

# Attitudinal Disposition of Correctional Officers' Towards an Inmates with Mental illness in Agodi Prison, Oyo State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

There is a frequently higher prevalence of mental health problems among the incarcerated population in Nigeria. However, their mental health is often neglected, leading to a complex interplay of issues that hinder effective rehabilitation and integration of offenders into society.

This study examined the attitudinal disposition of correctional officers towards the mental health of an inmate in Agodi correctional home, Ibadan. This is a cross-sectional study design and a stratified random sampling technique were used to select 200 correctional officers. A socio-demographic questionnaire and questions focusing on the stigmatization of inmates living with mental health. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test the generated hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that there was a significant relationship between counselling service and inmate mental health ( $r = .621, n = 200, p < .05$ ), there was a significant relationship between rehabilitation program and inmate mental health ( $r = .642, n = 200, p < .05$ ), there was a significant relationship between welfare service and inmate mental health ( $r = .716, n = 200, p < .05$ ), there was a significant relationship between correctional officers attitude and inmates mental health ( $r = .731, n = 200, p < .05$ ). This study underscored the potential consequences of negative attitudes, such as stigmatization, discrimination, and inadequate provision of mental health care, which can impede the rehabilitation and successful reintegration of inmates into society. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the attitudinal disposition of correctional officers towards inmates with mental illness is imperative.

**Keywords:** attitude, correctional Officer, Mental illness, rehabilitation, stigma

## 1. Introduction

The overrepresentation of people with mental illnesses in the criminal justice system, particularly those imprisoned in prisons, is a serious societal issue. Despite the focus on this topic over the previous two decades, poor personal and criminal justice consequences for offenders with mental illnesses continue to be worse than for offenders without mental illnesses (Lamb & Weinberger, 2011; Ringhoff, Rapp, & Robst, 2012). The issue has harmed people suffering from mental illnesses and leads to their continuous estrangement, stigmatization, and social difficulties. Correctional officers' attitudes and lack of mental health expertise may be factors leading to poor outcomes for offenders with mental illnesses. With prevalence rates ranging from 34% to 57%, the prevalence of mental illnesses among prison prisoners is much greater than that of the general population worldwide (Hasson et al., 2011; Naidoo & Mkize, 2012; Ogunlesi & Ogunwale, 2017), and in Nigeria (Arimiya'u et al., 2013). where the prevalence is 5.8% (Gureje et al., 2006). Substance abuse, depression, and anxiety disorders are common mental health conditions among inmates in Nigeria (Armiya'u et al., 2013; Adjorlolo et al., 2016; Olagunju et al., 2018).

Nigeria, like many African countries, faces the challenge of adequately addressing mental health issues within its correctional facilities (Naidoo & Mkize, 2012; Lambert et al., 2022). In addition to this, overcrowding, societal stigma, and limited resources to address mental health services contribute to an environment where mental health concerns are often overlooked (Abdulmalik et al., 2015). Correctional officers, as frontline custodians, play a pivotal role in shaping the atmosphere within these institutions. However, a limited empirical researcher from Nigeria have unpacked their attitudinal disposition towards the mental health of inmates for implementing effective strategies and interventions.

Extant literatures from the global north highlighted that correctional officers are often

exposed to challenging and volatile situations that can impact their perceptions of inmates living with mental illness (Marks & Tunner, 2014; Morgan et al., 2012; Kennedy et al., 2017). These circumstances are exacerbated due to poor awareness and understanding about the prevalence and diversity of mental health issues of inmates. Deep-seated stigmas have significantly influenced attitudes of correctional officers toward inmates exhibiting major symptoms of mental illness or have been diagnosed of mental health condition the countries (Abdulmalik et al., 2019; Gureje et al., 2006; Ogebe et al., 2011; Ubaka et al., 2018; Okoro et al., 2023). Non-participation of correctional officers in the destigmatization of mental health within the correctional system in Nigeria is a major barrier to the inclusion of people with mental illness in mental health policy and other health care provision in Nigeria.

Within the context of Agodi Prison in Oyo State, Nigeria, there exists a critical and pressing concern regarding the attitudinal disposition of correctional officers towards inmates with mental illness. The prevalence of mental health disorders among incarcerated individuals is a well-documented global phenomenon, and it poses unique challenges within the corrections system. However, the specific attitudes and behaviors exhibited by correctional officers towards inmates with mental illness in Agodi Prison have not been comprehensively investigated. The significance of this study stems from the recognition that the attitudes of correctional officers play a pivotal role in shaping the overall well-being, rehabilitation, and societal reintegration of inmates, particularly those grappling with mental health issues. The prison environment, by its nature, can be stressful and demanding, making it imperative to understand how correctional officers perceive and interact with inmates with mental illness. There may be insufficient training and awareness programs for correctional officers regarding mental health issues. This gap in knowledge might contribute to a lack of empathy and understanding, leading to inappropriate responses and actions towards inmates with mental illness. In extreme cases, negative attitudes towards inmates with mental illness can lead to human rights violations. Understanding the prevalence of such attitudes is crucial for ensuring the protection of the rights and dignity of all incarcerated individuals, irrespective of their mental health status. The attitudes of correctional officers may impact the rehabilitation efforts of mentally ill inmates. Positive attitudes and supportive environments can contribute to reducing recidivism rates, while negative attitudes may perpetuate a cycle of incarceration without addressing the root causes of criminal behavior. Therefore, this study is considered an step toward creating targeted awareness, promoting mental health services among the incarcerated population in Nigeria. . Nigeria can develop a correctional system that not only ensures public safety but also prioritizes the mental health and rehabilitation of inmates.

### *1.1 Brief History of Incarceration in Nigeria*

In Nigeria, the beginning of incarceration start from time immemorial. Available data indicate that various traditional communities had their various forms of prison system before the contact with white people. In Yoruba land, Ogboni house served as a kind of prison (Ayandele, 2016). In Edo state, the Ewedo house was used for such, not only for keeping those to be transported as slaves, but also those criminals who had to be incarcerated for a particular period (Awe, 2015). In the middle belt, particularly among the Tiv, there were indications of an awareness of imprisonment, criminals were required to agree to a sentence

of imprisonment as evidence wrong doing (Bohannan, 2016). It is also documented that in 1968, Sir Frederick Lugard documented evidence of existence of prisons system among the Fulani ethnics group who used them for both confinement of criminals and for housing condemned criminals. The Igbo solidly built unventilated rooms or houses by societies, villages, and influential persons in the community to incarcerate criminals and captives (Igbo, 2017).

Thus, the notion and reality of incarceration in Nigeria came before colonialism. What came at their heel was the particular introduction of the European form of the prison system. The first prison in Nigeria was located in Lagos called Broad Street Prison Lagos, which was established in 1872, by the British colonial government (Igbo 2017). In 1890, the Calabar prison followed, followed by the Sapele prison in 1898. Afterwards Onitsha, Degema, Ibadan, Jebba and Lokoja prisons were established (Egu, 2018). However, it must be known that colonial prisons were not meant for rehabilitation or restorative purposes. Prisons emphasis punitive than corrective. The inmates were used as means of forced labour.

### *1.2 Objectives of the Study*

The general objective of this research is to examine the attitudinal disposition of correctional officers' towards mental health of an inmate in Agodi Prison, Ibadan. The specific objectives include the following:

- 1) Investigate the relationship between Compassionate care and the mental health of inmates in Agodi prison, Ibadan.
- 2) To examine the relationship between rehabilitation programs and mental health of inmates in Agodi prison, Ibadan.
- 3) To investigate the relationship between welfare services and inmate mental health of inmate in Agodi prison, Ibadan.
- 4) To examine correctional officers understanding of inmate mental illness in Agodi prison, Ibadan.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research was used. The population for the study consisted of correctional officers in correctional home. A cross-sectional design allows researchers to collect data at a single time. This is beneficial for obtaining a snapshot of correctional officers' attitudes towards inmates with mental illness. It provides a current and immediate representation of the prevailing sentiments within the prison environment. A stratified random sampling technique were used to select ten (10) departments in Agodi Correctional Home of which simple random sampling were used to select twenty (20) officers from each of the selected departments to make it two hundred respondents.

The main research instrument is questionnaire tagged "Attitudinal disposition correctional officers' towards mental health of an inmate", The researcher presented a draft copy of the questionnaire to the researcher's supervisor and other lecturers in the Department of Social

Work for critical scrutiny and appraisal. The instrument was administered to 20 officers not included in the scope of the study to ascertain the instrument's reliability in another correctional home. The reliability coefficient of each of the sections were ascertained with the use of Cronbach's alpha method. The investigator personally administered the instrument to the respondents with the help of two research assistants to parents and caregivers in the selected areas. The researcher got the informed consent of the respondents. Data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used at 0.05 level of significance to establish the relationship among the study's independent and dependent variables.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Socio-Demographic Variables of the Respondent Inmates

Table 1 presented below shows the socio-demographic variables of the respondents at Agodi Correctional Home. Majority (66.5%) of the respondents were male while few 33.5% were female. Majority of the age range of the inmates were between 18- 49 (84%) while very few were above 50 years this is an indication that most active age were between age bracket 18-49 years when most of these age groups involved in criminal activities. More than half (55%) were from the Christian faith while few (7.5%) were from traditional religion practices. Large percentage (34.5%) were first degree holders while very few (6%) were with school certificate level of educational status. The majority (63.5%) were married while few (9.5%) were divorced or separated. More than half (55%) were serving sixteen years above while (6%) were on jail terms of below five years.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent inmates

Socio-demographic		Frequency (N=200)	Percentage
Age	18-29	52	26
	30-39	74	37
	40-49	42	21
	50 and above	32	16
Sex	Male	133	66.5
	Female	67	33.5
Marital status	Single	54	27
	Married	127	63.5
	Separated	19	9.5
Educational status	Secondary school certificate	12	6

	NCE	41	20.5
	HND/BSC	69	34.5
	Master Degree	42	21
	Above Master	36	18
Religion affiliation	Christian	110	55
	Muslim	75	37.5
	African traditional religion (ATR)	15	7.5
Years in Service	Below 5	12	6
	5-10	78	39
	16 +	110	55

### 3.2 Hypothesis One

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between Compassionate care and the mental health of inmates in Agodi prison, Ibadan.

Table 2. Pearson correlation showing a significant relationship between compassionate care and inmate mental health in Agodi Correctional Home, Ibadan

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Inmates mental health	17.09	4.85	200	.621	.001	Sig.
Compassionate care	12.51	2.10				

Table two presented above indicated that compassionate care has a significant relationship with the mental health of inmates in Agodi prisons Ibadan ( $r = .621$ ,  $n = 200$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The findings suggest that incorporating compassionate care into the prison system may have a positive impact on the mental health of inmates. This could have implications for policy development, encouraging prison authorities to prioritize and implement compassionate care practices.

### 3.3 Hypothesis Two

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the rehabilitation program and inmate mental health in Agodi Correctional Home, Ibadan.

Table 3. Pearson correlation showing significant between rehabilitation program and inmate mental health in Agodi Correctional Home, Ibadan

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Inmates mental health.	17.09	4.85	200	.642	.000	Sig.
Rehabilitation program.	18.51	3.10				

Table three showed that there was a significant relationship between rehabilitation programs and inmate mental health in Agodi Correctional Home ( $r = .642$ ,  $n = 200$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The p-value is less than 0.05, suggesting that the observed relationship between the rehabilitation program and inmate mental health is statistically significant. The results underscore the potential for rehabilitation programs to serve as interventions for addressing mental health issues among inmates. Designing and implementing programs that specifically target mental health improvement could be beneficial.

### 3.4 Hypothesis Three

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between welfare service and inmate mental health in Agodi Correctional Home, Ibadan.

Table 4. Pearson correlation showing significant difference between welfare service and inmate mental health in Agodi Correctional Home, Ibadan

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	p	Remark
Mental health of inmates	17.09	4.85	200	.716	.000	Sig.
Welfare service.	13.22	3.07				

Table three showed that there was a significant difference between welfare service and inmate mental health in Agodi Correctional Home ( $r = .716$ ,  $n = 200$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Recognizing the relationship between welfare services and inmate mental health may prompt collaboration between correctional facilities and mental health professionals. Integrating mental health perspectives into welfare programs could lead to more comprehensive and targeted interventions.

### 3.5 Hypothesis Four

**H<sub>04</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between correctional officers' stigmatizing attitude and inmate mental health in Agodi Correctional Home Ibadan.

Table 5. Pearson correlation showing significant difference between correctional officers' stigmatizing attitude and inmates mental health in Agodi Correctional Home, Ibadan

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	R	P	Remark
Correctional officers' stigmatizing attitude.	25.42	2.21	200	.731	.000	Sig.
Inmates mental health.	35.64	2.44				

Table five presented above indicated that there was a significant difference between correctional officers stigmatizing attitude and inmate mental health in correctional home ( $r = .713$ ,  $n = 200$ ,  $p < .05$ ). A correlation imply that higher levels of stigmatizing attitudes among correctional officers are associated with poorer mental health outcomes among inmates. This could suggest that correctional officers' attitudes and behaviours might influence inmates' mental well-being.

#### 4. Discussion of Findings

The paper documented that there was a significant relationship between counselling services and the psychiatric condition of inmates in Agodi Correctional Home. This is in tandem with the research carried out by Carole, (2015) which indicated that mental health counselling is a means to assist inmates who suffers from psychiatric problems to adjust to life more effectively. So also, mental health counsellors are to pay adequate attention with health and with the several variety of circumstances, socially and individually, that can affect individual functioning in life. It is designed to add up to the vitality and vigour and to the soundness in body, mind, spirit, and social linkage that ensure well-being, and so is considered, by our society. The findings also support the study by Kirti (2017) which revealed that counseling is helpful for inmates. They become more relax and self-conscious about their strength and weakness. They learn how to manage their emotions. The finding further corroborated the finding of Radhika, (2017) which posited that the inmates' health conditions, living conditions and personality features are the factors that need to be sustained when making provisions of counseling.

The finding also revealed that that there was a significant relationship between rehabilitation programmes and inmate psychiatric conditions in Correctional home. This is supported by the study conducted by Asokhia and Osumah, (2016), which revealed, among others that adult and extral moral educational programme and educational development project were available in the correctional home, which enhance their functioning. The result of the finding also corroborated the study of Akpunne (2015), positing a significant positive correlation between environmental conditions and readiness to engage in rehabilitation programmes among inmates of Nigerian correctional homes. The finding is also in line with the study of Omoni (2016) which documented that there is no significant difference in the perception between



warder and teachers of higher institutions on the provision of enough inmates' vocational and formal education programmes.

The finding indicated that there was a significant relationship between welfare service and inmate psychiatric condition in Agodi Correctional Home. This is in tandem with the study by Okirigwe, 2020) which posited that prison inmates are subject to psychological, sociological, legal and other issues like any human being. The result of the finding also supported the finding of (Ayuk et al, 2016) which revealed that poor salary, zero incentive and lack of reformatory facilities militate against welfare reforms in prison and its working system.

The finding documented that there was a significant relationship between correctional officers attitude and inmate psychiatric condition in Agodi Correctional Home. This is supported by the study conducted by (Serafini, 2018) which showed that mental health has remained a significant issue within the correctional home cohort group; Correctional officials were fairly knowledgeable about mental health; warders perceived themselves as having to play a small role in the rehabilitation of inmates with psychiatric conditions; regular daily activities and routing drug management were two challenges confronted by correctional officers in their discussion with inmates; warders' progressive readiness to serve psychologically ill inmates; and correction officers documented a need for more assistance and improved medical care within the correctional home. The result also corroborates the findings of (Lavoie et al, 2016) which indicated in his study of warders' behaviour that over half of the sampled warders believed that inmates with psychiatric conditions were not responsible for their current condition. The findings also support the view of (Powers-Mergo, 2015) which posited that warders perceived inmates with psychiatric condition as child-like and requiring more patience than mainline offenders.

## **5. Conclusion and Implications to Social Work Practice**

This study highlights the negative attitudes and biases held by correctional officers towards inmates with mental illness can have profound consequences on the rehabilitation and successful reintegration of individuals into society. These attitudes, including stigmatization, discrimination, and inadequate provision of mental health care, create significant barriers to the well-being and progress of inmates. Social work practitioners are crucial in addressing these challenges and fostering a more supportive and inclusive environment within correctional settings.

In this environment, the implications for social work practice are numerous. To begin, there is a need for more mental health awareness and education among correctional officials. Social workers may partner with correctional facilities to provide training programs that encourage mental illness knowledge, empathy, and stigma reduction. The possibility of stigmatization and prejudice can be minimized by cultivating a more knowledgeable and caring attitude among correctional staff, thus improving the possibilities for rehabilitation.

Second, social workers should advocate for and help build comprehensive mental health care services within correctional facilities. Adequate mental health treatment is critical for meeting

the unique demands of convicts with mental illnesses. Access to mental health practitioners, counselling services, and proper psychiatric therapies are all part of this. Social workers can help shape policies and procedures prioritising mental health in the correctional system.

In addition, social workers can argue for the development of alternative sentencing and diversion programs for those suffering from mental illnesses. Working with the legal and justice systems to develop policies that promote rehabilitation over punitive measures is part of this. Individuals with mental illnesses can be diverted away from typical correctional settings and into mental health treatment programs, reducing the chance of negative effects associated with imprisonment.

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