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**Evaluating the Conditions of Nigerian Correctional Centres and the dehumanising experiences of inmates: Insights from Afokang custodian facility, Calabar, Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

This study evaluated the conditions of Nigerian correctional centres and dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang custodian centre, Calabar, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to examine the relationship between dietary intake, prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre. Two null hypotheses were formulated from the objectives of the study. Literature was reviewed empirically and theoretically to show relationship existing between the dependent (the dehumanising experiences of inmates) and independent (dietary intake, prison overcrowding) variables. Cross sectional survey research design was adopted for the study as it allowed for the use of questionnaire. A 15-item questionnaire was used to gather data from a sample of three hundred and eighty-four (384) respondents through purposive sampling techniques. The sample size was determined using Cochran sample size determinant. Generated data were statistically tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical method. The data analysed revealed that there is a significant relationship between dietary intake, prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre. It was therefore concluded that conditions of Nigerian correctional centres relate to the dehumanising experiences of inmates. Based on this conclusion, the study recommended among other things that the government should prioritise the expansion of existing correctional facilities to reduce overcrowding. This can be achieved through the construction of new custodial centres or the decongestion of current ones by implementing alternative sentencing measures for non-violent offenders, such as community service or parole.

**Keywords:** Correctional centres, criminal justice system, dehumanising, inmates, dietary intake, prison overcrowding and awaiting trial

## **Introduction**

The state of correctional centres in Nigeria has raised critical concerns regarding human rights, justice, and the effectiveness of the penal system. Designed to reform and rehabilitate offenders, many Nigerian correctional centres have deviated significantly from this mandate, becoming hubs of neglect and dehumanisation. Inmates in these facilities endure dire conditions marked by overcrowding, inadequate medical care, poor sanitation, and insufficient access to basic necessities such as food and water (Ajah & Okpa, 2019; Odinka et al, 2023). These conditions contravene the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Mandela Rules), which emphasize the importance of humane treatment in correctional facilities (United Nations, 2015). Several reports and studies, including those by Amnesty International (2022) and Akinseye-George (2020), highlights the deplorable state of Nigerian prisons. These conditions have led to systemic violations of inmates' rights, reflecting the broader inefficiencies of Nigeria's judicial and correctional systems. In addition to the physical hardships, inmates often face emotional and psychological abuse, compounding their experiences of dehumanisation (Ukwayi & Okpa, 2018). Overcrowding, for instance, remains a critical issue, with facilities housing populations far exceeding their carrying capacities. As of 2023, the Nigerian Correctional Service reported that over 70% of inmates are awaiting trial, which exacerbates the overcrowding problem and undermines the presumption of innocence (Ukwayi, & Okpa, 2017; Nigerian Correctional Service, 2023).

Health crises in correctional centres also pose significant challenges. Infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, scabies, cholera and HIV/AIDS are prevalent due to the poor living conditions and lack of access to healthcare (Ukwayi, Okpa, & Akwaji, 2019; Adebayo, 2021). Malnutrition and mental health issues further deteriorate the quality of life for inmates. The sanitation in most correctional facilities is appalling. Toilets are often non-functional, forcing inmates to use buckets or open spaces within already congested cells (Okpa et al, 2022; Nzeakor et al, 2022). These unhygienic conditions contribute to the rapid spread of communicable diseases, endangering the lives of those confined within the facilities.

Amnesty International (2022) reports that many inmates also lack access to clean drinking water, further compounding health challenges. Constant threats of violence and exposure to abuse, creates an environment of perpetual fear and anxiety among inmates. Many inmates develop mental health disorders such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of prolonged exposure to these conditions (Onyejebu et al, 2021; Okpa et al, 2021). The absence of mental health support or psychosocial counselling exacerbates these challenges, leaving inmates to grapple with their trauma in isolation. Amnesty International (2022) notes that such emotional scars often persist long after release, hindering former inmates' ability to reintegrate into society. The primary purpose of correctional centres is to rehabilitate offenders, but the deplorable conditions in Nigerian facilities make this goal unattainable. The lack of educational programs, vocational training, and recreational activities means that inmates are deprived of opportunities to acquire new skills or knowledge that could help them reintegrate into society. Instead of fostering personal growth, these conditions often reinforce criminal behaviour, leading to high rates of recidivism. Akinseye-George (2020) argues that a system that fails to rehabilitate offenders not only perpetuates crime but also undermines public safety.

These conditions reflect a systemic failure to uphold the objectives of incarceration, which include rehabilitation, reformation, and reintegration of offenders into society. Recognizing the deplorable conditions within correctional centres, authorities have initiated reforms aimed at improving the facilities and aligning their operations with international standards. These efforts encompass policy changes, infrastructure development, and legislative actions to ensure the system fulfils its mandate of rehabilitation and reintegration. This study examines the conditions of Nigerian correctional centres and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang custodian facility, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the study**

The main objective of this study is to evaluate conditions in correctional centre and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were:

- (i) to determine the relationship between dietary intake and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre
- (ii) to assess the relationship between prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre.

### **Research hypotheses**

- (i) There is no significant relationship between dietary intake and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre
- (ii) There is no significant relationship between prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre

### **Dietary intake and the dehumanising experiences of inmates**

The quality and quantity of dietary intake in correctional centres play a significant role in shaping the experiences of inmates, often contributing to their dehumanising conditions. Adequate nutrition is a fundamental human right and an essential component of health and well-being. However, in many correctional facilities worldwide, including those in Nigeria, the dietary intake provided to inmates falls below acceptable standards, resulting in adverse physical, mental, and emotional outcomes. The dietary intake in many Nigerian correctional centres is often characterized by insufficient caloric and nutritional content, leading to malnutrition among inmates (Ali et al., 2021). Meals provided in these facilities frequently lack essential nutrients, with a heavy reliance on starchy staples and minimal inclusion of protein, vitamins, and minerals. This dietary deficiency not only affects the physical health of inmates but also exacerbates feelings of neglect and dehumanisation, as they are denied access to basic necessities required for survival.

Malnutrition in correctional centres is associated with various health challenges, including weakened immune systems, susceptibility to infectious diseases, and chronic conditions such as anemia (Okorie & Olusegun, 2019). The overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in many facilities further compound these issues, as inmates with poor dietary intake are less capable of fighting off illnesses. Such health vulnerabilities underscore the neglect of inmates' well-being and reinforce

their dehumanising experiences. Poor dietary intake also led to heightened tension and aggression within correctional facilities. Studies have shown that hunger and malnutrition can increase irritability and reduce impulse control, potentially contributing to conflicts among inmates and between inmates and staff (Adebayo & Akinlabi, 2018). This volatile environment further erodes the dignity of inmates and creates a cycle of dehumanising experiences.

The poor dietary conditions in Nigerian correctional centres are symptomatic of broader systemic issues, including inadequate funding, corruption, and lack of oversight. Allocations for inmate meals are often insufficient, and the funds that are provided are sometimes mismanaged, resulting in substandard food being served (Eze & Adigun, 2022). This systemic failure reflects a disregard for the rights and dignity of inmates, reinforcing their dehumanisation.

### **Prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates**

Overcrowding in correctional facilities often results in insufficient access to basic amenities such as bedding, clean water, sanitation, and ventilation. Inmates are frequently forced to sleep in shifts or share limited sleeping spaces, creating discomfort and increasing the risk of communicable diseases (Akinyele & Olatunde, 2020). In Nigerian prisons, overcrowding exacerbates unsanitary conditions, with insufficient toilets and bathing facilities leading to the spread of infections such as tuberculosis and scabies (Eze & Adigun, 2022). The inability to meet basic physical needs underscores the dehumanisation of inmates, as they are treated as less than human and denied the dignity they deserve. Overcrowded conditions create a sense of perpetual stress and anxiety among inmates due to lack of privacy, constant noise, and heightened conflicts (Jones et al., 2017; Olumide, 2019). The inability to find personal space or respite from the overcrowded environment often leads to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These conditions undermine inmates' sense of self-worth and contribute to the perception of imprisonment as a dehumanising experience.

Overcrowding fosters an environment where competition for limited resources, such as food, healthcare, and recreation, becomes intense, often resulting in conflicts and violence among inmates. Studies have shown that overcrowding increases the risk of inmate-to-inmate violence as

well as abuse by prison staff, further eroding the dignity of inmates (Adebayo, 2018; Zinger, 2022; Bastos et al., 2023). Additionally, overcrowded facilities hinder effective rehabilitation efforts, as educational and vocational programs are often stretched beyond their capacity, leaving many inmates without opportunities for personal development. Overcrowding places immense pressure on correctional staff, who are often tasked with managing large numbers of inmates without adequate resources or support. This strain can lead to neglect or abusive behaviours by staff, which further dehumanises inmates and creates a hostile correctional environment (Adeoye & Yusuf, 2021). The lack of staff-to-inmate ratio also compromises security within the facilities, increasing the likelihood of riots and unrest.

Overcrowding significantly hampers the implementation of rehabilitation programs, which are essential for the reintegration of inmates. In many overcrowded Nigerian correctional centres, vocational training, educational programs, and counselling services are either underfunded or non-existent (Ezugwu & Ude, 2020). This lack of access to rehabilitation resources not only perpetuates the cycle of crime but also exacerbates the sense of hopelessness and dehumanisation among inmates.

### **Research designs and Methods**

The study adopted the cross-sectional research design. This design is particularly useful in addressing complex social phenomena, such as prison conditions and the dehumanising experiences of inmates, where both numerical data and narrative insights are important. The study was carried out in the Calabar Correctional Centre, Cross River State, Nigeria. Afokang Custodian Facility, located in Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, Nigeria, is one of the country's correctional institutions. It is managed by the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS), the body responsible for overseeing the operations and management of prisons and custodial centres across the nation. Afokang serves as both a correctional facility and a detention centre, housing individuals who are awaiting trial as well as those already convicted of various offenses. Inmates at Afokang Custodian Facility often face dehumanizing conditions, such as inadequate dietary intake, poor sanitary facilities, and a lack of proper healthcare services. This situation exacerbates

the suffering of individuals who are already in distress due to their detention. The health of inmates is severely compromised by these conditions, leading to increased vulnerability to diseases and inadequate treatment for existing health conditions. There are also reports of human rights violations, including instances of physical abuse, inadequate legal representation, and neglect by prison authorities.

### **Population of the study & sample size**

The population of the study was awaiting trial inmates, convicted inmates and correctional officers. The sample size was determined using Cochran sample determinant. This sample determinant was used because the population of the study is unknown. The formula for Cochran sample size determinant is presented as follows:

$$n = \frac{Z^2(pq)}{e^2}$$

Where:

n = Required sample size

Z = Confidence level (put at 95% or 1.96)

p = Proportion of awaiting trial inmates, convicted inmates and correctional officers (given in this study as 50%). That is 0.5

q = Compliment of p (put at 50%, i.e, 1 - 50%). That is 0.5

e = Level of accuracy or margin error (put at 0.05).

Applying the formula therefore,

$$n = \frac{1.96^2(0.5)(0.5)}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = \frac{3.8416 (0.25)}{0.0025}$$

$$n = \frac{0.9604}{0.0025}$$

$$n = 384.16$$

$$n = 384$$

### **Sampling technique & instrument of data collection**

The study adopted purposive sampling technique. The instrument for data collection is a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections A, B, C. Section 'A' was designed to collect the respondent's demographic data such as sex, age, educational level, and religion. Section 'B' was items on 4-point Likert type scale designed to measure both the independent and dependent variables of the study. Each item requires the respondents to indicate the frequency under strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD). Section (C) of the instrument was used to measure the dependent variable, dehumanising experiences of inmates.

### **Sources of data & method of data analysis**

Primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. The primary sources consist of first-hand information obtained from respondent during fieldwork through questionnaire and interview. The secondary sources of data include text books, journal articles, internet materials, reports of dailies, gazette materials. Data collected was properly checked to make sure all items in each of the questionnaire was responded to. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analytical tool was used to analyse data collected from the field.

### **Result and discussion**

A total of 384 questionnaire were administered out of which 379 were retrieved for analysis, which account for 95 per cent response rate, 5 questionnaires were either wrongly filled or not completed.

#### **Hypothesis one**

There is no significant relationship between dietary intake and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre. The independent variable in this hypothesis is dietary intake while the dependent variable is the dehumanising experiences of inmates.

#### **Decision rule and result**



The Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistic decision rule states that if the calculated  $r$ -value is greater than or equal to ( $\geq$ ) critical  $r$ -value (0.195) from a sample size ( $n = 379$ ), at 0.05 alpha ( $\alpha$ ) levels of significance, reject null-hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and accept alternate hypothesis ( $H_1$ ). To test this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient is used to test this hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance and the result was presented on Table 1.

As presented in Table 1, the result was statistically significant  $r(377) = 0.501$ ;  $p < 0.05$ . This was because the calculated  $r$ -value of 0.501 was greater than the critical  $r$ -value of 0.195, at 0.5 alpha ( $\alpha$ ) levels of significance,  $df = 377$ . This means that, there was statistically significant relationship between dietary intake and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre, Cross River State, Nigeria. The correlation coefficient is a standardized measure of an observed effect, it is a commonly used measure of the size of an effect and  $r$ -values of  $\pm 0.1$  represent a small effect,  $\pm 0.3$  represent medium effect while  $\pm 0.5$  is a large effect. The squared correlation  $(0.501)^2$  which is a measure of effect size indicates the proportion of explained variance on the dependent variable.

Therefore, 25% of the variance in dietary intake is accounted for by dehumanising experiences of inmates. The magnitude of effect is moderate; this means that dietary intake correlates positively with dehumanising experiences of inmates in the study area. Therefore, we can conclude that, there is a statistical significant relationship between dietary intake and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of dietary intake and the dehumanising experiences of inmates

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Dietary intake	379	13.76	2.14	0.501	.000*
Dehumanising experiences of inmates	379	14.69	2.14		

\*significant at 0.05 level;  $df = 377$  critical  $r$  value = 0.195

Source: Field survey, 2024

Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre. The independent variable in this hypothesis is prison overcrowding, while the dependent variable is the dehumanising experiences of inmates.

Decision rule and result

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistic decision rule states that if the calculated  $r$ -value is greater than or equal to ( $\geq$ ) critical  $r$ -value (0.195) from a sample size ( $n = 379$ ), at 0.05 alpha ( $\alpha$ ) levels of significance, reject null-hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) and accept alternate hypothesis ( $H_1$ ). To test this hypothesis, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test this hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance and the result was presented on Table 2. As presented on Table 2, the result was statistically significant  $r(377 = 0.761; p < 0.05$ . This was because the calculated  $r$ -value of 0.761 was greater than the critical  $r$ -value of 0.195, at 0.5 alpha ( $\alpha$ ) levels of significance,  $df = 377$ . This means that, there was statistically significant relationship between prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre, Cross River State, Nigeria.

The correlation coefficient is a standardized measure of an observed effect, it is a commonly used measure of the size of an effect and  $r$ -values of  $\pm 0.1$  represent a small effect,  $\pm 0.3$  represent medium effect while  $\pm 0.5$  is a large effect. The squared correlation  $(0.761)^2$  which is a measure of effect size indicates the proportion of explained variance on the dependent variable. Therefore, 57% of the variance in prison overcrowding is accounted for in the dehumanising experiences of inmates. The magnitude of effect is large, this means that prison overcrowding correlates positively with the dehumanising experiences of inmates in the study area. Therefore, we can conclude that, there is statistically significant relationship between prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Calabar.

Table 2:: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r-value	Sig.
Prison overcrowding	379	12.99	2.10		
				0.761	0.000
Dehumanising experiences of inmates	379	14.69	2.14		

\* Significant at 0.05 level;  $df = 377$  critical  $r$  value = 0.195

Source: Field survey, 2024

## **Discussion of findings**

### **Dietary intake and the dehumanising experiences of inmates**

The statistical analysis for hypothesis one revealed that there is significant relationship between dietary intake and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre, Cross River State, Nigeria. The result suggests that the quality and adequacy of the food provided to inmates have a direct impact on their physical and mental well-being. Inmates who are not provided with proper nutrition suffer from malnutrition, weakened immune systems, and increased vulnerability to diseases, all of which can exacerbate their dehumanizing experiences. This finding emphasizes that inadequate or poor-quality food in correctional centres contributes to the degradation of inmates, reinforcing a cycle of suffering and neglect. The implication of this finding is far-reaching, particularly in terms of the rehabilitative goals of correctional institutions. Correctional facilities are meant to not only punish but also rehabilitate offenders, preparing them for reintegration into society. However, if inmates are not adequately nourished, their ability to engage in rehabilitation programs becomes compromised. Poor health and physical weakness can hinder their participation in activities designed to reform their behaviour, making rehabilitation efforts less effective.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies. A study by Walmsley (2015) emphasizes the importance of adequate nutrition in maintaining the health and well-being of prisoners. Inadequate diets led to malnutrition, which weakens the immune system and increases

vulnerability to infectious diseases. This not only affects the physical health of inmates but also their ability to engage in rehabilitation programs. The study supports the argument that poor dietary intake can significantly contribute to the dehumanizing experiences of prisoners by undermining their health. Similarly, a report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2016) underscores the need for adequate food and nutrition as part of the basic human rights of prisoners. It highlights that failure to meet these nutritional needs can be seen as a violation of prisoners' dignity and human rights, leading to conditions that are both physically and mentally detrimental. The UNODC report aligns with the findings that poor dietary intake can significantly affect the well-being of inmates, contributing to their dehumanization. In addition, research by Smith and Milligan (2019) highlights the role of food in the rehabilitation process. The study suggests that correctional facilities that provide inmates with proper nutrition are better able to engage them in rehabilitation activities, thereby reducing recidivism rates. This aligns with the finding that improving dietary conditions can enhance rehabilitation efforts and prevent the perpetuation of dehumanization in correctional settings.

### **Prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates**

The statistical analysis for hypothesis two revealed that there is significant relationship between prison overcrowding and the dehumanising experiences of inmates in Afokang correctional centre, Cross River State, Nigeria. The findings suggest that overcrowded conditions not only affect inmates' physical health but also their psychological well-being and rehabilitation prospects.

Overcrowding directly worsens the physical environment of the prison. With limited space and insufficient resources to accommodate the number of inmates, prisoners are forced into cramped conditions that make basic activities such as sleeping, eating, and moving around increasingly difficult. This creates a hostile environment where inmates are deprived of their privacy, leading to a loss of dignity and autonomy, which are crucial components of human well-being (Walmsley, 2015). The lack of personal space can heighten tension and anxiety among prisoners, contributing to aggression, violence, and an overall sense of insecurity. As a result,

inmates' experiences of overcrowding can be considered a major dehumanizing factor, as it reduces them to mere numbers in an already strained system.

In addition, overcrowding often leads to the strain of already inadequate resources, including access to healthcare, nutrition, and sanitation. Research has shown that overpopulated prisons face greater difficulties in providing adequate food, medical care, and sanitary facilities for inmates, which further aggravates their physical and mental health (UNODC, 2016). When these basic needs are not met, inmates are subjected to conditions that not only harm their health but also diminish their chances of rehabilitation, reinforcing a cycle of dehumanization. The lack of sufficient staff and facilities to manage overcrowded prisons can also undermine efforts to provide education, vocational training, or rehabilitation programs, further isolating inmates from opportunities for reintegration into society after their release (Jones et al., 2017).

## **Conclusion**

The study evaluated the conditions of Nigerian correctional centres and the dehumanising experiences of inmates at Afokang Custodial Facility in Calabar. The findings revealed that poor conditions in terms of inadequate dietary intake and overcrowding significantly contribute to the dehumanisation of inmates. These conditions not only undermine the physical and psychological well-being of prisoners but also hinder their chances of rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Overcrowding, in particular, worsens the challenges within correctional facilities, leading to a host of issues such as inadequate healthcare, insufficient living space, and heightened tensions among inmates. The dehumanising conditions in Nigerian correctional centres not only violate the rights of prisoners but also pose a broader threat to public safety and societal well-being. Therefore, addressing these issues is not just a matter of improving the lives of inmates but also of ensuring a more just, humane, and effective criminal justice system in Nigeria.

## **Recommendations for policy directions**

- i. For meaningful change to occur, concerted efforts from both the government and civil society are required to create a correctional system that prioritises the dignity and rehabilitation of offenders, ultimately contributing to a safer and more just society.

- ii. The government should prioritise the expansion of existing correctional facilities to reduce overcrowding. This can be achieved through the construction of new custodial centres or the decongestion of current ones by implementing alternative sentencing measures for non-violent offenders, such as community service or parole. Reducing overcrowding will improve the living conditions within the facility, allowing for better access to essential services and reducing tensions among inmates.
- iii. The government should ensure that nutritional standards are adhered to, and regular monitoring of food supplies should be conducted to avoid malnutrition and related health issues. Collaboration with nutritionists and health experts can help design meal plans that meet the dietary needs of inmates.

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