



## PLACED-BASED EXPERIENCES OF THE YOUNG ADULT INMATES IN NSUKKA CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

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**ABSTRACT:** *Considering the peculiarities of the young adults in their transition period from adolescence to adulthood, this study aims to explore the place based experiences among young adult inmates in Nsukka Correctional Centre. Exploratory qualitative research design was employed. 15 young adults that have spent between 1 month and 10 years were purposely selected for the study. Informed consent form was signed by the participants after due explanations of the research purpose. Data were collected through face to face in-depth interviews done in a quiet office to maintain privacy. The data were transcribed, analyzed thematically and emergent themes were supported by quotes from the respondents. Findings from the study showed that the young adults were depressed, longed for freedom to become productive, regretted past mistakes and bored of regimented life. Recommendations were made for the reduction of the number of young adult inmates, by ensuring access to opportunities and increased support that enhance restoration from any long-term negative physical and mental health effects of incarceration and skills needed for resilience and effective functioning for sustainable national transformation when re-integrated into the society.*

**KEYWORDS:** Place-Based, Experiences, Young Adults, Inmates, Nsukka Correctional Centre



## INTRODUCTION

Living with unknown individuals from different backgrounds and orientations, separation from loved ones in a confined inmate environment with the associated stressors can be emboldened with unpleasant feelings and experiences for the young adult. A community of place or place-based community is a community of people who are bound together by residence, work, and visit or spend a constant portion of their time together (Ramsey & Beesley, 2007). Confinement has a way of taking a toll on the mental health of inmates because suddenly the incarcerated are charged to deal with the long sentences, separation from loved ones and prison environment with the associated stressors with possible consequence of depression (Fingerman, 2017). The inmate's environment is laden with experiences of mental health stressors including elevated levels of depression, loneliness, nervousness, and anxiety amongst the individuals (Lindquist, 2000). Incarceration isolates and dramatically limits opportunities to build prosocial peer relationships, prevents youth from developing autonomy, and offers few meaningful pathways for skill development and can also be traumatizing for many young adults (Wolff & Shi, 2009). Young adults in this place-based community seem to find inmate life challenging considering their age. To provide an operational definition for the purpose of this study, place-based experiences consist of the experiences that these individuals undergo as they share their residence, work, and spend a significant portion of their time together (Ramsey & Beesley, 2007). The statistics of young adults have continued to have a steady increase globally. 1.2 billion young adults aged 15 to 24 years (16 per cent) form the global population, projected to increase by 62 percent over the next three decades, rising from 207 million in 2019 to 336 million in 2050. The sub-Saharan Africa is expected to have the largest increase (UNDESA, 2019a). Nigeria's population is currently 212,582,820 (World Population Review, 2021). According to population projections by the United Nations for 2020, about 43 percent of the Nigerian population comprised children 0-14 years, 19 percent age 15-24 years and about 62 percent are below age 25 years. By contrast, less than 5 percent are aged 60 years and above. This makes Nigeria a youthful population with a median age of about 18 years, which is lower than Africa and world estimates of 20 and 29 respectively (World Population Review (2021; Soyinka, 2020). The economic impact of unemployment on the young adult has become worrisome. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) 2021 reported that young people in Nigeria are calling on leaders and the government to set up structures and put policies in place to reduce the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, and of course, all other austere conditions on young people. From the ongoing, Nigeria is made up of a good number of young adults. These young adults engage in various forms of legal and illegal activities to cater for their personal needs and those of their families, given that the bulk of them may be their families' breadwinners.

Young adults' ages vary from country to country and from one authority to another. However, the term young adult is used to define inmates aged between 18 and 25 years (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2017). Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2018) affirms that young adulthood is generally defined as 18 to 25 while the United Nations defines young adulthood as 15 to 24 years (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). In Nigeria, persons between 18 to 35 are considered youth (Federal Ministry of Health, 2009) with no specific age range for young adults to the researchers best of knowledge. The researchers would have loved to adopt the Nigerian definition if it were within the transitory age of interest. Nevertheless, the study adopted the definition of young adults (18-25) by Massachusetts Institute of Technology because of the peculiarities of the age group. Due to the



developmental processes that take place at this period, young adults get themselves involved in so many activities, some of which are not healthy. Jurewicz (2015) averred that recent statistics show that about 40% of young adults aged 16–24 years have used illicit substances at least once. In addition, psychological disorders and behavioral problems such as substance abuse also reach their peak during young adult years, and rates of suicide attempts are most serious between ages 18 and 25.

It is imperative to note that young adults are in the stage of transition from adolescence to adulthood, bolstered with physical, physiological and psychological changes and activities. Young adulthood is described as "emerging adulthood," "the frontier of adulthood," or earlier, "the novice phase." (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2018). Lindell and Goodjoint (2020) pointed out that the life phase between adolescence and young adulthood is distinct. The transition to adulthood takes a gradual process that differs from person to person. Young adults are prone to poor decision-making, impulsivity, peer influence, accommodation change, great volatility and risky behavior (Arnett, 2015). However, having effective support structures in place would ensure that the young adulthood period is marked by healthy risk-taking and positive experiences that will help the young person to be successful as an adult, rather than engaging in negative risk-taking that leads to precarious circumstances and trauma. Therefore, it is essential to focus more on this important age of transition, because if this psychological and social transition is not well handled, there may be adverse effects on the young adult's present and future well-being (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Smit, Weatherby and Creighton (2014) reiterated the importance of giving every offender the opportunity to rehabilitate whilst serving his/her sentence, with the prospect of eventually functioning as a responsible member of the free society. This is because, whereas these changes are all developmentally normal, they are associated with numerous challenges (Lindell & Goodjoint, 2020).

Young adults have distinct characteristics that distinguish them from the older adults. Young adults are particularly skilled in maintaining contradictory emotions, confident while still being cautious and enthusiastic in the face of large degrees of uncertainties (Arnett, 2015). Young adults function in the same way with the older peers in calm situations, however, in conditions of hot reasoning, their intellect works like that of a 16 or 17 year-old evidenced by the high susceptibility to peer pressures (Michaels, 2016). It is also a time of great instability; life plans shift, residences change; and change of romantic partners. Jurewicz (2015) noted that young adulthood is a time of taking on responsibilities and frequently rebelling against them, establishing independence and facing consequences of actions. Young adulthood thinking capacities, relationship skills, emotion regulations are not likely to be at a developmental level where they have enough ability to cope with the demands of a diverse global, technological, rapidly-changing world (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2018). Young adults have very high rates of mental health disorders and are particularly vulnerable to addiction and substance use disorders, suicidal behaviours, eating disorders, high levels of poor health than at other ages, more likely to self-harm more likely to smoke cigarettes and abuse alcohol, prone to accidents and serious injuries (Lindell & Goodjoint, 2020; Allen, 2016; Jurewicz, 2015). This is simply because of their increased drive for activities of all sorts without commensurate developmental stability.

Some young adults living in abject poverty and crime areas may have experienced one disheartening situation or the other that may force them into unhealthy and detrimental decision making. These young adults with fewer resources face additional challenges and often find the



consequences of their mistakes, miscalculations, and misfortunes compounded when they also lose access to their existing support systems (Lindell & Goodjoint, 2020). Soyinka (2020) observed that young Nigerians between the ages of 18 and 30 years are the major victims of extortion and police brutality in the country, often framed as lazy and fraudulent and constantly harassed by the police. This is coupled with the fact that 34.9 percent of Nigerian youths are unemployed. Unemployment stood at 21.7 million in the second quarter of 2020 out of which are 13.9 million young adults. It is widely recognized that incarceration diminishes the wellbeing of individuals during and after (Fazel & Baillargeon, 2011); other common features of incarceration can be deeply harmful during this developmental period and separation from family connection can be experienced as a form of trauma (Barnert et al., 2017). Research shows that institutional settings harm young people developmentally, psychologically, and physically (Juveniles for Justice, 2018). Allen (2016) asserted that young adults are also more likely to self-harm in incarceration than older ones. Loneliness experienced by incarcerated young adults can affect their overall health, leading to poorer sleep (Schrempft, Jackowska and Hamer, 2019) and negative health consequences including cardiovascular disease, depression, stress (Hämmig, 2019).

It was observed that many studies have been carried out on older adults and younger adults in incarceration in Nigeria. However, to the best of knowledge of the researchers, no study has been carried out in the country on the young adults between the ages of 18 to 25 years with the aim of exploring their place-based experiences as inmates in a correctional center, bearing in mind the peculiarities of their transitory phase from adolescence to adulthood. The researchers therefore, intend to explore the experiences of these young adults (18-25) considering their developmental period. If this is achieved, it will enable the prison warden and officers to note more effective remedial services that will benefit the inmates who need these correctional services for appropriate reintegration into the society.

## **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

### **Study Design**

Exploratory qualitative design was employed for this study which afforded the opportunity to deeply explore the experiences of selected young adults (Bryman, 2016). The study was conducted inductively to allow themes and findings to emanate from the data rather than restricting the findings to a preselected theoretical framework (Gobena & Hean, 2019).

### **Sample and Sampling Procedures**

The study was centered on young adults (18 to 25 years) in Nsukka Correctional Centre. Therefore, the data for the study were collected from 12 young adult males in Nsukka Correctional Centre, Enugu State. The Nsukka Correctional Centre accommodates only males. Using purposive sampling technique, young adults who were willing to discuss their experience were selected (Bryman, 2016). The choice of 12 participants was suitable because it reached the saturation point where additional data do not lead to any new emergent themes (Given, 2016). The differences in their characteristics made room for some diversity in participants' perspectives. Getting at the inmates for participation was not very easy because the study was conducted in an incarceration center where protocols were strictly observed.

**Table 1. Characteristics of participants**

S/N	Names Coded	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Occupation	Educational Status	Religion	Duration of Incarceration	Sentence
1	Inmate A	21	M	Single		JS3	Christianity		ATM
2	Inmate B	18	M	Single	Job Man	SS2	Christianity	10 months	ATM
3	Inmate C	25	M	Single	Wine Tapper	JS3	Christianity	19 months	ATM
4	Inmate D	18	M	Single	Apprentice	JS3	Christianity	2 months	ATM
5	Inmate E	24	M	Single	Trader	SS1	Christianity	21 months	ATM
6	Inmate F	25	M	Single	Installation	JS3	Christianity	6 months	ATM
7	Inmate G	21	M	Single	Tiling	JS3	Christianity	14 months	
8	Inmate H	25	M	Single	Driver	JS3	Christianity	36 months	ATM
9	Inmate I	20	M	Single	Mechanic	JS2	Christianity	24 months	ATM
10	Inmate J	24	M	Married	Motor Alignment	SS2	Christianity	24 months	ATM
11	Inmate K	20	M	Single	Car Wash	Primary 4	Christianity	12 months	ATM
12	Inmate L	19	M	Single		Primary 6	Christianity	36 months	ATM

*Source: Data Collected on place-based experiences of young adult inmates, 2021*

Table 1 shows that the 12 young adult male who were chosen to participate in the study aged between 18 and 25 years. Only one is married. All were into one menial job or the other. The level of education shows that two had primary education and 10 did not complete secondary education. All (100%) of the participants are Awaiting Trial Males (ATM) and all were Christians. Duration of incarceration ranges from 2 to 36 months. All 12 young adults participated in the interview by choice and they were given informed consent which they read and signed.

### Data Collection

Data for the study were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews developed by the researchers and validated by experts in the Faculty of Social Sciences (Departments of Psychology and Social Work). In-depth interview was chosen because of their suitability for studies focused on exploring participants' experience and understanding of a given phenomena (Bryman, 2016). The semi-structured nature of the interviews was suitable for this study's inductive design, allowing the discussions to go in the direction of issues raised by participants in the course of the interviews (Ekoh George & Ezulike, 2021). The interviews were conducted using Igbo language and were recorded in the process. Precautionary measures were employed including wearing of facemasks and social distancing. Discussions were held in their chapel which was spacious enough. The ethical requirements for qualitative research were observed including obtaining informed consent from participants after detailed information about the study was given and ensuring the interviews were conducted in a space, method and language that assured their safety, comfort and complete involvement, during the data collection (Bryman, 2016; Pittaway et al., 2010). Due approval for the study was received.



## Data Analysis

The recorded data were transcribed using a verbatim transcription. Verbatim transcription of qualitative research interviews allows room for researchers to explore and have in-depth insights of the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Sebastian, 2021). The Igbo language was transcribed in English with strict effort made to be as close as possible to participants' original statements in Igbo. The researchers compared the transcribed versions with the recorded interviews to ascertain that it retained the original ideas of the participants and to guarantee validity of data. The participants were involved in the process to ascertain whether the findings were their original idea, in order to further increase the validity.

The participants' names were not included, but coded with inmates A to L after the transcription to ensure confidentiality. For illustration, Inmate A, M, 20 represents a twenty year old male coded as Inmate A. After the transcription, a thematic analytical method was used to analyze the data, and this involved using data to discover, interpret and report meaning patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers engaged in multiple reading of the transcripts to identify emerging themes; this was done to ensure validity and trustworthiness of the results. During the coding and analysis, an inductive approach was adopted. Identified emerging codes and patterns through multiple reading were organized in themes after comparing transcripts by the researchers (Bryman, 2016). The findings were supported by quotes from the respondents.

## RESULTS

Incarceration experiences were very overwhelming for the young adults. However, three major themes emerged from the findings; the first illustrates how the young adults were always thinking about their lives, isolated from other inmates, sad about everything and hopeless (depression). Secondly, they wished it never happened and wished there could be a rewind in the hands of the clock for corrections to be made (regrets for offenses committed). Thirdly, they want to be reunited to friends and families, tired of restrictions and regimented life, desires to have access to what they love doing best (urgent need for freedom).

### Depression

Living with family and friends, doing what one loves to do gives joy and confidence, but when on the contrary one ends up in incarceration for whatever reason, life becomes boring, sad, hopeless and lonely in the midst of multitude. The findings showed that the majority of the young adults were actively depressed. They feel that all their mates have outrun them and that life is not treating them well. Some of them seem to forget that what they were going through is the dividend of their actions. Inmate A recounts;

*I don't feel like talking to anybody, instead I prefer staying alone in my little corner without relating to anyone (Inmate A).*

From the findings, most of the young adults hardly smile. They look so dejected and rejected and complain that some of the inmates are even making matters worse by not showing any sign of change. This worsens their feeling of hopelessness. Inmate C narrates;



*It can only take God to change someone in this 'land' (as they generally call the Correctional Centre). Some of us come here and become more hardened instead of becoming better people. This makes me more hopeless and down (Inmate C)*

There is a complaint about the rationing of food in the Centre. The young adults keep remembering how well they feed at home and feel bad that they eat less now. Not just eating less amount of food, but eating what they do not like eating. Moreover, it is to eat or go hungry.

*They give us small portions of food and nobody cares whether you are satisfied or not. Who will even ask you? (Inmate C)*

### **Regrets for offenses committed**

Young adults are prone to overstep their boundaries and when they fail, they are usually full of regrets. All the inmates interviewed reported that they regretted their offenses. Many narrated how they were deceived and influenced negatively by bad friends.

*I was deceived by my friend when I came to the village to assist my aunty in farm work. It all happened that I exhausted the money I came home with, unfortunately my aunty was not taking good care of me and I needed money. I joined my friend to go and steal from someone's house and both of us were caught. My friend is even here with me (Inmate E)*

Some inmates admitted that their problem was that they were disobedient to their parents and would not listen to any advice from anyone. Now they are regretting their actions.

*I don't know anything called 'law', but I have learnt law in this land. I wish I have a second chance, if I do, I will never touch someone again in my life and will never go near somebody's belonging (Inmate E)*

Many of the young adults regretted taking themselves out of home because of their offenses. They expressed loss of the warmth of family and friends. Some lamented that since their incarceration, no family member ever visited them.

*I regret that I pushed myself away from my family and friends by my misbehaviours. Nobody has visited since I came here, in fact, I need help (Inmate F).*

### **Need for Freedom**

Freedom is one benefit nature accorded to everyone, but unfortunately, incarcerated young adults do not have freedom. They live regimented lives burdened with do's and don'ts. This type of life is a very hard nut for the young adults who are full of activities to crack.

*Oh no! I have lost my life, no movement, no will of your own. These people keep tossing us up and down. I can't wait to get out of this strange land (Inmate F)*

Others were claiming to have committed no offense but regretted that the bad company they kept brought them to this land.

*I regret disobeying instructions. I was always hanging out with older friends. I was warned but would not listen; now I am the one suffering for my disobedience. I want to go home (Inmate A).*



Majority of the young adults said that if they were free by now they would have been established in business or completed their education. The only married man among them lamented that he would have been with his family by now. He pointed out his fear that the wife might be tempted to be promiscuous because of hardship and so desires freedom urgently.

*I wish to leave this land so that I will go and reunite with my wife and two children. I am scared that my wife will become promiscuous because of suffering. I am dying little by little (Inmate J).*

The findings showed that all of the participants are Awaiting Trial Males (ATMs). None of their cases has been determined and no one knows when they will be taken to court for trial of their case. Some are just two months waiting while others have waited for as long as 36 months. Majority of them claim that they were dumped at the Centre because they do not have money to pay a lawyer that can facilitate their case.

*I have nobody that can help me. My people do not have money to pay a lawyer to assist me get out of this land. I don't want to continue staying here, yet I don't know when and how I can go to court. I need help (Inmate I).*

## DISCUSSION

This study explored the experiences of 12 young adults in Nsukka Correctional Centre. The analysis of in-depth interviews conducted with the young adults revealed that many suffer from depression. Bearing in mind the uniqueness of this stage of life, there is a dire need to provide a conducive environment for the developmental processes of the young adult to flourish, even when they offend. Young adults abhor vacuum, always longing to be busy with one thing or the other. When a conducive environment is not provided for them to be positively productive, they tend to get themselves involved with the wrong things that lead to their ending up as inmates. It is a general knowledge in our country Nigeria that most incarcerated inmates stay a long time as Awaiting Trial Males. Incarceration diminishes the wellbeing of individuals during and after incarceration (Fazel & Baillargeon, 2011). Loneliness and isolation can lead to a wide range of negative health consequences including depression and suicide (Hämmig, 2019). Many complained that the environment alone makes them sick. Mental health stressors in the incarceration environment include elevated levels of depression, loneliness, nervousness, and anxiety (Lindquist, 2000). The findings from the young inmates revealed that they don't have the privilege of doing what their heart desires. This is affecting them a lot because they are in the period of increased activity. There is a need to give every offender the privilege of rehabilitation whilst serving sentence, with the view of the offender ultimately functioning responsibly in the society (Smit, Weatherby & Creighton, 2014). Connecting young people to strong educational and career services including vocational rehabilitation and workforce development programs can help them avoid justice involvement or get back on the right track if they do become involved in the justice system (The Aspen Institute, 2014), and in turn prevent depression.

The young adult inmates regretted their irrational actions. Young adults establish their independence and face the consequences of their actions (Jurewicz, 2015). Their offenses resulted in separation from family and friends leading to isolation in an unknown land as they fondly call the Correctional Centre. Incarceration can be deeply harmful during this





developmental period, and separation from family can itself be experienced as a form of trauma (Barnert, 2017). This forms a great regret for these young adults.

Young adults love freedom and activity is a norm for them, therefore, anything stopping them from being active is not a welcome development for them. Confinement can mean social and sensory isolation for up to 23 hours a day. Given their developmental stage, this practice puts young people at especially serious risk for long-term psychological damage (Frank, 2017). From reviewed literature, incarceration is not the best correctional measure for young adults as it affects their developmental processes into full blown adulthood. Incarcerated young adults aged 18 to 24 offenders in adult establishments were found to be more likely to experience abuse and attempt suicide (Kolivoski & Shook, 2016). Suicidal attempt is as a result of loneliness, boredom, hopelessness and loss of savor for life. These young adults are left sitting in their cells with little to no opportunity to learn from past experiences, cope with underlying trauma, engage in meaningful accountability, and prepare for their future (Frank, 2017). With the understanding of the peculiarities of the young adult and the adverse and austere condition of the country, rehabilitation might be a better option than incarceration. There should be investment in the education, employment and health of the young people and creation of conditions conducive for sustained economic growth (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019).

## **CONCLUSION**

This Study explored the experiences of 12 young adults in Nsukka Correctional Centre. Qualitative design was employed and the findings revealed that these young adults are depressed as a result of their confinement. They regretted their actions that led to incarceration and wished for another chance. Finally, they were in desperate need of freedom. Majority of them lamented that they were tired of regimented and confined life. The researchers are of the opinion that there is a need to give every offender the privilege of rehabilitation whilst serving sentence, with the view of the offender ultimately functioning responsibly in the society.

## **Limitations**

1. The number of young adults was not many, and it contributed to the limited number used in the study.
2. Nsukka Correctional Centre has only males, which led to the researchers using only male inmates instead of both sexes.

## **Recommendations**

1. The young adult population (18 to 25) should be recognized as a distinct category from older adults.
2. Incarceration should be a last resort for young adults; investments should be made into seeking alternatives.
3. Government should involve these young adults in policies and decision making.



4. Where incarceration is absolutely necessary, there should be a strong focus throughout their period of custody on resettlement into the community.

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