



AVAILABILITY OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AMONG INMATES OF MAXIMUM-SECURITY PRISONS, SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

Omitogun Ezekiel Olusola¹, Ogunfowokan Rukayat Temitope²
and Omitogun Omolola M.³

¹School of Psychiatric Nursing, Aro Abeokuta, Nigeria

²Department of Nursing, Olabisi-Onabanjo University, Sagamu Campus, Ogun State

³Federal Medical Centre, Abeokuta Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *Social support in the prison system is an essential aspect of rehabilitation programme for the incarcerated individuals who have no control over decisions being made as regard their daily living during the period of incarceration. This study assessed the social supports available to the inmates of Maximum-Security Prisons in Southwest Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was employed for the study and the target population were the inmates Maximum Security Prisons in Southwest Nigeria. Three hundred and forty (340) participants from the maximum prisons were used for the study. An adapted questionnaire of multidimensional scale of perceived social support was used to collect data from the participants. Data were analyzed using descriptive tools and results presented in tables depicting frequencies and percentages. The findings show that 71% were males and 29% were females; 124 (36.9%) were below 25 years of age and 122 (35.8%) were between 26 and 35 years; 151 (45%) were married, 152 (45%) single and 37 (11%) were separated. Social support was low from family and friends with mean score of 2.84 and 2.49 respectively while NGOs and correctional officers' support were 3.45 and 4.34 respectively. The study concluded that respondents' social support were inadequate from their family and friends whereas, correctional officers and non-governmental organizations were supportive in spite of social stigma in the society.*

KEYWORDS: Correctional Officers, Incarceration, Inmates, Social Support, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Background

Social support is essential aspect of human community as it promotes communication, survival and adaptation to an individual, small groups or in an organization such as inmates who found themselves in the maximum-security prisons by reason of any culpable act. Imprisonment in actual sense is a serious problem for the victims of crime as well as their families and friends due to attributed social stigma during the period of incarceration and thereafter leading to withdraw of their support to the person and subsequent diminishing level of health and general relationship. Inmates' adaptation to prison life depends on numerous factors such as developing personal coping skills, conforming with rules and regulations and so on (Leban, Cardwell, Copes & Brezina, 2015) in which families, friends and other social organizations in the society play some vital roles (Shamrva, Santiago, Kubiak, Cumings, & Johnson, 2018).



Jamadar and Patil, (2017) postulate social support as a multi-dimensional construct that deals with subjective and objective needs and feelings of an individual in adapting to the environment and coping with challenges of daily living. Availability of social support and its perception might be beneficial to both family and state in reduction of recidivism rate among the ex-convicts (Dadi, Dachew, Tahiru, Habitu & Demissie, 2019). Wallace, Fahmy, Cotton, Jimmons, McKay, Stoffer and Syed, (2016) examined relationship between inmates' mental health and their social support thus, reported that inmates who have stronger connections or have a sense of closeness with their families during incarceration were reported to have experienced positive mental health.

In a prison system, social support can be viewed as an essential aspect of rehabilitation programme for the incarcerated individuals who also have no control over decision being made as regards their daily experience while still in this environment. Though, adequate social support might not be available in many prisons due to differences in policies that guides the prison administration. Amongst variables regarded as social support, Novek, (2017) identified strong connection with the families and friends, members of religious organization, roles of non-governmental organizations as social support to the inmates while correctional officers, medical personnel also serve important needs of the inmates.

Pettus-Davis, Veeh, Davis and Tripodi, (2017) equally opined that availability of social support is a major contributory factor in promoting optimal health of inmates during incarceration and upon release into the society since the prison settings globally tend to experience steady increase in population with increase of 20% in the last fifteen years and the proportion of people incarcerated yearly taking different dimensions around the world. The United State of America has 666 prisoners per 100,000 of the population (over 2.3million with 1.35millions in state prisons and 34, 000 in juvenile centres currently in prison (Novek, 2017), 146 per 100,000 in Western Europe, England and Wales compare with 103 in France, 94 in Belgium and 77 in Germany (Turner, 2018). In Nigeria, congestion, inadequate welfare and rehabilitation pose negative effect to the inmates' available social support (Ayuk, Emeka & Omono, 2013).

Maximum security prison may be noisy and crowded (Novek, 2017), yet at same time profoundly isolating cutting away inmates from family and friends who might seldom visit or not at all due to social stigma (Antonio, 2018) and institutional policies (Ayuk *et al*, 2013) leaving the incarcerated to harsh condition of the prison that stifles hope, triggers violence and teaches cynicism, suspicion and negative personality development for the sake of survival. These latter consequences also lead to vulnerability of inmates to poor physical health, psychological distress, negative social influences and gross decrease in their overall health (Leban *et al*, 2015; Novek, 2017). The prisoners have to cope with so many problems in the course of their jail term among which absence of families and loved ones, change in the social status, financial incapacitation, lack of autonomy and sometimes ill-health are major (Combalbert, Pennequin, Ferrand, Armand, Anselme, & Geffray, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Social support from families, friends, non-governmental organizations and the kind gesture of correctional officers have been described as a panacea for emotional distress during incarceration of inmates owing to its effective communication components. Moreover, normal adaptation of prisoners requires adjustment to the environment and optimal utilization of



available resources which is proportional to the estimated value and standard permitted by prison authority. It must also correspond with the objectives of the prison, rehabilitation of the prisoners and provision of necessary support while in jail (Besadre et al, 2017).

The official weekly report of Nigerian Prisons Service, total inmates as at 16th April, 2018 was 72,277 while total male was 70,865 and total female was 1,412 (1.95%); 49,229 (66%) out of 72,277 total inmates fell into awaiting trial category (Nigerian Prisons Service, 2018) which implies that there would be over utilization of resources, congestion, numerous health problems (Ayuk *et al*, 2013) and poor rehabilitation programme. Thus, there is negative effect on prisoners' social adjustment and re-integration to the society upon release (Ayuk *et al*, 2013). Subsequently, from the researchers' observation and interactions with inmates in some prisons in South-West Nigeria, there appears to be a wide gap between inmates' satisfaction and the social resources available at prison environment in Nigeria. This paper focused on assessing available social support to the inmates as a way of promoting their rehabilitation and building healthier environment.

Objectives of the Study

This paper assessed the social support available to the inmates of maximum-security prisons in Southwest Nigeria as means to promote their rehabilitation programme

Scope of the Study

This study was limited to the two maximum prisons in Southwest Nigeria; Abeokuta and Kirikiri Maximum Security Prison, Ogun and Lagos State respectively.

Justification for the Study

Despite the fact that the primary objective of prison is to maintain security of the prisoners and rehabilitate them, series of health problems were being reported among them causing government huge amounts of money yearly (Ayuk *et al*, 2013; Basu, 2004). Many of the inmates developed different preventable mental, physical and social problems. The inmates are equally reported to be under perpetual loneliness in a noisy maximum-security prison due to disconnection from family and loved ones (Novek, 2017). Although, several reports maintained that social support has been helpful in sustaining inmates' optimal health in developed countries (Costanza, Fisher, Ali, Beer, Bond, Boumans & Snapp, 2007; Besadre, *et al*. 2017; Shamrva, *et al*. 2018), the situation in Nigeria is incongruous with the finding (Ayuk *et al*. 2013; Omitogun, 2014). The study identifies the need to examine the availability of social support to this population.

Research Design: The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive design in assessing the social support available to the respondent.

Study Setting: Southwest a Yoruba tribe dominated geo-political zones in Nigeria with two maximum security prisons; Old Abeokuta Prison in Ogun State and Kirikiri Maximum Prison in Apapa area of Lagos State. Both centres were under Zone-A Zonal Headquarters (Lagos) being headed by Deputy Controller who in turn report directly to the Controller General at nation's capital. Similarly, there is regular transfer of both staff and inmates between the two centres especially whenever there is security challenge. Abeokuta Maximum Prison was founded in 1900 with official capacity of 510 inmates but due to persistent congestion, the total



inmates accommodated ranges from about 765 to over 1200 inmates. It has provision for all categories of offenders in respect to the level of their dangerousness with facilities for female offenders and gallows to execute condemned prisoner. Kirikiri Maximum Prison was founded in 1955 by the colonial masters with the official capacity of 1056. This prison is notable among others prison in Nigeria due to the nature of the offenders that are being kept there and for its congestion.

Sampling Size and Sampling Technique

The study adopted a simple random sampling technique to select all male respondents while total enumeration technique was used to capture the entire 98 female participants to meet up with male sample size. A calculated sample size using modified formula of W. G. Cochran (Glenn, 2009; GfK Plonia, 2013) was used to determined sample size for male respondents

$$n = \frac{\frac{Z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}}{1 + \left(\frac{Z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2 N}\right)}$$

Where N = Population of males

e = Margin error (0.05)

Z = Confidence Interval (z-score) = 1.96

p = Expected Prevalence (in decimal) = 0.5 (Pourhoseingholi, Vahedi, Rahimzadeh, 2013)

n = Sample size

A total of 349 male participants were calculated from the formula hence, 349 males + 98 females on total enumeration = 447 inmates were recruited for the study.

Instrument and Data Collection

The researcher adapted a multidimensional scale of perceived social support from Zimet, Dahem, Zimet & Farley (1988) on the rating scale of 1-5 (1 = Neutral, 2 = Strongly Disagreed, 3 = Disagreed, 4 = Agreed and 5 = Strongly Agreed). The questionnaire was divided into two (2) sections; Section (A) - Socio-demographic data and Section (B): Satisfaction on Perceived Social Support.

Data collection was through administering questionnaires within the space of six weeks. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, permission was sought from the prisons' authority and thorough explanation of the purpose was given to the respondents followed by signing of the consent form. Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to prevent alteration.

Method of Data Analysis

Data collected were subjected to proper sorting, invalid questionnaire were eliminated leaving 340 questionnaires that were computed and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 23. Descriptive statistics was used to assess socio-demographic



characteristics and social support variables while findings were presented using frequency tables and percentages.

Ethical Consideration

Approval of institutional Ethics Committee was taken before initiation of the study. Security protocols were followed all through the period of data collection. A proper written informed consent was taken from all the participants of the study. The privacy of the participants was ensured through anonymity. The chance to participate was also equitably distributed.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Items		Results	
		Freq.	%
Gender	Male	242	71
	Female	98	29
	Total	340	100
Age	Below 25	124	36.9
	26-35	122	35.8
	36 above	94	27.3
	Total	340	100
Marital Status	Single	152	45
	Married	151	44
	Separated/Divorced	37	11
	Total	340	100
Religion	Christianity	201	59.1
	Islam	134	39.4
	Indigenous	5	1.5
	Total	340	100
Education	No Formal Education	68	20.0
	Up to Secondary	225	66.2
	Beyond Secondary	47	13.8
	Total	340	100
Length of Incarceration	≤ 2yrs	209	61.5
	2-5yrs	73	21.5
	>5yrs	58	17.0
	Total	340	100
Occupation	Unemployed	50	14.7
	Artisans	132	38.8
	Public-Servant	33	9.7
	Trading	101	29.7
	Farming	24	7.1
	Total	340	100

**Table 2: Social Support Available for the Respondents**

2a). Family Support Available	Disagree F (%)	Agree F (%)	Mean	Std. dev.	Ave. Mean
Someone do help me when in need	176 (51.8)	164 (48.2)	2.92	1.61	2.84
I can share joys and sorrows with someone.	170 (50.0)	170 (50.0)	3.05	1.58	
Family really tries to help.	192 (56.5)	148 (43.5)	2.88	1.71	
Receives emotional support from family.	261 (76.8)	79 (23.2)	2.14	1.39	
I have someone who is a real source of comfort.	190 (55.9)	150 (44.1)	2.83	1.59	
Can talk about my problems with my family.	130 (38.2)	210 (61.8)	3.25	1.57	
Family is willing to help me to make decisions.	188 (52.3)	152 (44.7)	2.78	1.58	
2b). Support from Friends					
Can count on friends when things go wrong.	263 (77.4)	77 (22.6)	2.01	1.36	2.49
Share joys and sorrows with friends.	232 (68.2)	108 (31.8)	2.51	1.38	
Friends cares about my feelings.	193 (56.8)	147 (43.2)	2.80	1.59	
Family and friends contribute to my wellness.	210 (61.8)	130 (38.2)	2.65	1.58	
2c). Support from Religious Organization					
NGOs (e.g. religious body) are helpful	104 (30.6)	236 (69.4)	3.45	1.55	3.45
2d). Support from other sources					
Correctional officers are supportive.	21 (6.2)	319 (93.8)	4.34	.87	4.34

DISCUSSION

Four basic categories of social support identified were; family, friends, non-governmental organization (e.g. religious bodies, human right organization and voluntary groups like National Youth Service Corps advocacy group) and correctional officers' support. In contrast to Dadi, Dachew Tariku, Habitu and Demissie (2019) who reported good social support from friends, families and significant others in their study conducted among inmates in Ethiopia. The outcome of this study revealed that support from family and friends were inadequate to the respondents. The result showed that inmates don't receive adequate support from their immediate family as well as their close friends during the period of their jail term. This might be manifesting in the reduction of number of times been visited, failure to show up in the court during court proceedings and break in communication from home. The study was in line with Minnesota Department of Corrections (DOC-USA), (2011) report that over 40% of the



offenders were never visited during jail term. The possibility that social relationship is a significant part of life and sense of love and belonging is very key to value which an individual place on self especially from people that are very close them.

Similar to the report of Ngu (2016) that social support entails an individual perception whether he/she is loved and cared for, valued and esteemed and having the sense of belonging to a network of communication that has a set of mutual obligations. Though, Dadi et al (2019) attributed social ties from co-inmates as friendship from where they can derive some level of support; this was not so in this study possibly due to congestion where available resources might not be sufficient and due to frequent transfer of inmates across different centres for security reasons (Ayuk et al, 2013) thus, cutting away individuals that might want to place an obligation on self to render minimal support to them while in jail. The possibility of inmates developing emotional distress with direct impact on their mental health was equally attributed to lack of social support (Jamadar & Patil, 2017) during period of incarceration. Anxiety or psychological distress are problems of the mind and require that a sufferer finds a companion or close person to share the burden with at given period of time thus, promoting easy adaptation and coping to their given environment.

CONCLUSION

Social support was seen to be of significant importance for effective co-habitation and interaction in any society which might be inform of gifts or other items to the one in need, encouragement, empathy, love and affection to the sufferer however, inmates do not enjoy these adequately from their family and friends might lead to social stigma upon their release and associated anxiety disorder or distress, mental illnesses and high rate of recidivism.

The main social supports available to the inmates in this study were support from non-governmental organization and correctional officers including nurses and other health personnel. Though, they had potential for family and friends' support, in the absence of these, inmates turned to correctional officers. The disconnection from family and significant others possesses mental health challenge and decrease in optimal physical health to the inmates during their jail term (Wallace et al, 2016; Pettus-Davis et al, 2017). Availability of correctional officers, series of rehabilitation programmes as well as counselling and spiritual session were part of support enjoyed by the inmates from correctional officers however, increase workload is inevitable in the absence of continuous lack of social support from inmates' relatives and friends.

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