the need for therapy especially because of the implications for the women’s emotional and physical wellbeing. Based on the foregoing, some measures must be taken to ameliorate the condition of women inmates.

VI. Recommendations
The following recommendations are based on the findings of this study:

i. Prison counseling centers should be established and made functional, with trained prison counselors who will work with women inmates in order to assist them in ensuring that their problems in terms of their physical outlook is solved. Counselors should assist them also in providing a forum in which group discussions, workshops and seminars can be conducted in line with helping them solve their psychological trauma which ultimately leads to behavioral conditions - physically, mentally, emotionally and physiologically.

ii. The government should work hard at improving the conditions of women inmates by providing better clothes for them as well as training/employing more prison counselors capable of meeting their needs. This also means that the government should build more cells and provide adequate health facilities to ensure that diseases are put at bay.

iii. Government should also increase the budgetary allocation to the prison sector to help address the problem of deteriorating facilities.

iv. More NGOs should come to the aid of women inmates and assist government in terms of providing drugs, clothes/toiletries and vocational training for women inmates.

References


