

**A THEORETICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE REFORMATION AND REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES OF THE  
FEDERAL PRISONS IN NIGERIA; IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

From the simple societies to the contemporary period, societies have reacted in various ways towards those who violated the laws, customs, traditions and the general standard of behaviour of their group. The most common societal reaction to law-breaking has always been punishments in its various ramifications. However, the therapeutic nature of these punishment strategies, especially the kind found in correctional institutions in Nigeria, have generated a lot of debate among scholars and the general public as to their effects on the offenders and the society. The high rate of crime and recidivism in Nigeria society, seem likely to be strong attestations to the inadequacy and the ineffectiveness of the existing reformation and rehabilitation programmes of the Nigeria prison service, as a result of which the objective of transforming offenders into functional members of the society has not been achieved. This paper assessed the adequacy and effectiveness of the reformation and rehabilitation programmes of the Nigeria Prison Service viz avis global prison philosophy. Observations and literature review are replete with empirical data attesting to the fact that Nigerian prison is not adequately equipped for reformation and rehabilitation purposes. Findings revealed that Nigerian prisons are poorly equipped and maintained, facilities are out-dated and dilapidated, generally overcrowded with poor sanitary conditions, to mention but a few. It is therefore recommended that among the necessary reforms required within the Nigeria prison service, the services of correctional social workers, which is presently non-existent, must not be overlooked if Nigeria prison service is to be repositioned to key in into the global trend of harnessing available human resources to achieve over-all socio-economic development.

**Key words: Prison, social work, reformation, rehabilitation,**

## **Introduction**

The phenomenon of crime and punishment and the judicial process set in motion to process law offenders have been an area of hot debate among scholars right from the early times. If crime is defined as any act or conduct of an individual or group that violates the criminal law of a state (Igbo, 2007), scholars would ask such questions as “what actions or inactions violate the criminal law, and how are these actions and inactions come to be defined as crime?”. Other scholars go further to pose the questions of whose interests the criminal law represents or protects and what is the character and nature of the criminal justice system which is the judicial machinery that apprehends and prosecute offenders.

Crime has always been a problem to societies past and present, but one big question that kept occurring and which has continued to intrigue social scientists and criminologists in particular is “why do people commit crime?” Earlier scholars tried to explain it from the point of view that individuals can be possessed and directed by evil spirit or demon to engage in criminal behaviour against their will. Igbo (2007) termed this line of thought “Demonological Explanation”. This explanation was discarded on the ground of its unscientific nature. The classical explanation of why people commit crime has it that people engage in criminal behaviour or law breaking deliberately and consciously in pursuit of pleasure. This is against the background that because man is a pleasure-loving animal, he always engages in behaviour that will bring him pleasure as against those that will bring him suffering and pain. The Neo-Classical school while agreeing with the classical school that man as a pleasure-loving animal commits crime deliberately and consciously in order to maximize pleasure, disagrees with them on the ground that there are categories of people who commit crime indelibrately and unconsciously. These categories of people according to them are children, the insane, morons, and imbeciles who can not be said to exercise freewill rationally for the purposes of maximizing pleasure because of their underdeveloped or defective mental state.

There is also physical and biological explanation of why people commit crime. This is based on the biological and physical structure of people. This explanation argues that the structure determines function and that individuals behave differently owing to the fact that they are somehow structurally different (Ugwuoke, 2010). This line of thought was championed by the positive school of criminology led by Cesare Lombroso who identified three criminal types based on his diagnoses of peculiar physical characteristics that were distinct and distinguishable from those of non criminals. He believes in biological determinism which claims that individual abnormalities are indicators of potential criminal

conduct (Ugwuoke, 2010). Other explanations such as psychological and psychiatric perspectives see criminal behaviour as a result of emotional or personality problem as well as mental pathology. According to Vold as cited in Igbo (2007), criminal behaviour is as a result of inner conflict, emotional problem, unconscious feeling of insecurity, inadequacy and inferiority. These people may break the law because of underlying emotional conflicts which, with a frustration-aggression complex, they act out. Therefore they experience feelings of guilt and a desire to be punished in order to remove the guilt feelings and make-up for the offence committed.

Sociological explanation of crime and criminal behaviours lays emphasis on the influence of the social environments in which the individuals find themselves as a determining factor for criminal behaviour. Unlike biological and psychological explanations which try to explain criminal behaviour by reference to some unique characteristics of the individual, sociological theories of crime tend to attribute criminal behaviours to social conditions or life experiences encountered by individuals (Giddens, 2004).

At different times in history, the understanding and explanation of crime and criminal behaviours have always had implications for societal reactions. In traditional societies, people who do wrongs or violate the norms, beliefs and accepted standards of living of a people are generally regarded as evil, cursed, wicked and lazy as the case may be. Association with such people is always limited or avoided and therefore there were established ways of punishing such people. This varies from one cultural setting to another and ranges from payment of fine, flogging, excommunication, hanging, stoning, banishment, sacrificing to idols, and enslavement among many others. To some, violation of the laws of the land is an affront to the gods who are believed to be the custodians of the land. Therefore, it is the gods that punish whoever has the effrontery to violate their commands.

Around 18<sup>th</sup> century in Europe, punishment emerged as being a personal affair between the offender and the offended to become the concern of the society as a corporate body. One of the substitutes for individual actions that emerged was a misunderstood form of vengeance known as “*lex Talionis*” which means “like for like” with the popular saying “an eye for an eye” and “a tooth for a tooth”. This ancient philosophy of punishment characterizes the oldest known codified law known as “the Code of Hammurabi” which was developed around 2000 BC by a Babylonian King after whom it was named (Igbo, 2007). The Manual of Correctional Standard however suggests that it was an injunction of inflicting on another as retributive punishment more injury than one received at ones hands.

Carney (1977) noted that during the Middle Ages in Europe, the king representing the state had the sole right of passing judgment on an offender using different forms of punishments that best suit his whims. For instance, Countes, the tenth century king of England preferred impaling culprits after having them skinned alive for offences such as robberies or murder. William the Conqueror was reported to have crippled offenders instead of executions to provide object lesson to others. For plotting the death of King Charles the 1 of England, Thomas Harrison was sentenced to be drawn upon a hurdle to his place of execution and hanged by the neck. The ancient Egyptians of Africa tore the tongues of those who reveal state secrets. The French boiled culprits and under the reign of Henry the VI, thieves were mutilated and hanged. It was recorded that an average of six per day were dispatched during his reign. All these and many more horrible and barbaric ways were used by the state on behalf of the people to adequately punish offenders or wrong doers and to deter other potential offenders, yet people still commit crime. The big question still remains “why?”

The era of harsh punishment gradually gave way to the emergence of incarceration or imprisonment in the seventeenth century. The word prison was derived from the word “Prendere” meaning to “seize”. The history of prison is a history of captivity, suffering, punishment, and anguish. The Babylonian name for prison is “House of Darkness”. The most notable prison of antiquity was the great quarries of Syracuse which in the time of Cicero was used for safe keeping of criminals from all over Sicily, that island place of organized mafia (Barnes and Teeters, 1959)

The prison seen today as correctional institution has a long history, and as well as has had several reforms based on growing and prevailing philosophy of the time. John Howard (1726-1790), the Sheriff of Bedfordshire, England was one of the giants in prison reforms. He traveled extensively to other countries studying penal conditions. He was particularly impressed by Vilain’s Maison de Force and the Hospice of Micheal erected in Rome in 1704 by Pope Clement the VI. These correctional institutions were credited with being the first ever established for children with its motto as “it is insufficient to restrain the wicked by punishment unless you render him virtuous by corrective discipline”. This was the first hint of rehabilitation and the seed of today’s effort. The prison which was originally seen as a place for punishment has as its guiding philosophy “penal treatment” through various correctional measures which reformation and rehabilitation programmes embody. Apart from safe-keeping of offenders, the modern prison is meant to take a prisoner into a continuous course of study that is meant to equip him with knowledge, skills as well as change his orientation to better adjust within the society when discharged.

This paper therefore seeks to examine the various state programmes and apparatus within the Nigerian Prison instituted to reform and rehabilitate law offenders with the intention of reintegrating them back into the society as law-abiding, self-sustaining and contributing members of the society.

## **CONCEPTUAL CLERIFICATIONS**

### **Prison**

Prison has been defined by scholars in various ways but all seem to give an idea of what a prison is. The Encyclopedia of Social Sciences described a prison as a place where persons whose liberties have been curtailed by law are confined to assure successful administration of justice or the application of penal treatment. Encyclopedia Americana, (1986:619) also sees prison "as a place in which persons are kept in custody or confined pending trial or as a punishment after conviction". Nigerian prison Act (2009) defines prison as "any place or building in Nigeria declared by the minister of Internal Affairs through an order in the Federal Gazette to be a prison and on the same or subsequent order specify the area for which the prison is to be established". According to Orakwe (2011), "a prison is a place delimited and declared as such by the law of the state and created to ensure restraints and custody of individuals accused or convicted of violating the law or criminal code of the state". It has also be seen from a social work perspective as a place where those who are considered by law as social misfits are kept in custody with a view to keeping their behaviour within an acceptable limits while at the some time modify their general life adjustment (Skidmore, Tackerary, & Farley, 1976).

By inference therefore, the modern prison has the sole aim of remanding as well as correcting the anti-social behaviours of those placed in her custody so that the law-abiding society will be free from crime and also to help the prisoners themselves to adjust better in the society after release through the instruments of rehabilitation and reintegration.

### **Reformation**

Reformation is the gradual process of re-orientation and re-socialization of an individual who has deviated from socially and legally approved pattern of behaviour because of certain but certainly curable defects either in himself or in his environment. Reformation also incorporates all round development of character and capacity with particular emphasis on the development of responsibility and self control. According to Ekpe & Mammah (1997), reformation is the attempt to change the offender through treatment or curative measures so that when given the opportunity he will refrain

from committing crime.

### **Rehabilitation:**

Rehabilitation in this context is the whole process of making a prisoner useful to himself and the society by imparting in him basic skills and knowledge that will enable him regain his social functioning upon discharge. Rehabilitation seem to be considered adequate when the whole process of equipping a prisoner with knowledge, skill, technique and finance that will enable him earn a legitimate living within the society have been achieved or exhausted and also, when the behavioral and moral standards of the prisoner have been raised to a level that will enable him withstand the societal pressures of going back to crime (Skidmore, et al, 1976). As a concept, rehabilitation as define by Chambers 20<sup>th</sup> century Dictionary is to reinstate and restore to former privileges, rights, ranks etc, to bring back in good condition, working order, propriety, to make fit after disablement, illness or imprisonment for earning a living or playing a part in the world. It is to achieve this result that Fattah (1982) maintained that rehabilitation unlike punishment requires that the offender be treated humanely and with dignity and respect, be shown love kindness and compassion and not cruelty, contempt and hate. Ekpe and Mammah (1997) also opined that offenders should be rehabilitated with the ultimate aim of helping them become self-sustaining and disciplined citizens. This is based on the consideration that severe punishment is no answer to the problem of crime and deviance and that the offenders of today may also be converted into good doers of tomorrow.

### **APPROACHES TO CORRECTIONS**

Punishment as response to wrong-doing is very old and wide-spread. The justification for its use has deferred from group to group. But the most frequent reason for its use is deterrence. Over the years many approaches have been adopted and used in an attempt to deter and correct offenders with little or no significant effect. These approaches as noted in Encyclopedia of Social Work (8<sup>th</sup> ed vol.A-1: 354-356) are as follows:

**Retribution:** This is the eye-for-an-eye tooth- for-a-tooth approach. This kind of punishment is used on an offender as a punishment he morally deserves for committing such crime. It assumes that criminal act is inherently wrong and therefore must be punished with the same measure which the victim received.

**Restitution:** According to this view, offenders should reimburse their victims. They should return them to a whole state, returning what have been taken and providing the victim repayment for any loss whether it is physical injury or even death.

**General Deterrence:** The core of this view is that sanction for crime committed by any offender affects those who are not punished. It makes those who see others punished for committing crime to be law-abiding.

**Special Deterrence:** This approach focuses on the individual criminal. It expects that the criminal will learn from the punishment and avoid the behaviour that led to the punishment.

**Incapacitation:** This approach is based on the assumption that if society incarcerate those who are likely to commit future crime, that it will affect the crime rate by preventing the high-risk population from being free. The major flaw in this theory is that those who will likely not commit future crime are incarcerated and also the perception that punishment is for future behaviour and not past will be meaningless.

**Treatment:** The theorists of this approach contend that the behaviour of an individual can be changed by involving them in a variety of programmes even if it is against their will. Treatment programmes generally focus on rehabilitation, which includes re-education and re-integration. It was this treatment model that led to the need for indeterminate sentence.

**Capital Punishment:** this simply means punishment by death. It was widely used in many countries up to 1960s especially in the United States, in crimes such as murder, rape, sabotage, aggravated assault or espionage, kidnapping and burglary. This is with the notion that severe sanction of death penalty generally prevents people from committing serious crimes.

In recent years a number of alternative programmes have gained popularity. According to Altshuler, Armstrong, & Mackernzie, (1999) these programmes include such arrangement as work/educational release and community service. These programmes may be used in combination with probation and parole. They noted that the tenet of new penology is that the sooner the inmate could be released, the better, since criminal and delinquent behaviour tends to become more difficult to modify the longer a person remains institutionalized. It was argued that the farther the inmates move through the justice system, the less chances for successful rehabilitation. It is far better to remain in the community under designated restraints than to go to penal institution. He further claims that evidence suggests that an exposure to institutional life inhibits the successful reintegration of both adult and juvenile into law-abiding community.

Probation and parole have been used widely as an alternative to imprisonment especially in developed countries. Probation basically involves the suspension of sentence with a provision for supervision and guidance in the community. Parole on the other hand is a procedure through which an

offender is released from prison after having served part of his sentence to the care of a parole officer. This effort is developed to help the offender make his way back to the community quickly. It is treatment oriented. These are developed partly because most prison still have a basically punitive atmosphere and there is probably some justice to the fact that they serve more as a training ground for criminal careers than as effective rehabilitation centers (Ugwuoke, 2010). It has been argued that treatment outside the prison offers more flexible and less punitively structured atmosphere for innovative social work treatment models. Treatment outside the prison was the logical rallying point for those who believe that attempt to re-order the lives of inmates in traditional prison setting were futile. This group of scholars according to Brieland, Cushin and Atherto (2009) enumerated eight points to further claim that correctional programmes at community level are superior to institutional programmes. They argue as follows:

- That treatment outside the prison yard tends to avoid the effect of isolation upon the offender.
- That programmes outside the prison allow room for a greater range of correctional alternatives.
- Those prisoners are more amenable to social work intervention than in the prison yard.
- Policies outside the prison may be better able to match the needs of a particular type offender with the competence of a social worker.
- Re-integration goals and processes are expressed more readily in community-based programmes.
- Treatment outside the prison is cheaper.
- Familial and employment ties are kept in tact where treatment occurs in the community.
- In the treatment programmes outside the prison, the offender is insulated from some of the negative effects of the prison subculture.

These approaches as mentioned and discussed above have been at one time or the other adopted and put to use and were either discarded or amended. All, at their time of use seemed to have been a well thought-out and articulated response to crime and various societal ills based on the prevailing social conditions and mindset. They at their times seem to have been effective as adequate punishments, or as effective deterrence to potential offenders. Some approaches like restitution, retribution, and death penalty are now practiced in their barest minimum because they have been found to be outdated and barbaric and most often a means to do away with ones enemies. Death penalty most especially has failed to achieve the basic goal of deterrence as noted in the study conducted by Bowler and Pierce (1980), that instead of deterring potential offenders, it excites them.



Some approaches were disused because they just punish without equipping the offenders with the means to overcoming the inherent urge to commit crime.

## **REFORMATION AND REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES IN THE NIGERIAN PRISON**

The prison as introduced in Nigeria by the Colonial Masters was meant to detain and hold individuals in their custody to be punished for breaking the law. Modern prison as obtain in Nigeria today is built to detain and to heal as its basic and primary objectives. Imprisonment according to Ekpe and Mamah (1997) is the commonest form of punishment given to an offender. It also goes further to heal by attempting to direct offender's behaviours into law-abiding channels which will enable him resume socially acceptable living and refrain from illegal behaviours.

The objectives of a prison are very apt and clear. Apart from imprisonment or committal of an offender to some penal institution, the treatment process that follows is a core social work concern. This is because the total attempt to reorient and re-socialize the deviant potentials of one's personality and other programmes which create a feeling of repentance and new will to correct one's self are embedded in social work profession.

There exist a number of reformation and rehabilitation programmes that Nigerian prison employs to reform its wards, this according to section 58 of the UN Standard Minimum Rule, which argues that imprisonment can perform its purpose of protecting society against crime and thus be justified only if the period of imprisonment is used to ensure as far as possible, that upon return to the society an offender is not only willing but also ready to lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life. To this end therefore, the prison should utilize all remedial, educational, moral, spiritual and other forces and forms of assistance which are appropriate and available, and should seek to apply them accordingly to the individual treatment needs of the prisoners (UN Standard Minimum Rules-section 58 and 59). The most important of these programmes are vocational and academic education, social welfare services and religious programmes, recreational activities and the re-establishment or maintenance of healthy communication between the prisoner and his family and friends.

### **Communication**

Communicating with the outside world is considered to be very essential for a prisoner. It is part of the social welfare programme instituted to help prisoners write and receive letters to and from friends and family members including visits. Such correspondence is however scrutinized by the prison authorities. This is in line with section 37 of UN Standard Minimum Rule which allows the

prisoners under necessary supervision to communicate with their family and reputable friends at regular intervals, both by correspondence and by receiving visits. By supervision, the authorities demand to know what is written in the letters they write and receive. Sometimes, some letters are withheld or part of it blotted out with ink pen for security reasons. According to a welfare officer in Enugu prison, “the prison needs to know what is written in their letters, where we find it to give information about the prison, the prison authorities reserve the right to protect prison security by seizing such letters or ink over those sections that are unacceptable”.

However, the importance of receiving letters and visitors by prisoners can not be over emphasized. For the prisoners, the visitors who come to see them are often like ‘river of life’ which nourishes them. For the Awaiting Trial Prisoners (ATP), it is often the only hope of ever having their case heard and decided in court or coming out of the prison alive. The visitors bring them food, recommended drugs from the doctor, soap, clothes and other necessities they need for their survival in the prison. Beyond merely preparing the ground for their successful reintegration into the society upon release, allowing a prisoner the right to receive letters and visitors is of a vital importance to him and his survival.

### **Recreation**

A period of imprisonment is usually an arid phase in the life of the offender, marked by the decline of skills and talents and an all embracing, relentless and unrelieved boredom. A central challenge in every prison system is how to resist and put at bay this physical, psychological and spiritual degeneration of the prisoner. The modern prison meets these challenges by a combined programme of recreation and education, (Osaze, 1996).

Given the extreme crowding in Nigerian prisons, cell releases, that is to say, periods in which prisoners are let out of their cells are necessary if only for maintenance of the prisoner’s physical and mental health. For they provide the only opportunities for outdoor games and communal cultural activities. According a welfare officer in Enugu prison, the prisoners are let out of their cells twice everyday, from 10 am to 12 noon and from 4pm to 6pm. It is only when there is a serious emergency that we have to lock them up for the whole day, for instance where there is a suspected coup plan or prison break. The Awaiting Trial Prisoners (ATPS) are opened only once a day for about thirty minutes or at most one hour. In some prisons, they are not even let out at all. During the period they are released from their cells, the ATPs will hurriedly ravage for food, water to wash themselves, soap to wash their clothes and sometimes even try to shave their hairs, within a space of thirty minutes to an

hour. On the contrary, the prisoners (convicts) use the opportunity to air themselves and engage in games such as football, table tennis, play ludo, cards or draft.

Unfortunately, the Nigerian prison recognizes in theory the need to allow the prisoners time for recreation. Things are totally different in practice however. According to the reports of the Civil Liberties Organization, the means or facilities to exercise body and mind for mental and physical health is completely out of the question as only a handful of prisons have games and sport facilities. Most have neither football pitches nor basketball courts, neither race tracks nor gyming facilities. The only games they have according to the report are either ludo or some card games which the prisoners manage to get past the wardens. As a result of the deficiency in this vital rehabilitation programme, a warden in Aba prison complained that because the prisoners have little or nothing to occupy themselves with at these periods, they are not always easy to manage, they constituted a potential threat to prison security. They are always, moving around and it is not possible to see all of them at the same time. They can easily plan something and can easily begin to riot. But if they are playing football matches or other group games, their minds are occupied and you can easily keep your eyes on them and on few ones who are not doing anything. This is why in most prisons, they are not released because of lack of recreation facilities to keep them busy and for fear that they can plan and attack the wardens and try to escape (Osaze, 1996)

### **Education and Vocational Training**

If games and sport facilities are inadequate, educational materials are in worse states. Out of the one hundred and twenty nine prisons and two hundred and thirty two prison lock-ups in the country, only sixty seven prisons have something that look like libraries. (Nigeria Prison Service Annual Report 2006). The report had it that, most of these libraries are really no more than reading rooms with a few volumes, mainly of Bible and the Koran on empty and dusty shelves.

Essentially, Nigerian prison service runs educational and vocational training programmes with the purpose of equipping the prisoners with skills with which to make honest living after their terms of imprisonment. In addition to preparing them for such preparatory examinations as those for the general certificate of education, the programme is suppose to train prisoners in various trades, tailoring, wood-working, weaving, soap-making, art, house painting, electrical works, farm work etc. A former minister of internal affairs explained the logic behind this programme when he said that.

Educational/vocational training is an essential instrument for social and attitudinal change in the prisoners while it provides skills for inmates to be more useful to themselves on discharge; it also provides them the opportunity to develop good work ethics thereby discovering their self respect and dignity. ..encouraged with the relative success of vocational training in prisons, government is considering the possibilities of establishing more prison farms and cottage industries throughout the country (Bagudu, cited in Ike,1997).

There is however a gulf between policy and practice. For most of the prisons in Nigeria have no tools, machines and other training and work facilities. It is either that the machines and tools have broken down, worn-out and obsolete or that they do not exist at all. The convicts probably do get some training somehow, but without these equipments, it is grossly inadequate as is suggested by the high rate of recidivism in Nigerian prisons.

The educational programme designed to help the inmates acquire some basic knowledge as beautiful as it seems ends up in theory. As confirmed by many prisoners who have spent some years in prison, to them, they do not get any thing like lecture to prepare ready for any examination. There are no teachers and the prison authority is not even ready to pay for the teachers. A warder in Enugu prison said that it is not easy to allow prisoners to attend school from the prison, “what if they don’t come back? The security problems here is very serious, the staff explained. We provide them with only a few things but we cannot prepare them for exams. Those who prepare for those exams usually do so with their own money. They buy their books and study themselves. The prison is too poor for that” he concluded.

It can be seen from the foregoing that the prison has laudable rehabilitation programmes for the prisoners but lack of fund and perhaps neglect by the government seem to make the whole programme malfunctioning. Prisoners are then likely to be discharged worse than the way they were before conviction. Then, why won’t there be high rate of crime?

**Housing:** Living conditions in the prisons are appalling. They are damaging to the physical and mental well-being of inmates and in many cases constitute clear threats to health. Conditions such as overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of food and medicines and denial of contact with families and friends fall short of UN standards for the treatment of prisoners. The worst conditions constitute ill-treatment. Amnesty International Press Release (2008) has it that in many Nigerian prisons inmates sleep two to a bed or on the floor in filthy cells. Toilets are blocked and overflowing or simply

nonexistent, and there is no running water. As a result, disease is widespread. According to this report, most prisons have small clinics or sick bays which lack medicines, and in many prisons inmates have to pay for their own medicines. Guards frequently demand that inmates pay bribes for such “privileges” as visiting the hospital, receiving visitors, contacting their families and, in some cases, being allowed outside their cells at all. Prisoners with money may be even allowed mobile phones, whereas those without funds can be left languishing in their cells. One inmate said: "If you don't have money, if you come to prison, you will suffer. They collect money from you. It is not right." Under this condition, no meaningful reformation and rehabilitation can take place.

The Nigerian government has, on numerous occasions, stated its willingness to reform the criminal justice system, but despite many Presidential Commissions and Committees recommending reform of the criminal justice system, these recommendations have not been implemented. Instead, the government has simply set up new committees and commissions to study, review and harmonize the previous recommendations.

The result of the study by Tanimu (2010) described Nigerian prison as a place of torture and punishment rather than reformatory and rehabilitation centers. According to their findings, many of the prisoners are not learning any trade because the equipment and tools are in the state of despair. Many of them die because of wide spread of disease. The study found out that many of these inmates belong to informal groups to protect themselves against their senior prisoners and some wicked prison staff. They summed up their findings by saying that the conditions in Nigerian prisons are terrible with no signs of any improvement in the facilities within the recent years. To them, reformation and rehabilitation should be taken seriously if the objectives for which the prisons were established are to be achieved. However, the extent to which these are to be achieved in Nigeria prisons remain doubtful in view of the nature of treatment of offenders and the resources available to achieve them.

## **SOCIAL WORK AND REHABILITATION OF PRISONERS**

Social Work as defined by a curriculum study sponsored by the council on social work education seeks to enhance the social functioning of individuals singly and in group by activities focused upon their social relationships which constitute interaction between man and his environment (Zastrow, 2008). These activities according to Boehm can be grouped into three functions; restoration of

impaired capacity, provision of resources and prevention of social dysfunction. Social Work is an art, science and a profession that help people to solve personal, group and community problems and to attain satisfying personal, group and community relationship through social work practice (Skidmore, 1997). The focus is on the reduction of problem in human relationship and enriching living through improved human interaction. A social worker is able to perform these functions by acting as Outreach Worker, Broker, Advocate, Evaluator, Teacher, Mobilizer, Behaviour Modifier, Care Giver, Consultant, Community Planner, Data Manager, and an Administrator (Okafor, 2004).

The history of prison as noted before has been that of captivity and torture with no meaningful effort towards correction. Meaningful social work services started with the effort of John Augustus in 1841 in Massachusetts who began to re-claim and save prisoners in Boston Police Courts by asking Judges to put prisoners in his care (Ekpe & Mammah, 1997). This was based on his supreme confidence in the ability of human beings to influence another. He thus became the first Probation Officer ever. As offenders are sentenced to institutions and placed for probation and parole, various professional groups became interested in making this effort as effective as possible. Social Work was one of these.

In Nigeria however, it was the promulgation of decree no 9 of 1972 under Mr. Adapoyi Jomo the then Director of prison that gave rise to prison welfare section of Nigerian Prison. The aim was to realize the actual rehabilitation of offenders in line with United Nations Minimum Standard Rule for treatment of offenders. The changes that came into the prison according to Srivastara (1969) followed the understanding which saw crime and deviation as complicated behavioural manifestations of socially maladjusted individual. Based on this, social workers in correctional institutions take into consideration the custodial responsibility of prison staff and co-operate with them to effect a mutually supportive treatment. It is generally agreed that social workers can and do play important roles in the rehabilitation or treatment of prison clients, although over the years there has been considerable controversy over the role of social work in correctional setting and whether social workers contribute positively to treatment efforts (Social Work Encyclopedia 1987, Vol.1: 357).

Scholars have identified some primary functions of social workers towards prisoners' rehabilitation, they include as stated by Ekpe and Mamah (1997).

- i. Making social investigation through personal interview as concerns offender's health, family, work place, criminal history, and social relations.
- ii. To help the offender understand why they are where they are and help them adjust to prison life.

- iii. The prison social worker helps not only to make the inmates accept the life situation of the prison but equally accept and learn the type of trade that suit their purpose. This helps to re-socialize and re-orient them to live normal life when discharged.
- iv. The social worker helps to encourage group interaction among the inmates under supervision. This helps the inmates to learn and change from the experience of others.
- v. The social worker acts as a link between the inmates and their families, relatives, friends and other relevant persons and organizations.
- vi. The social worker is part of the offender's admission procedures in order to council and help determine the proper placement of the offender within the prison facilities
- vii. The prison social worker participates in the pre-release contact with those that will be useful in the prisoner's life outside the institution.

Skidmore (1997: 239) on the other hand sees social workers as playing an important role in the whole process of rehabilitation of inmates with the following intentions:

- i. To help the inmates understand themselves, their relationship with others and what is expected of them within the society in which they live.
- ii. To rehabilitate offenders in other to help them help themselves so that they can return to and become part of the society and to guide them towards comfortable with themselves and their associates.
- iii. To change the values of clients so that they become congruent in action with the values of the community.
- iv. To modify the environment in order to bring about healthier social climate that will be more responsive client needs.

In conclusion therefore, Skidmore sees rehabilitation process as the administration of penalty in such a way that the offender's current behaviour is kept within accepted limits while his general life adjustment is modified. Zastrow (2008) added that social workers assist correctional inmates with behavioural changes particularly with the ones necessary to cope with the many day-to-day prison problems. He also noted that although it is possible to diagnose clearly the course of an individual's criminal behaviour, the social worker can help inmates identify their maladaptive behaviours and needs. The Encyclopedia of social work (2007) also noted that social workers assist inmates and families in the adjustment involved in the inmate's returning to their families and the impact of this event on the family roles. Champagne and Felizardo (2005) summarizes this by saying that social

workers in the prison setting alleviates the problem of social functioning either through direct manipulation of the environment or by utilizing case work and group work procedures to bring about change in the individual's social functioning particularly in his interpersonal relationship.

From the above discursion therefore, it is quite imperative that social worker's services in a correctional setting is invaluable. Its entry into the correctional institution came at a period when the correctional setting was in distress and in need of an answer or solutions, and how best to handle it inmates. It is therefore the appearance of social work profession within the prison setting that gave it the hope of ever making success in its rehabilitation programmes. The social worker equipped with his professional skills and principles accepts the prisoner, understand and respect him as a person. This encourages the client to gradually develop feeling of trust and confidence towards the worker and share ideas, emotions and problems and through a bond of warmth and support, change is effected.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The Nigeria prison service is yet to key in into this established global trend. Beautiful as reformation and rehabilitation programmes of Nigeria prison are, their implementation fall far bellow expectation. The reasons are not farfetched. One of the major problems is corruption among the key players in prison administration coupled with lack of government genuine interest in prison services. These have led to poor and dilapidated infrastructures and facilities, leading to over-crowding or prison congestion with its antecedent consequences of mixing adult and juvenile offenders, convicted and unconvicted prisoners and even male and female offenders; poor feeding, inadequate medical care, clothing, sanitation and hygiene. The major consequence of these is that rehabilitation will be impossible. This is because, facilities and opportunities for skill acquisition and education will be lacking, adequate recreation will not be ensured for fear of prison brake. All these have seriously undermined the sole function of prison service which apart from keeping safe custody of those legally interned, is to identify the cause of their anti-social behaviour in order to treat and reform them to be a law-abiding, self-supporting functional member of the society.

Inferring from the above inadequacies is the need for a renewed interest in the "business" of the prison by the government instead of leaving it as a charity ground for philanthropists and religious organizations. There should be vigorous and aggressive monitoring to reduce corruption and to ensure judicious utilization of available resources. There should be a review of staff remuneration and training to ensure quality service. The infrastructure and training facilities for prisoners should be



genuinely looked into, to partly address the problem of overcrowding and inadequate rehabilitation. More importantly, Nigeria prisons should think towards strengthening their welfare units with qualified social workers to better harness the invaluable professional services they can offer as stated above and to reposition Nigeria prisons to adopt other quality cost effective rehabilitation strategies such as probation and parole and other community service programmes that are widely used in this modern era.

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