

Inmates perception of the living conditions in a medium security prison in North Central Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: The United Nations in her quest for the humane treatment of all human beings, had created and adopted a number of International legal instruments to protect and guarantee human rights to all persons including those who are incarcerated in the prisons. However, the application of these instruments in practice falls short of prescribed standards in many prisons and reformation centers in Nigeria. This study empirically assessed the prison inmate's perception of living conditions in Makurdi Medium Security Prisons, North-Central Nigeria.

Methods: A cross sectional descriptive study was carried out on 132 inmates, selected by simple random sampling technique. Data analysis was done with Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.0 and presented as tables.

Results: The mean age of the respondents was 25.±6.5 years. The male inmates formed the majority with ratio of 17.6:1. The mean duration of stay in prison custody was 3.2±2.6 years with

culpable homicide being the commonest reason for imprisonment in 31.1% of cases. The majority of inmates were not satisfied with the quality and quantity of food provided for them (90.9% and 94.7% respectively), where they sleep (87.9%), water they drink (60.6%), methods of refuse and sewage disposal (81.1%), recreational facilities (80.3%) and the nature of the health care services provided (80.3%).

Conclusion: The inmates perceive that the standard of living was generally below the minimum international standards. Hence it is recommended that Nigerian prison service should implement relevant policies aimed at improving the living standard of inmates in Nigeria prisons.

Key words: Perception, Living Conditions, Inmates, Prison, Nigeria.

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Introduction

The United Nations in her quest for the humane treatment of all human beings, including those who are imprisoned, created and adopted a number of International legal instruments to protect and guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms. Amongst these instruments is the Standard Minimum Rules (SMR) which articulates the rights of prison inmates.^{1,2} Rules 9-26 and Rule 86 (sub-sections 41-43) of the SMR identified the living conditions in a prison to be among the chief factors determining a prisoner's sense of self-esteem and dignity. The emphasis of the rule is on where the inmate sleeps, what he or she is allowed to wear, what, how and where he or she eats, whether he or she has a bed with sheets and blankets or sleeps on the floor,

whether or not he or she is allowed to wash and with what frequency, whether he or she has ongoing access to a toilet or has to ask (or sometimes plead with) the warder/wardress each time he or she feels like defecating.^{2,3} The Universal Declaration on Human Rights reaffirms these right in its first Article (Article 10) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights mandates which stated that “*All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with humanity and with respect for the inherent dignity of the human person*”⁴

The core mandate of Nigerian Prisons Service as a Correctional Institution is custody, reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of the inmates into the community upon completion of term and to generate revenue for the Government through prison farms and industries.^{5,6} Nigeria Prison Service in her pursuit to effectively carry out the mandates bestowed on them by the government of the Federation, domesticated many of the instruments guiding the management of offenders (especially the SMR) as a guide for reformation. Over the years the application in practice, however, of these instruments falls short of standards in many prison formations leaving the inmates with several consequences.^{5,9}

Despite the low standard of living, the Nigerian prison population has been on the increase over the years.

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This is largely due to effects of civil unrest, of ethno-religious conflicts, Niger-Delta conflicts, electoral violence, pipeline vandalisation, Fulani herdsmen attacks, youth gangsterism and kidnappings and more recently the Boko haram insurgency among others.¹⁰ Most of the detainees are awaiting trials.¹¹⁻¹³ There is however the risk of returning back to prison; since after serving their sentence, they will most likely go back to the perverse society from where they were brought. This study assessed the inmate's perception of the living conditions in Makurdi medium security prison and compared the findings with SMR, which is a prerequisite for the reformation of the ever increasing population of inmates worldwide.

Materials and Methods

Study Setting

This descriptive study was conducted at the Makurdi medium security prison between 10th and 25th June, 2016. The establishment of the Nigerian Prisons dates back to 1861 but the present prison services was created following the decree No 9 of 1972 law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The modern Nigerian Prisons Service is run under the Minister of Interior with a decentralized system of administration which places the administration under Controller General of Prisons (CGP). At the end of 2015, the Nigerian prison service had a staff strength of about 27,000, taking lawful custody of about 47,628 inmates nationwide. Makurdi minimum security prison, located along Makurdi-Otukpo Express-way, Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria is directly under the control of the Controller of Prisons, Benue State Command. The prison was commissioned on 10th February, 2001, for the purpose of retribution, deterrence and reformation of inmates.

The Prison has an administrative block, records section, gate lodge, welfare section, industrial workshop and a medical unit. The medical unit provides comprehensive health care services to inmates and staff. In addition, there were recreational facilities like football pitch within the prison yard.

Study Design

A cross sectional descriptive study was used.

Study Population

As at the time of this study the prison had a total lock up of 837 male and female inmates against the original proposed inmate capacity of 240. The females were 13(1.6%) and the male constituted 98.4%. The inmates were categorized into lifers, long term, short term and awaiting trials. An appraisal of the inmates list obtained from the record section showed that majority of the inmates started their incarceration in Makurdi minimum

security prison. However, some of the inmates were convicted in other prisons across Nigeria where they had served some period from their sentence; and later transferred to Makurdi prison to continue their jail term. Of the total 837 inmates only those who had served for 6 months and above were included in the study. The eligible inmates who did not consent were also excluded.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The minimum sample size for the study was calculated by using the formula $(n=Z^2P(1-p)/d^2)$.¹⁴ Considering the inmates perception of living conditions from previous study (90.0%), an error margin of 5% and a power of 80%, a sample size of 138 was arrived at. Taking into account of the inmate's population of less the 10,000 and a drop-out rate of 10%, the correction for infinite factor was made and the minimum sample size was adjusted to 132. Of the 13 females in custody, 7 consented to the study and were all selected purposively, while 125 males were selected by simple random sampling technique. The list of all the male inmates was obtained from the record units and used as the sampling frame. The actual respondents were selected by computer generated numbers.

Data Collection.

Data was collected using an interviewer administered questionnaire. The information obtained included: socio- demographic, perception about accommodation, feeding, water supply, environmental sanitation, recreational facilities and health care services. A pre-testing of the questionnaire was carried on 14 (10% of the calculated minimum sample size) inmates at Otukpo medium security prison, about one and half hour drive from Makurdi Minimum security prison.

Data Analysis

Data collected was checked for completeness, cleaned and entered into a computer for analysis using the Statistical Programmes for Social Science (SPSS) version 23. Age was presented as means with SD while duration of stay in the prison was presented as median with range as this variable was skewed. Categorical variables were presented as proportions.

Ethical Issues

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the ethical committee of Benue State University Teaching Hospital and the Controller of prison in-charge of Makurdi State Command before the study was conducted. An informed verbal consent was also obtained from each of the participants before carrying out the study, agreeing that inmate's confidentiality must be maintained.

Results

Socio-demographic Characteristics

Table 1 presents socio-demographic profile of the respondents. The respondent's age ranged from 18-50 years, with mean age of 25 ±6.5 years. Majority (94.7%) of them were males. Above two-thirds (68.9%) were singles, about half (50.8%) of the respondents were students and majority (61.4%) of them had secondary education. Eighty one percent of the respondents were Christians 54.5% had stayed between 1 and 3 years in prison.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n= 132)

Variable	Frequency (n=132)	Percentage
Age group (years)		
18-25	61	46.2
26-35	58	43.9
36-45	8	6.1
≥ 46	5	3.8
Male	125	94.7
Marital Status before Imprisonment		
Single	91	68.9
Married	37	28.0
Divorced	4	3.0
Occupation before Imprisonment		
Student	67	50.8
Farming	20	15.2
Trading	19	14.4
Civil Servant	9	6.8
Others	17	12.9
Level of Education before Imprisonment		
Primary	20	15.2
Secondary	81	61.4
Tertiary	31	23.5
Religion		
Christian	107	81.1
Muslim	25	18.9
Duration of Stay in prison (years)		
< 1	44	33.3
1-3	72	54.5
> 3	16	12.1
Offence committed		
Homicide	41	31.1
Theft	39	29.5
Armed robbery	26	19.7
Rape	10	7.6
Drug abuse	2	1.5
Others	9	6.8

Others: Vandalism, unlawful possession of arms, kidnapping, occultism, attempt to free a suspect in lawful custody

The average duration of stay was 3.2 (± 2.6) years. The predominant reason for imprisonment of the respondents was culpable homicide (31.1%), followed by theft (29.5%), conspiracy/Armed robbery (19.7%), rape (7.6%) and psychoactive substance abuse (1.5%). Other offences include vandalism, unlawful possession of arms, kidnapping, and involvement in occultism (3.8%).

Accommodation, Clothing and Toiletries

In terms of accommodation, 87.9% of the respondents attested that there are more than 60 persons per cell and 80.3% of the cells had no window nets. Slightly above half (50.8 %) of the respondents slept on bare floor. Amongst the respondents who had beds, 51 (78.5%) used double bunk. Above two-third (70.5% of the respondents were provided with pairs of uniform and , 29.5% were provided with just one pair. Almost all (93.2%) of the respondents were not provided with soap/detergents (Table 2).

Table 2: Respondents perception of Accommodation, bedding and Clothing of Inmates (n= 132)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Number of persons per cell		
21-40	7	5.3
41-60	9	6.8
> 60	116	87.9
Perception of adequacy of space		
Yes	26	19.7
No	106	80.3
Possession of Mosquitoes nets		
Yes	26	19.7
No	106	80.3
Own a bed		
Yes	65	49.2
No	67	50.8
Bed type (n = 65)		
Double bunks	51	78.5
Single	14	21.5
Own Pairs of Uniform		
Yes	93	70.5
No	39	29.5
Provided soap/detergent		
Yes	9	6.8
No	123	93.2

Environmental Conditions Of the Prison

Seventy four (56.1%) of respondents disposed their refuse via open dumping methods as shown in Table 3. In terms of satisfaction with the methods they often used, more than two-third (81.1%) of them opined that they were not satisfied with their method of refuse disposal. Slightly above two third (66.7%) of respondents agreed

they used water closet as their method of sewage disposal. Almost all (97.7%) of the respondents agreed they had between 1 – 2 toilets per cell with more than 20 persons using a toilet. The predominant source of water during was well. Other sources were borehole (21.2%) for dry season and 25.0% use tap water. Only 51.5% and 32.6% of respondents agreed they always had water to drink and to bath as needed respectively.

Table 3: Respondents Report on Environmental Conditions in Prison (n=132)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Refuse disposal method		
Open dumping	74	56.1
Collecting bins	49	37.1
Incinerator	9	6.8
Satisfaction with Disposal Methods		
Yes	25	18.9
No	107	81.1
Type of Toilet Used		
Open defecation	20	15.2
Water closet	88	66.7
Pit latrine	3	2.3
Number of toilets per cell		
One - two	129	97.7
> two	3	2.3
Number of inmates using a toilet		
1-10	1	0.8
10-20	1	0.8
> 20	130	98.5
Daily toilet cleaning		
Yes	68	51.5
No	64	48.5
Water source during raining season		
Well	50	37.9
Borehole	47	35.6
Pipe borne	35	26.5
Water source during dry season		
Sanitary Well	71	53.8
Pipe borne	33	25.0
Borehole	28	21.2
Always have water to drink as needed		
Yes	68	51.5
No	64	48.5
Always have water to bath as needed		
Yes	43	32.6
No	89	67.4
Satisfaction with water supplied		
Yes	52	39.4
No	80	60.6

Nutrition

Table 4 presents the inmate's report of food supplied in prisons. Almost all (99.2%) the respondents agreed that they were served three times a day, but the foods were usually served at unusual hour, while 0.8% reported being fed just once a day. Regarding the quantity and quality of the foods served, majority of the respondents opined that the meals served were not optimal (90.9% and 94.7% respectively).

Table 4: Perception of Respondents about Nutrition (n=132)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Times food is served per day		
One	1	0.8
Thrice	131	99.2
Food served at usual hour	1	0.8
Adequate Food quantity	12	9.1
Good Food quality	7	5.3

Health Care and Recreational Facilities

Table 5 represents the summary of inmate's perception of health care services and recreational activities present in prison. All the respondents (100%) agreed that the prison has a hospital within the prison yard. Of the total, 90.9% admitted that the hospital has nurses and doctors.

Table 5: Perception of Respondents on Health care (n=132)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Enough Nurses/doctors in prison hospital	120	90.9
Who attended to patients in last visit		
Doctor	66	50.0
Nurse	47	35.6
Auxiliary staff	19	14.4
Purchase of Prescribed drugs was by		
Self/relatives	71	53.8
Prison	40	30.3
NGOs	15	11.4
Faith based organization	6	4.5
Available recreational Facilities	112	84.8
Types of available recreational Facility (n=112)	n=112	
Draft	37	33.0
Football	33	29.5
Ludo game	29	25.9
Others	13	11.6
Frequency of use of recreational Facility (n=59)	n = 59	
Once a week	52	88.1
Twice a week	7	11.9
Satisfaction with recreational Services (n=132)	26	19.7

Other games: Whot game, long jump, rope skipping

Regarding last visit to the health facility for treatment of common ailments, half (50%) of respondents stated they were seen by doctors. Majority of the respondents purchased their drugs out of pocket (53.8%). Above two-thirds (84.8%) of the respondents opined that recreational facilities were available, of these draft constituted the highest (35.9%) followed by football (29.5%) and Ludo (25.9%). Fifty nine respondents do partake in exercise, of which 88.1% do once in a week and 11.9% participate twice in a week. Majority (80.3%) of the respondents were not satisfied with the available recreational facilities.

Educational Facilities

Majority (75.8%) of respondents stated that there were no educational programme in the prison and 24.2% agreed having an educational programme within the prison. The types of programmes available were primary education (40.6%) followed by tertiary education (37.5%) and then secondary education (21.9%). Majority (96.2%) of respondents agreed there was no library facility in the prison, while 3.8% agreed having a library facility out of which majority (80.0%) asserted the library does not have enough books. Majority (96.2%) of respondents were not allowed access to the library.

Table 6: Perception of Respondents on Educational Facilities (n= 132)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Educational programme availability	32	24.2
Types of programme available		
Primary	13	40.6
Secondary	7	21.9
Tertiary	12	37.5
Library facility	5	3.8
Enough books in library (n = 5)	1	20.0
How often do you use the library		
Occasionally	5	3.8
Not at all	127	96.2

Discussions

The sociodemographic profile of the inmates in our study depicts a typical representation of Nigerian prison documented in similar studies where the prison population is mostly inhabited by young, single adults, who are students.¹⁵ Concerning accommodation, clothing and provision of basic needs like toiletries, the findings in our study (Table 2) is at variant to the UN provision of humane treatment for persons deprived of liberty.⁴ This study has revealed an evidence of overcrowding which is similar to reports from studies conducted in other parts of Nigeria. For instance, overcrowding was reported in most cells with an average sleeping area of 9.5 sq feet in a study carried out in Ille-Ife

Osun State Nigeria.¹⁶ Similar findings were also reported in California where prisons designed to carry approximately 85000 inmates housed nearly twice that much (approximately 156,000 inmates).¹⁷ A study carried out by Garcia et al in Spain also identified overcrowding in prisons as a problem affecting many countries.¹⁸

Also in our study, most cells (80.3%) do not have windows and over half of inmates were not provided with mosquito nets and beds. This implies that inmates would be exposed to mosquito bites and could frequently come down with malaria. Apart from direct disease condition which may affect the inmates secondary to overcrowding, the physical comfort of sleeping in a cell and on bed among the study population was denied. Most of the inmates (70.5%) were provided with uniforms, however 93.2% of them were not provided with soap and detergent. The finding is similar with that reported in a study carried out by Oninla O.A. et al¹⁸ where skin infections and infestations were reported to be very high among inmates which could probably be due to poor personal hygiene. This finding is also in keeping with a study done in a Lebanese prison where prisoners were rarely provided with soap and water by the administration.¹⁹

Being able to take care of one's physical necessities in private and in a decent manner is extremely important to everyone but especially to prisoners whose sense of self-esteem and dignity may have already been shaken by other factors related to incarceration. In this study, the environmental sanitation, as captured in (Table 4) is sub-optimal. The commonest method of refuse disposal in this study was open dumping. Other methods like the use of collection bins and incineration was not commonly practiced among our study population. Even though most of the inmates opined not to be happy with the method, they still practiced them probably because they had no better option. Similarly, the toilet-inmate ratio in this study was found to be 1: 80 persons which poses a great health risk for infection transmission among inmates. These findings are probably due to inadequate resource allocation to prison population.¹⁹ In the interest of both prisoners and the entire society, it is important that the criminal justice administration should expedite proceedings of inmate's trails to decongest the prison population. Furthermore, professional associations, non-governmental organizations, concerned individuals and prominent individuals in the society should draw the attention of country's political leaders to these problems to properly implement policies that could lessen the burdened of Nigerian prison services beyond their resources.

In our study access to drinking and bathing water is inadequate. The different sources of water as captured in table 3 showed that sanitary well was the predominant

water source, followed by borehole and the most stable source of water during dry and raining season. The finding in this study is not completely in line with the SMR rule 21 which stipulates that drinking water be made available to every prisoner whenever he/she needs it.³ Outside the use of water for personal purposes, rule 14 of the SMR also made provision for regular/routine cleaning of the prison cells. Inadequate water supply can predispose the inmates to risk of contracting water-borne disease like cholera, hepatitis A virus and salmonella. Being able to stay clean is one of the key factors helping prisoners to maintain their dignity, hence the issue of water needs to be properly addressed by the authority. Even though inadequate water supply has been demonstrated as a problem of public health importance in our study, similar condition had been reported in California prisons where the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) had to restrict inmates shower privileges, ability to flush their cell toilets and access to clean clothes. At San Quentin state prison, most inmates were also said to have been restricted to three showers a week for a maximum of 5 minutes due to inadequate water supply.²⁰

Regarding the inmates report about nutrition as captured in table 4, majority of the inmate's stated that food was not of adequate quality and quantity. This is not in line with Rule 20 (subsection 1) of the SMR⁴ which stressed that *"Every prisoner shall be provided by the administration at the usual hours with food of nutritional value adequate for health and strength, of wholesome quality and well prepared and served"* Our finding is also at variant with that obtained from studies reported by Eves et al in United Kingdom where food was found to be adequate in quantity and quality but was only found to be deficient in some minerals such as magnesium and vitamin D.²¹ A similar study done by Hannan Jones in Australia in which multiple methods were used to assess food availability including verification of food portion, quality and practices showed the planned food was nutritionally adequate except for vitamin D, long chain fatty acids and sodium which was above the upper limits.¹⁶ The variations between the prison in Nigeria and other prisons in other parts of the world could be due to the fact that the said countries are well developed as such inmates rights for good food are well observed. In a similar research done in South Africa, prisoners reported that food was of poor quality and not sufficient in quantity and that they often went hungry repeatedly for many hours.²² To make life more tolerable, since SMR rule 87 made provision for self-feeding of inmates who have not yet been convicted, relations could as well assist the government to reduce the burden of feeding.

Physical and mental health of prisoners is one of the most vital as well as the most vulnerable aspect of life in

prison. The level of health care in prison and medication should be at least equivalent to that in the outside community. In our study, all the inmates (100%) admitted having a hospital in the facility and a good proportion (90.9%) said there are nurses and doctors in the hospital who provide care for inmates. This is in line with the Article 3 of United Nation declaration of Human right.⁴ But with regards to their sources of drugs, slightly above half (53.8%) said they paid for prescribed drugs by themselves. These findings are consistent with those of Haider et al in a Lebanese prison where on the average less than two general practitioners were found providing about 3 weekly visits per 100 prisoners.¹⁹ The findings in our study may be a replication of the national health system in general. Nigeria as a country has never been able to meet up with the international standards that have been set for the advancement of health over the years. Nigeria's poor health care system has been described as alarming by many authorities, and that calls for urgent attention from the government at all levels as well as medical practitioners.^{20,23,24} In the general population most hospital expenditures incurred by patients are made out of pocket.^{20,22-25} Concerning the recreational facilities, majority of the inmates agreed that recreational facilities existed in Makurdi, minimum security prison; draft, ludo were amongst the facilities enlisted. Majority of the inmates (80.3%) however opined they were not satisfied with the services provided. Similar studies were reported at a provincial dentium facility for women where the nurses of the nearby community health centre made it their business to promote health and prevention alternatives to the inmates. They encouraged the use of natural products, exercise, courses in stress management and problem solving.²⁶ In studies carried out in Switzerland, it was reported that prisoners were engaged with different forms of prison sports and watching of television as a form of recreation.

Interns of educational programmes for inmates, there is an obligation under international law to treat prisoners with respect for their human rights. These programmes are founded on "the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" (Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights).⁴ Nigerian prison authority is not left out in the implementation and provision of these programmes. In our study, there is available educational programmes in the prison, but majority of the inmates (75.8%) are not aware or they were not given the opportunity (Table 6). This is probably due to the fact that the provision is still at its elementary stage in our prisons. Furthermore, the emphasis on beneficiaries of SMR provision of programmes is mainly on sentenced prison inmates. In our study population

where majority of the inmates are waiting trials, the prison authority may not extend the services to all, even when it is available. The existence of educational programme in our study is consistent with those reported in Ikoyi medium and maximum prisons where the prison is said to have partnership with government universities through the Onesimus project and Open University where many inmates attend the University and are trained. In Kaduna prisons also, inmates are allowed to write General Certificate Examinations and are also allowed to attend the Open University via online programmes.²⁷ This is indeed a good development in our prisons, since the inmates can leverage on the educational programmes for better integration into the society from which they were probably drawn from after the completion of their sentence.

Limitations

The nature of the environment may affect data collection (i.e. security reasons). Inmates may also hide some information for fear of punishment despite assurance of confidentiality

Conclusion

The perception of inmates about the standard of living conditions with respect to, accommodation, environmental conditions, health care, feeding, recreational facilities and educational programme was largely below expected. Hence it was recommended that Nigeria prison service should implement policies aimed at achieving the standard minimum rules of offenders in order to optimize the living standard of inmates in Nigeria prisons.

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest among the authors.

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