



Personality, Parenting Styles and Psychopathology among Inmates in Selected Nigerian Prisons

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ABSTRACT

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This study assessed the prevalence of psychopathology, assessed the personality traits, determined the relationship between personality traits and psychopathology and the relationship between parenting style and psychopathology among inmates in Kirikiri Medium and Maximum prison. These were with a view to providing information to stakeholders, social workers and mental health workers on how personality and parenting style relate to psychopathology and how each stakeholder can bring their expertise to lessen the psychological burden of incarceration.

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. It was carried out at the Kirikiri Medium and Maximum prison Apapa, Lagos, Nigeria. Three hundred and eighty male inmates were selected for the study using a simple random and proportionate sampling technique due to the difference in the population of the two prisons. A battery of instruments was used for the study namely the, Big Five Inventory-10, Parental Attitude Questionnaire and the General Health Questionnaire- 12. A section of the questionnaire obtained socio- demographic information, crime convicted for, duration of sentence, length of stay and a question on substance use. Data obtained was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Pearson product moment correlation was used to test for relationship between the variables while t-test was used to test for difference.

Keywords:

Psychopathology, personality traits, parenting style, prison inmates, Nigerian prison

INTRODUCTION

Prison inmates face many problems such as isolation from the familiar, overcrowding, guilt, and stigmatisation. All these cumulate and cause deterioration in the mental health of inmates (Sharma et al., 2015). Apart from alienation from the family and society, prisoners grapple with some other problems in prison which deteriorate their psychological wellbeing such as overcrowding unhygienic cell environment, delay in legal proceedings (under trial cases), physical and mental suffering by prison officials and group clashes and conflict among prisoners (Nurse et al., 2003). Once they get sentenced by the court they get stigmatized as offenders by the society. This stigmatization disturbs their life after the expiration of their term and leaves most damaging effect on offenders (Schnittker & John, 2007). Prisoners who cope well with the circumstances become capable of

adjusting while those who find themselves unable to adjust with the jail environment start feeling guilty, show aggression, display suicidal behavior, and develop stress and depression, anxiety, and other psychiatric problems (Dye, 2010).

Reports from countries with different levels of income indicate that incarcerated individuals are much more likely to be suffering from mental illness and substance abuse disorders than are those outside of prisons and jails. In Nigeria, researchers found that over one-third prisoners sampled had a mental disorder (Fatoye et al., 2006 ; Mosaku et al., 2014). The common psychiatric disorders prisoners suffer include anxiety, depression, psychosis, personality disorders and substance misuse. It also increases suicide risk in criminals (Fazel & Baillargeon, 2011). Some mental health problems have been observed to be higher among incarcerated inmates compared to the general population (Fatoye et al., 2006). Inmates with mental illness also are more likely to reoffend than other inmates (Heikes et al., 2000).

It has been revealed that individuals convicted of crime are prone to mental disorders and uncondusive prison

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environment may play a vital role in the development of mental and physical ailment in them (Fatoye et al., 2006; Tarekegn, 2013). Prison health cannot be addressed in isolation from the health of the general population since there is a constant inter-change between the prison and the larger community, be it through the guards, the administration, the health professionals and the constant admission and release of prisoners. Zawn (2013) stated that prisoners rarely, if ever, get therapy or comprehensive treatment, so mental health issues that were previously controlled with medication and therapy may get much worse during incarceration. Prison health must be seen as a part of public health. Addressing the mental health needs of prisoners can minimize the rate of recidivism and help divert people with mental disorders away from prison into treatment and rehabilitation.

METHODOLOGY

Three psychological instruments constituted the battery of instruments in addition to a section which collected information on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and information on substance use. Such information included age, religion, marital status, crime convicted for, duration of sentence and duration of term served.

The research instruments used for the study are the Big Five Inventory (BFI-10), Parental authority questionnaire (PAQ), and the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12).

Descriptive statistics such as mean (standard deviation) and frequency (percentage) were used to describe the respondents' socio-demographic details and information on substance use. Stepwise Multiple Regression analysis was used to test for the predictive strength of socio-demographic variables on psychopathology, Pearson product moment correlation was used to test for relationship between the Personality traits and level of psychopathology and Parenting style and level of psychopathology, while independent t-test was used to test for difference in the prevalence of psychopathological symptoms in inmates awaiting trial and convicted inmates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some researchers in Nigeria had shown that there is a high prevalence of depression and other mental health problems among prison inmates. (Idemudia et al., 2001; Fatoye et al., 2006). Osinowo (1999) also identified depression, while Udofia (1997) highlighted psychopathy and alcoholism among prison inmates. Akinnawo (1993) found a prevalence rate of 20.86% for psychopathology in a Nigerian prison population. When people are placed in prisons with its

attendant problems of dehumanisation, hunger, social and emotional deprivation, it can increase their proneness to psychopathology.

Some studies have also shown that individuals convicted of crime are prone to mental disorders and unconducive prison environment may play a vital role in the development of mental problems. The interesting question is whether personality traits make inmates susceptible to developing psychopathology. Some Nigerian studies (Balogun, 2014; Mosaku et al., 2014) have revealed the interaction between personality and psychopathology among prison inmates. However, no published study has investigated the relationship between the level of psychopathology, personality, and the parenting style among inmates in Nigeria, hence the focus of this study.

The current study employs a descriptive survey design to assess the prevalence of psychopathology and to examine the relationship between personality traits, parenting style and psychopathology among inmates in selected Nigerian prisons. The goal is to provide information to stakeholders, namely prison warders, social workers, and mental health workers on how personality and parenting styles relate to psychopathology and how each stakeholder can then bring their expertise to lessen the psychological burden of incarceration. It will equip religious bodies and non-governmental organizations who are often the frequent visitors to the prison on how they can help meet the emotional needs of inmates. Parents and guardian will also be informed on parenting styles and the long-term effect of each style.

Furthermore, the outcome of this study will provide mental health workers and counselors with knowledge on how to help in the rehabilitation of the inmates especially upon the expiration of their prison term so they can ensure their psychological fitness and reabsorption into the society. Most importantly, the study intends to provide the Government and the judicial sector with information that can help them make policies that put into consideration the psychological well-being of inmates.

Hypothesis 1

There will be a significant relationship between personality traits and level of psychopathology among inmates.

The table below shows that there is a negative significant relationship between Openness and Psychopathology at ($p = 0.046$; $r = -0.102$) while Conscientiousness ($p < .001$; $r = -0.236$), Agreeableness ($p < .001$; $r = -0.314$) and Neuroticism ($p < .001$; $r = 0.274$) had a weak negative relationship with Psychopathology. However, there is no significant relationship between Extraversion and Psychopathology at ($p = 0.365$; $r = 0.047$).

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Table 1. Pearson’s Correlation between Personality Traits and Psychopathology

	GHQ score	
	r value	p value
Extraversion	0.047	0.365
Agreeableness	-0.314	<.001
Conscientiousness	-0.236	<.001
Neuroticism	0.274	<.001
Openness	-0.102	0.046

** . Correlation is significant at .01

We therefore accept the hypothesis that ‘There will be a significant relationship between Personality and Psychopathology among inmates based on the finding.

Hypothesis 2

There will be a significant relationship between parenting style and level of psychopathology among inmates.

The table below shows that the authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting style of the father had

a negative significant relationship with psychopathology at ($p = <.001$; $r = -.309$) also ($p = <.001$; $r = -.240$), then ($p = 0.004$; $r = -.149$) respectively, the authoritative and authoritarian parenting style of the mother also had a negative significant relationship with psychopathology at ($p = <.001$; $r = -.320$ and $-.270$ respectively). However, the permissive mother parenting style had no significant relationship with psychopathology at ($p = 0.702$; $r = .020$).

Table 8. Correlation Matrix between Parenting style and Psychopathology

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. F-authoritative	1						
2. M-authoritative	.710**	1					
3. F-authoritarian	.494**	.683**	1				
4. M-authoritarian	.548**	.664**	.806**	1			
5. F-permissive	.333**	.134**	-0.069	-0.008	1		
6. M-permissive	0.097	.218**	0.026	-0.018	.606**	1	
7. GHQSCORE	-.309**	-.320**	-.240**	-.270**	-.149**	0.020	1

** . Correlation is significant at .01

(Note: On the table above, F denotes Father and M denotes Mother)

The findings confirm the hypothesis; therefore, we accept the hypothesis that ‘There will be a significant relationship between Parenting style and level of Psychopathology’.

Hypothesis 3

There will be significant difference in the prevalence of psychopathological symptoms in inmates awaiting trial and convicted inmates.

Table 3.

	Mean	SD	Df	T
Convicted	4.83	3.28	379	0.25 ^{ns}
ATM	4.75	3.17		

ns: not significant

An independent sample T-test was conducted to compare the prevalence of psychopathological symptoms in inmates awaiting trial and convicted inmates. Results revealed no significant difference ($p = 0.80$, $t = 0.25$.) in the psychopathological symptoms between convicted inmates ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 3.28$) and inmates awaiting trial ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 3.17$).

DISCUSSION

Exploring the relationship between Parenting style and Psychopathology revealed that Authoritative, Authoritarian and Permissive parenting styles had a negative significant relationship with psychopathology. The Authoritative and Authoritarian parenting style of the mother had a negative significant relationship. This means that the parenting style adopted did not make the inmates prone to psychopathology.

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However, the permissive mother parenting style had no significant relationship with psychopathology. Previous studies found Permissive Parenting style and its hybrids promoted the development of social and performance anxiety (Akinsola & Udoka, 2013). A study also linked the post-traumatic reactions of criminal offenders to traumatic childhood events like poverty, abusive and neglectful parental treatment (Widom, 1989).

According to Tarekgn (2013), when prisoners stay in prison for long, the probability of developing mental illness is increased and this might be due to prisoners feeling totally detached from the external world. In the present study, there was no significant difference in the level of psychopathology among inmates awaiting trial and convicted inmates. In a study done to evaluate the demographic and psychosocial characteristics of incarcerated offenders in a Nigeria prison, it was found that respondents awaiting trial consisted 96.3% of those found to have psychiatric symptoms (Fatoye et al., 2006). In a study conducted to assess the well-being of prison inmates in Nigeria, it was revealed that inmate status significantly affected psychological well-being of inmates as convicted inmates had more psychiatric symptoms compared to awaiting trial inmates (Agbakwuru & Ibe-Godfrey, 2016). This agrees with a study carried out by Abdulmalik et al. (2014) to assess the prevalence and correlates of mental health problems among awaiting trial inmates in Agodi Prison. It was discovered that there was no significant difference exists in the prevalence of mental health problems among the awaiting trial inmates as compared to the convicted inmates' population. However, the study revealed that there was difference in the type of mental disorders observed. Awaiting trial inmates had more symptoms of depression and substance abuse when compare with convicted inmates. Findings in this present study does not agree with those from previous study that found that inmates who were new to prison and who anticipated serving long sentences reported poorer adjustment than inmates who had already spent significant amounts of time in prison.

IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

The result from this study showed that the prevalence rate of psychopathology among prison inmates is high and that there is no statistically significant relationship between personality, parenting styles and psychopathology. It is important that stakeholders like the Nigerian Prison Service, the judicial system, families, and the mental health team have adequate knowledge of the prevalence of the subject matter of discourse and its consequence for post-prison adjustment to improve the quality of psychological service provided to prison inmates. It is also worthy of note that at the time of this study, only one resident psychologist caters for the psychological needs of the inmates in each of the prisons. The findings of this study, therefore, shows that there is need for more clinical psychologists to get involved in the Nigerian

prisons to help in the psychological assessment and management of inmates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made from the findings of this study

- Prison policies and conditions of confinement that have created or worsened psychopathology should be reviewed.
- Psychological and social services should be made available to prison inmates and families of inmates grappling with the psychological consequences of incarceration. This may be achieved by providing mental health training to prison health workers, establishing regular visits of a community mental health team to prisons, or enabling prisoners to access health services outside the prison setting.
- Primary health care providers in prisons should be provided with basic training on how to identify and manage common mental health disorders. A wholesome after care program should also be designed to cater to the biopsychosocial needs of prison inmates after serving their term.
- There should also be periodical psychological assessment of prison inmates to evaluate the impact of incarceration and provide the necessary intervention promptly.
- It is also important that arrangement be made to maximize visitation and social support from the outside world to minimize the distinction between prison and the free world to discourage dysfunctional social withdrawal that is difficult to reverse upon release.

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