

Prison Counseling as Panacea for National Reintegration of Incarcerated Youths

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Abstract: The call for national reintegration of Nigerian youths is a responsibility shared by all, including the guidance counselors. Globally, the best way to reintegrate imprisoned youths into the society has been a major issue facing national governments, correctional officers and the society at large. The studies reviewed in the present study show that counseling has been an effective approach in the rehabilitation of incarcerated clients through its programs and services in different parts of the world. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to present prison counseling as a panacea for national reintegration of incarcerated youths into the Nigerian society. Based on the outcome of the review, it was recommended among others that the government should reinforce the place of guidance counselors through employment in correctional institutions, funding of counseling interventions for incarcerated persons and most importantly by licensure of the counseling profession in Nigeria.

Key words: Counselors, national reintegration, Nigerian youths, prison counseling, prisoners

INTRODUCTION

Historically, it has been an accepted right of societies to imprison criminals. The notion of imprisonment as a means of punishing criminals was not alien to many pre-literate communities, especially in West Africa. In Nigeria, for instance, various tribal communities had their own legitimate means of dealing with offending members of their societies. The Ugboni House among the Yorubas and the Wedos among the Edos, served as prisons in pre-colonial Nigeria. Among the Tivs, Igbos and Fulanis, there were existence of functional means of imprisonment. In recent times, the approach most societies use to deal with those who commit serious crimes is also to confine them to prisons, some staying there for the rest of their lives, others for some time while a few may be sentenced to death. In Nigeria, the present day prisons system is well structured when compared to those during the pre-colonial era. The beginning of organized prison system in Nigeria dates back to the colonial era when the British Government began to establish some prisons. The Minna Old Prison was established in 1834 followed by Broad Street Prison built in 1872, Calabar Prison in 1890, Sapele Prison in 1900, Ilorin Prison in 1914 and Enugu Prison in 1915, among others. Among the most recent prisons are Minna new and Okene Prisons that were both built in 2001 (Orakwe, 2002; Obioha, 2011).

The Nigerian Prisons system was set up in line with three forms of penal legislation, namely, the Penal Code and the accompanying Criminal Procedure Code Cap 81 Laws of the Federation 1990 (CPC), the Criminal Code and the accompanying Criminal Procedure Act Cap 80 Laws of the Federation 1990 (CPA) and the Sharia penal legislation in 12 Northern states. By its founding philosophy, the Nigerian prison service is an institution designed to administer penal action to adult offenders. Its import lies in the bid to lessen crime in the society. On the basis of imprisonment policy, the prison service was built to manage criminals in prison yards (Obioha, 2011). This constitutional task empowers the Nigerian prison operatives to: keep convicted inmates in safe custody; keep awaiting trial inmates in custody until law courts ask for their production; punish offenders as instructed by the law courts; reform the convicted inmates; and rehabilitate and re-integrate prisoners who have completed the sentences in the prison (Adetula *et al.*, 2010). The general purpose of setting up the prison institution in different parts of the world (including Nigeria) is to provide a rehabilitation and correctional facility for individuals who have violated the rules and regulations of their society. The Nigerian government has kept this major goal in mind by endeavoring to provide some facilities for rehabilitating prisoners in the country. A report by the National Human Rights Commission

Nigeria revealed that facilities such as educational, vocational and recreational facilities are found in most Nigerian prisons. Thus, it is essential that prisoners be helped to acknowledge the need to dedicate themselves to benefit from these facilities. In this respect, the counselor becomes paramount in the criminal justice system since they are professionally trained to offer this kind of help amongst others that could help restore incarcerated clients to a life in which they would contribute to themselves and to their society. In addition, counselors are needed in prisons given that the behavior of inmates undergoes a rapid negative transformation as a result of the psychological breakdown during incarceration. According to Eseré (2007), prisoners need to seek counseling at all times to enable them face the scary challenges of incarceration; and counselors in Nigeria need to expand their services to non-school settings like the prisons. This recommendation is strengthened by research outcome that most of the Nigerian prisoners come out of the prison dejected, stigmatized, traumatized and hopeless (Orakwe, 2002). In addition, Agali (2004) had an interview with 48 prisoners comprising of both male and female on the 10th day of their imprisonment and observed elevated level of psychological symptoms which were found to be related with worries and mental stress. In fact, imprisonment most often results to isolation, depression and anxiety. This unsatisfactory state of affairs associated with prisoners in Nigeria also inform the need for counselors-in-training to become equipped with relevant knowledge, skills and abilities for counseling in prison setting. In addition, prison counselors can help inmates to cope with the pains of imprisonment as identified by the Nigeria Prisons Service. Such pains include but are not limited to denial of liberty, social rejection, denial of material possession, denial of heterosexual relation, deprivation of independence and loss of refuge. It is against this background that the study focuses on exploring prison counseling as panacea for national reintegration of prisoners into the Nigerian society.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Conceptual review

The prison: The prison is a place where people caught and prosecuted for violating the criminal laws of the State are remanded for as long as the court of law has declared. It is a world within another world and in the case of Nigerian prison, a setting where the offenders are physically and mentally deprived to the extent that it results to low self-esteem and psychological upheaval (Eseré, 2007). This author also stated that the main function of the prison services is to provide rehabilitative and reformatory services to prisoners to make them

well-adjusted and become responsible citizens upon release. According to the Nigeria Prisons Service, a prison is a place delimited and declared like that by the law of the State and established to insure restraint and guardianship of persons accused of or convicted for violating the criminal laws of the State. Civil prisoners such as debtors, prisoner-of-war and state detainees are also received and kept in the prison custody. The Nigeria Prison Service further stated that the purpose of incarceration generally accepted by all include retribution, protection of society, deterrence, reformation and rehabilitation of the convicted persons.

A prison is a correctional facility in which individuals are confined and denied a variety of freedoms under the authority of the State as a form of punishment. The most common use of prison is as part of a criminal justice system in which people officially charged with or convicted of crimes are confined to jail until they are either brought to trial to determine their guilt or complete the period of incarceration they were sentenced to after being found guilty by the court of law. We would like to also conceive a prison as a correctional institution designed to securely house people who have been convicted or awaiting trial for a crime. These individuals are known as prisoners/inmates/offenders and are kept in custody on a short or long term basis. Individuals who commit heinous crimes are sent to prison for more years than their counterparts who committed less terrible acts. Thus, the more serious the offence, the longer the prison term imposed and some could be sentenced to life imprisonment or even death.

The Nigeria Prisons Service outlined the following as the functions of prisons: taking into lawful custody those certified to be so kept by courts of competent jurisdiction; producing suspects in courts as and when due; identifying the causes of their anti-social behavior; setting in motion, mechanisms for their treatment and training for eventual reintegration into the society as normal and law abiding citizens on discharge; and administering prison farms and industries for this purpose and in the process generate revenue for government.

The unique characteristics of prisons have important implications for counseling clients in this setting. Prisons are meant for those who have committed serious or repeated crimes. Prisons vary in size and are separated by function and inmate classification. According to the Nigeria Prisons Service, there are many prisons created by the law of the Federation and are classified. Based on types of prisoners received, there are about five classes of Prisons in Nigeria, namely.

Convict prisons: A convict prison receives all classes of prisoners, that is, long and short term, condemned criminals, female prisoners and lunatics up to the stated accommodation that has been allotted by law. Examples of convict prisons are Enugu, Jos and Port-Harcourt Prisons.

General prisons: These are of administrative creation and not statutory. They can hold prisoners on short sentences where accommodation, law or departmental directives allow. Such prisons are under the command of either Superintendent or Assistant Superintendent. Examples are Uyo and Ikpot-Ekpen Prisons.

Divisional or provincial prisons: These types of prisons hold only persons sentenced under two years. The reason why these prisons cannot hold other kind of offenders such as those on long term or condemned is that no proper security measure exist in them and due to inadequacy of Staff (the Prison being a small one) and mainly because this is laid down by law. Onitsha and Ogoja Prisons are designated provincial prisons while Afikpo and Agbo Prisons are designated divisional prisons.

Lock-up prisons: These are usually located at places having a Court of Prisoners serving sentence of up to three months but never more.

Prison camps: This type of prison combines reformatory policy with the best use of prison industry and labor. Prison camps are and should intend primarily for first offenders. These prisoners are sent to the camps to serve their sentences under conditions different from their conditions of lives before conviction. Examples of such prisons are Ogba Prisons camp at Benin Prisons and Mando Prison camp at Kaduna Prison.

According to the Nigeria Prisons Service, due to the policy statement by the Federal Government of Nigeria on the reorganization of the Prisons and the integration of Federal, Local Government and Native Administration Prisons, the classification of prisons has become extended. That is, Nigerian Prisons are now grouped on functional basis too, namely.

Remand and reception centers: This is meant to serve the courts and cater for remands, debtors, vagrants and prisoners serving under 3 months.

Training prisons: This is meant for first offenders.

Industrial prisons: This is meant to concentrate on production and to house medium and long-term prisoners.

However, from a global perspective, other various types of prisons, according to the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (NCASA, 2008) include: Intake facilities (processing centers for inmates receiving orientation, medical examinations and psychological assessment); Community facilities (halfway houses, work farms, prerelease centers, transitional living facilities, low security programs for nonviolent inmates); Minimum security prisons (dormitory style housing for inmates classified as the lowest risk levels serving relatively short sentences for nonviolent crimes); Medium security prisons (higher security risks such as those with a history of violence); Maximum security prisons (most restrictive prisons for violent inmates and those posing the highest security risks); Multiuse prisons (inmates of different security classifications generally used in States with smaller prison populations); and Specialty prisons (for inmates with special needs, such as people with mental illness, physical disabilities or HIV/AIDS).

Prisoners differ from other clients' population because most are involuntary clients offenders who are convicted of one or more crimes and are serving mandatory sentences. Some of them are uncommunicative, hostile or angry and they may be physically aggressive and do not share one voice. Shearer and Ogun (2002) characterized this type of attitude as clients' resistance which often includes various beliefs such as the sense of isolation and detachment, counselor distrust, compliance, low self-disclosure, cynicism and denial. In addition, they may have dysfunctions in interpersonal relations, substance abuse, mental or physical health problems, employment issues and other areas of concern. In addition, it is important to recognize that offenders in prisons are not alike. They are far more diverse than the prisons staff in terms of their ethnic, religious, geographical and work background (McCullough, 2005). Sun said that although, offenders are placed in correctional programs or institutions against their will and they are required to participate in various types of treatment activities, they often have motivations for counseling. They are motivated to understand their experiences and frustrations, just like other human beings.

Prison counseling: Counseling involves the implementation of practices that help individuals, groups and organizations function optimally by addressing and changing personal and interpersonal dysfunctions that occur in many areas emotional adjustments, relationship problems, career planning, vocational and educational issues and health problems. Individuals need counseling to improve their well-being, alleviate distress and maladjustment and resolve conflicts (Todd

and Bohart, 2003). The orientation of individuals is shared by all helping professionals, including prison counselors.

Prison counseling is also referred to as correctional counseling or offender counseling or correctional rehabilitation (Voorhis *et al.*, 2014). Prison counseling often focus on helping inmates to achieve their personal, educational career and independent living goals through a counseling process (Tenibiaje, 2006). Prison counseling involves the restoration to useful life of a person sentenced to a prison term and theory behind this form of rehabilitation is that an inmate is not permanently criminal and that it is possible to restore them to a life in which they contribute to themselves and to society around them. Operationally, prison counseling refers to a professional relationship that empowers offenders/inmates to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals. According to Sun the goals of prison counseling are; to reduce recidivism that offenders experience and help offenders understand and overcome their internal and external conflicts through developing more accurate social cognitions about themselves and others and the patterns governing their interaction. Despite these goals, Dewey observed that the problem with prison counseling is that prisoners usually do not want to change. They are in prison against their will and their main concern is getting out. If they seek counseling at all, they may look upon it as a way of playing the model prisoner role and getting an early release or as a way of getting favours from prison officials. Therefore, counselors-in-training at the prisons must be astute while dealing with inmates.

The terms “prison counselor”, “correctional counselor” and “offender counselor” are often used interchangeably to refer to counselors working with inmates or incarcerated clients in the criminal justice system. A prison counselor is a psychologically trained professional serving incarcerated clients/offenders and are thus involved in the criminal justice system. Sun stated that the prison counselor should see inmates not only as criminals or clients who need to be corrected or treated but also as individuals who use their cognitions to understand and explain their crimes, mental disorders and/or need areas. The inmates’ dysfunction shapes the limited or distorted social cognition that they use to make sense of their experience. Thus, any counseling efforts that fail to help them understand their experiences cannot have lasting benefits on their functioning. Operationally, a prison counselor is a correctional treatment specialist that uses his knowledge, skills and abilities in helping to rehabilitate offenders, that is, the prison inmates.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Deducing from Tenibiaje (2006), there are several roles that should be performed by counselors serving incarcerated clients. Correctional counselors give assistance to inmates in securing a job through specific training received and find job through direct contact or connection by the rehabilitation counselors with employers. Correctional counselors should provide counseling, psychotherapy training, career counseling, relationship issues, creative training, planning and practice employer attitude, job development skills and counseling in financial management to the prison inmates. They should assist the prison inmates, so as to achieve optimal adjustment to living and working within their chosen environment. They should help offenders become reintegrated into the community upon release the expiration of their prison sentence. Reintegration of prison inmates into the society should be a collaborated effort of counselors, Non-Governmental Organization and Government.

In addition, Sun stated the following as the general responsibilities of prison counselors to include: assessing the offenders’ risk and needs in such areas as reoffending, anger management, poor impulse control, interpersonal conflicts, prison adjustments, substance abuse, mental health, education and employment; performing counseling services, case management (matching the offender’s needs with available services and treatments and coordinating the services) and other interventions to address prisoner’s criminogenic needs (factors associated with recidivism) and dysfunctions in those areas; reviewing, preparing and updating records and reports (either on paper or in a computer file) concerning the clients’ issues in crime involvement, institutional infractions, institutional program participation, personal relationships and other areas; initiating recommendations dealing with issues such as offender transfers and custody level reduction/increase based on their new custody scores; serving as a witness at disciplinary hearings for offenders on the counselor’s case-load; participating in all staff meetings to discuss, develop and implement rehabilitation plans for an offender as required by rules, policies and procedures of the prisons system and participating in emergency assignments in which counselors must act as security personnel, perhaps assisting security staff in times of inmate disturbance or conducting a search of the offender’s person and cell for contraband.

According to the Michigan Civil Service Commission, the prison counselor carries out the activities of a prison counseling treatment and rehabilitation program. They

outline the following job duties that a prison counselor performs: evaluates prisoners' behavior to determine when progress has been made through treatment programs; gives general vocational, academic, social and personal counseling to individuals; processes security classification sheets to determine inmates' custody level; prepares reports and progress information for submission to the Parole Board; participates in misconduct hearings; conducts property hearings to determine what kinds of personal belongings the prisoner will be entitled to have; provides assistance in structuring the total institutional program for the individual prisoner; explains the institution and its program to prisoners; maintains records, prepares reports and composes correspondence related to the work; develops case histories for use by psychiatrists and administrators for evaluation and treatment; interviews prisoners, their families and other interested individuals or agencies to obtain personal history data; meets with prisoners and prisoner groups to resolve problems and to explain rules and regulations; confers with administrative and medical personnel in formulating plans for work assignments, training and other aids in institution adjustment and parole preparation; participates in the development and implementation of substance abuse policies and programs within the facility; identifies prisoners with drug abuse problems; and recommends either discipline or added privileges for prisoners to encourage acceptable behavior.

The prerequisite knowledge, skills and abilities required of a prison counselor, as recounted by the Michigan Civil Service Commission includes: knowledge of the operations of a correctional facility; knowledge of psychological and social problems in a correctional setting; knowledge of individual and group counseling techniques; knowledge of counseling and guidance tools and techniques; knowledge of methods of alleviating social, psychological and environmental problems which are unique to the correctional setting; knowledge of correctional facility custody rules, regulations and procedures; knowledge of correctional treatment and rehabilitation programs; knowledge of the goals and objectives of correctional treatment services; knowledge of the underlying theories and techniques of social work as it relates to prisoners; knowledge of the trends in the treatment of prisoners; Knowledge of security procedures; computer literacy skills and the ability to learn, master and apply new technologies in correctional settings; skills in written, verbal and nonverbal communication and ability to use them in communicating effectively with others, possess multicultural competence; ability to apply current methods in the development of treatment plans for prisoners; ability to obtain and

evaluate pertinent information from interviews with prisoners or prisoners' families; ability to deal with persons having anti-social attitudes, to win their confidence and influence their actions; ability to maintain favorable public relations; ability to establish and maintain an effective working relationship with individuals and groups; and ability to maintain records, prepare reports and compose correspondence related to the research.

According to Sun, a career in prison counseling provides individuals with a great opportunity to use their knowledge, skills and values to positively affect individuals as well as their communities and society. Sun further elaborated on the following opportunities: Counselors can help correctional clients to reach their optimal growth, development and well-being and to live a crime-free live. They work with individuals in need who are themselves the victims of crime, sexual abuse, family violence, discrimination and other social problems. Counselors are often required to work both in and outside correctional system, interacting and cooperating with family members, social service agencies, groups, community, victims and other staff in the justice system to enhance safety and well-being of the community and general public. Counselors are given many opportunities to develop and apply counseling theories and practice. Thus, prison counselors influence the functioning of society and the smooth operation of the criminal justice system. Through the process of assessment, guidance and effective intervention and treatment of offenders, correctional counselors helps inmates to function well in prison or community setting and to balance their mental state and interpersonal relations. Any individual improvement in social-cognitive capacity, thinking, motivation, emotions and behavior, regardless of how significant it is will benefit family, community and society.

CONCLUSION

The study focused on the description of prison counseling as panacea for national reintegration of inmates in Nigerian prisons. The paper discussed the concept of prison, its functions; characteristics of prisons and of prisoners; concept of prison counseling; roles of prison counselors; and skills, abilities and knowledge required by prison counselors. Although, prison counseling has the same mission as other counseling professions, its clients, settings and responsibilities of the counselor are unique. Thus prison counseling has unique characteristics which distinguish it from other counseling professions. Prison counseling is also known as correctional counseling or correctional rehabilitation. It is obvious that prison counseling can help correctional clients/prisoners to achieve their personal, career,

educational and independent living goals. In Nigeria, prison counseling is gradually evolving and from this review it is clear that it can be beneficial in the reintegration of incarcerated youths in the country if proper attention is paid to it by the Government, Non-governmental organizations, prison staff, guidance counselors and researchers. Since, prison counseling holds a viable promise in the bid to reintegrate incarcerated youth into the Nigerian society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made:

- Government should reinforce the place of guidance counselors in non-school settings like the prisons through employment of counselors in correctional institutions, funding of counseling interventions for incarcerated persons and most importantly by licensure of the counseling profession
- Non-governmental organizations should also acknowledge the role of counseling in national reintegration of prisoners into the society by their support of guidance and counseling services and programs in both school and non-school settings
- Guidance counselors should increase their participation in non-school interventions in such areas like rehabilitation of incarcerated youth
- The Nigerian counselor education curriculum for almost all the Universities in country need to be modified to include the training of counselors with specialty in such areas as prisons counseling to meet this ultimate task of national integration of incarcerated youth
- Prison officials should cooperate with guidance counselors that come with rehabilitation programs and research for reintegrating offenders into the society and assist them for effective aftercare services

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