



LONELINESS AS DETERMINANT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS OF AWAITING-TRIAL INMATES IN LAFIA CORRECTIONAL CENTRE, NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of loneliness on Psychological Distress of awaiting trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. Cross sectional Survey design was adopted for the study. 243 participants consisting of 213(87.7%) males and 30 (12.7%) females were randomly selected using purposive sampling technique. The instruments used for the study were the Perceived Social Support Scale and Psychological Distress scale. Data collected were analyzed using linear regression analysis. One hypothesis was tested and the results of the hypothesis indicated that loneliness (Friends support, Family support, and Significant support) significantly influence Psychological distress among awaiting trial-inmates in Lafia correctional center, Nasarawa State, Nigeria, and the result was supported ($R^2=110$, $F(3,239)=9.862$; $p=.000$). It was concluded that, psychological treatments components such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Behavior Modification should be included as active rehabilitation and reformation programs of awaiting-trial inmates in Nigeria. This will contribute to the evidence-based approach to rehabilitation. The researchers recommended among others that awaiting trial inmates should be educated on the influence of loneliness on psychological distress.

INTRODUCTION

A prison is an institution established throughout history to punish those who break the law while protecting public safety (Abiola, 2002). However, the quest for public safety or punishment of offenders often results in new legislation which increasingly allows for unprecedented numbers of individuals to become imprisoned in correctional centers (Haney, 2002). Longer sentences, along with an increase in individual imprisonment present continual dependence on government resources, which have an enduring, major effect on our society, and the legislative focus on imprisonment is not without its collective consequence to the individual, and the very nature of humanity.

The combination of overcrowding and the rapid expansion of prison systems across the country adversely affected living conditions in many prisons, jeopardized prisoner safety, compromised prison management, and greatly limit prisoner access to meaningful balance life, and sense of wellbeing.

Concern over the level of psychological distress experience among incarcerated inmates (awaiting-trial inmates inclusive) is increasingly an issue of mental health discusses in Nigeria, especially psychologists, and other experts involved in the management of corrections (Agboola, Babalola, & Udofia, 2017; Okoro, Ezeonwuka, & Onu, 2018). For instance, adjustment difficulty and unhealthy responses to external stimuli constitute the emotional distress of inmates. Considering the poor dietary condition, poor sanitation, and crowded nature of Nigeria's correctional environment, many prison inmates often feel distressed (Agboola, Babalola, & Udofia, 2017). For the first time entering the harsh prison yard, the prisoner may feel deeply sad, rejected, deteriorated, weak, and awful (Agboola et al., 2017).

A study among prisoners in England and Wales (Ibrahim, Esena, Aikins, O'Keefe, & McKay, 2021) showed that 63 % of prisoners had psychological distresses. Furthermore, 70 % of prisoners in Ghana (Armiya'u, Obembe, Audu, & Afolaranmi, 2019), 63 % of prisoners in Zambia (World Prison Population, 2019), 61.9 % in Ethiopia, and 57 % of prisoners in Nigeria (Ibrahim et al., 2021) experienced psychological distress. Given this, psychological distress refers to a state of nervousness, anxiety, anger, grief, disgust, and emotional pain (Ebeh, Annorzie, & Mbagwu, 2019). For the purpose of this study, psychological distress is the emotional condition one feels when coping with upsetting, frustrating or harmful situations (WHO, 2017).



Loneliness is a critical factor among justice-involved individuals because it increases the risk of exposure to criminogenic strains” (Cullen, 1994; Maschi, 2006; Robbers, 2004). It is a factor that determines people’s level of psychological and physical health. People who are lonely tend to have poorer psychological health, they often feel dejected and rejected, they suffer from social phobia, depressive symptoms, and suicidal ideation and they may take plenty of alcohol or they indulge in other forms of substance abuse (Mowen, Boman, & Schweitzer, 2020). Likewise, a lack of social support is thought to exacerbate the stressors that justice-involved people experience and contribute to maladjustment (Cullen, 1994).

In view of the importance of the above, studies show that wherever there is loneliness, there is often a tendency for poor emotional issues, such as diminished psychological health (Fazel & Baillargeon, 2011; Mefoh, Odo, Ezeh, and Ezeah, 2016). As a result, this study aims to investigate the influence of loneliness on psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

Statement of the problem

Psychological distress is more prevalent among prison inmates’ population. Statistics showed that prison inmates suffering from psychological distress among countries vary but they are relatively high. For example, 70% of Ghanaian prison inmates suffer from mental morbidity, 63% in England and Wales, and 63% of prison inmates in Zambia, (Armiya’u et al., 2019). Nigerian prison showed that there are 57% inmates with psychological distress in correctional custody (Awopetu, 2014). Nigerian prisoners experience severe psychological distress compared to a prevalence of 5.8% in the general Nigerian population (Mefoh et al., 2016).

Previous studies revealed that psychological distress is more common among prisoners who are awaiting trials than among other prison inmates’ populations (Abdulmalik, Adedokun, & Baiyewu, 2021).

Considering the huge number of awaiting-trial inmates with mental distress in Nigeria prisons, a good number of them exhibit clinical symptoms like loneliness, (Armiya’u, Obembe, Audu, & Afolaranmi, 2013), suicide (Agbahowe et al., 1998), major depression, (Ebeh et al., 2019) and psychotic illnesses, among others. Psychological distress is commonly associated with medical illnesses which could enhance suicide risk. Specifically, these psychological conditions seem to have changed their perceptions and thinking regarding their future.

While these facts remain about mental illness and its contribution to the global burden of diseases, reporting these indices of psychological distress is grossly underestimated, even more so in low-income countries. From the foregoing, it is evident that many cases of psychological distress have gone undetected. This indicates that published prison inmates statistics were probably grossly understated because research on the phenomenon in most correctional centers of the country were virtually not investigated, and in most cases, the issue of ‘dark figures’ complicate the phenomenon. Hence, there is no accurate count of persons with mental challenges who are incarcerated in Nigeria, and information about inmates’ health conditions is inadequately reported. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the influence of loneliness on psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

Based on the review of extant studies, the current study postulated the following question: What is the influence of loneliness on psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria?



Objectives of the study

The study's fundamental objective is to specifically investigate the influence of loneliness on psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis

Based on the review of extant studies, one hypothesis was formulated to guide the study as thus: there will be a significant influence of loneliness on psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significant

Significance of the study

It was expected that the findings of this study will provide valuable information regarding awaiting trial inmates and the contribution of loneliness on influence psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria

1. It is hoped that the findings of this study will result in an awareness to the high prevalence of mental health challenges amongst inmates and that it will influence future decision making and planning for mental healthcare services at correctional service and other correctional services in Nigeria.
2. Stimulate further investigation by Nigerian correctional service administration for further actions.
3. Theoretically, the findings will shade light on the existing knowledge and the realities about the situation of awaiting-trial inmates and inform the academic community who are interested to conduct basic researches, further, into this area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The existence of psychological distress has been recognized for thousands of years. For example, the book of Job illustrates a classic case of psychological distress. Job is seen as a profoundly distressed man, he lost interest in things he used to like doing, became hopeless; became withdrawn, self-blaming, self-depreciating, and had sleep disturbances. Clayson et al (2006) stated that even a 3,900-year-old Egyptian manuscript provides a distressingly accurate picture of the sufferer's pessimism, his loss of faith in others, his inability to carry out the everyday tasks of life, and his serious consideration of suicide. These historical descriptions are congruent with some of the present accounts of the phenomenon of psychological distress.

For the purpose of this study, psychological distress is the deviation from some objectively healthy state of being. It implies maladaptive patterns of coping. It is mild psychopathology with symptoms that are common in the community. It is negative feelings of restlessness, depression, anger, anxiety, loneliness, isolation, and problematic interpersonal relationships.

Psychological distress can be stimulated by stressors, personal life changes, or trauma. When an individual experiences this unpleasant feeling, it can greatly impact their overall functioning. While every person reacts to stress in distinct ways, psychological distress can manifest as extreme fatigue, sadness, avoidance behaviors, fear, and anxiety. A person experiencing psychological distress may seem distant and unlike themselves, often avoiding social situations.

Psychological distress can be divided into moderate or higher levels of distress, which differ fundamentally on the severity of symptoms and outcomes.

Moderate levels of distress manifest as an overall negative mood in the individual, whereby they find it more difficult to complete daily tasks. In this case, it is very important to understand the root cause of the distress and understand what may help the individual. The first steps include making lifestyle changes in order to reduce the activities that may be causing the distress, in addition to opening up to someone and discussing the stress. Learning important coping skills are also



important, such as breathing techniques to reduce anxiety, yoga for progressive muscle relaxation, meditation, and changing negative thoughts through the process of cognitive reframing.

High levels of distress manifest as chronic problems that severely affect the individual physically and emotionally due to feeling such stress for a long period of time. Over time, high levels of distress may develop into mental illnesses, such as attention deficit disorder, anxiety disorders (e.g. panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder), and depression. The individual is also at a much higher risk of developing hypochondria and other health complications which can be due to loneliness.

Loneliness refers to as the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is deficient either qualitatively or quantitatively.

One of the likely distresses that inmates in prison experienced is loneliness. Loneliness is usually an unpleasant emotion that typically includes anxious feelings about a lack of connectedness or communality with others. Loneliness is a common human experience that can affect a wide range of people although some people are at a greater risk of it than others. Loneliness, feeling lonely, or being alone had often been used interchangeably (Karnick, 2019) but these terms are not exactly the same. For instance, it is possible to feel lonely in the midst of people or in a crowd or to feel socially connected when alone (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). Loneliness is a result of the complex set of feelings encompassing reactions to the absence of intimate and social needs. It is an emotional state in which a person experiences strong feelings of emptiness and social isolation (Seligman, 2018), Loneliness is detrimental to psychological well-being and has a deleterious effect on various aspects of health (Abiola, Udofa, & Zakari, 2021). Loneliness is composed of negative emotions; a lonely individual feels socially frustrated, has feelings of nobody to count on for support, absence of a social network, and lacks sense of social belongingness. Studies (Karnick, 2005; Rokach, 2019) show that loneliness has detrimental effects on the physical and mental health of the individual. Generally, research seems to show that loneliness is associated with poor psychological well-being.

The term loneliness was first used by Sigmund Freud in 1939 to describe the inner structure of the person that could be completely changed after an experience of loneliness. Years later, Sullivan elaborated on Freud's description of loneliness; he proposed that humans are social animals with a need for contact and that loneliness is the result of this unfulfilled need (Copel & Sullivan, 1953).

There are three assumptions underlying loneliness. First, loneliness results from perceived deficiencies in one's social world. Second, loneliness is a subjective state, as distinguished from the objective state of social isolation. Third, the experience of loneliness is unpleasant and distressing (Carr & Schellenbach, 1993; Kraus, Davis, Bazzini, & Church, 1993; Younger, 1995). Three major types of loneliness have been identified: existential, pathological, and psychosocial. Existential loneliness is a universal human characteristic, inborn in all persons, and not related to object loss or lack of intimate relationships. Existential loneliness is also referred to in the literature as primary loneliness (Austin, 1989; Francis, 1986). Pathological loneliness is thought to be related to dysfunctional cognitions and affective states, usually experienced by severely disturbed and psychotic individuals, mainly schizophrenic patients (Austin, 1989). Psychosocial or ordinary loneliness is often a product of situational change or temporary separation. It is global, generalized, and uncomfortable. Psychosocial loneliness is also referred to as secondary loneliness (Carr & Schellenbach, 1993).

Furthermore, in order to distinguish loneliness from other related concepts, it is essential to identify its defining characteristics (Walker & Avant, 1995). Rokach (1988) pointed to four major elements of the experience of loneliness: self-alienation, interpersonal isolation, distressed reactions, and agony. None of these elements is in itself specific to loneliness; however, the four elements combine to create the experience of loneliness (Rokach, 1988). Self-alienation, which



is a feeling of separation from one's self, core, and identity (Rokach, 1988), has two components: emptiness and depersonalization. Emptiness is the hollowness and blackness felt by the lonely, while depersonalization is characterized by a feeling of unreality and confused identity (Rokach, 1988). Interpersonal isolation refers to the feeling of being emotionally, geographically, and socially alone; it has three components: absence of intimacy, perceived social alienation, and abandonment. The absence of intimacy is a disturbing feature of loneliness; it refers to the lack of a close, intimate, and caring relationship. The absence of intimacy has two components: a lack of closeness to others in general. This component focuses on deficiency in relationships in general and missing a specific relationship, i.e., a person who is no longer present, or the absence of any intimate relationship in one's life (Rokach, 1988).

Perceived social alienation refers to the perception of being socially unwanted and alone, or abandoned. Perceived social alienation has two components: disconnectedness and social rejection. Disconnectedness refers to the feeling of being socially and emotionally detached from others; social rejection refers to the actual rejection that is often felt by the lonely (Rokach, 1988). Abandonment refers to the person's belief that he or she was purposefully left behind or abandoned. Abandonment also has two components: intimate rejection and betrayal. Intimate rejection refers to the feeling of rejection by close and intimate persons (e.g., mother, girlfriend); betrayal is a generalized feeling of being unaccepted and unwelcomed by others.

Despite this, loneliness has been defined as an emotional state in which an individual is aware of the feeling of being apart from another or others, along with the experience of a vague need for individuals (Copel, 1988). Loneliness has also been defined as an unwelcome feeling of lack of companionship and a wish for interaction different from that being experienced (Francis, 1976). Younger (1995) noted that loneliness is the feeling of being alone in spite of longing for others, and hence, defined loneliness as the experience of isolation, disorientation, or "lostness" within a dimensional domain of meaning. Riley, & Shaw, (1985) pointed out that in contemporary literature, loneliness is defined as the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is deficient either qualitatively or quantitatively.

For DuBois, and Silverthorn, (2005), loneliness is a situation experienced by the individual as one where there is an unpleasant or inadmissible lack "of (quality of) certain relationships. This includes situations, in which the number of existing relationships is smaller than is considered desirable or admissible, as well as situations where the intimacy one wishes for has not been realized.

More so, loneliness is a pervasive, depressing, debilitating condition that can affect all of one's life" (Killeen, 1998). It is described by the lonely as an "emptiness" or "hollow feeling" (Austin, 1989). Also, Killeen (1998) suggests that loneliness is unique for every individual and called it "the difficult-to-define concept."

Research literature suggests that loneliness is a consequence or correlate of numerous variables. Loneliness has been found to be negatively related to self-esteem and positively related to depression, i.e., lonely persons have been found to be relatively depressed and their self-esteem was low (Ouellet & Joshi, 1986; Roscoe & Skomski, 1989). A positive relationship has also been found between anxiety and loneliness. Jackson and Cochran (1991) found a positive relationship between the subjective experience of loneliness and impaired mental health, including neuroticism, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, psychosomatic concern, and aggression. Significant associations have also been found between shyness, lower extroversion, and loneliness. A person who is shy may find difficulty in relating to others and in expressing his or her thoughts and emotions, which may contribute to the feeling of loneliness (Kalliopuska, 1986). Finally, significant relationships have been reported between loneliness and physical problems, and greater age-related increases in blood pressure and poorer sleep quality were found in lonely older adults (Cacioppo et al., 2002).



Research design

The present study employed a cross-sectional survey design. The cross-sectional survey design is preferred because the study is not examining cause-effect relationship. Also, this design is considered appropriate because there was no any manipulation with respect to variables. As such, the variables of interest have all existed. The study independent variables are perceived social support, self-efficacy, and loneliness. While, psychological distress is the study dependent variable.

Setting

This current study was carried out among 243 selected awaiting trial inmates in Jos Correctional Centre, Plateau state, Nigeria.

Participants

The population for this study consists of two hundred and forty (240) awaiting-trial inmates of Lafia Correctional Centre, Lafia State, drawn from the awaiting trial section, using a purposive sampling approach, as this avail the researcher the choice to identify participants who are willing to participate and respond to the research questionnaire. The participants' demographic characteristics showed that 85.7% of the participants were male while 11.7% were female. Moreover, 14.0% were between 16 – 20 years, 22.2% were from 21 – 25, 26.7% were from 26 – 30 years, 12.3% were from 31 – 35 years, 12.8% were from 36 – 40 years while 11.9% were from 41 years and above. On their marital status, 57.2% were single, 39.5% were married while 3.3% were divorced. On their religion, 63.8% were Christians, 34.2% were Islam while 2.1% were Traditionalists. Their years of awaiting trail ranged from 1 – 8 years. On the other hand, 13.6% of the inmates had FSLC, 58.0% had SSCE, 16.9% had NCE/Diploma, 7.0% had B.Sc while 4.5% had postgraduate certificates.

Sample and Sampling technique

A simple random sampling technique was employed to select 240 awaiting-trial inmates. The inmates' list was taken as a sampling frame and study participants were selected by using systematic random sampling technique. The total population based on the sampling frame was 351 awaiting-trial inmates. The study sample size was determined using Krejcie, and Morgan (1970), sample size determination. As a result, sample size (n) was computed by single population proportion formula $[n = [(Z\alpha/2)^2 * P (1 - P)]/d^2]$ by assuming a 95 % confidence level of $Z \alpha/2 = 1.96$, 5 % margin of error, taking a proportion of psychological distress approximately.

Instrument

Data was gathered by means of validated instruments. Two questionnaires were used to gather data for this research. The first instrument is the short version scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) developed by (Zimet et al., 1988). It is a 12-item with response options a 7-point Likert-type, ranging from very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (7). Items were divided into three sub-groups, consisting of four items each that relate to the sources of the social support; family, friends and significant others. The second instrument is a psychological Distress Scale (PDS) developed by (Kessler et al., 2003) to measure psychological distress. Response choices included "Not at all"(0), "A little" (1), "Quite a lot" (2), and "Very much" (3).

Procedure

The researchers took a letter of introduction to the Controller of Correctional Centre Lafia, Nasarawa State Command, for permission. Three correctional staff were instructed by the Comptroller to superintend the exercise and assist the researchers to talk to the awaiting-trial inmates. At the venue of the study, the researchers explained the purpose of the study and

assured the inmates that their responses would be confidential and anonymous. When reasonable rapport was established between the parties, which are between the researchers and the respondents, the researchers gave out the questionnaires to those respondents who indicated interest to participate. Many inmates volunteered to participate in the study and they were all giving the questionnaires to complete. Completed questionnaires were collected from 351 inmates, but during the analysis, only 240 questionnaires were analyzed. The rest were discarded due to multiple and wrong responses on a single item and/or other anomalies.

RESULTS

The data for this study was analyzed using multiple regression analysis and the result is as presented in table 1.

The hypothesis of this present study stated that there will be a significant influence of loneliness on psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. This hypothesis was tested using simple linear regression and the result is presented in table 1.

Table 1:

Summary of Simple Linear Regression Showing the Prediction of Loneliness on psychological distress of Awaiting-trial inmates in Jos Correctional Centre, Plateau State, Nigeria

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	β		
1 Psychological Distress	Constant	39.352	3.438	11.446	.000
	Loneliness	.333	.078	.264	4.257

Result in table 1 shows that there was a significant and positive prediction of loneliness on psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria ($\beta = .264$, $t = .264$; $p = .000$). Loneliness was a significant positive predictor of psychological distress meaning that inmates who scored high on loneliness significantly scored high on psychological distress and vice versa. Based on this result, the hypothesis which stated that 'there will be a significant influence of loneliness on psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria was therefore supported.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The current research aims to investigate the influence of loneliness on psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates in Lafia Correctional Centre, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The hypothesis which states that there will be a significantly influence of loneliness on psychological distress was therefore supported. This could be due to the fact or probably that prison inmates are lonely because they are isolated from the society; the truth is that they are in solitary isolation; they're not making friends with fellow inmates, as well as not bonding together. As such, these manifest as depressive symptoms. The finding is consistent with the work of (Karnick, 2005; Rokach, & Brock 2019) who shows that loneliness has detrimental effects on physical and mental health of the individual. This finding further agrees with (van Beljouw et al., 2010) who reported that higher levels of loneliness predicted higher levels of depression. Result of the study also aligned with (Jackson & Cochran, 1991) who found a positive relationship between the subjective experience of loneliness and impaired mental health, including neuroticism, low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, psychosomatic concern and aggression. Similarly, the study outcome consistent with prior research by Holvast et al., (2015) who reported that loneliness is not only mental health, but also physical health. He also reported that loneliness has significant effects on depressive



symptoms. This finding disagrees with Mellor et al. (2008) who indicated that loneliness was associated with physical health.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the result of this study demonstrated that, loneliness was found to be major predictor of psychological distress experiences among awaiting-trial inmates of Lafia correctional center, Nasarawa State.

This research represents an important contribution to research investigating influence of loneliness on psychological distress among awaiting-trial inmates in the Nigerian Correctional centers. Also, this study indicates and support that psychological treatments components such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Behavior Modification should be included as active rehabilitation and reformation programs of awaiting-trial inmates in Nigeria. This will contribute to the evidence-based approach to rehabilitation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the outcome of the study:

1. There is need for community survey study to be carried out to identify major predictors of psychological distress in the population compare to prison statistics. This will then make it possible for policies on intervention strategies to accommodate the mental health component and promote psychological well-being of awaiting trial inmates.
2. Specialized therapies by psychologists serving in the Nigerian Correctional Services should be deployed to safeguard the psychological health of the inmates especially those awaiting-trial.



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