

Research Article

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## Counseling needs of prisoners at the Ankaful prisons in the Central Region of Ghana

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**Abstract:** The lives prisoners live are informed and decided on by a number of factors. Most of the time, this determination is based on the emotional and psychological support that is either given or deprived by stakeholders and those dear to incarcerated individuals. The premise of the argument is that all prisoners deserve some form of counselling need but is not all the time they are given such support. On these grounds, Investigating the kinds of counseling needs of inmates at Ankaful Prisons in the Central Region was the study's primary goal. The research was descriptive in nature. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire and it was purposively administered to sixty (60) respondents within the chosen location. The data was personally collected by the researcher through hard copy forms. The study was analysed with

SPSS version 25 and Microsoft Excel 2016 Professional Edition. The findings showed that the counselling needs of prisoners are in the form of physical, emotional, and psychological. It was also found that these needs were provided by private individuals/donors, churches and religious bodies as well as some prison officials at Ankaful Prisons. It was concluded based on these findings that in as much as these counselling needs are provided for the prisoners, they appear to be woefully inadequate.

**Keywords** – Counselling needs, Emotional, Physical, Prisoners, Psychological

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Prisons are societal institutions used to house and care for lawbreakers (Akyina, 2018). According to (Counseling Today, 2022) people who are addicted to drugs, homeless, or mentally sick now frequently end up in prisons. Prisons must protect the public by keeping prisoners safe while they serve the sentences imposed by the courts and prevent crime from occurring beyond the prison gates. In addition, it is crucial that they maintain good order and discipline, seek to address the root causes of crime in order to prevent future victims, and support rehabilitation and reform in order to lower reoffending (Prisons strategy White Paper, 2021). Prisoners must consequently receive counseling in order to prevent reoffending following their release. Most countries require prison inmates to undergo some form of reformation before they can be released (Bohm & Haley, 2005). In this way, they (ex-convicts) would be able to benefit society, themselves, and their immediate family after serving their sentences. Correctional sentencing and reformation of prisoners after their term of imprisonment has now replaced this type of punishment.

For instance, the Prison Service is currently referred to as Correctional Services in South Africa. The Bureau will be renamed the Ghana Correctional Service or Correctional Service of Ghana in 2007 according to Ghana's director-general of the Prisons Service (GPS) (modernghana.com, 2007). The Prisons Council has approved the name change, according to GPS's Director-General, but an Act of Parliament is still necessary for it to become official. Additionally, he claimed that jails function as correctional centers and that inmates acquire some form of vocational training in order to properly reintegrate back into society. Since the Chief Education Officer and the Ministry of Labor decided to establish a nationwide system of vocational advice in 1962, Roadmap for the development of prison-based rehabilitation programmes, 2018 claims, there has been a strong need for vocational assistance. A nationwide vocational guidance system was formed in Ghana in order to improve the educational system match the country's economic progress and labor shortages.

## 2. LITERATURE SURVEY

### 2.1. Counseling needs of prisoners

Inmates in prison come from a variety of backgrounds and have been sentenced by a competent court to serve their sentences (Gaes & Goldberg, 2004). According to the authors, prisoners can be divided into a variety of categories. Sometimes people are imprisoned for other reasons as well, such as when they are on remand and must appear in court on the date the case has been postponed. Counselling deals with personal, social, vocational, empowerment, and educational concerns. Counsellors work only in areas in which they have expertise. These areas may include intra- and interpersonal concerns related to school or college adjustment, mental health, ageing, marriage or family issues, employment and rehabilitation. According to Brand and Price (2000), there are many counselling needs of prisoners, but they can be grouped under emotional, social, physical and financial (economic) needs. According to Huffman (2006), many prisoners experience relatively mild psychological abnormalities like sadness and anxiety. By receiving early assistance, these patients can avoid experiencing more severe mental health issues.

The criminal justice system largely ignores the problems and requirements of addicted women. According to literature, there are significant issues with psychological and psychiatric morbidity, such as substance misuse, personality disorders, sexual/physical abuse, PTSD, and self-harm (Byrne & Howells, 2002). According to Holtfreter and Morash (2003), program staff, advocates for women offenders, and correctional administrators can make decisions about the combination of program elements that should be made available to women, as well as the extent to which programming must address multiple domains, by identifying common and co-occurring needs, particularly those associated with high risk for recidivism. Tenibiaje (2010) asserted that after being released from jail, convicts required to find gainful job. The counselors were necessary to help the prisoners undergo a complete transformation. They could not be changed or prepared for useful employment through the type of training provided in jails. The jail had Inmate Training and Productivity (ITP), which had the duty of instructing convicts in prison farms and enterprises. These small-scale businesses taught the prisoners how to produce industrial goods like furniture, soap, toilet paper, aluminum pans, and metal construction.

For prisoners, housing is a physical issue as well. Compared to those who are housed, homeless people are more likely to be incarcerated, and incarceration can hasten the loss of housing (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2004). The stability of housing might be negatively impacted by even a brief period of detention (Centre for Poverty Solutions, 2003). It is clear from the examination of the literature that counseling is a crucial aspect of daily living. It supports people as they work through challenges, conundrums, or worries related to their life. It has been discovered that the needs theories, perception theories, and counseling needs theories used in therapy are helpful in addressing the counseling needs of prisoners. Counseling is theory-based and focuses on how an individual feels, thinks, and emotionally reacts to himself or herself and the context in which he or she finds themselves, with the goal of changing that person's behavior in that environment. In a relationship between two people, one person

makes an effort to help the other organize himself better so he might find some measure of enjoyment by adjusting to the circumstance.

## **2.2. The role of counsellors in meeting prisoners' counseling needs**

A key component of prison guidance services is the counseling service. As outlined by Adana (2004), the purpose of counselling services is to help inmates to become more productive and self-satisfied by affecting changes in their behavior processes. In order to meet the prisoner's counseling needs, many stakeholders come to the prisoner's aid. Counsellors, NGOs, police officers, prison governors, religious groups, and social welfare officials are all stakeholders. Counselors are aware that each client is unique. A person's understanding of a language depends on their worldview and personal experiences (Loucks, 2002). During the counseling process, counselors shouldn't try to mold their clients into their ideal of who and how they ought to act.

The counsellor enables the client to examine a variety of elements of their life and feelings by encouraging open and free communication (Tenibiaje, 2000). As they are likely to be emotionally invested and to have beliefs and biases that could be harmful to the outcome of the counseling process, family and friends are unlikely to be open to such discussions. Counselors should refrain from becoming emotionally invested in their patients and from doing so during treatment sessions (Taylor & Buku, 2006). Clients cannot be advised or judged by counselors. Counselors encourage clients to explore uncomfortable emotions including anger, resentment, guilt, and fear during private sessions.

Counselors are able to assist clients in examining and acknowledging elements of their lives that they had previously avoided or considered challenging (Nelson-Jones, 2005). Tenibiaje (2006) added that early experiences may be examined in an effort to understand why people react or respond in particular ways in particular circumstances. Following this, it is frequently thought about how the client might alter their behavior. Counselors support their clients' work in a way that honors their values, personal resources, and capacity for self-determination (The Hazelton Clinic 2017). Counseling's main objective is to teach clients how to make choices and create new patterns of feeling, thinking, and acting. Counselors concentrate on the objectives that their clients hope to achieve. Clients examine their current functioning levels and the adjustments needed to accomplish their goals. Counseling, therefore, requires both decision and change and progresses through many phases like exploration, goal setting, and action (The counselling process, n.d).

Effective counseling, as stated by Brown and Lent (2008), enables the client to make educated decisions, which results in a positive change in their attitude and/or behavior. Effective counseling, in the opinion of Tenibiaje (2010), does not entail delivering counsel or advocating on behalf of others (these are more appropriate roles for a life coach). The main goal of counseling is to provide the client with the freedom to choose, decide, and act. Counseling should help clients get a better grasp of who they are in order to overcome challenges inhibiting their academic progress or issues in their professional, educational, or social lives. Ipaye (2004) defined counseling as a process of molding, reconstructing, and rehabilitation. He clarified that counseling involves rehabilitating, reintegrating, and changing a prisoner's conduct. Through specialized training and by making direct connections with employers, counselors help offenders find work (Bouffard et al., 2000). Inmates should get counseling, psychotherapy training, relationship counseling, career counseling, creative training, planning and practicing employer attitudes, building job skills, and money management guidance as part of the rehabilitation process (Huffman, 2006).

## 2.3. Empirical review

According to Scott, Spender, Doolan, Jacobs and Aspland's (2001) study, many women are imprisoned for very minor offenses, and some are kept behind bars for years while they await trial. Tenibiaje (2000) examined the background traits of jail inmates and came to the conclusion that women also had a new dimension to crime, which contributed to the greater crime rate. With an increase in jailed women, women in Nigeria were nearly four times more likely to commit crimes.

Inmates could not read the questionnaire in 54.7% of cases, and 16.2% needed the researcher's help to complete it, according to Tenibiaje (2006). Only 19.1% of respondents had completed junior high school, while 10% had completed senior high school. The jail study team in Nigeria was able to help because 70.9% of prisoners were also able to recognize, read, understand, interpret, and converse in English Language or Pidgin English with ease. The perceptions of prisoners are essential to their survival. It causes many convicts to make poor decisions based on erroneous information, and it has a significant impact on their choices. People organize and interpret their sensory inputs to give their surroundings meaning (Dulebohn & Ferris, 1999). However, perception and objective reality can diverge significantly. Dulebohn and Ferris stressed in their study that how seriously prisoners take the counseling service depends on how they perceive it.

According to O'Looney's study from 2005, there are three different types of prisoners who view counseling differently. According to the study, almost 17% of the respondents felt uneasy around female counselors. The emotional revelations of these prisoners made the female counselors feel humiliated. Prisoners' impressions of counseling were divided into three groups, according to O'Looney (2005). Less nervousness and more confidence in interpersonal relationships were both indicated by about half of the respondents. These abilities were said to have been developed by counselors. They communicated more effectively and frequently employed positive thinking techniques, according to their comments. They asserted that they had improved their understanding of and tolerance for their fellow inmates.

According to O'Looney (2005), significant others (17%) continued to use drugs as a strategy to boost their energy or mask their anguish and anxiety. Counseling is therefore not a substitute for dealing with personal issues because it hasn't brought about the same sense of relaxation that they associate with drugs, and many people don't want to confront upsetting memories. The third group (29%) had mixed feelings on the value of counseling. They drew from their prior encounters and preconceived notions regarding counseling.

## 3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The incarceration of persons of irrespective gender and age groups has been one of the contributing factors of increasing crime rates when there are no measures put in place to ensure their reformation. According to the findings of Riggs (2013), prisoners who are able to participate in educational programs have less than 43% chances of becoming repeated offenders. United Nations: Office on Drugs and Crime also gave a strong assertion that the essence of prison system is to reform persons, then there must be systems put in place to ensure that individuals who find themselves in such conditions are provided with the right forms of support. However, this is not always the case especially when put in the Ghanaian context. According to Dadzie (2011), Ghanaian prisons are not able to provide the requisite reforms for prisoners during periods of incarceration. Afari (2011) also observed that there is no financial assistance given to prisoners who have acquired employable skills to put their skills to profitable use.

From the above discussions made, it can be understood that to a large extent the purpose for which prisons were set up has been largely defeated. This can be blamed on the apparent lack of financial as well as social support that is non existence (Hirschberger & Ngwayi, 2020). However, the lack of availability of these needs does not mean that

prisoners will not have them in mind. Counseling is of great consequence when provided in the right manner and also supported with adequate infrastructure. Most of the time, prisoners do not have the right persons to discuss their troubles with. According to Dadzie (2011), counseling needs of prisoners have been disregarded and unattended. This leaves the door open when it comes to undertaking an academic inquiry into finding out exactly what prisoners need. This gap served as motivation for the undertaking of this study. Therefore this study seeks to Counselling needs of prisoners at the Ankaful prisons in the Central Region of Ghana in order for counselors and the government to meet them.

**Table 1: I have very serious anger issues**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	AGREE	26	43.3	43.3	43.3
	NEUTRAL	14	23.3	23.3	66.7
	DISAGREE	20	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data 2021

**Table 2: I am not able to manage my relationships well**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	6	10.0	10.0	10.0
	AGREE	38	63.3	63.3	73.3
	NEUTRAL	10	16.7	16.7	90.0
	DISAGREE	6	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data 2021

**Table 3: There is no one to support me**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	8	13.3	13.3	13.3
	AGREE	20	33.3	33.3	46.7
	NEUTRAL	10	16.7	16.7	63.3
	DISAGREE	22	36.7	36.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data 2021

**Table 4: Prison officers provide us with the support**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	18	30.0	30.0	30.0
	AGREE	12	20.0	20.0	50.0
	NEUTRAL	10	16.7	16.7	66.7

DISAGREE	20	33.3	33.3	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data 2021

**Table 5:** Churches and religious bodies assist us in many ways

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid STRONGLY AGREE	10	16.7	16.7	16.7
AGREE	42	70.0	70.0	86.7
NEUTRAL	8	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data 2021

**Table 6:** Family and friends support is once in a while

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid STRONGLY AGREE	12	20.0	20.0	20.0
AGREE	22	36.7	36.7	56.7
NEUTRAL	8	13.3	13.3	70.0
DISAGREE	18	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data 2021

**Table 7:** We get counselling very often

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid AGREE	30	50.0	50.0	50.0
NEUTRAL	8	13.3	13.3	63.3
DISAGREE	22	36.7	36.7	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data 2021

**Table 8:** We get real experts to support us

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid STRONGLY AGREE	10	16.7	16.7	16.7
AGREE	28	46.7	46.7	63.3
NEUTRAL	14	23.3	23.3	86.7
DISAGREE	8	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data 2021

Table 9: There is growth at the end of the sessions

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	STRONGLY AGREE	10	16.7	16.7	16.7
	AGREE	32	53.3	53.3	70.0
	NEUTRAL	8	13.3	13.3	83.3
	DISAGREE	10	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	60	100.0	100.0	

Source: Survey Data 2021

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OR METHODS

The study employed a descriptive survey design. A descriptive research was conducted on the prison in Ankaful in order to gather pertinent and reliable data regarding the counseling requirements of inmates. By sharing their opinions of the counseling service, a sizable sample of respondents also contributed a substantial amount of information about the counseling requirements of inmates. All Ankaful Prison inmates, regional heads and employees of the Central Region's social welfare departments, sectional heads, and prison counselors made up the population of this study. The Ghana Prisons Service reported that 1994 prisoners were housed at Ankaful Prison (2012).

Prison inmates, the directors of the Social Welfare Departments in two regions, the department heads of the two prisons, and prison counselors were all included in the sample frame. The study included 60 participants. A representative sample size of 65 is required for a population of 1994, according to Bujang (2021). Random sampling technique was used to sample inmates from the prison, while purposive sampling was used to sample the institutional heads. The study used a survey questionnaire. Using this instrument ensured that there would be a statistical analysis and conclusion made to the counseling needs of prisoners in the chosen area of data collection. In addition, there were measurable variables that could be replicated.

Through both primary and secondary sources, the convicts and institutional leaders (Regional Directors of Social Welfare Departments across the regions, Sectional Directors, and Counsellors) were consulted for this study. A survey questionnaire was used to gather data for the study. During the study, a few ethical considerations were taken into account. An introduction letter was received from the Department of Educational Foundations of the University of Cape Coast in order to request approval from the institutional authorities of the prison for the data gathering activity. Before being given permission to conduct the surveys, the researcher identified himself, the study's title, and its goal to the heads. I asked the institutional leaders for convenient times to conduct the poll.

The data were edited first to check for consistency and grammatical mistakes. The researcher utilized descriptive statistics to examine the data from the descriptive survey (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage). Version 17 of Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. Frequency tables and charts were used to present the study's results.

#### 5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

##### What are the Ankaful Prisons' inmates' counseling needs?

It was discovered that convicts have a variety of counseling needs. 43.3% of respondents said they concurred with the statement that they have major anger management problems, while 23.3% disagreed. Another 33.3% of those surveyed disagreed that they needed counseling because of their anger problems. This suggests that Ankaful

Prison inmates have a real need for anger control (Hollenhorst, 1998). It was observed from the analysis also that 10% of the respondents strongly agreed that they are not able to manage or sustain their relationship with people very well. It was also found that 10% disagreed with this opinion. From the perspective of 63.3% of the respondents they were in agreement to this statement although 16.7% were found to have provided neutral responses. This implies that most prisoners at Ankaful Prison have problems when it comes to managing their relationships (McCarthy & Adams, 2018).

According to 13.3% of the respondents, it was ascertained that they strongly agreed that there is no one ready to provide them with the needed support. It was found further that 33.3% of the prisoners shared similar opinion and for that matter agreed to the statement. The analysis showed that 16.7% of the respondents were neutral in their responses while 36.7% were observed to have disagreed that this is a counselling need for them.

### **How are the counseling needs of prisoners met at Ankaful Prisons?**

In terms of measuring the source of counselling needs of prisoners, 30% of the respondents strongly agreed that prison officers at Ankaful Prison sometimes provide them with the support they require and it was shown also that 20% were in agreement with this statement. According to the perspective shared by 16.7% of the respondents, they provided neutral positions but 33.3% disagreed that prison officers provide them with support of any kind.

According to 16.7% of the respondents, they strongly agreed that churches and religious bodies assist them when it comes to their counselling needs. The findings presented showed additionally that 13.3% were neutral in their responses whereas 70% agreed that they receive counselling from this source. This implies that large churches and religious bodies support prisoners with counselling needs to some degree. It was gathered from the findings that 20% of the respondents strongly agreed that their family and friends support them once in a while and this opinion was shared by 36.7% who agreed with the statement as well. The findings revealed that 13.3% of the respondents were neutral in their feedback but 30% disagreed that they receive any form of counselling support from their family and friends.

### **What level of counseling is provided to inmates in Ankaful Prisons?**

The survey discovered that 50% of respondents agreed that they receive counseling very frequently, but 36.7% disagreed, indicating that the services provided to inmates for their counseling requirements are insufficient. 13.3% of those surveyed indicated they were undecided about this remark, according to the survey data in table 7. This means that counseling support may be offered, but that it would be offered equally to all inmates at Ankaful Prison.

Based on feedback gathered from the analysis, it was ascertained that 13.3% of the respondents disagreed that they get the right counselling experts to support them and it was shown that 16.7% strongly disagreed to this stance. It was observed from the analysis that 46.7% agreed to this statement that they get counselling experts to support them. It was observed that 23.3% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed to this statement as shown in the table 8 above.

The findings showed that 16.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that there is growth at the end of each counselling session they have and it was found also that 53.3% agreed that there is growth for them when they finish receiving counselling. On the other hand, 13.3% were found to have provided neutral responses while 16.7% disagreed. This finding implies that most prisoners see impressive change in their attitudes after counselling has been offered to them.



## 6. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The benefit of this study is to provide relevant stakeholders with recent information concerning how prisoners are managed and the shortcomings thereof that exist regarding their counseling needs. It is hoped that such stakeholders will assist in the most admirable fashion to ensure that such counseling needs are provided.

## 7. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

It is hoped that the findings of this study can serve as empirical input for future researchers in the area of prison reformation. The expectation is that the academic discourse on the subject matter will be deepened and there will be informed writings that will provide richer knowledge of Ghanaian prison systems. These contributions are expected to be realized either sooner or later by other writers.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The counseling needs of prisoners at Ankaful Prisons were found to have been emotional, psychological and social in nature based on the findings. The study gathered that significant sections of the prisoners have anger management issues and some also have problems sustaining relationships even if they are able to create one. The analysis showed that most of the prisoners also come from broken homes. This means the basic support which was to be given to them at the foundational level was absent. In the midst of these challenges, persons are likely to be engaged in activities which will turn them into criminals one way or another.

It was also concluded that various stakeholders attempt to provide some form of support to prisoners. These bodies were observed to be private individuals, churches and religious bodies as well as prison officers at Ankaful Prison. The study found also that some family members in their own bit try to support their relatives who are found in prison. The study concluded that in terms of adequacy of counseling, the prisoners at Ankaful Prison receive sessions from experts but this was not as adequate as they will need. It was also shown that the prison officers once in a while support these prisoners in order to help them deal with whatever challenges they may be facing.

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