

Research Article

Impact of prison environment of inmates of high-down prisons

Gabriel A*

Faculty of Law, Criminology with Forensic Psychology, Middlesex University, London, UK

Abstract

The goal of creating the prison as an institution in nations around the world including the United Kingdom is to rehabilitate and reform offenders. However, there have been several debates about the effectiveness of the prison system. This research proposal is based on the impact of prison environment on inmates of high down prisons in the United Kingdom. This proposal is an offshoot of a previous research carried out in Kirikiri maximum prisons in Lagos, Nigeria by the researcher. The goal of the research is to compare and contrast between what entails in Nigerian prisons and the United Kingdom prisons and to proffer solutions and make recommendations for improvements in the prison system as a whole. The main sources of information for this research will be primary and secondary materials which include oral interviews, administration of questionnaires, journals and government's gazettes. The research will critically review the situations of the British prisons with HMP high-down prison as a case study. To achieve this, fifty inmates of HMP prisons will be selected through simple random sampling to partake in the survey. Questionnaire will also be administered to the inmates to ask series of questions about life behind bars, the staffs of the prison will be interviewed orally. When analyzing the data collected, it will be done through quantitative and qualitative analysis. The time frame will span three months, from July to September 2014.

Introduction

From time to time, there are always arguments and discussions between sociologists, criminologists, academic scholars and the prison administrations about the purpose of imprisonments and whether the prison has met the objectives it was created for. Most of this school of thoughts agrees crime should be deterred, they also believe the punishment must not exceed the crime committed by the inmate in order not to create a crisis while solving a problem.

Baccaria [1] explains that sentiments must be waved aside while punishing an offender; it must be based purely on rational thinking. He further stressed that crime that produced pleasure for the offender must be substituted by pain by putting the offender behind bars. Contemporary criminologists and sociologists have suggested that offenders shouldn't just be locked in prisons and the keys thrown away but must be reformed and rehabilitated. They further debated that there should be room for improvement in the aspect of reformation and rehabilitation of offenders instead of making punishment worse for offenders. There is also a general believe that deviants need help and should be given all the help they need in order to become better to themselves and the society. Ostreicher [2] further buttress this point by saying;

"Those who have fallen foul of the collective norms and laws of the society expressed in criminal laws should be reformed; that is why the term correction is applied to reflect this thinking"

Imprisonment is a punitive measure that is meant to be retributive and deter an offender from crime. Many schools of thoughts agree that law-breakers should be sent to prison to atone for his crime, these punitive measure will discourage him and other would-be offenders from committing crime.

According to Obioha [3];

"Imprisonment is most conceived as a formal perspective of inflicting pain on the individuals, which has been an aspect of the traditional criminal justice system in various societies in Nigeria"

*Corresponding author: Akinyemi Gabriel, Faculty of Law, Criminology with Forensic Psychology, Middlesex University, London, UK, Tel: +2348124074453; E-mail: gabrieloluseyi_akinyemi@yahoo.co.uk

Received: Sep 04, 2018; Accepted: Oct 02, 2018; Published: Oct 07, 2018

Citation: Gabriel A. Impact of prison environment of inmates of high-down prisons. *GSL J Forensic Res.* 2018; 1:105.

Mc Corkle and Korn [4] define a prison as a;

"Physical structure or building in a topographical setting where a number of people who have offended live under highly regimented conditions, utilize the resources made available to them by the state in a secluded environment that is different from the larger society"

The objectives of creating the prison in the United Kingdom is to rehabilitate and correct recidivists and deviants, keep offenders in safe custody, punish offenders as instructed by the criminal justice system, re-integrate offenders who have completed their time back into the society.

Prisons all over the world have the responsibility to rehabilitate offenders and also remove these offenders from the environment for some certain period of time. Prisons do more than lock up offenders, they go deeper by trying to find out what led an offender to break the law, they proffer treatment programs and also skill acquisition for the offenders so when they leave the prison they will be able to do something tangible with their life and the pull of crime won't draw them away. The prison also sends inmates to schools within the four walls of the prison institution, some get professional certificates while others are awarded university degrees. This will make them integrate faster into the society when they leave the prison.

Many scholars have debated that these goals are not being met. They further argue that the prison has turned to a hotbed of criminal minded people. They reason that the prison instead of reforming the inmates make them hardened, subject them to inhumane treatment, they are held under a tensed atmosphere. In the process, the offenders feel battered and bruised and in most cases their punishment exceeds the crime they commit. They feel dejected and traumatized; some become suicidal while some become mentally unbalanced while going through this punitive process. This research aims to critically review whether the United Kingdom Prisons are accomplishing the objective for which they are established and the impact of the prison environment on the inmates.

The following questions have been formulated for the present study:

1. What is the social and demographic nature of HMP high-down prison inmates?
2. How do the inmates feel about being locked up?

3. What factors are responsible for deficient treatment of inmates?
4. What are the general experiences of the inmates?
5. What are the specific experiences of the inmates?

Literature Review

The way the criminal justice system treats offenders has generated lots of debates and discussions recently, men has been views as the “scape goat” while women are most likely to get a “slap on the wrist” for the same crime a male offender commits. Though some scholars argue that the criminal justice system hasn’t been lenient with women and harsh on men as some school of thoughts debate but the statistics are there for all to see. This means that women are less likely to be arrested by the law enforcement agents, charged to court, found guilty and convicted by the court of law. But some scholars debate that women are less likely to offend in proportion to men.

Furthermore, imprisonment and reformation as a tool to checkmate crime has generated lots of arguments from different scholars. Stevens (1998:5) concludes that;

“In thirty years, we have come this far. But it hardly seems like a prison suited for 21st century. The present solution to crime is to send people to prison, to hold them in more better and secured conditions. This is not a solution to the problems of crime. If prisons worked then we would be closing prisons not building more”

Chiney [5] also corroborates this argument by saying for imprisonment to be effective, it has to be reformatory in its approach and reduce recidivism, and imprisonment should be more than keeping an offender behind bars to rot away. When imprisonment takes a pragmatic approach towards rehabilitation and reformation, then crime can be nipped in the bud. But Chinoy (1967) sharply disagrees with this school of thoughts. Chinoy [6] believes that the prison system even though it’s geared towards reformation and rehabilitation of offenders has further worsened the offender’s behavior and made him or her hardened. Chinoy [6] further argues that they learn new ways of crime when in the prison and it has invariably become an institution for criminals. He continued by saying the those who have been in the prison for a longer time socialize the new offenders and they invariably become hardened, the situation even becomes worse when they come out of the prisons and face stigmatization from the society because of their ex-convict identity. Most of them have a hard time getting a decent job, and some get rejected by friends and families who should have welcomed them back with loving arms thereby pushing them further into crime.

Many schools of thoughts from all walks of life have different views about the prison and impact of imprisonment on inmates.

Sykes [7] sees the prison as a place;

“Where people are highly secluded from the rest of the world with entirely new order of control”

Many of these scholars agree the prison is a form of social control within a spatial and geographical topography.

Scholars that believe in the functionalism theory see imprisonment as a means to an end to discipline offenders, they also see imprisonment as a tool that eradicate offenders from the environment in order to forestall further criminal activities and protect the society from harm. The functionalist theorists also see imprisonment as a tool that rehabilitates offenders, teach and guides offenders to abide by the law and be useful to themselves and the society after their release.

According to Goffman [8], the prisons are filled with;

“A class of individuals who are restricted contact with outside world and stereotypical behavioral pattern where social mobility is restricted”.

The labelist theorists believe the prison is a community filled with tramps, which are highly dangerous to their community and pose a threat to the peaceful organization of the society at large.

The structural-functionalism theory was propounded by Radcliff-Brown [9] of the British School of social anthropology and later developed by South African born anthropologists, Meyer Fortes (1906-1983) and Max Gluckman (1911-1975).

These scholars see the prison institution is seen as a functional, structural whole with different parts. What these means is that the beliefs, value system and culture of the prison systems are just like the society at large.

Merton R.K [10] came with the Social Structure perspective theory. Merton R.K [10] is a sociologist who discussed the manifest and latent functions of structures in the society and also their differences in relation to their way of life. Merton [10] used this theory to describe the intended and unintended functions of the prisons system.

Merton R.K [10] further debates that;

“Imprisonment, social control, regimented culture and seclusion are designed to produce positive results in the life of the individual prisoners upon release. The whole re-socialization processes in the prison system are actually intended to mold the cultural behavior of individual inmates”

In essence, Merton R.K [10] is saying that the prison as a system can produce both good behaved and bad behaved individuals in the society.

The criminal justice system has also been faulted by some scholars and schools of thoughts as contributory factors to enhancing criminal behavior and recidivism rather than reforming the offender. In the 90’s in Canada, Gendreau et al., [11] carried out an empirical study whereby they discovered a relationship between the amounts of time an inmate does in the prisons and the inmate’s rate of relapse back into crime.

Gendreau et al., [11] debates that;

“The longer an inmate is incarcerated, the more the possibility of relapsing back into crime, the shorter an inmate is remanded, the less possibility of relapsing back into crime”

Furthermore, some scholars also believe that most reasons why offenders become recidivist is largely dependent on the way they are incarcerated and what the way the prison as an institution treats the offender.

Nurse, Woodcock, and Ormsby [12] also explained that the impact of the prison environment could affect the mental of the inmates. Prison inmates generally battle with isolation and lack mental stimulation, this makes them abuse drugs, and they also develop negative relationship with prison staffs and bullying of fellow prisoners. Nurse et al., [12] further explains that when prisoners are incarcerated for long periods of time, their health is not tasked so it begins to deteriorate gradually. Because of this state of isolation, drugs serve as a means to escape from reality and the loneliness their imprisonment has caused. Douglas et al., [13] further stressed that women in prisons complained that poor hygiene in the prison, limited access to physical activities, and unbalanced diet also affected their mental health negatively.

Methodology

Research design

This research will examine the conditions in the British prisons with HMP High down prison as a case study. To achieve this, fifty inmates of HMP prisons will be selected through simple random sampling to partake in the survey. Questionnaire will also be administered to the inmates to ask series of questions about life behind bars, the staffs of the

prison will be interviewed orally. When analyzing the data collected, it will be done through quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Population and sampling procedure

The sample population for the survey will comprise of five hundred inmates out of which ten percent of the inmates will be selected for the survey. In other words the sample size will constitute fifty inmates of high-down prisons. The sample size will be scattered in more than twenty different cells and inmates will be chosen using simple random sampling through balloting method.

Instruments

The method of data collection for the study will comprise of both quantitative and qualitative methods. When using quantitative data, it will involve the use of questionnaires while qualitative data will involve oral some selected staffs of the prison that will be relevant to the research. A questionnaire that will have three different sections will be administered to the inmates. The inmates selected for the research will first be stratified on the type of offence that led to their imprisonment.

Furthermore, the reason oral interview is necessary is because it will help to ascertain or disprove the information gathered from the inmates by the use of questionnaires. The process will involve selecting about four to six respondents who have first-hand knowledge and can give honest information about how the prison is run. These respondents will range from those in the prison's medical department, the welfare department, the records department, the religious leader and probably the prison governor. They will all be interviewed orally.

The research will make use of both primary and secondary data. This may also involve perusal of some official documents and books which will give the researcher more insights about the history of high-down prisons, how it was established, the past prison governors, the geographical topography of the prison amongst others. The data analysis will comprise of; distribution of respondent's socio-demographic characteristics, level of education, religion, marital status, category of offence, date of imprisonment, date of release amongst others.

The use of non-participant observation will also be used when collecting data. And they will include; admission and discharge processes, occupational and educational facilities available in the prison, accommodation, feeding, medication, amongst others

In order not to forget the plot of the research, a previous research has been carried out in Lagos, Nigeria in the late 2012; the purpose of the new research is to find out the core similarities and differences between United Kingdom and Nigeria prisons and how both conditions can be improved. Simply put, this researcher is interested in what obtains in the western world prisons and African prisons.

At the conclusion of the survey, the findings will be analyzed and the questionnaire will be processed into data. The questionnaires will also be edited to check for those that were not properly filled; those that were filled properly will be coded and analyzed in expressed frequency distribution tables and simple percentages.

Research time-table and resources

The time plan of the research is supposed to start July and end September 2014 spanning three months. The researcher will visit the prisons once in a week; this will enable the researcher to book appointments in earnest with prison staffs in order to conduct oral interviews with them. It will also give the researcher some ample time to draft the questionnaires that will be administered to the inmates as the research reaches its crescendo. The researchers will also make use of prison documents and books, journals and articles from libraries and internet materials to further complement his research surveys if need be. All these materials may not necessarily be made use of but some may be needed as the research progresses. Academic resources and academic journals too will be critically examined in the research work.

Interview time will be every Monday and each interview will last between 30 and 45 minutes.

References

- Baccaria C (1776) *Criminology*. New York, McGraw –Hill.
- Ostreicher L (2003) *When Prisoners Come Home*. Printer – Friendly Format.
- Obioha EE (1995) *Prison Culture in Nigeria; A Study of Life Within Agodi Prison Community*. Ibadan M.Sc. Dissertation, Unpublished. Ibadan: Department of Sociology, University of Ibadan.
- Mc Corkle L, Korn R (1954). Re-Socialization within walls. *The Annals of American Academy of political Science* 293: 1: 88-98.
- Chiney L (1991) *Patriarchy, Prisons and Jails: A critical look at trends in women's incarceration*. *The prisons J* 71:51-67
- Chinou E (1967) *Society: An introduction to sociology* New York: Random House.
- Sykes G (1958) *The Society of Captives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Goffman E (1961) *Asylums*. New York: Garden City Anchor Books.
- Radcliff-Brown R (1952). *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. New York: The Free Press Soyinka W 1972. *The Man Died: Prison Notes*. London: Penguin Books.
- Merton R K (1949) *Social theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press
- Gendreau P, Goggin C, Cullen FT (1999) *The Effects of Prison Sentences on Recidivism*. User Report: 1999-3. Corrections Research, Department Solicitor General Canada. Ottawa: public Works and Government Services Canada.
- Nurse J, Woodcock P, Ormsby J (2003) *Influence of environmental factors on mental health within prisons: Focus group study*. *British Medical Journal* 327: 1-5.
- Douglas N, Plugge E, Fitzpatrick R (2009) *The impact of imprisonment on health: What do women prisoners say?* *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 63: 749-754.