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EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP ROLE AMONG INMATES IN OKEKURA PRISON, ILORIN, KWARA STATE

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Abstract

Within correctional centres, formal authority lays solely on the staff of the prison i.e. the wardens. The real control however often flows through the informal hierarchies shaped by inmate leaders. The paper examines how leadership dynamics among inmates within Oke-kura correctional centre, Ilorin, Kwara State, affects both individual outcomes (recidivism, training engagements) and collective outcomes (safety, cohesion etc). It also investigated the criteria used in the selection of inmate leaders and identified the leadership structure among the inmates. The study relied on a qualitative research method of data gathering and thematic and content analysis. A total of 21 KII and IDIs was conducted among inmates serving sentenced terms of more than 7 years. Findings indicated that inmates' subculture and leadership hierarchy exists within Oke-kura prison. The study identified the following positions: Inspector general, Commissioner, Provost, Chief justice, Welfare and religious leader. Criteria for selection included inmate literacy level, language diversity, level of loyalty to the prison wardens, relationship with other inmates and general good behavior. The paper concludes that although leaders among inmates can coordinate and manage their cell mates; serve as a rehabilitation tool and as eyes and ears for officers in their absence, leaders can also serve as a hindrance to inmates' rehabilitation, indicating a dual impact. Hence the paper recommends the employment more officers in correctional centres in order to avoid over-reliance on inmate leaders; also correctional centres should adopt non-custodian sentencing such as fines and community service to reduce congestion of centres.

Keywords: informal leadership, prison subculture, rehabilitation, recidivism, dual-impact

Introduction

According to Gupta and Choudhary (2019), correctional facilities are distinct, delicate, moral, unpredictable, and unstable settings with far-reaching effects that yield and exert significant power and influence, depriving people of one of their fundamental human rights. They are the most extreme form of authority in nations lacking the death sentence. As a result, persons in charge of these influential organizations must meet high standards. Despite living together, the inmates' constitution makes them a distinct social group that is not driven by free will.They thrive in incredibly cramped conditions, often sharing all places except for a bed; they must remain in a group even if they fear for their personal safety.

The correctional centres are institutions created to administer and enforce justice, correct the offenders and uphold order in the society. Ideally, power in such centres rests firmly in the hands of correction staff; wardens and administrators (Aidoo, 2024). However, in reality, these centres usually have two systems of control, the official authority of the staff and the unofficial power of the inmate leaders. This duality is especially noticeable in the correctional centres of Nigeria, where inadequate staffing, overcrowding and scarcity of resources have provided an enabling environment on which the hierarchies of inmates would develop. This dual system of control is a common pattern witnessed across the globe. Prison gangs such as the Aryan Brotherhood or the Mexican Mafia have informal power in the United States (Miravalle,2025) and are often in competition with the formal authority. In the United Kingdom, leadership is organized in the form of wing reps or prisoner councils, but is often supervised by staff (Williams and Liebling, 2023). These examples demonstrate the universality of the phenomenon of inmate leadership and its two-fold effect: it can promote rehabilitation and order, but it may also promote subcultures that are resistant to reform.

Clemmer uses the term "prisonization" to describe the intricate processes by which new inmates learn the norms of prison society and what is expected of them in order to define the prison subculture and how inmates adjust to it (McKendy and Ricciardelli, 2018). Initially, the prisoners' status is diminished from that of civilians to that of faceless individuals numbered in a uniform, subject to institutional control and the strict hierarchy of the jail. Additionally, individuals become accustomed to their new eating, sleeping, and working habits and accept the subordinate role of a prisoner. A "society of captive" develops in reaction to incarceration, according to Sykes (1960). New inmates join a society with an inmate's code to help them deal with the "pain of imprisonment"(Honeywell, 2018).

Inmate leadership can use categorized into two, those inmates officially selected by prison staff to hold leadership positions, often within programs that promote rehabilitation or conflict resolution and informal leaders, inmates who gain authority through unofficial means, such as personal influence, control of contraband, or affiliation with prison gangs. These individuals are often respected for their skills or knowledge, gaining trust of their peers.

Both types of leaders significantly influence prison culture, shaping norms and behaviors within the inmates' population. Positive leaders can help maintain order and support rehabilitation efforts, while negative leaders may contribute to violence, resistance to authority and criminal behavior.

Statement of the Problem.

Inmates' subculture plays a crucial role in shaping prison dynamics, influencing rehabilitation outcomes, institutional security, and post-incarceration reintegration. Within correctional facilities, inmates develop informal social structures with distinct norms, values and behavioural patterns as a response to the restrictive prison environment. While these subcultures serve as coping mechanisms, they often reinforce deviant identities, perpetuate violence and strengthen criminal networks. The persistence of these subcultures challenges prison management, weakens rehabilitation efforts and contributes to high recidivism rates, making their study essential for effective correctional reform. Several criminological theories highlight the significance in shaping behavior. Clemmer's (1940) Prisonization Theory posits that prolonged incarceration fosters the internalization of criminal values, making post-release reintegration difficult. Sykes (1958) deprivation Theory explains how the loss of liberty, autonomy and security leads inmates to develop collective resistance, often reinforcing antisocial behavior. Additionally, Sutherland's (1939) Differential Association Theory suggests that prison environments serve as spaces for criminal learning, where inmates acquire new techniques and rationalizations through peer interactions. These theories collectively suggest that inmate subcultures are not merely incidental byproducts of imprisonment but are deeply embedded in the prison experience, influencing both behaviour and institutional stability. Correctional policies have largely focused on formal rehabilitation programs while neglecting the influence of informal social dynamics within prisons. Without understanding inmate subcultures, interventions designed to promote rehabilitation, reduce criminal networking and improve prison security may remain ineffective.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

i. To know the criteria in selecting inmate leaders.
ii. To identify the leadership structure among inmates.
iii. To identify the role of inmate leadership in rehabilitation process.

Literature review

The general nature of leadership depends on the culture in which the leader operates. In this study, leadership roles among inmates primarily examines how leadership dynamics develop within prison environments and how such dynamics influence inmate behavior, and rehabilitation efforts (Osundeyi, 2025). A leader can be described as someone who sets an example through action or a reputation for action, and who affects and guides the beliefs and actions of others. He is the one who establishes rapport, the unofficial, uncontrolled group life revolves around him. Prison administrators do not have a set program, unless there is a conflict. Making the time go as smoothly and comfortably as possible is the single goal shared by the group and the leader (Adegoke, 2022).

Concept of leadership

There are several definitions and notions for leadership, a global phenomena that is most simply defined as the ability to guide, direct, or influence others (Merriam-Webster, 2014). The most generally used definition focuses on the leader as a person, the leader's behavior, the leader's effect, and the relationships between the leader and the led (Bass, 1999). Similarly,Cai, 2023, argued that there are multiple ways to explain leadership, there are numerous strategies and styles that govern how leaders provide guidance, direction, or influence others. A leadership style is a leader's method of offering guidance, executing plans, and motivating others. Understanding the interactions between a leader and his or her followers is essential to effective leadership. Leadership is not simply the ability or static capacity of a leader. One must consider the dynamic nature of the interaction between leader and followers. In these social dynamics, all parties strive to influence one another in order to achieve a common goal. Leadership is the process by which a leader attempts to persuade his or her people to set and achieve a goal or goals (Bwalya, 2023).

Leadership style.

1. ***Laissez-Faire leadership.***

According to Xiaoxiong, 2025, the laissez-faire leadership style was first described by Lewin et al in 1938. Laissez-faire leadership empowers followers or workers to make their own decisions. It is also known as declarative leadership or the hand-off leadership style since the leader delegates work to followers with little or no supervision. A laissez-faire leader believes in their followers' freedom of choice and leaves them alone to do whatever they choose. These leaders offer basic but limited information and resources. There is hardly any participation, interest, or communication in the group. Laissez-faire can produce competent and highly skilled individuals, but it also results in complacency and a lack of motivation (Gbadebo, 2025). When leaders demonstrate Laissez-faire, they genuinely do not care if the follower maintains standards or meets goals.

2. ***Transactional leadership***

Burns (1978) characterizes leadership as the ability of leaders to influence followers to act in accordance with their needs and desires."Leadership, as opposed to mere power, is inextricably

linked to the needs and desires of followers" (J. M. Burns, 1978, p. 19). "Power and leadership are evaluated by the extent of the intended effect on the population." The transactional leader sees a need or want that a possible follower already has and uses it to their advantage. Furthermore, the transactional leader identifies potential motivations in followers who endeavor to fulfill elevated expectations. "A transactional leader does not endeavor to alter the existing organizational culture; rather, they operate within that culture, delineating followers' responsibilities, expectations, tasks, and rewards, all in exchange for fulfilling the contract or acquiescing to the leaders" (Cebula & NIC, 2012, p. 42).

3. ***Transformational leadership.***

According to Bakker et al, 2023, transformational leadership does more with colleagues than just make deals or set up exchanges. Transformational leaders want to be examples of higher morals, enthusiasm, and optimism. They also want to turn their followers into leaders and help the organization achieve long-term, unlimited success. Transformational leaders encourage change and get their followers to make it happen, all while making themselves and their organizations better.

Transformational leadership could be a game-changer for corrections and help bring about change. Haenisch (2008) says that bad communication and bad leadership are the main things that keep state government employees from being productive. Haenisch does not explicitly mention transformational leadership; however, he delineates essential factors for enhancing productivity, such as proactive and efficient leadership, reciprocal communication, and well-defined goals and objectives, fostering teamwork and positive motivation.

Concept of Prison.

The idea of prison has been examined from a number of viewpoints, including structural and functional perspectives. McCorkle and Korn (1954) describes a prison as a physical edifice situated in a particular geographic area, where numerous individuals inhabit highly specialized conditions and adapt to the distinct alternatives offered by the unique social environment. Sykes (1958), Goffman (1961), and Okunola (1986) envisioned prison as a highly isolated environment, characterized by a novel system of order and control. From a functional standpoint, a prison is regarded as a facility for the punishment of offenders, where criminals are isolated from society to safeguard it from additional criminal conduct. It is a place where people can change and learn how to be good citizens who follow the law and work hard after they get out.

The Nigerian Correctional Service was founded to supervise convicts in prison yards. This constitutional function enables the Nigerian Correctional Service to:

▪ Hold inmates awaiting trial in custody until requested by the courts.

▪ Punish offenders as instructed by the courts.

▪ Reform convicted inmates.
▪ Rehabilitate and reintegrate convicts who have completed their sentences in prison.

Prison as a Correctional Institution.

Gibbons (1980) defines reformation as the training of offenders in order to transform their destructive attitudes and values into socially acceptable ones. It is the process by which criminals learn social skills that will allow them to effectively participate in traditional society. A reformatory punishment entails inflicting pain on a person in order to deter them from committing a specific type of crime (Amstrong 1978). According to Skotnicki (2019), reformatory penalties work through a learning process that makes the criminal conscious and appreciative of why committing crime is wrong. The realization of the wrongfulness of criminal activities, rather than the dread of punishment, is what drives the offender to reform.

Opara (2010) also views reformation as the process of improving the offender by attempting to alter their deviant behaviors, thereby instilling in them the resolve to avoid criminal conduct.

Subculture among inmates.

Three models—the deprivation model, the importation model, and the integration model—were proposed by earlier studies to explain the emergence of an inmate subculture (Irwin, 1980; Wheeler, 1961; Sykes, 1958; Clemmer, 1940).
1. Deprivation model: According to this theory, the institution's walls are where current inmate subcultures first emerged (Irwin, 1980). Specifically, deprivation of prison life leads to the development of an inmate subculture. Inmates are subject to prison regulations and its strict hierarchy, and their status is initially reduced from that of civilians to that of faceless figures wearing standard prison attire. As a result, prisoners start to embrace a subordinate role by adopting and copying new eating, sleeping, and working habits.

2. Importation model: In contrast to the deprivation model, the importation model asserts that the prison culture is fundamentally the same as the inmate's street culture. The majority of prison culture is derived from outside subcultures that are brought in, along with social-demographic traits and criminal career variables like length of incarceration and criminal record (Clemmer, 1940).
3. The deprivation model and the importation model are combined in the integrated model (Archambeault & Fenwick, 1998). According to the integrated model, the deprivation model typically applies to prisoners who have served time in prison but were raised in a stable home in a respectable community and solely committed the offenses for which they are detained.

Because the integrated model can help explain why inmates react differently to their culture and the prison experience in general, it is thought to be the best explanation for the development of the inmates' subculture.

Prison culture permeates every room, making it challenging to manage, particularly when there are more than 200 inmates. Prison staff acknowledges that they permit prison subcultures to flourish within reasonable bounds because unofficial leaders assist them in upholding prison order. Furthermore, they pointed out that because informal leaders do not break prison regulations and employ subordinate inmates to carry out their dirty activities, they are unable to effectively eradicate the prison subculture.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.

EAGLY's social role theory (1987). The role is the most basic idea in role theory. A collection of behavioral expectations imposed on people according to their place in a social system is known as a role (Biddle, 1986; Rizzo, House & Lirtzman, 1970; Tubre & Collins, 2000). One of the most significant aspects of social conduct, according to role theory, is that people respond differently and predictably based on their social identities and the circumstances. Role theory's symbolic-interactionist viewpoint focuses on how people understand their experiences in and out of roles as well as the connections between them. It is considered that roles are negotiable, adaptable, and come in sets.This approach is typified by the role identity literature that places a much greater focus on the individual's relationship with a role. Role expectations influence the interaction between inmates. The imported street roles and institutional power relations promote dominance, aggression, and status competition in male prisons; they reflect agentic male role expectations. Loss of traditional external roles in female prisons is likely to result in fictive families, care giving and cooperative networks, which represent collective role expectations.

Situational amplification. Role distinctive behaviours are enhanced by the prison environment (overcrowding, scarce resources, staff regimes) where masculine roles are rewarded, aggressive subcultures develop; where communal roles are used to control anxiety, supportive subcultures are developed. This construct assists researchers and practitioners to explain gendered dissimilarities in coping, violence, and social organization within facilities.

Strengths.

1. Integrative social explanation. It connects macro social structure (division of labour, stereotypes) to individual behaviour without cutting differences off to biology and is thus flexible to institutional environments such as prisons.

2. Context variation predictive. The theory anticipates that behaviour will be changed by altering role opportunities or institutional incentives- useful in policy: subcultural patterns can be altered by altering prison routines or role opportunities.

Weaknesses.

1. Minimizes agency and intersectionality. It is able to ignore the interaction of personality, race, class and previous criminal subculture (importation effects) with gender roles to generate different inmate behaviours.

2. Limited causal specificity. It is not easy to demonstrate that role expectations lead to certain behaviours within prisons; deprivation, importation and situational models are also used to explain subcultures hence isolating socialzeichrole effects is not easily achievable empirically.

Social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner (1979). According to social identity theory, a person's awareness of belonging to particular social groupings has emotional and moral significance for him. Social categorization of this group membership is a way to organize and systematize the social environment, especially in relation to its function as a mirror of social ideals and a direction for action. Additionally, it offers an orientation system that establishes and defines each person's unique position throughout society. According to social identity theory, categorization is adequate to explain the formation of social identity, but additional motivational variables are required to account for the development of intergroup prejudice.

The Social Identity Theory describes the development of self concepts through group memberships and motivates in group favouritism and outgroup discrimination; in prisons it predicts gang formation, role hierarchy and inter group conflict- useful in understanding Ilorin prison dynamics and when tensions are likely to occur around visiting or allocation of resources.

Fundamentals of Social Identity Theory.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a theory that suggests three interconnected processes: social categorization (classifying people into groups), social identification (identifying with the group as part of the self), and social comparison (comparing the ingroup favorably with outgroups in order to boost self esteem). SIT demonstrates that the ingroup bias and intergroup discrimination can arise even in the presence of minor group differences.

Relevant mechanisms of prison subcultures.

Group formation: Prisoners arrange themselves according to ethnicity, gang affiliation, offence type, or housing unit; these identities are salient social identities, which influence behaviour.

Ingroup favouritism and solidarity: When a prison has an identification with a group, mutual support, shared norms, and collective defence against competitors or employees are enhanced.

Intergroup conflict and status competition: Teams want to have positive distinctiveness (better status, resources), and this creates competition, violence, and symbolic boundarymaking (e.g., tattoos, language, rituals).

Examples of its use in prisons.

Gang consolidation: New prisoners take on a gang identity to acquire protection and status; SIT projects quick internal cohesion and aggression against other gangs.

Resource conflicts: In the allocation of scarce resources (food, phones, visits), groups mobilize to gain benefits, which increases intergroup conflicts.

Implication of rehabilitation: Categorical salience (mixed housing, intergroup sharing of tasks) or superordinate identities (prisonizontwide programs) can be reduced to reduce conflict.

Strengths.

1.Accounts for rapid group effects: SIT explains rapid or minimal categorization to generate strong group behaviour, which is consistent with the findings of fast gang formation in prisons.

2.Actionable interventions: The theory implies that there are specific strategies (less salience of divisive categories; cultivating superordinate identities) which can be experimented within institutions.

Weaknesses

1.Minimizes structural factors: SIT concentrates on psychological processes and can pay little attention to material and institutional factors (e.g., overcrowding, staff practices) that also influence subcultures.

2.Poor predictive specificity: Although it can be used to explain the formation of groups, without the addition of local history, power relations, and the effect of importation, SIT is not very specific regarding which particular group boundaries are going to predominate in a particular prison.

METHODS

The qualitative research design was used in the study; this type of research design is best adapted to investigating such complex social phenomena as inmate leadership and informal authority. Qualitative methods enable a closer insight into lived experiences, perceptions, and social dynamics in correctional centres unlike quantitative methods which use numerical data. This design has been selected to obtain the subtle aspects of how inmate leaders shape the rehabilitation, safety and cohesion within Oke-kura Correctional Centre.

Key Informant Interviews (KII): The interviews were given to prison staff and selected prisoners who had knowledge on the structure of leadership within prisons. KIIs gave information on the selection criteria of leaders, the roles, and how they interact with wardens. In-Depth Interviews (IDI) was carried out with the inmates who had a sentence of over seven years. IDIs enabled the subjects to provide personal experience related to life in prison, leadership relationships, and how the hierarchy of inmates affects rehabilitation and safety.

Overall, 21 interviews were taken, which guaranteed the diversity of the views. The selection of the long-term prisoners was also not accidental, as they are likely to have undergone and learned the leadership arrangements of the prison over the years.

The sampling method was a purposive one. The prisoners were chosen according to length of sentence (more than seven years), literacy level and their desire to take part. The personnel were selected according to their supervisory functions and direct contact with inmate leaders. This strategy made sure that relevant knowledge and experience of the participants were available to add value to the research.

The research used content and thematic analysis. Transcripts of interviews were coded to find common themes including leadership positions, selection criteria, effects on rehabilitation and problems associated with inmate hierarchies. Themes were then sorted into categories that

indicated individual outcomes (e.g., recidivism, training engagement), as well as collective outcomes (e.g., safety, cohesion).

Ethical Considerations

Because the study of prisons is sensitive, ethical guidelines were followed to the letter. All the participants provided informed consent and the confidentiality was ensured. Inmates identities were safeguarded through pseudonyms. Another guideline followed in the study was the recommendations of the Correctional Service of Nigeria, and there was no risk of the involvement undermining the safety of the inmates or the security of the prisons.

Findings

The qualitative data gathered through the interviews of 21 participants, which included prison staff and long-term prisoners, demonstrated a rather detailed and well-developed inmate leadership structure in Oke-kura Correctional Centre. The results are classified into three broad themes: (1) the organization of inmate leadership, (2) selection criteria of leadership, and (3) the two-fold effect of inmate leadership on rehabilitation and the prison process.

1. Inmate Leadership Structure at Oke-kura

The study uncovered a hierarchical leadership system among inmates that mirrors formal governmental institutions. This structure is not officially sanctioned but is widely recognized and respected within the prison community. The key positions identified include:

Title	Responsibilities
Provost	Top-most inmate leader who maintains discipline among all inmates, enforce informal codes of conduct
Inspector General	A top-ranking inmate leader; oversees all inmate affairs and liaises with wardens.
Commissioner	Supervises specific blocks or units; enforces rules and coordinates daily routines.
Chief Justice	Mediates disputes and delivers informal judgments on inmate conflicts.
Religious Leader	Leads prayers, organizes religious gatherings,

- PROVOST.

1. General Provost : The general Provost is the head of all inmates leaders, not only the leaders but also to all inmates in the correctional center. He serves as the highest authority among inmates and an intermediary between inmates and the authorities in the correctional center. He oversees the affairs of all inmates and also check the behaviour of inmates. He is responsible for carrying out a lot of activities which include waking up early before officers arrive to check for complaints and inspection of cells before the officer in-charge arrives.
2. Assistant General Provost: is the second in command, and also the eye of the general Provost in his absence.
3. Cell Provosts: cell Provosts is a division of Provost that are only assigned to each of their various cells to oversee the affairs of the inmates in their cell. They are also the highest authority among leaders in their cell and have the final say in their individual cells. The cell must be under his watch ,and also serves as an intermediary between the inmates and the general provost. He also has the power to choose or recommend cell members that are capable of leadership roles.

- INSPECTOR GENERALS: The inspector General is the second in command in each cells ,he report directly to the Provost. He must also be updated on the number of inmates both new intake and the ones who have left. He is responsible for head count in the morning and in the evening after lockup to check if anyone is missing. He also monitors the ration of food that is alloted to the cell.

- COMMISSIONERS: They are officers in the cell assigned to various duties in the cell such as officer in charge of water, food, cleaning etc. The Commissioner is to oversee the running of each work done by inmates for the effective running of each cell and the prison environments. He's also in charge of finances, by keeping records with the staff on behalf of inmates.

- CHIEF JUSTICE: The chief justice is the custodian of the law and also in charge of official conflict resolution. He is in charge of the inmates court trial of each cells and also have the power to give verdict and punishment but according to the law. Due to congestion, lack of technology such as CCTV and large numbers of inmate, officers sometimes cannot see it all or monitor it all especially when there is lockup and all inmates are in their cell, inmates leaders are choosen to serve as a monitoring tool and a sort of spy among others. They are saddled with the responsibility of overseeing the affairs of their fellow inmates or cell mates. This gives them a sense of belonging and hope while incarcerated. The authorities also need an eye among the inmates, someone who is loyal to them so has to give report of everything going on in their cells including suspicious moves by inmates. Different method are used to resolve or stop conflicts among inmate. The leaders in each cell have the power to charge any on-going misunderstanding, argument or fight. Charging is an action that has the highest authority among inmates, when used on any of the inmates nobody have the right to talk or either ask questions. Another way is the use of “LAW”, there is an outline law that guides the behavior and activities that goes on in the correctional center by the inmates. The custodian and interpreter of this law is the “CHIEF JUSTICE” there are severe punishment attached to any form of conflicts in the correctional center if you are the instigator.

- RELIGIOUS LEADERS: There are two different religious leaders in each cell ones for the Muslim and one for the christians. They lead prayers, organise religious gatherings and provide some sort spiritual guidance.

2. Leadership Selection Criteria.

Leaders of inmates are not just selected randomly; the choice is made based on a set of personal traits, social capital, and perceived loyalty. The most frequently mentioned criteria are:

i. Level of literacy: Leaders are often literate and able to communicate with the inmates and the staff effectively. This is essential in the interpretation of rules, writing of petitions and settlement of disputes.

ii. Language Diversity: Since Nigeria is a multilingual setting, a leader who knows various local languages (e.g., Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo) is desirable because they can help reduce communication barriers. Language barriers usually causes conflict amongst inmates because of the ethnic diversity that makes up the the populace. These differences in traditions and languages, often lead to misunderstandings that turn violent. Hence the reason why inmate leaders must possess multi-lingual qualities.

iii. Loyalty to the Wardens: When the prisoners show respect to the prison staff and adhere to the regulations, they will be given leadership positions.

iv. Peer Respect: Leaders have to have the respect of the rest of the inmates, which is usually gained by seniority, wisdom, or previous experience in leadership.

v. Good Behavior: A clean disciplinary record and participation in religious or education programs is regarded as the sign of reform and responsibility.

These requirements signify a practical attitude to the process of leadership choice, which is a combination of institutional requirements and the dynamics among inmates.

3. Dual Effect on Rehabilitation and Prison Life.

The impact of inmate leaders on prison life is complex, and it yields both beneficial and adverse results:

Positive Impacts:

a. Rehabilitation Support: The leaders usually promote involvement in vocational training, literacy classes, and religious programs. An example is one inmate who told of how the Religious Leader inspired him to take a course in Quranic studies that enabled him to gain a sense of purpose and curb aggressive behavior.

b. Conflict Resolution: The chief justice has played a significant role in dispute resolution without violence. In another instance, a space tussle was resolved by mediation between two prisoners before it escalated.

c. Operational Efficiency: Wardens use inmates leaders to run day-to-day operations, allocate resources, and report misconduct. This delegation is particularly vital when there is a high population as staff are unable to observe all the cells.

Negative Impacts:

a. Power Abuse: There are leaders who take advantage of their office to get something out of it and demand bribes or favors in order to protect or reserve access to resources.

b. Strengthening of Subcultures: inmate leaders can maintain prison codes that deny collaboration with the staff or involvement in rehabilitation programs. As an example, one of the participants explained how the Provost had discouraged him to go to vocational training because it is a sign of weakness.

c. Exclusion and Favoritism: Leadership can be used as a means of exclusion whereby leaders prefer their ethnic or religious affiliates among inmates. This has caused tensions and sometimes violence, especially in cells that are mixed with different ethnics.

Before selection of an inmate to become a leader, such individual must have met some criteria such as, above average literacy, here the level of education attained at the time of imprisonment comes into play, communication skills, relationship with other cell mates, loyalty and truth level to the authority, level of coordination and level of obedience to the rules that guides the correctional center and the understanding of different languages. Although, Leaders are sometimes chosen by the authorities in the correctional center, inmates are also given the opportunity to show their interest in the leadership positions and are allowed to conduct elections in their cells. There are instances when a leader can be removed, with or without warning, when such a leader is found cheating on fellow inmate (s), stealing, being bias, not carrying out his outlined duties well, being self centered or caught in the act of homosexuality. Depending on past actions of the leader, a warning may first be issued, after which non-compliance will lead to outright removal.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of Oke-kura Correctional Centre point at the fact that there is an organized hierarchy of inmate leadership resembling formal state institutions. This is not isolated to Ilorin, but a general trend in the Nigerian correctional facilities where overcrowding, understaffing and resource limitation force the wardens to depend on the inmate leaders to run day-to-day operations of the facility. The positions of Inspector General, Commissioner, Provost, Chief Justice, Welfare Leader, and Religious Leader illustrate the way in which inmates recreate the structures of governance in the society within the prison walls. This imitation is not only functional but also symbolic: functional in the preservation of order, symbolic in the strengthening of the right to the authority of inmates.

This two-sided influence of inmate leadership, either positive or negative, concurs with the international study of prison subcultures. Leaders may stimulate rehabilitation through vocational training and religious involvement, but may also encourage exclusion, favoritism, and opposition to change. This two-sidedness highlights the complexity of informal power in correctional centres.

Over the past few years, the Nigerian correctional system has been reformed with the most notable reform being the 2019 Nigerian Correctional Service Act. This act aimed at updating the system of running prisons, eliminating overcrowding and focusing on rehabilitation rather than punishment. It also brought in the non-custodial sentencing, including community service and fines, to reduce the overcrowding in correctional centres (Alamu and Makinde, 2020).

Nevertheless, with these reforms, overcrowding is one of the challenges that persist. By 2023, prisons in Nigeria were functioning at more than 150 percent capacity with over 70 percent of the inmates awaiting trials. (National Human Rights commission, 2023). Inmate leadership in this case is a survival strategy. Wardens, faced with excessive numbers, entrust power to some of the trusted inmates. Although such delegation aids in keeping the order, it also creates informal hierarchies that can compromise rehabilitation. Indicatively, in Kirikiri Maximum Security Prison, the leaders among the prisoners have been found to regulate access to vocational programs at times requiring them to pay bribes or favors. These practices bring out the dangers of excessive dependence on inmate power.

International Perspectives

The relationship dynamics experienced in Oke-kura reflect the global experiences but with different manifestations. In the United States, prison gangs, like the Aryan Brotherhood or the Mexican Mafia are common examples of inmate leadership. Control of contraband, the organization of violence and the manipulation of external criminal networks are some of the key informal powers that are exercised by these groups (Fleisher & Decker 2001; California Department of Corrections, 2021). However, unlike the hierarchy of Oke-kura, the prison gangs in the United States of America are run on loyalty and intimidation networks, usually discouraging cooperation with the staff, which disempowers rehabilitation.

Additionally, in the United Kingdom, prisoners have been experimented with as leaders (councils), in which case they are formally acknowledged as such to enable communication with prison officials(Liebling, 2015; Ministry of Justice, 2020). These councils seek to use the leadership to their benefit, like enhance food allocation and solving of complaints. Although this model minimizes the risks of informal hierarchies, critics claim that it justifies the inmate-based structures of power and can potentially strengthen subcultures.

Racial and linguistic diversity determine leadership dynamics in South African correctional centres. Inmate leaders tend to come up depending on their capacity to bridge ethnic lines (Williams and Liebling, 2023), just as Nigeria focuses on language diversity in the selection of leaders. Nonetheless, other gangs like the Numbers gangs in South Africa prisons also have problems with gangs that have informal authority and perpetuate violence (Skotnicki, 2019). These comparisons demonstrate that inmate leadership is a global phenomenon, which is determined by local circumstances but it always has opportunities and threats.

Advantages of Inmate Leadership.

The results of Oke-kura indicate that inmate leadership has a number of advantages:

1.Operational Efficiency: Inmate leaders help the wardens to deal with overcrowded houses, allocate resources, and impose discipline. This delegation is very important in Nigeria, where there is a high staffing shortage.

2.Conflict resolution: The Chief Justice and other leaders are important in facilitating conflict mediation, violence minimization, and cohesion.

3.Rehabilitation Support: Religious leaders and welfare officers promote the attendance of educational and vocational programs and give moral and practical support.

4.Cultural Cohesion: Multilingual leaders can be used to bridge ethnic differences thereby creating cohesion among diverse prison populations.

The above advantages imply that inmate leadership can be an effective instrument in the correctional management, especially in the resource limited settings.

Risks and Challenges

Notwithstanding all these advantages, inmate leadership poses serious threats in the following ways:

1.Power Abuse: Leaders can use their positions to their own advantage and require bribes or favors.

2.Strengthening of Subcultures: inmate leaders have the ability to maintain prison rules that deter collaboration with the staff or enrollment in rehabilitation programs.

3.Exclusion and Favoritism: Leaders may also use leadership positions to favor some ethnic or religious groups, which causes tensions and violence.

4.Bilateral Authority: The over-dependence on inmate leaders may lead to the undermining of the formal authority of the wardens, thereby establishing parallel authorities.

Conclusion and recommendations

The results of Oke-kura Correctional Centre highlight how complicated inmate leadership in Nigeria is. Inmates leaders offer guidance and support in environments that are under-resourced, but they are dangerous and may jeopardize rehabilitation and justice. The United States, United Kingdom and South African comparative perspectives draw the universality of this phenomenon, but they provide also the models of reform.

Finally, the dual effect of inmate leadership indicates that there are weak areas of the correctional system in Nigeria. To resolve these weaknesses more staffing, non-custodial sentencing, and organized models of inmate involvement should be employed. In the absence of such reforms, the prison system will still be based on informal hierarchies, and there will be more and more exclusion, favoritism, and recidivism.

This study conducted in Oke-kura Correctional Centre to identified the complex nature of formal and informal authority in the Nigerian correction system. Even though the wardens have official power, the pressures of overcrowding, staffing shortages, and system-wide issues have opened a gap that inmate leaders have used to become powerful. The chain of command, including Inspector General, Commissioner, Provost, Chief Justice, Welfare Leader, and Religious Leader, shows how prisoners recreate the governance systems of society in order to enforce order and unity within prison walls.

The two-fold influence of inmate leadership is evident. On the one hand, leaders play a positive role of coordinating day-to-day activities, mediating conflicts, promoting rehabilitation initiatives, and promoting culture integration. Conversely, they may propagate prison subcultures, misuse authority and undermine formal authority thus breaking rehabilitation efforts. This two

sidedness mirrors the advantages as well as the disadvantages of informal power in the correctional centres.

The leadership of the inmates at Oke-kura Correctional Centre is a reflection of the wider society in Nigeria, where informal power usually serves to fill the void created by ineffective formal structures. This problem needs to be solved not only by reforming the prison system but also by more general measures to enhance governance and lessen the use of informal institutions. By doing so, correctional centres can move closer to their core mission: rehabilitating offenders, ensuring justice, and contributing to a safer and more cohesive society.

Finally, the study ends by recommending the following based on the implications of findings on one of the core aims of correctios which is rehabilitation of offenders. They are:

1. Staffing: This is necessary to hire more correctional officers to minimize the use of inmate leaders. Wardens would be in a position to regain control and administer rehabilitation programs in a just manner, which could not be done with inadequate staffing.

2. Non-Custodial Sentencing: Community service, fines, and probation should be expanded to decrease overcrowding, as the levels of hierarchies among inmates would be minimized. This has been given a legal framework in the 2019 Act but has not been widely implemented.

3. Structured Inmate Participation: Prisons may also use structured models of inmate participation, as is the case with inmate councils in the UK. This would enable the prisoners to serve positively without compromising formal authority, and;

4. Checks and balances: There should be mechanisms that will oversee the inmate leaders so that they do not misuse their roles. This may include periodic checking by wardens and feedback by fellow prisoners.

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