

Causes of Despair Among Correctional Centre Inmates in Rivers State: Implication for Counselling Psychology

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Abstract

The study investigated causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State: Implication for counselling psychology. Survey research design was adopted for the study. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided findings of the study. Population of the study consisted of correction centre inmates in Rivers State (Port-Harcourt, Elele and Degema). A sample of 300 correction centre inmates was chosen for the study through fluid survey online calculator. Stratified random sampling technique was used for the study. An adapted instrument titled “Beck’s Despair Inventory Scale” (BDIS) was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha levels of significance. Results showed that; there was a significant difference between the mean response of male and female correction centre inmates on their causes of despair in Rivers State, there was a significant difference between the mean response of married and single correction centre inmates on their causes of despair among correction centre inmates in Rivers State, and there was a significant difference between the response of correction centre inmates who were employed and unemployed on their causes of despair in Rivers State. Based on the findings, it was recommended that Rehabilitation programmes for individuals’ personal development should be taken seriously and should be provided in correction centre in Rivers State.

Keywords: Causes of Despair, Correction Center, and Inmates

INTRODUCTION

The prison, now correction centre is a place established by law of the federation to ensure restriction and safe custody of a person convicted of violating the laws of the state. The

correctional centre administration in Nigeria, Rivers State in particular has been facing a lot of problems, our correction centre cells are overcrowded due to inadequate provision of accommodation; the result is that too many inmates live in very relatively small cells. There has been increase in the number of inmates in the Rivers State correction centres without corresponding accommodations for them. There is an acute shortage of rehabilitation facilities in Rivers State correction centres, in the course of training inmates, there is no provision of various teaching or training equipment for deferent trades. As a result, the correction centre inmates fall ill. Incidentally, the health facilities there are inadequately equipped. Sarkin (2010) stated that the personnel in the correction centre in Nigeria at large are grossly inadequate and that even the available ones are not well motivated for an effective and efficient service delivery.

Another important area of concern is hygiene. The absence of proper hygienic life or conditions in the prisons, endanger the lives of both the staff and convicts. Reformation and rehabilitation are important and indeed the dominant aspects in the modern panel practice. In correction centre, like other forms of incarceration, stressful life events manifest in an individual's life. Correctional system is often viewed as a form of punishment that produces significant changes in one's physical, psychological, and social functioning. Despite our ability to cope and adapt as humans, traumatic incidents may change a person's bio-psychosocial balance to such an extent that the memory of a particular negative event overshadows all other experiences and affects the ability to cope with reality (Sarkin, 2010).

In the correction centre, however, basic human values are distorted, contributing to temporary or even irreversible psychological problems. These complications vary from mood disorders such as despair, substance-related disorders, personality disorders, and psychotic disorders (Grohol, 2013). Invariably, the management of the risk factors for the development of such conditions is related to the effectiveness of the rehabilitation in the prisons. Although evidence suggests that correctional system conditions can lead to anxiety, despair, self-harming or other aggressive behavior, obsessions, psychoactive substance abuse, and suicide. There is no agreement in the literature on the causal relationship between confinement and development of psychological disorders (Shalid, 2014).

LaVigne (2014) reported that about half (48%, n =205) of the male participants interviewed between four and eight months after their release indicated that they had no close friends. For those who did report a close friendship, a large number of their friends identified had been in correction centre (40%) or had participated in criminal activity. Despite the fact that many ex-correctional inmates live with family members upon release, social isolation has been described as a 'core experience' of many ex-correctional inmates as a result of homelessness or unstable, unsuitable housing.

Despair is one of the major psychological problems among inmates of correction centres. Often times, episodes of despair usually follow the experience of sudden or prolonged stressful events. Majority of times, newly admitted inmates suffer from despair for a period of time as a result of trauma or stress of the new environment; this often increases the risk of self-harm and suicide among them with attendant cost. Thom-Rita (2018) explained that mental disorders occur frequently in the context of incarceration. Related to this, is the fact that the correctional system

may lead to the development of mental illness, especially despair. The correction centre environment neutralizes the formation and development of basic human values, contributes to stigmatization, alters the convict's conduct and leads to temporary or even irreversible psychicequelaes (Singh & Verma, 2016). Evidence suggests that correction centre conditions can lead to anxiety, despair, self-harming or hetero-aggressive behavior, obsessions, psychoactive substance abuse and suicide. Though there is no agreement in the literature on the causal relationship between confinement and mental disorders (Sloma, 2015). In addition to feelings of inadequacy, important feelings in correction centre, people are anticipated suffering in life outside of incarceration, fear of family abandonment, guilt for being absent from raising and educating their children, losing their right to the social importance of work, identity loss, social discrimination that impairs prospects for working outside of the criminal context and social recognition (Goyal et al, 2011). All these contribute to the development of despair among incarcerated people.

In developing countries, the prevalence rates of despair are higher (Taylor & Parrot, 2018). This is so because environmental factors that contribute to the genesis of depressive disorders are more preponderant. These include high rates of poverty, a lack of social welfare and high rates of endemic infectious diseases, to mention just a few. Gender, age, educational status and marital status differences may exist with respect to levels of despair faced by correction centre inmates. Liebling (2016) conducted surveys within inmates and staff in 12 United Kingdom correctional centres in order to understand the relationship between individual background vulnerabilities, correction centre quality, and correctional inmate distress. Her analyses included controls for four background variables indicative of vulnerabilities for suicide: previous suicide attempts, previous self-harm, psychiatric treatment, and drug use. Each of these variables predicted agreement with the statement "I have thought about suicide in this correction centre." She found that vulnerability indicators were related to the correction centre setting and correction centre quality, and that vulnerability and establishment of differences significantly predicted correctional inmate distress. Regression analyses revealed that deprivation indicators explained 45 percent of the variation in distress while "imported vulnerability" measures explained between 8 and 15 percent.

Mental health problems have been observed to be higher among incarcerated inmates compared to the general population and are a significant causes of morbidity among correctional inmates (Fazel et al, 2011). Major despair includes diagnoses of unipolar affective disorder with at least 5 of 9 of the symptoms of low mood, loss of interest, changes in sleep and activity, loss of energy, guilt feelings, suicidality, and loss of concentration for nearly every day for a duration of at least 2 weeks (Nseluke, & Siziya, 2011).

In Rivers State, prevalence rates vary between 11-60% depending on the study setting. The World Health Organization (WHO) buttressed this fact when it stated that despair, which currently affects 5-10% of the population, is set to become the second largest cause of disease burden by 2020 and is the third most common reason for primary care consultation (Beverly & Repper, 2010). Recognition and treatment of despair often takes place in primary healthcare, secondary, and tertiary institutions with trained and qualified personnel. However, this level of

personnel are lacking among correction centre staff, hence, the obvious difficulty in the assessment and treatment of this category of people, requiring special care. This is made worse by the fact that the proportions of the correctional system with possible clinically diagnosable psychiatric morbidity and significant depressive symptoms are quite high (Torrey et al, 2010).

Khurana and Dhar (2010) in their research on inmates of Tihar Jail, meditation on quality of life, subjective well-being, and criminal propensity among convicts. They found that the level of criminal propensity came down and that of subjective well-being went up after the inmates attended the Vipassana meditation courses. According to them, the hard life in the correction centre seriously affects the quality of life and subjective well-being of the criminals in the correction centre. This may be so because the health systems in developing countries is poorly organized and poorly funded, as compared with the health care system in industrialized countries. Two major problems face correction/correction centres administration today in the greater part of the globe – inadequate funding, and over-crowding. Rivers State is no exception. Rivers State is neither lacking in recuses nor funds, but lacks appropriate funding and allocation policies, which leads to gross under funding of public institutions such as the correction centre. Hence, the correction centre staff, and inmates may suffer deprivation. In Rivers State, as in most countries, correction centre systems shoulder the burden of providing healthcare services. They are, however, ill-equipped to perform this responsibility, due to limited recuses (human and capital), corruption and the ever-increasing number of inmates (Kadiri, 2014).

In Nigeria, Rivers State in particular, correctional centre establishments are struggling to provide minimal mental health services to the inmates, and only a few have exposure to psychiatrists. The provisions for the mentally disordered correction centres have also been observed to be inadequate. Given the limited recuses of most correction centres, however, it seems doubtful whether most correction centres with these illnesses receive appropriate care. Appropriate mental health interventions and care should be a priority for this population (Ohaeri & Jegede, 2011). However, this present research investigates causes of despair among correction centre inmates in Rivers State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The correctional centre administration in Rivers State has been facing a lot of problems, our correctional centre cells are overcrowded with male and female, married and single inmates due to inadequate provision of accommodation; the result is that too many inmates live in very relatively small cells. There has been increase in the number of inmates in Rivers State correctional centres without a corresponding accommodation for them. There are no programmes in Rivers State correctional centres to improve inmates education, there are no provision of various teaching, training equipment or tools for various skills and trades such that they will be gainfully engaged when released from correctional centres to better their lives. As a result, the correctional centre inmates fall sick and despaired. Incidentally, the clinics there are not adequately equipped, the personnel in the correctional centres in Rivers State are grossly inadequate and that even the available ones are not well motivated for an effective and efficient

service delivery. Reformation and rehabilitation are important and indeed the dominant aspects in the modern penal practice.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State differ based on gender?
2. To what extent do causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State differ based on marital status?
3. To what extent do causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State differ based on employment status?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female correction centre inmates on their causes of despair in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean response of married and single correction centre inmates on their causes of despair among correction centre inmates in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant difference between the mean response of correction centre inmates who were employed and unemployed on their causes of despair in Rivers State.

Methodology

Survey research design was used in this present study to ascertain the current opinion as causes of despair among inmates of correction centres in Rivers State. The population of this study consisted all correctional centre inmates in Port Harcourt, Elele, and Degema. The total population of correction centre inmates in the three prisons as at the time of this study estimated 8,438. The population comprised Awaiting-trial inmates and correction centre inmates.

The population comprised 243 males and 377 females, 128 married inmates and 282 single inmates, 142 employed inmates and 354 unemployed inmates. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select correctional centres and inmates for the study. The stratification was done according to gender, marital status, and employment status.

A sample of 300 correction Centre inmates was selected for the study. The composition of the sample was 100 inmates selected from each of the correction centre (Port Harcourt, Elele and Degema) in Rivers State through fluid survey online calculator. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select correction centres and inmates for the study. The stratification was done according to gender, marital status, and employment status. An adapted Beck's Despair Inventory Scale was used for data collection. The instrument was divided into two sections A and B. Section A centered on correction centre inmates' personal data such as gender, marital status, and employment status. Section B consisted of 21 items measuring correctional centre inmates' causes of despair. Items on the instrument were presented as statements to which the respondents were instructed to indicate their levels of agreement or disagreement. The lowest

score was 1 while the highest score was 4. The responses and weights of the items are as follows: Very High Extent, High Extent, Low Extent and Very High Extent respectively

The instrument was validated by the authors because it is a standardized instrument. However, it was revalidated by three experts (two in Guidance and Counselling and One in Measurement and Evaluation). The suggestions of the experts were incorporated into the final draft of the instrument. Although the reliability of the instrument was determined by the authors, the reliability of the instrument was re-ascertained since it was adapted in the study. Cronbach alpha was used in determining the reliability that yielded a coefficient of $\alpha=0.71$.

The instrument was administered by the researcher and four research assistants. The permission of the controller of each of the correction centres used in this study was sought for. The correction centre wardens as research assistants assisted in the administration of the instruments to the inmates sampled for the study. Upon completion of the instruments, all the copies of the instruments administered were retrieved. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while independent t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Results

Research Question One

To what extent do causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State differ based on gender?

Table 1: Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (S) Analysis of Data on gender Causes of Despair among Correction centre Inmates in Rivers State

Gender	N	Mean(\bar{x})	S
Male	243	43.28	5.05
Female	57	56.63	6.46

Table 1 shows that male inmates in Rivers State had a mean (\bar{x}) score of 43.28 and standard deviation (S) score of 5.05 while the female counterparts had mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation score of 56.63 and 6.46 respectively. By this result, despair is higher among female inmates than their male counterparts in Rivers State.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female correction centre inmates on the causes of despair among correction centre inmates in Rivers State.

Table 2: T-test Analysis on the difference between the mean response of Gender on Causes of Despair among Correction Centre Inmates in Rivers State

Gender	N	(\bar{x})	S	Df	Alpha level	p-value	Remark
Male	243	43.28	5.05	298	0.05	0.000	Significant H ₀ is Rejected
Female	57	56.63	6.46				

Table 2 shows that $p < 0.05$ hence hypothesis one which states that there is no significant difference between the mean response of male and female inmates on the causes of despair in Rivers State is rejected. This means that causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State significantly differ based on gender.

Research Question Two

To what extent do causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State differ based on marital status?

Table 3: Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (S) Analysis of Influence of Marital Status on Causes of Despair among Correction Centre inmates in Rivers State

Marital status	N	Mean (\bar{x})	S
Married	85	61.86	6.85
Single	215	48.22	5.17

Table 3 shows that married inmates in Rivers State had a mean (\bar{x}) score of 61.86 and standard deviation (S) score of 6.85, while their single (unmarried) counterparts had a mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation scores of 48.22 and 5.17 respectively. By this result, despair is higher among married inmates than their single or unmarried counterparts in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between the mean response of married and single correctional centre inmates on their causes of despair in Rivers State significantly differ based on marital status.

Table 4: T-test Analysis on the difference between the mean response of Marital Status on the Causes of Despair among inmates in Rivers State

Marital Status	N	(\bar{x})	S	Df	Alpha level	p-value	Remark
Married	85	61.86	6.85	298	0.05	0.002	Significant H ₀ is Rejected
Single	217	48.22	5.17				

Table 4 shows that $p < 0.05$ hence hypothesis two which state that there is no significant difference between the mean response of married and single inmates on their causes of despair in Rivers State is rejected while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This means that marital status significantly constitutes causes of despair among inmates in Rivers State.

Research Question Three

To what extent do causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State differ based on employment status?

Table 5: Mean (\bar{x}) and Standard Deviation (S) Analysis on the Influence of Employment Status on Causes of Despair among Correction Centre inmates in Rivers State

Employment Status	N	Mean (\bar{x})	S
Employment	42	29.16	4.23
Unemployment	258	54.74	6.58

Table 5 shows that inmates who were employed in Rivers State obtained mean (\bar{x}) score of 29.16 and standard deviation (S) score of 4.23, while inmates who were unemployed had a mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation (S) score of 54.74 and 5.58 respectively. By this result despair is higher among unemployed inmates than their counterparts who are employed in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference between the mean response of inmates who were employed and unemployed on the causes of despair among inmates in Rivers State.

Table 6: T-test Analysis on the difference between the mean response of Employment Status on the Cause of Despair among Correction Centre Inmates in Rivers State

Employment Status	N	(\bar{x})	S	Df	Alpha level	p-value	Remark
Employed	42	29.16	4.23	298	0.05	0.001	Significant H ₀ is Rejected
Unemployed	258	54.74	6.58				

Table 6 shows that $p < 0.05$ hence hypothesis three which states that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of correction centre inmates who were employed and unemployed on their causes of despair in Rivers State is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is retained. This means that causes of despair among inmates in Rivers State significantly differ based on employment status.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One/Hypothesis One, Analysis of data using mean and standard deviation showed that male inmates of correctional centres in Rivers State obtained mean (\bar{x}) score of 43.28 and standard deviation (SD) score of 5.05, while their female counterparts obtained mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation scores of 57.67 and 6.46 respectively. By this result, despair is higher among female inmates than their male counterparts in Port Harcourt Degema, and Elele of Rivers State. On the application of t-test, it was revealed that $p < 0.05$ hence null hypothesis one which states that gender does not significantly influence causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State was rejected. This means that there is significant difference between male and female centre inmates on their causes of despair among inmates in Rivers State. This finding is much expected considering the rate at which crimes are perpetrated by young men in Rivers State. This present finding is in agreement with Werner-Wilson and Fitzharis (2001). The present finding could be due to the fact that women are more emotional when they encounter different situations than the male.

Research Question Two/Hypothesis Two, Analysis of data using mean and standard deviation revealed that that married correctional centre inmates in Rivers State obtained mean (\bar{x}) score of 61.86 and standard deviation (SD) score of 6.85, while their unmarried counterparts had mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation scores of 48.22 and 5.17 respectively. By this result, despair is higher among married inmates than their unmarried counterparts in Rivers State. On the application of independent t-test, it was found that $p < 0.05$ hence hypothesis two which states that marital status does not significantly constitute causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State was rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between married and single inmates on their causes of despair among inmates in Rivers State. Married people are likely to feel the absence of their spouse and children while in correction centre. Not being able to see such significant ones may cause them more despair. This may have contributed to the present finding.

Research Question Three/Hypothesis Three, Mean and standard deviation analysis of data showed that correctional centre employed inmates in Rivers State correctional centres obtained mean (\bar{x}) score of 29.16 and standard deviation (SD) score of 2.23, while unemployed inmates had mean (\bar{x}) and standard deviation scores of 54.74 and 5.58 respectively. By this result, despair is higher among unemployed inmates than employed counterparts in Rivers State. On application of independent t-test, it was revealed that $p < 0.05$ hence hypothesis four which states that employment does not significantly influenced causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State was rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between employed and unemployed on their causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State. This result is well expected because in Rivers State, the condition in which the rich and employed enjoy certain privileges while in correction centre is high, the unemployed correction centre are abandoned and tormented. This situation may predispose the unemployed inmates to high level of despair. The present finding agrees with Lorant (2013) whose study revealed a dose-response relationship between despair, education and employment.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. There was a significant difference between the mean response of male and female correctional centre inmates on their causes of despair in Rivers State.
2. There was a significant difference between the mean response of married and single correctional centre inmates on their causes of despair among correctional centre inmates in Rivers State.
3. There was a significant difference between the mean response of correctional centre inmates who were employed and unemployed on their causes of despair in Rivers State.

CONCLUSION

Based on the major findings of the study it was concluded that; differences exist in despair among male and female correctional centres inmates in Rivers State; differences exist in despair among married and single correctional centres inmates in Rivers State; differences exist in despair among employed and their unemployed counterparts in correctional centres in Rivers State.

Contributions to Knowledge

This study has contributed to knowledge by establishing that; despair is higher among female inmates than their male counterparts in Rivers State; despair is higher among married inmates than their unmarried counterparts in Rivers State; despair is higher among unemployed inmates than their employed counterparts in Rivers State; despair is higher among unemployed inmates than their employed counterparts in Rivers State.

Implication for Counselling Psychology

These findings have psychological counselling implications thus:

1. Lack of employment, marital inadequacy, and gender disparity should not be seen as normal thing in the life of inmates. In our society today, many of us overlook the effects of abuse, poor health condition, welfare dependency, cultural dislocation, anxiety, economic upheaval, somatic feelings, and trauma-related features in the life of inmates are normal, hence can cause despair. This necessitates psychological counselling to help inmates achieve psychological stability.
2. Those variables that can lead to inmate despair in jail such as abuse, poor health condition, welfare dependency, cultural dislocation, anxiety, economic upheaval, somatic feelings, and trauma-related features, etc. should not be overlooked. These causes of despair in female and male inmates should also be seen as a strong challenge to correctional centre inmates. Therefore, psychological counselling should be applied to help inmates overcome these causes of despair.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

1. Rehabilitation programmes for individuals' personal development should be taken seriously and should be provided in correctional centre in Rivers State.
2. Recreational facilities should be provided in correctional centre in Rivers State. This will help to reduce the rate of despair among the inmates.
3. Guidance and counselling units should be established in all correctional centre in Nigeria to enable correctional centre take care of their emotional and psychological needs.

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