

Reintegration Challenges of Discharged Prisoners in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State.

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Abstract

Challenges confronting the reformation and rehabilitation of prison inmates and discharged offenders seem to be in diametric contradiction to solving criminal, eco-social and psychological challenges involving discharged offenders in Nigeria. Social acceptance and reintegration of discharged offenders become difficult and debilitate their social functions in society. This study was designed to assess the reintegration challenges of discharged offenders in Awka South LGA of Anambra State. The study adopted a cross sectional survey research method. Data were collected from a sample selected through simple randomization and analyzed using inferential statistics. Essentially, the findings revealed that stigmatization, which often manifests as discrimination, marginalization, and obvious hostility, hinders the reintegration of discharged offenders and influence their behaviour and attitude towards societal members. The study identified unemployment, poor interpersonal and financial management skills, homelessness, poverty and health related challenges as the common reintegration challenges experienced by offenders upon their re-entry into the society. The study recommends a paradigm shift from governments' interventions in the prison facilities alone to increased investment in formal education, skill acquisition, soft loan scheme, and counselling programs for discharged offenders.

Keywords: Discharged offenders, Nigeria, Prisons, Reintegration challenges.

Introduction

Social reintegration is understood in this cases as aftercare support programs given to offenders as they try to resettle into the society following periods of imprisonment. It encompasses a number of interventions designed to assist offenders live a law-abiding lives in the community following their release, especially to divert their attention from the criminal activities. Criminal justice system employs alternative measures of treatment which include a restorative justice process, transitional care intervention services, and the entire process of offenders' prison rehabilitation to achieve behavioural changes in an offender by addressing particular psycho-social, economic and welfare issues associated with crime and criminal behaviour with a view to reducing the rate of recidivist. This gives the prisoners a chance to lead a crime free life once released and can have major benefits for the community in reducing crime and its associated costs (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2006; Ameh, 2010). In correctional services, social reintegration connotes, assisting prisoners to maintain positive relationships with family and friends on the outside, perform civic duty of voting, prepare for release through gradual re-entry programmes through educational, cultural and recreational activities underpinned by conditions of incarceration that respect each individual's human dignity and help them to achieve better standards of living (Borzycki & Makkai, 2007).

The welfare, rehabilitation and reintegration of released offenders have long been a very sensitive issue in our society. For instance, the challenge in rehabilitation and reintegration poses high volume of returnee's prisoners as a reflection in the tremendous growth of the US prison population during the past 30 years. With over 10,000 ex-offenders released from American state and federal prisons every week, more than 650,000 ex-offenders are released from prison every year, and two-thirds of this population will likely be rearrested within three years of release as a result of inability on the part of prison officials and government to rehabilitate and reintegrate them effectively upon release.

This is accounted for by personal factors such as low self-esteem, low motivation, skill deficit, lack of training, mental illness, substance abuse, lack of stable economic record and weak social and cognitive skills as experienced in Nigeria prisons (United Nations Office on Drugs and crime, 2012; Visser Winter field & Coggeshall, 2015; Rakis, 2005; Craffam Shinkfield, Lavelle & McPherson 2004; Harper & Chitty, 2004). Correctional education; vocational training programs (VTP) and adult and remedial education programs (AREP) has been linked as a factor in reduction of recidivism and post-release unemployment in situations where they are provided. Those leaving prison lack both the relevant vocational training and experience of the application process to compete effectively in the labor market that is already set heavily against them, it is against this foregoing that the study examined the challenges that discharge offenders encounter as they reenter their communities

Challenges of Nigerian Prisons System

The prison system in Nigeria is designed to take inmates into a course of continuous study. Inmates are taught trade, skills and they also participate in other vocational and educational programs in areas of interest. Prisoners also participate in games and other forms of activities including religious activities. The Prison's Act No 9 of 1972 made it clear that prisons are not designed for the punishment of inmates but rather a move to identify the causes of their anti-social behaviour and set in motion, machineries for correcting their faults so that they may return to the society as useful and law abiding citizens (Osayi, 2015).

The prison system acts as correction centres for deviant members, but yet, there is a paucity of reliable information on ex-prisoner experiences in securing accommodation and employment in the community. With little or no resources or support networks, many of released prisoners who do not end up returning to prison are forced into poverty and homelessness. Statistics also show that a large percentage (75%) of released prisoners end up being repeat offenders due to poor reformation in prisons (Baldry, McDornel, Maplestone, & Peeters 2002; Nnonyelu, 2000; Tanimu, 2006).

The Nigerian prisons have for long struggled with inadequacies within the system as a corrective institution which often leaves the prisoners in a mentally brutalized manner with broken bodies and spirits. It is not an exaggeration to adduce that Nigerian prisons system is a home for idle mind due to lack of what to do and lack of workshop facilities (Adetula 2002; Yongo 2000; Aiyedogbon, 1998; Obioha 1995). This negates the essence of imprisonment amounting to human development and increases the problems of release of maladjusted prisoners. It is also no news that there is a positive correlation between length of stay in the prison and offenders' rate of recidivism which can be traced to the "lock up patterns and prisons contents" (Gendreau et al., 1999; Obioha, 2002).

Most prison yards in Nigeria have poor sanitation, poor medicine distributions and poorly qualified health workers recruitments, lack of basic resources and are populated far

beyond its carrying capacity. This has been identified as the major catalyst for the deplorable health conditions and widespread infectious diseases such as air borne infections, skin scabies and bilharzias. Most inmates sleep up to three (3) in a small flat bed, on the floor or sometimes, attach their bodies to the walls of the filthy cells. Toilets are blocked and are over flowing or simply non-existent and there is no running water. Prisoners with money can bribe the officials allow them use mobile phones, whereas those without fund can be left to languish in their cells (Obioha 2002; Ifeako, 2001; Ifionu, 2000).

Reintegration challenges of Discharged Prisoners in Nigeria

Fox (2002) stated that there is a recognition that the preparation for reintegration should commence before the offenders' release. After their release, interventions should support their immediate transition from the prison to the community and reinforce the gains achieved through the prison treatment and continue until a successful reintegration is completed. Findings from previous studies showed that public stigmatization and inability of the prisons as an institution to train the prisoners to become useful and law abiding citizens on discharge are among the major reintegration challenges (Ugwuoke, 2000).

Travis and Petersilia (2001) maintained that social reintegration is affected by how successful programmes which were started in prisons such as education and professional qualifications, or drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs can be accessed, continued, practiced, or completed in the community. Social reintegration includes how effective community support is in offender's re-adjustment to living in free society. Offenders confined in correctional institutions are confronted by a range of socio-economic and psychological challenges that tend to become obstacles to a crime free life style. Some of these challenges are as a result of the offenders past and others are more directly associated with the consequences of incarceration and the following difficult transition back to the community (Visher, Winterfield & Coggeshall, 2005; Borzycki, 2005).

Poor inter-personal skills, low levels of formal education, illiteracy, poor cognitive or emotional state, low or lack of planning and financial management skills are practical challenges that are faced by offenders at the time of their release. The failure of discharged offenders in Nigeria to successfully reintegrate into the society is one of the numerous symptoms of a sick prison system in Nigeria. Most of these challenges faced by them have roots in their experiences behind the walls of the prisons. The failed reentry of prisoners into society involves some significant cost for society, both financial and in terms of public safety. The costs of programmes to support the reintegration of offenders must be assessed against the benefit of avoiding the significant future social and financial costs (Harper & chitty 2004).

Most Nigeria prisons lack good toilet and sanitation system, standard clinics, health officials as well as good ventilation systems. The absence or poor supply of these basic amenities make these prisons a safe haven for diseases and infections. Many a times, victims of these diseases are not well treated and they leave the prisons with infections upon release. The poor health conditions of many discharged offenders constitute a significant challenge to their successful reintegration (Wickson, 2010).

Attitude of the Public towards Discharged Prisoners in Nigeria

Aside the deplorable environmental and health conditions in Nigeria prisons, negative attitude and negative perception of ex-offenders have worsened the reintegration process of discharged offenders. As a result of this, many them face the problem of isolation from

societal members and immediate family members (Orakwe, 2011). There is substantial evidence that employers and other employees discriminate against ex-offenders as a result of distrust they have towards them. They believe that their criminal records will continue to push them back into crime even in the place of work. Such discrimination may result in pushing them back to crime. Employment has been shown to be an important factor in the reintegration process, especially for men over the age of 27 that characterize majority of individuals released from prisons in the country (Orakwe, 2005).

The period of transition from custody to community can be particularly difficult for offenders and contribute to the stress that is associated with being supervised in the community. The period of incarceration has had several “collateral effects” on many discharged offenders in society. Many of them have lost their livelihoods, their personal belongings, their ability to maintain housing for themselves and their families, they may have lost important personal relationships and may have experienced mental health difficulties or acquired self-destructive habits and attitudes (Borzycki 2005; Borzycki & Markkai, 2007). It therefore becomes important that challenges ex-offenders face as they make their way into the community be examined.

Strategies for Effective Reintegration of Discharged Prisoners in Nigeria

Unsuccessful reintegration of discharged prisoners in Nigeria has contributed to the high rate of recidivism, serious personal, social and institutional problems in the country. This unsuccessful reintegration is attributed to government negligence of the needed structures to ensure successful reformation of prison inmates and discharged prisoners. Such as skill acquisition programs, formal and religious education in prisons (Segun, 2009; Bamiloye, 2011; Susan, 2006). Kanayo (2008) noted that government laws that will protect the economic, political or social rights of discharged prisoners should be put in place in the country. And there should be government sponsored massive public enlightenment campaigns on the need to eschew all forms of negative attitude towards discharged prisoners.

These will afford discharged prisoners the much needed conducive environment to achieve successful reintegration process (Osakwe, 2009). Improvement in the quality of de-emphasizing punishment, encouraging after care services, equipping existing workshops, improved public sensitization on the need to avoid stigmatization and contribute towards after care services are strategies that can contribute to the effective reintegration of discharge prisoners in Nigeria (Ajala & Oguntuase, 2011) All interventions, regardless of their method, are best delivered as part of an integrated programs designed to address an individual offenders’ specific issues and challenges. And renewed attention has been given to “strength-based” approaches to make use of personal and community assets in order to help released offenders face their challenges and successfully reintegrate into the community (Manuna & Lebel, 2002).

Reintegration Shaming Theory Reintegration shaming theory was propounded by Braithwaite (1989). This theory is associated with discharged prisoners’ reentry issues. It also explores how recidivism relates to different forms of shaming and argued that public words or gestures of forgiveness are the driving forces of lower recidivism acts. He identified two types of reintegration shaming; integration and disintegration shaming. He asserted that disintegration shaming elicits no reconciliation between the shamed offender and the community which leads to higher recidivism.

On the other hand, integrative shaming enables community members to give ex-offenders the opportunity to reenter the society having been assured of change of

behaviour. It is apparent that the difference between reintegration and disintegrative shaming depends on the public's attitudes toward discharged offenders. Therefore, prisoners' successful reintegration into the society is strongly built on the positive attitudes given to them by families, friends, and their communities which make them feel that crime has been forgiven. On the other hand, a discharged prisoner who finds it difficult to re-enter the society may be as a result of the negative attitudes people hold against them.

Rehabilitation Theory Rehabilitation is premised on the effectiveness of programs during the incarceration of offenders, as well as integrated after-care supports on the re-introduction of offenders to society to prevent re-offending. Rehabilitation theory propounded by Jean Hampton (1993) was a reaction to the early school of penology. The theory lays emphasis on the positive attitude towards discharged prisoners. The assumption of rehabilitation theory is that people are not natively criminal and that it is possible to restore a criminal to a useful life of being productive, law-abiding citizens where they contribute positively to the development of themselves and society.

He further noted that the idea of rehabilitation may be used to prevent crime by changing the personality of the offender. Also, that the gravity of the offence committed may give us clue as to the intensity and duration of the measures needed to rehabilitate offenders. Rehabilitation require that offenders should be treated humanely with dignity and respect, be shown love, kindness and compassion not cruelty, contempt and hate (Ugwuoke, 2000).

Theoretical Synthesis These theories have alternatively complemented each other in the explanation of reintegration challenges of discharged prisoners in Nigeria. Reintegration shaming theory believe that successful reintegration into the society is strongly built on the positive attitudes given to discharged offenders by families, friends, and their communities which make them feel that crime has been forgiven. Rehabilitation is premised on the effectiveness of programmes during the incarceration of offenders, as well as integrated after-care supports networks on the re-introduction of offenders to society to prevent re-offending. They believe that people are not natively criminal and it is possible to restore a criminal to a useful life of being productive, law-abiding citizens where they can contribute positively to the development of themselves and society. Integration shaming theory makes rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders more effective.

Method

Research Design The study is a cross sectional survey designed to collect data from a sample of 200 out of a population of one hundred and eighty-nine thousand and forty-nine (189,049) male and female persons residing in Awka South Local Government Area. This population includes the categories of interest (discharged prisoners, correctional agencies and officers and the rest of the public) from where the sample size was chosen among some randomly selected communities within the study area. Awka, Amawbia, Nise and Okpuno were chosen out of the nine communities that make up the study area as a result of their strategic positions and relevance to the study.

Questionnaire schedule and In-depth Interview Guide were the instruments used in collecting data from 200 male and female participants (18 years and above) residing in 25 households selected through systematic random sampling from identified clusters within the four selected communities. Also, purposive non-probability sampling technique was employed to select the respondent for the In-Depth Interview (IDI)

Discussion of Findings

Here, major issues of the research are presented and cross tabulated with some of the socio demographic variables. These include awareness of available correctional and rehabilitation program, public attitude towards discharged prisoners, reintegration challenges faced by discharged prisoners, factors militating against reintegration of discharged prisoners, and strategies for effective reintegration of discharged prisoners. These are presented with tables.

TABLE 1: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON ATTITUDE TOWARDS DISCHARGED PRISONERS (N=200)

Variables/Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Attitude toward discharged prisoners		
Stigmatization	57	28.5
Discrimination	29	14.5
Hostility	25	12.5
Marginalization	36	18.0
All of the above	53	26.5
Total	200	100.0

Field work, 2016

Table 1 above presents the attitude toward discharged prisoners. Majority (28.5%) of the respondents agree that they are aware of the outcome of stigmatization and believe that negative attitude influences the behaviour and reintegration of discharged prisoners in society. But (26.5%) of the respondents agree that marginalization (18%), discrimination (14.5%), and hostility (12.5%), respectively, are common negative attitude demonstrated towards discharged prisoners and at the same time all contributes to the behaviour of the discharged prisoners in society. Additional result from one of the key informant interview supports the above proposition, by added that the society holds negative attitude towards discharged prisoners and this negatively affect their reintegration process.

Nawa o! Discharged prisoners' ke! Most people wouldn't want anything to do with them. I am one of those that detest them a lot. The Nigerian prison system is very faulty, instead of correcting the inmates; the prison condition makes their criminal tendencies even worse. When these individuals regain their freedom, they go into the society and become even worse criminals. So you see, you cannot blame me for being too careful around these individuals (28 year old male, post graduate student).

Negative attitude and poor perception of incarceration have worsened the reintegration of discharged prisoners. Over the years, discharged prisoners face the problem of unemployment and isolation from societal members and immediate family members which tend to become obstacles to a crime free life style. Some of these challenges are as a result of the offenders past and others are more directly associated with the consequences of incarceration and the following difficult transition back to the community (Osakwe, 2011; Borzycki & Baldry, 2003; Visher, Winterfield & Coggeshall, 2005; Borzycki, 2005).

This therefore reveals that the prevalence of negative attitude towards discharged prisoners will hinder their proper reintegration and will cause socio-psychological and economic and cultural dysfunctional roles of discharged prisoners in society.

TABLE 2: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON REINTEGRATION CHALLENGES (N=200)

Variables/Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Presence of challenges		
There are a lot of challenges	185	92.5
There are not so much challenges	15	7.5
Forms of Reintegration challenges		
Unemployment	71	35.5
Poverty	5	2.5
Homelessness	41	20.5
Health related challenges	34	17.0
All of the above	34	17.0
Not applicable	15	7.5
Total	200	100.0

Field work, 2016

Table 2 above present responses on reintegration challenges against discharged prisoners in the study area with majority (92.5%) of the respondents agree that there more than enough reintegration challenges confronting discharged prisoners in society. This majority agree that unemployment (35.5%), homelessness (20.5%), and health related challenges (17%), respectively are the common challenges affecting discharging prisoners in society. Additional proposition from one of the key informant interview supports the above findings. It states that discharged prisoners face severe economic, social, and political conditions in the State.

Most of them have to deal with the problem of getting a job. In this country, most people will not give you a job when they hear that you are an ex-convict, no matter how qualified you are for the job. Most of them on release, discover that they have being rejected and abandoned by their family and friends. Being a prisoner in this country is no joke, it carries untold negative labels, and this makes post prison life very difficult (43 years old female, correctional officer).

Most of the challenges faced by discharged prisoners in the country have roots in the experiences behind the walls of the prisons. The failed reentry of prisoners into society involves some significant cost for society, both financial and in terms of public safety (Harper & chitty 2004). Poor inter-personal skills, low levels of formal education, illiteracy, poor cognitive or emotional state, low or lack of planning and financial management skills are other common reintegration challenges experienced by discharged prisoners in the country.

TABLE 3: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ON FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION (N=200)

Variables/Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Militating Factors		
Discharged prisoners have not resolved within themselves to absorb change	32	16.0
Discharged prisoners are not provided with funds to start up something after they must have been rehabilitated within the prison	69	34.5
Stigmatization on the part of the community where they were meant to re-enter	31	15.5
Government are not fully committed to reintegration programs for discharged prisoners	33	16.5
All of the above	35	17.5
Total	200	100.0

Field work, 2016

Table 3 above present responses on factors militating successful reintegration of discharged prisoners in society with majority (34.5%) of the respondents agree that discharged prisoners are not provided with funds or other incentives to start up something like a small scale business after they must have been rehabilitated from the prison into society. (16.5%) of the respondents maintained that the Nigerian government are not fully committed to providing reintegration programs for discharged prisoners in society. Many other respondents (16%) agree that it is rather a psycho-social problem in the sense that discharged prisoners have not resolved within themselves to absorb positive change to contribute to the development of community of re-entry. It was (15.5%) of the respondents that noted that stigmatization on the part of the community where they were meant to re-enter have always posed serious challenges affecting the reintegration process of discharged prisoners. In additional to the above proposition supported from the findings of one of the key informant interview argued that discharged prisoners face several limitations which militate against their reintegration process. One of them has this to say:

The situation of discharged prisoners in this country is very appalling. It is disheartening to say the least. They suffer serious stigmatization. People would easily disassociate themselves from them. This affects their self-esteem and makes some of them to resort to living in their shelves. Some others fight back, and in most cases, they do this by going back their previous criminal activities. The government on the other hand has not done much to help their course. They see prisoners as people who cannot contribute anything to the society, never do wells. For this reason, they pay deaf ears to their needs (36 years old male, correctional officer).

Unsuccessful reintegration of discharged prisoners in Nigeria has contributed to the high rate of recidivism, serious personal, social and institutional problems in the country. This unsuccessful reintegration is attributed to government negligence to provide the

needed structures to ensure successful reformation of prison inmates and discharged prisoners. Such as skill acquisition programs, formal and religious education in prisons. These often leaves the discharged prisoners mentally brutalized with broken bodies and spirits and idle minded (Yongo 2000; Aiyedogbon, 1998; Obioha 1995).

Conclusion

There is clear evidence that the situation of discharged prisoners in society is poorly managed. It is important to note that discharged prisoners just like any other Nigerians have the potential of contributing to the socio-political and economic growth of the country but such is dependent on the quality and success of their reintegration process. The fact that the reintegration of discharge prisoners in the country has continued to achieve little or no success poses serious threat to national peace and security. The possibility of these individuals to accept criminality as a way of showing their frustration and coping with poverty, unemployment and rejection is always glaring. Consequently, the Government and non-governmental organizations as well as the general public should take the issue of ex-prisoners' reintegration as a matter of serious concern. The Government should invest more in issues that concern prisoners and discharged ones in order to expand skill acquisition, formal education and counselling. Also, there should be an establishment of a loan scheme for discharged prisoners. This loan will help them start up business upon release and should come with little or no interest. The Government should also endeavour to improve the structure of prisons by providing funds and laws that will protect the economic, social, educational and political rights of discharged prisoners. And all forms of marginalization against them should be criminalized through wide spread of public sensitization programs to educate the masses on the need to accommodate discharged prisoners in society. A welfare program should be established by the Government for discharged prisoners. This program should be managed by a non-government organization in order to ensure high productivity. The program should be aimed at assisting discharged prisoners in their quest to reintegrate into society. This assistance should come in the way of securing accommodation, jobs, education, legal services and other necessities for them.

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