

# RECIDIVISM OF INMATES: A STUDY OF AFOKANG PRISON IN CALABAR

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## ABSTRACT

The results of a study of recidivism of inmates in Afokang Prison situated in Calabar of the Cross River State of Nigeria are compiled with implications for rehabilitation. The failure of the conditions of ordinary imprisonment to change behaviour generally, and the demonstration of the denial of exconvicted offenders' economic and social facilities in Nigerian society in particular, are both justification for the Nigerian government to embark upon rehabilitation programme aimed at behavioural change of the exconvicted offenders. The data indicate the views expressed by the inmates concerning how they feel about treatment given to them by fellow Nigerians. These all justify the conclusion that the study of the process of recidivism and feelings of the exconvicted offenders can help to maximize the idea of adoption of rehabilitation of the exconvicted offenders rather than punitive measures.

**Key Words:** Criminality, Inmates, Imprisonment, Reoffending, Rehabilitation

## INTRODUCTION

It has become clear that appropriate application of behavioural treatments can change offenders' behaviour. In order to help change offenders' behaviour (Etuk 2000), it is maintained that one has to study the process of imprisonment. In Nigeria, imprisonment is the primary and conventional way of dealing with criminal offenders and there is little chance of its being replaced by radically different dispositions in the near future (Tunde, 2000).

In this study, we want to look at how Nigerian inmates view the conditions they encounter in prison, and how they would avoid returning to the prison.

## METHOD

In practice, we interview 150 subjects right in Afokang Prison premises in Calabar. Out of the 150 respondents, 35 were females. During the period we met each of the prisoners face to face and we interviewed them individually through a structured interview questionnaire. Subjects were

randomly chosen from inmates beginning terms in Afokang Prison. According to Afokang Prison policy, all prisoners from one month to two years, are custodied in cells separated from prisoners who have more than two years, and we were allowed entry to study prisoners of not more than two years of imprisonment.

We found out that a good number of the inmates had been previously imprisoned, and though about 25% had no previous record. The data were collected through open ended questionnaire between February 2001 and August 2001.

All the inmates (150) interviewed were between the ages of 19 and 30 years, a total of 35 females that entered the sample, 21 ranged between 25 and 30 years and 14 ranged between 19 and 23 years. The major ethnic groups like the Hausa, Yoruba, and Ibo entered the sample. In determining who among the inmates were rearrested and jailed, prison records were used in finding out the recidivated inmates.

As far as sociodemography is concerned, samples drawn from Afokang Prison were representatives of the Nigerian populations for

which they were drawn. That means almost all ethnic groups, example south south, south west, south East, south North and North south, North west, North East and North North states of Nigeria were represented in the sample. Respondents were told that the purpose of the study was to determine issues of some interests about Nigerian prisoners. Many statements expressed by the inmates were about attitudes toward a variety of criminal justice policies in the country. Many causal statements expressed by the inmates focused on case characteristics that, when influenced, or are associated will bring changes to the chance of recidivism. Out of many expressions, four were tested in relation to recidivism. Here we look for functional links between beliefs and behaviour, changes on attributes and recidivism.

The first expression was "Damn the law and retaliate whosoever caused you to be in prison". This expression tapped the idea of an inmate willing to return to evil practices, which are against the law of the country. The second expression "there was justice in the trail that sent me to jail". This was to find out if the inmate believes in the country's justice system. The third statement was "it is ever right to break a rule". this was to investigate whether or not the inmates would believe, in the rigid perspective on the absolute rightness of the law after release. The last expression was "Authority figure induces obedience to law". This was to investigate whether or not the presence of Police would deter an inmate from committing crime after release. In assessing the idea of imprisonment which is believed could cause change to behaviour, we examined the inmates' views on the effectiveness of correctional treatment. Thus the correctional treatment theory is that of deterrence which suggests that:

...greater punishment discourages criminal activities while mild punishment increases criminal involvement.

(Leschied, 1999: 91).

The deterrence theory is associated with increased punishment and decreased treatment but not reduced recidivism.

Building on deterrence theory, considerable effort has been applied to develop reliable and objective investigation to examine if punishments deter prisoners from committing crimes after release.

#### DATA ANALYSIS:

The data collected was statistically organized to show a disproportionate number of crime committed by each group. The sample included 41 subjects who committed violent crimes, 98 subjects committed property crimes while 11 subjects were involved in drug or alcohol use. Out of 150 respondents, 20 females committed property crimes while 10 committed violent crimes and 5 females involved in drug use.

The analysis of inmates' responses was based on the calculation of chi-square statistics. Similarities and differences between the would-be recidivates and those who would not recidivate after release were examined. Total recidivate and non-recidivate differences for each response category were analyzed on percentages, and for sampling variation between recidivates and non-recidivates was analyzed using chi-square.

Table 1 shows the results of statistical tests of comparing the percentages who decided to damn the law and retaliate whosoever was the cause of their imprisonment. In the study, out of 150

Table 1: Damn the Law and retaliate whosoever caused the imprisonment

Perceived behaviour after release	Retaliation	No. Retaliation	
Recidivate	71(82.6%)	15(17.4%)	86
No recidivate	22(34.4%)	42(65.6%)	64
	93	57	150

$$X^2 = 36.15$$

$$P < 0.05$$

$$df = 1$$

inmates who were interviewed, 93 decided to retaliate when they are released from prison while 57 decided not to retaliate.

Out of 86 inmates who decided to return to prison if needs be, only 17.4% decided not to retaliate when released while 82.6% promised to retaliate. A total of 64 inmates who decided not to return to prison, 34.4% decided to retaliate while 65.6% decided not to retaliate.

The chi-square measure was statistically significant  $\chi^2 = 36.15$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). The retaliation

hypothesis is likely to be highly supportive of criminality in Nigeria. For example, killing in retaliation is a major correlate of delinquency in Nigeria and the idea of retaliation may precipitate multiple criminogenic needs by the released exconvicted offenders.

What we have termed the criminal justice condition hypothesis in Table 11 was highly significant  $\chi^2 = 13.2$ , ( $p < 0.05$ ) by several aspects of the data. For example, out of 150 respondents, 89 respondents agreed that there was justice done in their judgment. In spite of the justice in their trials, 97 agreed to recidivate by all means. As revealed, (Dickson, 1999) static criminal history in Nigeria was the strongest predictor. In Nigerians prisons, the inmates complaint that there are no government aftercare facilities for ex-prisoners. For example, in Nigeria, when one is convicted, he/she loses certain rights and

privileges as a citizen. In Nigeria, an exconvicted has no right to work with government agency, no right to hold government office, no right to contest election. Such denial of one's right can prompt an exconvict to get involve in procriminal activities which may cause him to return to prison.

The prediction of recidivism from measures of criminal history conveys a discouraging message in Table 111 that things remain as they are. In contrast, most specific behaviours are amenable to change. If measures of current behaviour in prison predict recidivism, it is therefore arguable that they include some pattern of behaviours that lead to reoffending. If those behaviours can be changed recidivism can be decreased.

Table 111 Indicates that out of a total of 150 respondents, 72 agreed to break rules and 95 respondents agreed to recidivate even if it would cause breaking the rules. When we measured the right to break rule hypothesis high significant level  $\chi^2 = 31.0$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). The respondents state that rule breaking might be right if the government does not rehabilitate them (the exconvicted offenders), instead regards them as outcasts or the society.

Their position was concisely depicted that if it is a matter of life and death, then it is permissible to break rule and survive. Majority of the inmates felt that rule violation could be

Table II: There was a sense of Justice in my Judgment

Perceived behaviour after release	Justice	No Justice	
Recidivate	68(76.4%)	21(23.6%)	89
No recidivate	29(47.5%)	32(52.5%)	61
	97	53	150

$\chi^2 = 13.2$   
 $P < 0.05$

Table III: It is Ever Right to Break a Rule

Perceived behaviour after release	Right to Break Rule	No Right to Break Rule	
Recidivate	62(86.1%)	10(13.9%)	72
No Recidivate	33(42.3%)	45(57.7%)	78
	95	55	150

$\chi^2 = 31.0$   
 $P < 0.05$

Table IV: No Police Presence Can Cause one to Obey Rule

Perceived Behaviour after release	Police Presence	No Police Presence	
Recidivate	70(81.4%)	16(18.6%)	86
No Recidivate	40(62.5%)	24(37.5%)	64
	110	40	150

$X^2 = 6.68$   
 $P < 0.05$

legitimate when there are appropriate reasons. Many inmates pointed out that the law is not infallible and absolute in its sovereignty, but there must be just and legitimate reasons for transgressions.

Inmates' responses to the enforcement question "can police presence make one to obey rules?" Table IV revealed the efficacy of truth and affiliation over fear and distance. Inmates strongly condemned the idea of using severe or hostile punishment to gain compliance of the law. They state that typically meted out punishments by authority who are less intimate figures is not an effective technique for obtaining compliance.

When we subjected the data in Table IV to tests, it was revealed that out of 150 respondents, 86 fear Police presence while 64 did not fear Police presence and 110 agreed to recidivate inspite of police presence. The chi-square statistics revealed that no Police presence can deter crimes in a given area ( $x^2 = 6.68, p < 0.05$ ).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The data outlined in the preceding sections of this work derived from direct interview study of the belief of inmates while in prison. The results in this study bear on our model of the criminogenic process and the design of how we receive exconvicts into the society.

It is a believable fact that exconvict behaviours to embark on recidivism are caused by the societal behaviour of discriminating against them in the society. For example, many exconvicts are not allowed to hold position in government organizations, not to be voted for, not to allow to take someone on police or court bail. An exconvict is always subjected to suspicion. This study observes that all the collateral

consequences of imprisonment rather make exconvicts to become criminally hardened. The denial of rights and barring them legitimate opportunities may lead them to recidivism and in this case the purpose of correctional concept is defeated.

This study reveals that the female inmates had the lowest percentage arrested 35(23%) as compared to total inmates in the study. Out of 35 females, 28 (80%) was the higher percentage of those females who recidivated after release. Although none of the female inmates stayed more than 12 months in prison. With these, we conclude that criminal sanctions themselves are typically found to be only minimally related to recidivism.

Almost all the respondents in Afokang prison with few exceptions were astonishingly alike in their views about human nature and the reasons why recidivism may not be decreased. Like other Nigerians, exconvicts recognized the role of rules and laws in controlling crime in order to establish limits and boundaries for human behaviour.

They seek rules that may remove the established institutional arrangements which may not be intentional. But is instead by the by-product of institutional arrangements that are intentional. That is to say, the legal status of exconvicted offenders has been so arranged and enshrined in the constitution so that an exconvicted offender is treated by an average Nigerian as a leper or an outcast within Nigerian community. The denial of exconvicted offenders' economic and social means would lead to a major correlate of recidivism. In this case, the idea of actively neutralizing procriminal pressures of criminal activities among exconvicted offenders may be thwarted. The results of this study have not pointed out any solid reasons for punishment

having any impact on recidivism. Deterrence theory which is used in examining this study does not show that offenders after their release learn that crime has some negative consequences. It is discovered in this study that there are no convincing theoretical grounds for believing that fear of criminal sanctions by inmates will reduce recidivism after their release from prison. This study reveals that the impact of punitive figures is diminished because of their enforcement techniques. Moreso, as the stigma that reduces the legal status of exconvicted offenders cannot assure crime free behaviour among many exconvicted offenders. Emphasizing the rehabilitation programme for exconvicted offenders appears to be more powerful than the threat of sanction or the risk of legal penalty in internalizing compliance of our legal system among the exconvicted offenders. Ultimately, the model of the persuasive socializer may achieve greater success by reducing the rate of recidivism than the coercive one.

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