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Women in Prison and Their Information Needs: South – South Prison Libraries Perspective

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Abstract

The study aims at identifying the information needs of women in South-South Prison, Nigeria. The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The census sampling technique was adopted for this study. Four objectives were set for the study and the interview was used to elicit information from respondents. Findings showed that Akwa-Ibom Prison topped the highest (21%) of the women in South-South Prison, followed by Cross River Prison (19%), Delta Prison (18%), Edo Prison/Rivers Prison (17%) and Bayelsa Prison (8%). Findings also reveal that the information needs of prisoner's women covered medical information (98%), education/security information (97%), life after prison/spiritual and moral (86%), financial (84%), family/friends (82%), legal issues (72%) among others. (70%) found the libraries condition in adequate. The study reveal that (73%) counselling topped the highest way of meeting information needs of women in prison. Factors affecting information needs of women in prisoners include, congestion/lack of hygiene / poor funding (96%), lack of medication / health care (91%), lack of security (89%), lack of accommodation after released (78%), lack of time to interact with family/ friends (77%), sexual abuse/excessive prolonged use and pre-trial detention (75%), lack of training/lack of special treatment for women (66%), mental health problem (61%), illegal activities (55%) among others.

The paper concludes that Government should ensure that prison policies and programmes are specifically tailored to the needs of women, including those in the areas of resettlement among

others. Recommendations were put forward to enhance access to information by the prisoner's women.

Introduction

Prisoners are people who are incarcerated in prisons and denied freedom of movement due to crimes they have committed. In most countries around the world, the majority of individuals who make up the prison and jail population have limited education and life skills and do not come from a background where reading is carried out (IFLA, 2005). In the Nigerian context, prison inmates are made up of convicted persons who are sentenced to serve various terms for crimes committed, and often a larger number of Awaiting Trial Persons (ATP), who may spend many years in this condition (Amnesty International 2008). The fact that the prisoners are incarcerated restricts them from free movement and a full social life. Most importantly, they are restricted in getting information from the outside world.

Every individual requires one form of information or the other to satisfy an information need. Women inmates are individuals who have been cut off from their local environment and kept in custody as a result of crimes committed and separated from the larger society. Whether or not inmates are on short or long term jail, rehabilitation and reformation is a necessity in the Nigerian prison sector. Prison libraries provide an important means of self-improvement for inmates. They act as a supplement to educational programs and lead to better work opportunity which in turn creates more stable and productive citizens. Oreh (2006) rightly observed that education in prison is necessary because its provision will make the prisons become places of continuous and informal learning rather than schools of crimes.

Bastick and Townhead (2008) argue that women prisoners are discriminated against as compared to male prisoners in almost every aspect of prison life including decisions as to pre-trial detention, opportunities for education and employment and healthcare Information needs of prisoners are information that are wanted or desired, despite the fact that the information needs of inmates vary. Prisoners have the same information needs as persons in the regular society. The relevance of information need for the prison population has been documented in several literatures Burt (1977), Campbell (2005), and Medina (2000) as quoted by Emasealu (2010) described the information needs of inmates to be information on health related issues, information on how to find solution to situational problems, information on educational

opportunities, information on how to cope in prison and psychological information needs. Incarcerated persons have the same reading interest and information needs like other citizens in the society.

Presently, there is no study on prisoner's women and their information needs in South- South Prison Libraries, Nigeria, thus the need to carry out this study to gather a broad insight on the needs of the women in prison with a view to contributing to the wealth of knowledge, literature and to improving their condition, identify the challenges they face while meeting their needs and proffer possible solutions to them. Finally, findings on prisoner women in prison can be used to guide the formulation of comprehensive prison reform in generally and intervention programs for women and men in South-South Prison.

Objectives of the Study

This study sought to establish ways of enhancing the information needs of the women in prison. To attain this goal, the study stipulated the following objectives:

1. To determine the information needs of the women in prison
2. To examine the condition of the South-South prison libraries.
3. To know the extent to which the South-South prison libraries are meeting the information needs of the prisoners women
4. To establish the challenges confronting women in prison

Research Questions

For the purpose of this research, the following questions have been formulated:

1. What are the information needs of the women in prison?
2. What are the condition of the South-South Prison Libraries?
3. To what extent the South-South prison libraries are meeting the information needs of the prisoner's women?
4. What are the challenges confronting women in prison?

Literature Review

An information need is recognition that one's knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal (LISWiki, 2015). Information needs leads to search and demand for information to meet the required gap. A lot of studies have been conducted on the prisoners and their information needs in the Western world. This was recognized in IFLA (2005) which said that an incarcerated person has not relinquished the right to learn and to access information. Though restrictions

are imposed on the access to certain information usually when such access is known to present a danger to prison security, the fact remains that prisoners have their own information needs. The World Health Organisation (1999) stressed the need for prisoners to have access to health care, including prevention measures equivalent to that available in the community. This denotes the prisoners' health information needs. The condition of most prisons; for instance overcrowding make the prisoners prone to a lot of health hazards. This obviously makes information about health and hygiene, prevention and cure of common diseases like air-borne and water-borne diseases vital to the prisoners and essential for their survival in the prison. Campbell (2006) further maintained that any legal information, that an inmate can apply to his/her situation can mean relief from poor conditions if not from incarceration itself.

Similarly, Womboh (1991) revealed that most of the prisoners (about 76%) were not educated beyond school certificate. Only about 24% of them acquired education higher than that. The inmates' educational level is a major factor to be considered in providing library and information services to them. The prisoners in the different groups from all the prisons alike, admitted having dire need for information that can give them spiritual and emotional stability so as to be in good terms with God and man and become better citizens of the society. Ajogwu (2005) in Nigeria noted, that the prisoners' information needs include religious and spiritual needs amongst others. Just as Dike (2002) and IFLA (2005) noted, the prisoners need spiritual information materials to attain emotional stability and better life style.

A study conducted by Sambo, Usman & Rabiu (2017) showed that the information needs of prisoners covered health conditions/financial (99%), spiritual and moral (88%), life after prison/ information on legal issues (86%), family/friends (68%), literacy education (65%), skill acquisition (63%), right in prison (42%), prison rules (34%), and others information needs (26%). More so, in the same study, majority (85%) of the respondents found libraries condition inadequate. Likewise, IFLA (2005) stated that the prison library collection should include materials in print and other formats to meet the informational, educational, cultural, recreational, and rehabilitative needs of the prison population.

Women in prison require specialised resources and attention with respect to diet, exercise, clothing, medication and medical care (Women in Prison Project Group, 2007). However it is argued that the prison environment is incompatible with the needs and care of women body. It is more difficult to catch up on missed sleep and missed meals due to the inflexibility of the prison regime while alerting staff to a medical problem may be difficult, particularly at night (Women in Prison Project Group, 2007). Additionally, although the responsibility for prison

health care was transferred from the Prison Service to the NHS in April 2006, which in theory means that prisoners should have access to the same range and quality of services as are available to the general population, this has not necessarily been effective and efficiency utilized by prisoners women in Nigeria.

Women are more likely to lose their housing while in custody in comparison to men (Loucks, 2004). Corston (2007) states that at least 30% of women in prison lose their homes during incarceration, although some would say this is a conservative figure which is more likely to be almost 40% (Davies, 2011). This may be explained by the fact that women are more often single parents and have tenancy agreements in their own names while men are more likely to have a partner at home to maintain the tenancy (Loucks, 2004).   A lack of accommodation has significant implications for the lives of women on release. Often during the process of possession of a property, the contents, or more specifically, the occupiers' possessions, are disposed of. This can make the early stages of release particularly difficult and unsettling. Also, many women are unable to regain their children from care without suitable accommodation yet this is made difficult but that fact that they often cannot get access to housing in the first place without being the main carer of their children (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). According to (Penal Reform International, 2007) that women in prison frequently come from deprived backgrounds, and many have experienced physical and sexual abuse, alcohol and drug dependence and inadequate health care before imprisonment. In addition, Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project documented custodial misconduct in many forms including verbal degradation, rape, sexual assault, unwarranted visual supervision, denying goods and privileges, and use or threat of force. "Male correctional officers and staff contribute to a custodial environment in state prisons for women which is often highly sexualized and excessively hostile" (Human Rights Watch Women's Rights Project, 1996).

Although women are a minority in national prison populations all over the world, the female prison population is increasing. This increase in women's imprisonment is part of a global trend towards the increasing popularity and use of imprisonment and a corresponding under use of constructive alternative, non-custodial sanctions. Further, the rate of increase in the number of women in prison is much greater than that for men (Bastick, 2005). For instance, in England and Wales, the number of women in prison has increased by more than 200% in the past 10 years versus a 50% increase in the number of men in prison during the same period (Prison Reform Trust, 2006).

In 2009, the National Association of Women Judges disclosed that women, including pregnant women, in federal prisons were receiving unacceptable health care (Saar, 2010). The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has developed policies that exclude routine use of restraints during labour and delivery ("Facts," 2014). However, information is lacking regarding the implementation of this policy (Saar, 2010). Further, only 21 states have passed similar laws ("Facts," 2014).

A special report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (2006) based on a survey of prisoners found that female inmates had much higher rates of mental health problems than male inmates. An estimated 73% of females in State prisons, compared to 55% of male's inmates had a mental problem. In Federal prisons, the rate was 61% of females compared to 44% of males; and in local jails, 75% of females compared to 63% of male inmates. Further, 62% of white females, 20% of black females and 22 % of Hispanic females in State prison were identified as mentally ill. Nearly four in ten white female inmates aged twenty-four or younger were mentally ill.

The prisoners also complained bitterly about the strictness of the prison security policies on reading materials. They said that many information resources are not allowed into the prison because of security and this affects their reading rights. This agreed with what Singer (2000); Shirley (2003) and (2007) lamented, that many prison functionaries whimsically try to stop entry of materials in the library on the basis that it may be harmful to the security of the institution and mental health of the inmates.

In the case of Nigeria, findings further showed that the uncomfortable nature of prisons coupled with prison policies and laws militate against meeting of the prisoners 'women information needs through library and information resources and services. This is in line with what Lehmann (2000) and Singer (2000) stressed, that the library programme does not function independently but operates within the larger prison environment, whose mission and security policies often conflict with the library professional code of ethics and its belief in free access to information.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey using questionnaire and interview to collect data. Also, three research assistants who were prison staff in each of the prisons. This is due to the restrictive nature and security constraints tied to the Nigerian Prison Service. A total of three hundred and fifty six respondents comprise of South- South Prisons in Nigeria were selected for the study. The prisons are: Akwa-Ibom State prison, Bayelsa State prison, Edo State prison,

Cross river State prison, River State prison and Delta State prison. As shown in table 1 was the population and sample of the study.

Table1: Population and Sample of the Study

Location	Number of Questionnaires Administered	Number of Questionnaires Returned
Prison Akwa-Ibom State	79	64
Prison Bayelsa State	23	23
Prison Edo State	59	52
Prison Cross River State	71	59
Prison Rivers State	68	53
Prison Delta State	57	55
Total	**356**	**306**

Source*:* South- South Prison Service Records and Statistics as at 2016/2017

The purposive sampling technique was used for this study. This technique also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling is that sampling technique where the units that are investigated as based on the judgement of the researcher (Egbule and Okobia, 2001). Therefore the sample size is 356. The data collected for the study were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Simple percentage was used to analyse the respondents' characteristics and the research questions. A total of 356 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 306 (86%) copies of the questionnaire were retrieved. The response rate of (86%) is considered adequate for the study because the standard and acceptable rate for most studies is 60%.

Research Findings and Discussion

Table 2: Distribution of Women in South-South Prisons, Nigeria

Women in South-South Prisons	Frequency	Percentage
Akwa-Ibom State	64	21%
Bayelsa State	23	8%
Edo State	52	17%
Cross River State	59	19%
Rivers State	53	17%
Delta State	55	18%
Total	306	100%

Table. 2, shows that Akwa-Ibom State Prison topped the highest (21%) of the women in South-South Prison, followed by Cross River State Prison (19%), Delta State Prison (18%), Edo State Prison/Rivers State Prison (17%) and Bayelsa State Prison (8%). This represents the prisoners women involved in the survey.

Table 3: Educational Distribution of Respondents

Qualification of the Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Primary School Certificate	101	33%
Secondary School	113	37%
Technical College	24	8%
Polytechnic	33	11%
College of Education (NCE)	19	6%
University Degree (s)	16	5%
Total	306	100%

Results in **Table 3**, shows that majority 37% of the respondents had secondary school, 33% primary school certificate, 11% polytechnic, 8% technical college, 6% college of education, 5% university degree. This is supported by Womboh (1991) revealed that most of the prisoners (about 76%) were not educated beyond school certificate. Only about 24% of them acquired education higher than that. The inmates' educational level is a major factor to be considered in providing library and information services to them.

Table 4: Information Needs of the Prisoners Women

Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage
Rights in the prison	187	61%
Family/friends	251	82%
Life after prison	263	86%

Medical information	299	98%
Security information	297	97%
Information on legal issues	221	72%
Financial information	257	84%
Education information	297	97%
Skill acquisition	109	36%
Spiritual and moral	263	86%
Others	67	22%

As indicated in **Table 4**, 98% of respondent's medical information, 97% education information/security, 86% life after prison/spiritual and moral, 84% financial information, 82% family/friends, 72% information on legal issues, 61% right in prison, 36% skill acquisition and 22% others information needs. This is agreed with World Health Organisation (1999) stressed the need for prisoners to have access to health care, including prevention measures equivalent to that available in the community.

Table 5: South- South Prison Libraries Condition

Prison libraries condition	Frequency	Percentage
Adequate	61	20%
Inadequate	214	70%
No response	31	10%
Total	306	100%

Table 5, shows that majority 70% of respondents found prison libraries condition inadequate for meeting their needs, 20% found them adequate and 10% no response. This is against prisoners rules. The recognition of the prisoners' right to information is contained in the United Nations (Rule 40) Standard Minimal Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners of 1955 (IFLA 2005). This states that every institution shall have an adequately stocked library for use of all categories of prisoners and the prisoners shall be encouraged to use it.

Table 6: Ways of Meeting Information Needs of Women in Prison

Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Library	42	14%
Family/Friends	205	67%
Counselling	223	73%
Radio/Television broad cast	51	17%
Church/mosque	205	67%
Books/Newspaper/magazine	63	21%
Physician/Nurses	179	58%
Prison staff	97	32%
Others	31	10%

Table 6, revealed that counselling 73% topped the highest way of meeting information needs of women in South- South prison, followed by 67% family/friends and mosque/church, 58% physician/Nurses, 32% prison staff, 21% books/newspaper/magazine 17% radio/television broad cast, 14% libraries and 10% others. Libraries which supposed to be the highest information providers are lack behind. This could be as a result of poor funding of the libraries and prisons as a whole.

Table 7: Problems Confronting Women in Prisons

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
Congestion	293	96%
Sexual abuse	231	75%
Lack of medication and health care	278	91%
Poor funding of the prison	291	95%
Lack of training	203	66%
Illegal activities	167	55%
Lack of hygiene	293	96%
Lack of accommodation after release	238	78%
Lack of time to interaction with family/friends	235	77%
Mental health problem	187	61%
Lack of security	271	89%
Excessive prolonged use and pre-trial detention	231	75%
Lack of special treatment for women	203	66%
Lack of policies to protect pregnant women	115	38%
Lack of babies care	105	34%
Others	73	24%

From **Table 7**, it is clear that the factors affecting the prisoner's women information needs is congestion/lack of hygiene / poor funding of the prison 96%, lack of medication / health care 91%, lack of security 89%, lack of accommodation after released 78%, lack of time to interact with family/ friends 77%, sexual abuse/excessive prolonged use and pre-trial detention 75%, lack of training/lack of special treatment for women 66%, mental health problem 61%, illegal activities 55%, lack of policies to protect pregnant women 38% and 24% others problems.

Conclusion

Certain conclusion can be drawn from the study: Women in prison and their information needs were vary which can be provided for through library and information services. The prison library is in the best position to provide the prisoners information needs. Meanwhile, prison libraries in Nigeria had not meet up with this challenges. This study brought into lime-light the needs of the Federal, State and administrator to look into prison libraries in Nigeria and South-South prison libraries in particular so as to achieving the objectives of modern day imprisonment thus- rehabilitation, re-socializing and re-integrating as well as to preparing the prisoners to becoming better citizen who can readapt into the society after prison.

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government should ensure that prison policies and programmes are specifically tailored to the needs of women, including those in the areas of resettlement.

2. Timely access to all services available for women outside prison should be available for women inside prison. As with all prisoners, confidentiality of medical records should always be guaranteed.

3. Needs of women in prison should be tackled by taking advantage of the time they are in prison to provide education about preventing illness and maintaining good health, especially HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. Further, vocational and job training programmes should be offered.

4. Government should ensure that prison policies and programmes are specifically tailored to the needs of women, including those in the areas of resettlement.

5. The prisoners should be encouraged to use libraries by making libraries conducive and adequately stocked with current materials for all categories of prisoners.

6. Women in prison should always have access to condoms as well as dental dams, given the possibility of sex within prisons. As a basic rule, however, sex involving staff and prisoners should be prohibited under all circumstances.

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