# NIGERIAN CORRECTIONAL SERVICE AND PRISON CONGESTION IN PORT HARCOURT CENTRE, RIVERS STATE

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study examined Nigerian Correctional Service and prison congestion in Port Harcourt Centre, Rivers State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A sample size of 260 was obtained from a population of 720 using Taro Yamane Scientific Formula. A self-designed instrument titled,' Nigerian Correctional Service and prison congestion in Port Harcourt Centre Questionnaire' (NCSaPHCQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and a reliability co-efficient of 0.78 was obtained. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The research questions and hypotheses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the chi-square respectively. The findings of the study revealed that the roles played by personnel including poor record keeping culture, poor supervision, absence of training and lack of professionalism lead to the congestion of the Port Harcourt Correctional Centre. Also, the clumsy bail processes, lack of effective implementation of prison reforms and absence of synergetic relationship among stakeholders contribute to the teething problem of prison congestion. Based on the above, it was recommended that the personnel of the Centre should improve on their record keeping culture, supervise their subordinate personnel sufficiently, promptly producing inmates in courts and imbibe the culture of professionalism. Finally, the service should employ more robust strategies, implement the various reform programmes, ensure that there is an improved synergetic relationship among stakeholders and initiate policies from within that will ensure that personnel of the Centre perform their duties effectively, efficiently and conscientiously in order to meet up with global standard.*
*Keywords: Inmates, Penal Code, Prison.*

## 1.    Introduction

Crime and criminality are inevitable aspects of every society, whether underdeveloped, developing or developed. Human beings have basic and universal needs which must be satisfied in order for them to be alive and contribute to building a virile society. In the course of satisfying these basic and universal needs, and the desire to achieve set goals, some human beings are tempted to go against the societal culture, norms and values which it holds in high esteem. In so doing, they go into criminality and other social vices which the state frowns at. The state whose existence is anchored on the provision of security and welfare of the citizenry, impose punishment on these set of citizens whose actions/inactions are against the laws of the land. In doing so, states established centers in various locations to serve as homes to those that commit crimes (Onunbon, 2020). In Rivers State, there are four

Correctional centres including; Degema, Port Harcourt, Elele and Ahoada.

Agwanwo (2023) opined that the Penal Code and the accompanying Criminal Procedure Code Cap 81, Laws of the Federation 1990 (CPC), the Criminal Code and the accompanying Criminal Procedure Act Cap 80, Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the Sharia legal legislation have all empowered the Nigerian Correctional Service to perform functions. Several scholars believe that the personnel of the various centres across the country have not done well in the course of carrying out their constitutional duties with a view to decongesting the Correctional centres. Others accused the leadership of the service for their failure to implement the various reform committees' recommendations over the years and the near absence of adequate welfare for the personnel (Udenze & Njeteneh. 2019, Orunbon, 2020 & Petrick, 2023).

Majority of Nigerian citizens believe that the service is lacking in their core constitutional mandate. Each correctional centre established by the state has a carrying capacity based on the availability of facilities, manpower in quality and quantity, welfare of inmates and the vision of the state in ensuring that the inmates turn-out to be worthy citizens who will be willing and also possess the well-withal to contribute to building a prosperous society. In saner climes, prisoners acquire skills and other requisite knowledge and live a post-confinement life contributing meaningfully to building a better society (Ibileke, 20202). In Nigerian Correctional Centres in general and Port Harcourt Correctional Centre in particular, a myriad of challenges including poor funding, corruption, lack of manpower in quality and quantity, inept leadership, infrastructural deficit, etc. have combined to make the Nigerian Correctional Centres some of the worst detention centres in sub-Saharan Africa. The result is unprecedented congestion of the centres with its attendant negative effects (Agwanwo, 2023).

The fundamental objective of the state in establishing prison centres is to maintain safe and secure environment for the staff, inmates and visitors/ relatives of the staff/inmates. It is envisaged that correctional centres should be managed within an ethical context which recognizes the obligations of those concern to treat all inmates with empathy, respect for their humanity and protect their rights as prisoners, because they are still citizens who have inalienable rights that the state and its agents should not only recognize but also ensure these rights and privileges are protected. Inmates should not be discriminated upon as a result of sex, culture, ethnicity, political leanings, socio-economic status, etc. The purpose of subjecting a citizen to trial and subsequently committing them to prison or awaiting trial include amongst other things for; deterrence, incapacitation, rehabilitation, retribution, restitution and reformation.

Agomoh, et al (2001) listed the following factors as responsible for prison congestion in Nigeria including but not limited to; high remand/awaiting trial population, lack of speedy trial, overuse of imprisonment sentences by the courts, abuse of the discretionary powers of arrest and bail conditions by the police, inadequate legal aid facilities and logistic challenges. Politicization and poor investigation/prosecution of cases have also played negative roles in the congestion of prison across the nation. Mina and Soroghaye in Agwanwo (2023) have opined that the personnel of the Nigerian Correctional Service especially in Port Harcourt are not doing enough to decongest the prisons in the country and observed that the Correctional facilities are flawed with a lot of short comings including dilapidated facilities, increase inmate mortality rate, corruption and failure to repeal archaic laws that are negatively affecting the efficiency, competence and service delivery of the Service. They frowned at the unwillingness of the custodial service to conduct risk and needs assessment that will be aimed at developing appropriate correctional treatment methods for reformation and rehabilitation programmes to enhance the reintegration of inmates into the society as better citizens who will be willing and capable of contributing to building a virile society.

The Port Harcourt Correctional Centre is one of the most congested Correctional Centres in Nigeria, with its negative consequences, housing more than 4,600 inmates (convicts and awaiting trials) as against the original capacity of 804 in 1918 when it was built. More than 67% of the inmates are on awaiting trial (Arewo, 2024, Matthew & Norah, 2020). Agwanwo (2023) has posited that the problems facing the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS) in general and Port Harcourt in particular include; poor funding, dilapidated infrastructure, massive corruption, inept leadership, and failure to repeal obnoxious laws leading to unprecedented prison congestion and high mortality rate among inmates. The facilities in Port Harcourt Correctional centre which has not experienced significant expansion coupled with high criminal population in the state and other nearby states have now become a source of worry to the state, prisons' authority and the general welfare of the inmates. Ayade (2010) stated

that overcrowding in Nigerian Correctional Centres have resulted in the spread of infectious diseases like tuberculosis, Aids, etc. it has also lead to poor ventilation, inadequate feeding, stressed facilities resulting in turning out inmates worse than they came and thereby defeating the overall aim of the establishment of the centres. Overcrowding/prison congestion occurs when the number of inmates exceeds the carrying capacity of the centre, thereby making it impossible for inmates to be housed in a humane, hygienic, safe and psychologically appropriate manner. Some studies have variously referred to the Correctional centres in Nigeria as death traps, death beds, unhygienic abodes, disease centres, etc. but few studies have really linked the role of the service and its personnel in the congestion of the Port Harcourt Correctional centre. It is against this backdrop that the following research questions were asked to guide the study.

*What are the roles played by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional centre in prison congestion?*

*To what extent has the strategies employed by the Nigerian Correctional Service help in reducing prison congestion in Port Harcourt Centre?*

## Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are to;

*Determine if the roles played by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional centre encourage prison congestion.*

*Examine the strategies employed by the Nigerian Correctional Service in reducing prison congestion in Port Harcourt Centre.*

## Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will guide the study;

*The roles played by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional centre do not contribute to prison congestion.*

*The strategies employed by the Nigerian Correctional Service do not help in reducing prison congestion in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.*

## 2. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Reformative theory of punishment propounded by Cesare Beccaria, an Italian criminologist in 1973. The theory is aimed at transforming the criminal minds while in confinement in a way that the inmates of the penal-correctional institutions can lead the life of a normal citizen and contribute to building a virile society after their release. It believes that rehabilitation and reformation should be the core objectives of incarceration. He is of the view that the object of criminal punishment should not be punitive and destructive in nature, but its aim should be making the criminal a better citizen through physical, intellectual and psycho-mental indoctrinations (Tepperman, 2006).

The theory is based on the humanistic principle that if an offender commits a crime under a particular circumstance, it could be that such circumstance may never occur again. Therefore, efforts should be made by the state to reform the inmates during the period of incarceration. Though, he believed that if criminals sent to detention centres are to be transformed into better and productive citizens, then there should in place physical, intellectual and moral training in the various centres with adequate facilities, equipment, trained personnel, improved welfare of inmates and proactive leadership that will promote the overall well-being of the inmates. The relationship between the theory and the present study is based on the fact that the purpose of imprisonment includes; deterrence, incapacitation, rehabilitation, retribution, restitution and reformation and this is what the theorist believed. The primary purpose of imprisonment is reformation and inculcating hard work, probity, due diligence and forthrightness in the mind of the inmates in order for them to come out as better human beings who will contribute to building a better and enduring society. Therefore, there is a nexus between the theory and the present study.

## 3. Methodology

In this study we adopted descriptive survey design because it seeks to describe the characteristics of a certain group. It is also because the sample size was drawn from a large population aimed at investigating the correctional service and prison congestion in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

The population of this study consists of

all the personnel of the Port Harcourt correctional centre, Rivers State, Nigeria. The population is 720.

The sample size of 257.14 which was approximated to 260 was gotten through Taro Yamane (1960) scientific formula as shown below. Respondents were selected using a multi-sampling techniques including; stratified random sampling and purposive/judgmental sampling techniques. Under these methods, personnel were divided according to their ranks (strata) and the instrument was distributed accordingly. Mathematically, the Taro Yamane formula is expressed below;

$$S = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

$$= \frac{720}{1+720(0.05)^2}$$

$$= \frac{720}{1+720(0.0025)}$$

$$= \frac{720}{1+1.80000}$$

$$= \frac{720}{2.8}$$

$$= 257.14285714$$

$$\approx 260$$

Therefore, the sample size is 260.

The instrument used in the study was a self-developed questionnaire for effective and adequate data collection. The adopted instrument was 'Nigerian Correctional Service and Prison Congestion in Port Harcourt Correctional Centre Questionnaire'. The instrument has a modified four point Likert scale with the following items: SA= Strongly Agree, agree (3), D= Disagree (2) and SD = Strongly Disagree (1). To arrive at a decision, the following was used;

Critical Mean = $\frac{4+3+2+1}{4}$ = 10/4 2.5

To ensure the validity and suitability of the instrument, it was submitted to more knowledgeable scholars in the Department for content, construct, face, internal and external validity. The questionnaire produced after the corrections, comments and suggestions was an enhanced one with high validity rating. To determine the reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability test model was used to measure the internal consistency. The result was 0.80 reliability index which shows that the instrument adopted for the study was is highly reliable.

The data obtained from the field was analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 21). The research questions and hypotheses were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation and chi-square respectively.

**Results Presentation**

Research Question 1: What are the roles played by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional Centre in prison congestion?

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of the Roles Played by the Personnel

| | Items | SA | A | D | SD | M | S/DEV. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Record keeping culture | 107 | 113 | 25 | 15 | 3.20 | 0.86 |
| 2 | Training and professionalism | 120 | 108 | 22 | 10 | 3.30 | 1.37 |
| 3 | Production of inmates in court | 110 | 115 | 30 | 5 | 3.19 | 1.55 |
| 4 | Logistics | 89 | 129 | 31 | 11 | 3.14 | 1.35 |
| 5 | Supervision | 104 | 125 | 16 | 15 | 3.22 | 1.32 |
| | **Grand Mean** | | | | | **3.21** | **1.29** |

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024.

The above reveals the summary of the roles played by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional Centre in congesting the prison. From the above table, it can be observed that Insufficient training and lack of professionalism have the mean and standard deviation values of 3.30 and 1.37 respectively, followed by production of inmates in court with mean value of 3.19 and standard deviation of I.55. Logistic challenges, though, is a factor has the least values of 3.14 and 1.35 of mean and standard deviation respectively. Bearing in mind that the criterion mean is 2.5, the grand mean is 3.21, then it indicates that the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional Centre play a significant role in the congestion of the prison.

$H_{01}$: Roles played by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional centre does not contribute to prison congestion.

Table 2: Chi-square Analysis on the Roles Played by the Personnel and Prison Congestion

| Variables | Mean | Std. Dev. | N | Df. | $x^2_{cal.}$ | $x^2_{crit.}$ | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Roles | 3.29 | 1.29 | 260 | 12 | 68.23 | 21.026 | Reject |
| Prison Congestion | 3.02 | 1.05 | | | | | |

Table 2 displays the chi-square analysis on the roles played by the personnel and prison congestion. From table 2 above, the chi-square calculated (68.23) is greater than the chi-square critical value (21.026), hence, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate. We therefore conclude that the roles played by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional centre contribute largely to prison congestion.

Research Question 2: What are the strategies employed by Nigeria correctional Service in reducing prison congestion.

Table 3: Descriptive Analysis on Strategies Employed by Nigeria Correctional Service

| S/N | Items | SA | A | D | SD | M | S/Dev. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Cooperation with other stakeholders | 35 | 25 | 120 | 80 | 2.06 | 1.20 |
| 2 | Bail processes | 60 | 40 | 90 | 70 | 2.35 | 1.13 |
| 3 | Training and retraining | 62 | 48 | 100 | 50 | 2.47 | 1.12 |
| 4 | Prison reforms | 28 | 32 | 120 | 80 | 2.03 | 1.21 |
| 5 | Initiating programmes from within | 32 | 28 | 115 | 95 | 2.01 | 1.22 |
| | **Grand Mean** | | | | | **2.18** | **1.18** |

Source: Researcher's fieldwork, 2024.

Table 3 indicates the descriptive analysis on strategies employed by the Port Harcourt Correctional Service personnel contribute to congestion. From the above table 3, it can be observed that training and retraining has the highest mean and standard deviation of 2.47 and 1.12 respectively. Immediately followed by bail process with mean and standard deviation of 2.35 and 1.13 and the least mean and standard deviation values (2.01 & 1.22) of initiating programmes from within.

$H_{02}$: The strategies employed by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional Service do not help in reducing prison congestion.

Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis of the Relationship between Strategies Employed and Prison Congestion

| Variables | Mean | Std. Dev. | N | Df. | $x^2_{cal.}$ | $x^2_{crit.}$ | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Roles | 2.18 | 1.18 | 260 | 12 | 17.70 | 21.026 | Accept |
| Prison Congestion | 3.02 | 1.05 | | | | | |

Table 4 above reveals the chi-square analysis of the relationship between strategies employed by the personnel and prison congestion. It shows that the chi-square calculated (17.70) is less than the chi-square critical value (21.026). Hence, we accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternate. We therefore conclude that the strategies employed by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional Service do not help in reducing prison congestion.

## 4.    Discussion of Findings

**Personnel's Roles and Prison Congestion in Port Harcourt Correctional Centre**

Based on the analysis, it was discovered that the roles played by the personnel in Port Harcourt Correctional centre contribute largely to prison congestion. This means that the personnel are in one or way or the other to be blamed for prison congestion in Port Harcourt Correction Center. The present study shows a lackluster attitude of personnel towards record keeping, training and exhibiting high professional standards which are at its lowest ebb while the production of inmates is not done with due diligence. Poor logistics and lack of supervision and absence of professional discipline have all contributed to the congestion of the prison in Port Harcourt, rather than decongesting it. The above findings are in line with the earlier works of Morgan (2007) and Mina & Ramsey-Soroghage (2020) who believed that most of the roles played by the personnel of the Nigerian Correctional Service contribute largely to prison congestion, rather than decongesting the various detention facilities in Nigeria.

**Strategies Employed by the Personnel and Prison Congestion**

From the result of the analysis, it was deduced that the strategies employed by the personnel in Port Harcourt Correctional Centre do not help in reducing prison congestion. This shows that approaches adopted by the personnel in carrying out their functions r are not effective and result-oriented. Hence, there is need for modification of the strategies or change them entirely. The above are in line with the findings of Agomoh, et al (2001) and Abdulrasaq ([2016)](#) that believed that prison congestion in Nigeria has causative factors including but not limited to; high remand/awaiting trial population, lack of speedy trial, overuse of imprisonment sentences by the court, abuse of the discretionary powers of arrest and bail conditions by the police, inadequate legal aid facilities and logistic challenges. Politicization and poor investigation/prosecution of cases have also played negative role in the congestion of prison across the nation. The findings are also in line with the findings of Mina and Soroghaye in Agwanwo (2023) who revealed that the personnel of the Nigerian Correctional Service are not doing enough to decongest the prisons in the country and observed that the Correctional facilities are flawed with a lot of short comings including dilapidated facilities, increase inmate mortality rate, corruption and failure to repeal archaic laws that are negatively affecting the efficiency, competence and service delivery of the personnel. They frowned at the unwillingness of the custodial service to conduct risk and needs assessment that will be aimed at developing appropriate correctional treatment methods for reformation and rehabilitation programmes to enhance the reintegration of inmates into the society as better citizens who will be willing and capable of contributing to building a virile society. So, for there to be prison decongestion, the strategies being presently used by the centre must be rejigged or jettisoned to meet up with international standard.

## 5.    Conclusion

The study investigated Nigerian Correctional Service and prison congestion in Port Harcourt Centre, Rivers state, Nigeria. It has been observed that the various roles played by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Centre contribute significantly to the congestion of the centre. The roles played by the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional Centre in congesting the centre include; poor record keeping culture as a result of insufficient training, lack of professionalism, absence of supervision and lack of proficiency as a result of logistic challenges. The above roles have all contributed to the congestion of the prison in Port Harcourt, rather than decongesting it.

Furthermore, other factors contributing to the congestion of the Port Harcourt Correctional Centre include; poor/lack of synergy between the service and other stakeholders, clumsy bail processes, absence of effective training and re-training to meet up with international standard, poor implementation of the prison reforms and depth of visionary and proactive leaders who will initiate programmes from within to ensure the decongestion of the centre.

## 6.    Recommendations

For us to achieve an epoch of prison decongestion, the following recommendations should be implemented:

*Training and re-training of the personnel to attain professional competence, adequate supervision, timely production of inmates in courts, improved logistics provision and emplace policies and programmes that will ensure that inmates are not seen as people worthy of death before their sentence pronouncement and subsequent incarceration.*

*The management and the personnel of the Port Harcourt Correctional Centre must ensure that they genuinely work with other stakeholders on the implementation of prisons reforms, ensure that bail processes are seamlessly done, and finally, implement policies and programmes of the federal government on prison reforms to achieve the decongestion of Correctional Centres without much delay.*

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