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EMOTION REGULATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH AMONG INMATES OF CORRECTIONAL CENTRES IN BENUE NORTH-WEST SENATORIAL DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The psychological health of inmates is paramount for the effectiveness of the entire rehabilitation process. Inmates who are psychologically health are likely to be more reformed than those with psychological health issues. However, the drivers of psychological health among this population is not known. Therefore, this study investigated emotion regulation and psychological health among inmates of correctional centres in Benue North-West Senatorial District. The study adopted cross-sectional survey design. The participants for the study were 234 inmates of correctional centres in Benue State who were proportionately sampled. They consisted of 165 (70.5%) males and 69 (29.5%) females. Their ages ranged from 24-67years with a mean age of 45.65years (SD=14.204). The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale were used for data collection. Multiple Linear Regression was used for statistical analysis. The result shows that there was a significant influence of emotion regulation on psychological health; All the dimensions of emotion regulation; cognitive reappraisal, and expressive suppression significantly predicted psychological health. It was recommended that the management of correctional centres should adjust their rehabilitation programmes to include a module on emotion regulation skills training where qualified clinical psychologists will educate, guide and support inmates enrolled in this programme to build the emotional skills to modulate their emotional reactions to the day to day demands of incarceration.

Keywords: Emotional regulation, psychological health, inmates, correctional centres

INTRODUCTION

The psychological health of inmates in correctional centres today has become top priority for health professionals recently. The last two decades has experienced a sprout of medical and psychosocial workers serving as advocates for better psychological health conditions for inmates worldwide (Clindus, Mennin & Ehring 2020). There are also many agencies and organizations currently advocating for the rights of inmates as they serve their jail terms. Thus, the psychological health of inmates is no more a concern for just correctional staff and inmates' families, but researchers, clinical psychologists and humanitarian agencies also have keen interest in the psychological health of inmates. The current indices on psychological health among inmates suggest the critical need for an appraisal of correctional psychiatry services to allow re-invention and better representation in public mental health services (Craig et al., 2019). Currently, the burden of mental illnesses among inmates is high, largely unmet in comparison to the general population and portends grave risk if unattended (2017; Fazel et al., 2016). Closely linked is the fact that incarceration and particularly the correctional "milieu" is a common breeding ground for psychosocial stressors that may precipitate or perpetuate mental disorders.

Even with sound mental health legislations in place, correctional psychological practice in most developing nations and to a lesser degree in certain advanced nations still faces several pervasive challenges (Olagunju et al., 2023; Craig et al., 2019). These include social rejection of convicts, poor transparency, human rights violations, overcrowding, limited rehabilitation infrastructure, poor prisoner-staff ratio, "over-use" of incarceration with the attendant "dumping syndrome", and slow adjudicating procedures for the mentally ill within criminal justice system among others. Concerning resources, forensic expertise as well as the ratio of beds in dedicated forensic units (put at 0.08 per 100,000 population in a report from Nigeria) are also grossly inadequate (Olagunju et al., 2023; 2015). Proportionally, lower income countries spend a smaller percentage of their health budget on mental health. The median percentage of health expenditures dedicated to psychological health is 0.5% in low-income countries and 5.1% in high income countries, with graduated values in lower and upper-middle income countries (Walmsley, 2017). The intertwined nature of the above challenges often daunts best practices in correctional psychiatry. Such system-level challenges include lack of expertise, absence of mental health

legislation, poor health resources, lack of research data, fragmented health services, attitude of professional to mentally ill offenders and socio-cultural factors (Ogunnubi et al., 2017; Olagunju et al., 2015).

In Nigeria specifically, human rights watchdogs have attributed the high rate of psychological disorders among inmates to overcrowding and lack of privacy, violence, enforced solitude, lack of meaningful activity, isolation from social networks, insecurity about future prospects and inadequate psychological health services (Ogunnubi et al., 2017). Several studies of the prevalence of psychological disorders in Nigerian correctional centres have also identified associated factors (Lovett et al., 2019; Craig et al., 2019), including: demographic characteristics (age, marital status, living situation prior to imprisonment); medical history (current medical complaints, co-morbid physical illness, personal and familial history of mental disorder, self-reported mental health); frequency of visits to inmates; duration and status of imprisonment (prison term length, trial status); and correctional conditions and services (self-reported ratings of correctional centre accommodation, feeding and healthcare) (Onyemocho et al., 2017).

In addition to severe psychiatric disorders, high levels of psychological crisis including homicide, suicide and risk for violence have been documented among inmates. For instance, previous studies have indicated that suicide was ten times higher in correctional populations relative to general population (Durcan & Zwemstra, 2024; Lize et al., 2015). This has often warranted the integration of risk assessment, reduction and management in routine psychological health evaluation and discharge planning as measures to obviate violence, dangerousness, and re-offending (Large & Nielssen, 2017). The prevalence of depression among inmates in Nigeria is high; Port Harcourt (37%), Benin City (72.6%), Ilesa (85.3%) and Jos (30.8%) (Armiya'u et al., 2023). While prevalence rates differ between studies, global systematic reviews have indicated that the prevalence of depression among inmates is consistently higher than in the general population (Fazel et al., 2016; Fazel & Seewald, 2022). Among the correctional population, many factors are implicated in predicting psychological health worldwide.

One factor implicated in predicting psychological health is emotion regulation. It is the deliberate or unintentional process of influencing the experience of emotions and their intensities (Seligowski et al., 2015). Many influential theories of emotion agree that emotions are coordinated, biologically-based responses to internal or external cues that are perceived as relevant to an organism's needs, goals, or concerns (Scherer et al., 2021). These responses are often adaptive. However, it is sometimes necessary to regulate emotions that are either too intense or are poorly matched to the demands of the present situation. There are two dimensions of emotion regulation; cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Expressive suppression (which involves inhibiting ongoing emotion-expressive behavior) is considered a response-focused strategy, as it is used to modulate an emotional response after it has developed in full. Alternatively, cognitive reappraisal (which involves changing one's thinking so as to change one's emotional responses) is considered an antecedent-focused strategy, as it is typically used to modulate an emotional response prior to its complete unfolding (Feldner et al., 2016). In contrast, cognitive reappraisal is typically adaptive, as it is effective at down-regulating (reducing) unpleasant emotion in a broad range of contexts, without deleterious physiological or cognitive consequences. Mirroring these results, clinically oriented investigations have found that lesser use of expressive suppression and greater use of cognitive reappraisal tend to be associated with lower levels of psychopathology (Werner & Gross, 2020).

Meta-analyses have indicated that emotion regulation has a significant relationship with psychological health. Cognitive reappraisal has been found to be positively correlated with psychological health whereas expressive suppression was found to be positively correlated with poor psychological health (Hu et al., 2024; Kraiss et al., 2020). In South Africa, mental health is associated with adaptive emotion regulation strategies rather than the maladaptive ones (Basson & Rothmann, 2018). Also, low cognitive reappraisal and high suppression have been found to be

susceptible to symptoms of anxiety, depression and depression in comorbidity (Zhu et al., 2021). Inmates who reappraise their thoughts, express, and experience more positive emotions and less negative emotions as compared to suppressors, who experience and express more negative emotions (Ogunnubi et al., 2017). This is fascinating as there are congruent and incongruent findings in this area. This calls for more solution-based research attempts to clarify this puzzle.

Till date, researchers are yet to elucidate the role of emotion regulation on psychological health among inmates in North-central Nigeria. Although these factors are very key techniques adopted as coping strategies, they have been ignored in researches among inmates in this region. This partly explains the dearth of interventions to support the inmates currently incarcerated in corrections centres in Benue state. Therefore, this study comes in as an attempt to cover the loops by examining emotion regulation and psychological health among inmates of correctional centres in Benue North-West Senatorial District.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine emotional regulation and psychological health among inmates of correctional centres in Benue North-West Senatorial District. The specific objective of this study is to examine the influence of emotion regulation on psychological health among inmates of correctional centres in Benue North-West Senatorial District.

Research Questions

How does emotion regulation influence psychological health among inmates of correctional centres in Benue North-West Senatorial District?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was tested in the present study:

There will be a significant influence of emotion regulation on psychological health among inmates of correctional centres in Benue North-West Senatorial District.

METHOD

This study adopted cross-sectional survey design to investigate emotion regulation and psychological health among inmates of correctional centres in Benue North-West Senatorial District. Therefore, based on the sample size determination table, a sample of 234 is representative of a population of 593. This study employed the use of proportionate sampling. This is a technique of probability sampling where samples are drawn from different population units based on the initial density of the population. As applied in the present study, the inmates from the correctional centres were drawn for the study in the proportion of their original populations in the correctional centres.

Participants: The participants for the study were 234 inmates of correctional centres in Benue State. They consisted of 165 (70.5%) males and 69 (29.5%) females. Their ages ranged from 24-67 years with a mean age of 45.65 years (SD=14.204). In terms of their religion, 104 (44.4%) were Christians, 91 (38.9%) were Muslims while 39 (16.7%) were practicing other religions. As for their ethnic groups, 84 (35.9%) were Tiv, 55 (23.5%) were Idoma while 95 (40.6%) were from other ethnic groups. As for their marital status, 90 (38.5%) were single, 63 (26.9%) were married, 44 (18.8%) were separated/divorced while 37 (15.8%) were widowed. Concerning their durations under incarceration, 54 (23.1%) were incarcerated for 1-5 years, 95 (40.6%) were incarcerated for 6-10 years while 85 (36.3%) were incarcerated for over 10 years.

Instruments:

The instruments used for this study include Emotion Regulation Questionnaire, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale.

Pilot study:

The instruments used in this study were tested in a pilot study conducted among 42 inmates of Otukpo correctional centre. The essence was to test if the instruments are reliable using a related sample. The participants were composed of 36 (85.7%) male and 6 (14.3%) female inmates. Their ages ranged from 26-60years with a mean age of 42.59 years (SD=11.85). The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire had an overall alpha coefficient of .82, and .73 and .76 for the cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression subscales respectively. The item total correlation revealed that all the items correlated highly with items 6 having the lowest scores of .330 and item 9 with a score of .887 which are more than the score of .30 recommended by Cristobal et al. (2007).

Procedure:

This study was conducted among inmates of correctional centres in Makurdi and Gboko. The researcher obtained a letter of introduction from the Head of Psychology Department and the letter was presented to the Correctional Service headquarters in Benue to seek approval for the research. Upon obtaining the approval, the researcher visited the correctional centres in Makurdi and Gboko to notify them and plan activities for data collection among inmates. Thereafter, the consent of the inmates was sought before the administration of questionnaire was carried out. They were assured that their information will be kept confidential and used solely for research purpose. Also, they were assured that the study will not constitute any harm to the respondents in any way. Furthermore, two research assistants (correctional officers) were adopted from each correctional centre and given proper orientation on research ethics and procedures. Simple random sampling was used to draw the sample for the study. The questionnaires were administered face to face and it took the respondents about 30 minutes each to respond to the questionnaire. Overall, the administration took 14 days to be completed. After administration, all the 234 copies administered copies were considered for statistical analyses.

Data analysis:

Multiple Linear Regression was used to test hypothesis

RESULTS

The hypothesis raised in this study was tested using multiple linear regression and standard multiple regression.

Table 1: Summary of inter-correlation among emotional regulation and psychological health among inmates of correctional centres in Benue State.

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Cognitive Reappraisals	20.470	5.749	-					
2. Expressive Suppression	12.479	3.904	.681**	-				
3. Psychological Health	44.782	6.526	.922**	.707**	.726**	.521**	.405**	-

The results displayed in table 1 above shows that there was a significant positive relationship between cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression ($r=.681$, $p<.001$), cognitive reappraisal and cognitive reappraisal and cognitive reappraisal and powerful others locus of control ($r=.637$, $p<.001$), cognitive reappraisal and psychological health ($r=.922$, $p<.001$). The results also shows that there was a significant positive relationship between expressive suppression and expressive suppression and internal locus of control ($r=.477$, $p<.001$), expressive suppression and expressive suppression and psychological health ($r=.707$, $p<.001$).

Table 2: Summary of Multiple Linear Regression showing the influence of emotion regulation on psychological health among inmates in Benue State.

Predictors	R	R ²	F	df	β	t	sig.
Constant	.928	.862	720.400	2,231		36.858	.000
Cognitive Reappraisal					.822	24.606	.000
Expressive Suppression					.147	14.392	.000

The results presented in table 2 shows that there was a significant influence of emotion regulation on psychological health; $R^2=.862$, $F(2,231)=720.400$, $p<.001$. This implies that emotion regulation explained 86.2% of the variance in psychological health. All the dimensions of emotion regulation; cognitive reappraisal ($\beta=.822$, $t=24.606$, $p<.001$), and expressive suppression ($\beta=.147$, $t=14.392$, $p<.001$) significantly predicted psychological health. This means that inmates psychological health increases with the level of emotion regulation ability. Thus, hypothesis one was supported.

DISCUSSION

Hypothesis one was tested to find out the influence of emotion regulation on psychological health among inmates of correctional centres in Benue North-West. Findings indicated that emotion regulation significantly influenced psychological health among inmates. The dimensions of emotion regulation; cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression have significant positive influence on psychological health. Emotion regulation entails the ability of inmates to modulate their emotions and use this knowledge to enhance their psychological health. It is common for inmates who understand their emotional reactions to be more psychologically sound and contribute more positively to their immediate environment. This is in line with the Ryff's theory of psychological health which states that people who are psychologically healthy are more likely to understand their emotions and use it to positively relate with others. This finding thus agrees with Tsujimoto et al. (2024) who found that poor emotion regulation ability was associated with affect, life satisfaction, and health, whereas high emotion regulation ability was related to negative affect, mental and physical health. These findings are related with the present study but differs where the study failed to indicate how the dimensions of emotion regulation influence psychological health. Another related study by Chukwuemeka and Obioha (2023), found a significant relationship between cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, and psychological well-being. This finding is closely related but differs in the sample used for the study. Also, Mojsa-Kaja and Ivcevic (2023) found both direct and indirect effects of emotion regulation strategies on depression, anxiety, and stress. Similarly, Maya et al. (2023) found that emotion regulation

strategies (situation selection, distraction, rumination, cognitive reappraisal, acceptance, expressive suppression, and emotional support seeking) and psychological health (life satisfaction, depressive symptoms, perceived stress, and loneliness) are significantly correlated. This finding also agrees with the present study. More so, Wobeto et al. (2023) revealed that emotion regulation (expressive suppression and cognitive reappraisal), and mental health (depression, anxiety, and stress) were significantly related. Individually, they found that expressive suppression was associated with more vigor, which in turn was associated with less anxiety and stress; cognitive reappraisal was associated with more vigor, which in turn was associated with less anxiety and stress. Another related study by Tasneem and Panwar (2022) revealed that emotional regulation and psychological well-being are the positive and significant correlates of mindfulness. Other researchers (Vilte et al., 2022; Shah et al., 2022; Hala & Shereen, 2021) have found negative correlations between psychological well-being and difficulties in emotion regulation. This finding also agrees with the present study. Researchers have also found that emotional suppression were independently associated with poorer psychological health (greater depressive symptoms and psychological distress, lower emotional and personal well-being) (Sheykhangafshe et al., 2021; Low et al., 2021). Rahmania et al. (2020) revealed that emotion regulation had a positive significant correlation with psychological well-being. Earlier studies (Kraiss et al. (2020; Gomez-Acousta & Perez, 2020) have found small to moderate negative relationships with psychological well-being for the strategies of avoidance and rumination, and positive relationships with reappraisal and acceptance. However, it is quite absurd that majority of the reviewed studies have found low to moderate correlations among the study variables. This is quite contrasting with the present study that revealed high correlation coefficients between emotion regulation and psychological health. These differences could be due to the difference in sample, settings and instruments used.

Implication of findings

The need for a psychologically stable and orderly society for the peaceful coexistence of both the young and the old is critical. Growth, development and technological advancement can only be achieved under a relatively stable environment that can nurse the positive psychological health of its inhabitants. This means that psychological health is as important as other forms of health. This is why each country has a system put in place to manage people whose psychological health is derailed and in addition, there are correctional centres who provide them with the skills to gradually reintegrate into the society. Inmates are human just as the general population and the need for all inmates to experience psychological health is paramount. Inmates who are psychologically healthy are expected to understand the rationale behind their incarceration, they cooperate more with correctional staff, regulate their emotions to undertake the rehabilitation process and see their reintegration into the society as a priority and as a function of their cooperative efforts.

However, when the psychological health of inmates is altered, it becomes difficult for the aim of incarceration to be achieved at the first point. More so, there are many factors that tend to affect the mental state of inmates in correctional centres. In Nigeria, a general paucity of psychological health services (lack of human resources, timely mental health assessments and psychotropic medications) and psychosocial interventions (limited rehabilitation, vocational and community rehabilitation services) have been observed in correctional studies. There are also worrisome conditions that could represent significant psychosocial stressors to inmates in low-income countries such as; poor sanitation, lack of food and opportunities for recreation; poor communication between the medical and justice systems; and delays in trials, case-processing and release. It has long been acknowledged that the uncertain outcome of court hearings and the welfare of dependents during incarceration are important risk factors for psychological disorders among inmates, and that speedy trials are necessary to avoid prolonged exposure to these and other stressors.

Human rights watchdogs have described correctional facilities conditions in the country as harsh, appalling and damaging to the psychological health of inmates. Furthermore, correctional

facilities are often overstretched and overcrowded, with many holding of them three times their designated capacities. More so, the medical treatment of inmates in Nigeria is grossly inadequate. It is generally acknowledged that there is a very low rate of identification and treatment of psychological disorders. Inmates with psychological disorders are in some cases incarcerated with the general correctional population and little effort is made to provide psychological health care.

Conclusion

Based on the findings obtained from the results of the present study, the following inferences were drawn: Emotion regulation (cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression) is a significant positive determinant of psychological health among inmates of correctional centres.

Recommendations

In line with the findings obtained from the results of the present study, the researcher has made the following recommendations for clinical practice and policy making: It is recommended that the management of correctional centres should adjust their rehabilitation programmes to include a module on emotion regulation skills training where qualified clinical psychologists will educate, guide and support inmates enrolled in this programme to build the emotional skills to modulate their emotional reactions to the day to day demands of incarceration.

In addition, policies and laws regarding criminal justice that are binding on the welfare of inmates should give room for personal and social influences on the psychological health of inmates. In doing this, the rehabilitation process should give inmates the room to feel in control of their lives, to accept that some aspects of their lives are controlled by their network of support and that others are meant to occur by chance.

Lastly, clinical psychologists in their research and clinical practice on inmates of correctional centres should consider the possibility of the composite role of emotion regulation on the psychological health of inmates. The effects of these variables can be assessed during clinical and psychological examinations on inmates.

Authors' contribution

All the authors contributed equally to this study, they read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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