

Survey of the Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Prisoners in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigated the information needs and seeking behaviour of prisoners in Delta State, Nigeria.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and the instrument used to collect data from the respondents was a structured questionnaire, administered with the aid of five research assistants. The population of the study comprises inmates in the five prisons in Delta State already convicted in jail for various offences. The total population of the study is 1,154 inmates in Delta State prisons.

Findings: The findings of the study revealed that the major information needs of the prisoners in Delta State were information on legal help on how to be set free, information about family members and well-wishers, and health related needs. Respondents in this study indicated they prefer family members and friends, radio/television and prison wardens because they believe they are able to provide the information they need. The findings of this study equally revealed there is presence of library services and resources in all the prisons in Delta State but the library resources and services rendered in the prison are grossly inadequate. From the study, it was established that the factors militating against the accessibility and use of information by the prisoners were restriction of family members and friends from the prisoners, hostile nature of prison workers, and inadequate library materials.

Implication: The findings of the study clearly imply the lack of preference for information services from prison libraries. This stem from the fact that prisoners have not perceived the prison libraries as capable of meeting their information needs. It is implied therefore, that the librarians in prison libraries should not just strive to equip the libraries, but must put in place strategies to ensure the prisoners utilize the resources to meet their information needs.

Originality/Value: The originality of this paper is in found in the finding that prison libraries have not served the purpose for which they were established since majority of the prisoners rarely see the libraries as relevant source of information.

Paper type: Empirical research

Keywords: Information Needs, Seeking Behaviour, Prisoners, Delta State, Nigeria

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Introduction

The primary duty of any government across the globe is to respect and protect the rights of her citizens, the access and use of information is also not an exemption. Nigeria is the most populous black nation in the world and the law that

enhances access to information is the Freedom of Information Bill signed into law by the President Goodluck Jonathan administration on the 28th day of May, 2011. However, Anyanwu, Akanwa, & Ossai-onah (2013) opined that the purpose of the Freedom of Information Bill 2011 is to make public records and information freely available to

the public, protect public records on grounds of public interest and personal privacy as well as protect public officers who provide such information without authorization.

Nigeria has a population of over 180,000,000 people; there is no contradiction that a nation with such population would have some deviant and criminal elements perpetrating evils in the society. Emasealu (2010) asserted that the presence of deviants and criminals and their nefarious activities pervade every society. Emasealu (2010) further stressed that the presence of deviant elements in the society has led to the formulation of a set of rules and regulations which constitute the penal policies toward the administration and dispensation of criminal justice in the effort to punish as well as reform criminally minded people. The Collins Dictionary (2018) defined a prison as the buildings where criminals are kept as punishment or where people accused of a crime are kept before their trial. The agency in charge of prisons in Nigeria is the Nigerian Prisons Service. The criminal offenses that has led a lot of persons to prison in Nigeria ranges from stealing, armed robbery, pick pocketing, arson, murder, treason, sedition, abduction, affray, immigration offenses such as illegal smuggling of goods and persons, drug trafficking, sex and rape offenses, traffic offenses, contempt of court, unlawful possession of firearms, smuggling and attempting to escape from custody among other misdemeanors (Chiemezie, 2005; Jarma, 1998; Orakwe, 1995; Womboh, 1991; Dike, 2002; Fayeye, 2000; Bashir, 2003).

People in prisons in Nigeria are called prisoners and most cases inmates with a majority of them awaiting trial. According to the World Prison Brief (2018) Nigeria currently have a total number of 71 522 prisoners including pre-trial detainees and remand prisoners. These set of individual in incarceration need information for their psychological well-being and rehabilitation. Bruce (2005) states that, information plays a significant role in our daily professional and personal lives and we are constantly challenged to take charge of the information that we need for work, fun and everyday decisions and tasks. Prisoners require information about their well-being and things happening outside their confined state. From observation and visit to some Prisons in Delta State, Nigeria, public libraries are not doing enough in reaching out to Prisoners with a

view to knowing and meeting their information needs. Prisoners are the most hindered set when it comes to information access and use. The few prisons with libraries are stock full with outdated materials with few or no professional librarians managing them.

However, understanding the information needs and seeking behaviour of prisoners would pave the way for libraries in the area of organizing services and resources that meet their exact information need. This study is hereby undertaken to ascertain the information needs and seeking behaviour of prisoners in Delta state Nigeria with a view to filling the lacuna in the literature and rendering better prisoner centered services and resources that meet their needs.

Background to the Study

Nigeria Prisons Service is under the ministry of internal affairs charge will the control of all the prisons in Nigeria. The National Headquarters of the Nigerian Prisons Service is located at Bill Clinton Drive, Airport Road, Abuja, Nigeria. The Nigeria Prisons Service is currently headed by Ja'afaru Ahmed who is the Controller General of Prisons. Nigeria Prison has a growing number of inmates with pre- trial inmates in the top chart. Prison population total (including pre-trial detainees/remand prisoners) is 71 522 (World Prison Brief, 2018). Currently, Nigeria has 240 prisons across the country. Delta state of Nigeria which is the location of the study has five prisons located in Warri, Sapele, Ogwashi-Uku, Agbor and Kwale with the number of inmates in the increase. The five prisons in Delta State have a total number of 1,154 convicted persons in jail for various offences and this figure does not include those awaiting trials. The state of Prisons in Nigeria is pitiable as a lot of inmates are stock in a tight room with little or no good facilities for their wellbeing.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to ascertain the information needs and seeking behaviour of prisoners in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

- ✓ Ascertain the information needs of Prisoners in Delta State, Nigeria.
- ✓ Determine the preferred information sources of prisoners.

- ✓ Examine the available and adequacy of library information resources and services to prison inmates
- ✓ Find out the factors militating against the accessibility and use of information by prisoners.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

- ✓ What are the information needs of Prisoners in Delta State, Nigeria?
- ✓ What are the preferred information sources of prisoners?
- ✓ Are library information resources and services available to prison inmates adequate?
- ✓ What are the factors militating against the accessibility and use of information by prisoners?

Literature Review

The study of information needs and gathering behavior dates back to 1948 when Bernal and others presented a paper on scientific information at the 1948 Royal Society conference (Bernal, 1960). During the past 30 years or so, a considerable body of literature has been produced dealing with information needs and information-seeking behavior of both individuals and groups in a variety of contexts (Anwar, Al-Ansari & Abdullah, 2004). Information seeking is a basic activity indulged in by all people and manifested through a particular behavior (Kakai, Odongo&Bukenya, 2004). There is paucity of empirical evidence on the information seeking behaviour of prisoners especially in Nigeria.

The historical evolution of Nigerian prisons dates back to the colonial times. Prior to 1876 Native Authority Prison, in Bauchi, existed as far back as 1821 under powers conferred by the Native Authority Ordinance in the northern parts of the country. In 1876 the first modern Prison in Nigeria, the Broad Street Prison, in Lagos was opened. In 1971 Government White Paper was released proposing a function-based regrouping of the prisons; the broad objectives of imprisonment and its unification; and setting up of a Social Welfare section to handle prison reformation, rehabilitation and to further enhance administrative efficiency (Jarma,1998).

Only a few studies have been carried out on the information seeking behaviour and needs of

prisoners in Nigeria. Eze (2014) carried out a study on the information needs of prisoners in Southeast Nigerian prisons. This study delved into the information needs and information seeking behavior of prisoners in the prisons of five states in Southeast Nigeria. Major findings showed that the prisoners have a good number of information needs ranging from educational, legal, vocational, spiritual, to recreational and financial information needs which are not provided for adequately through library and other information providers. Similarly, Saliu, Saliu & Rabi (2017) undertook a study on Prisoners and their Information Needs: Prison Libraries Overview. The findings of the study revealed that the information needs of prisoners includes; health conditions, financial (99%), spiritual and moral (88%), life after prison/information on legal issues (86%), family/friends (68%), literacy education (65%), skill acquisition (63%), right in prison (42%), prison rules (34%), and others information needs (26%). Mwuese, Terfa, and Victoria (2016) studied Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Prisoners' At the Medium Security Prison in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. The findings of the study revealed that the major information needs of the prisoners understudy was health information needs, followed by legal information needs, educational information needs, religious information needs to mention but a few. Ajogwu (2005) noted that in Nigeria prisoners' information needs include religious and spiritual needs amongst others.

The study of Mwuese, Terfa& Victoria (2015) also found out that the preferred information source of prison inmates is their lawyers, TV/ Radio broadcast, prison waders, health workers to mention but a few. More so, Rafedzi and Abrizah (2014) studied information needs of male juvenile delinquents. The findings of the study revealed that formal information channels such as the library are not preferred maybe because they are perceived as ineffective by inmates, regardless of their types of information needs and its objective validity. The Internet and informal networks among inmates were the most preferred source of information. Nacro (2009) researched on the Information needs of women in prison with mental health issues. The study took the form of an enquiry on what information was available for women in prison with mental health problems and what more could be made available. From the study it was clear there is a lack of information

available for women prisoners, and particularly those with mental health problems. However, Cobb and Farrants (2014) studied male prisoner's constructions of help-seeking. This study is concerned with how male prisoners talk about help-seeking in order that treatment programmes can be developed that better address their needs. The researchers interviewed nine prisoners in relation to help seeking. One key finding of the research is that prisoners resist formal help because of a perceived injustice in the system, disrespect for staff and feeling helpless when they are "bombarded with medication to keep quiet". When they do engage with formal help-seeking behaviours it is frequently "to work the system".

However, Ozioko, Uzoamaka & Jacinta (2012) studied provision of library and information resources and services to meet prisoners information needs in South-East Nigeria. Findings also showed that the varieties of library resources and services as well as human resources provided are grossly inadequate considering the population of the prisoners. Becker (2007) revealed that in spite of the fact that the prison library is to be funded for the provision of facilities and services for the prisoners, unfortunately, the library programmes are usually the first to be reduced or done away with when the prison's overall budget is cut. This has reflected in poor library services and resources to prisoners. Shirley (2006) remarked similarly that when there are budget constraints, the library and education programmes are the most likely departments to have their services reduced or eliminated. She further maintained that there have been a few cases where library space was taken over and converted to living quarters for new prisoners and budgets were cut. Similarly, Okwor, Ugwuanyi and Ezeji (2010) studied Library Services to Prisoners in South-East Geopolitical Zone. The study revealed that the information needs of the prison inmates in certain disciplines were lacking or nonexistent. It noted that library resources in the prison libraries are grossly inadequate. It was also revealed that the collections in these prison libraries are being managed by people without proper training in information handling and management. It noted with dismay that prison libraries do not or rather receive the attention it deserved from government and the society in general.

Consequently, Mwuese, Terfa and Victoria (2015) carried out a research on Information

Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Prisoners' At the Medium Security Prison in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. The study revealed that a number of factors inhibited access to information which include among others: high cost of information materials, high rate of illiteracy, lack of awareness on the part of the prison inmates, radio/television programmes totally absent and no information centers, and public libraries services to them. The study concludes that prisoners need and seek information materials like other citizens and that the information needs and seeking behavior varies from person to person. Emesealu (2010) affirm that user's attitude and emotions constitute barriers to accessibility of library information materials. Prison inmates are people believed to suffer from various emotional instabilities, such as fear, anxiety, irritability and depression. Emesealu (2010) further stressed that the challenge of accessibility and utilization results in series of attendant problems, which impair the psychological well-being of prison inmates. Conclusively, the study of Sambo, Usman and Rabi (2017) revealed that the factors affecting the prisoner's information seeking behaviour is problem of uncomfortable nature of the prison/long delay before trial, poor funding of the library and prison as a whole, little time allowed prisoners for interaction with outside information providers and lack of free access to the libraries, building used for library is unfavourable, prison policies and law that restrict certain reading materials, lack of current materials and lack of professional staff, lack of training for available workers, lukewarm attitude of staff, lack of access to court, other factors.

Theoretical Framework

This research is on information needs and seeking behaviour of prisoners in Delta State, Nigeria. Three theoretical frameworks have been provided in discussing the variables of interest. These are: the psychological theory of Specific Deterrence, Ellis' Behavioural Model of Information Seeking and Dervin's Sense making approach.

The theory of Specific Deterrence postulated by Andenaes, (1968) predicts that individuals experiencing a more severe sanction are more likely to reduce their criminal activities in future. This theory has severally been replicated and supported by economists (von Hirsch, Bottoms, Burney, & Wikstrom, 1999). They insist that incarceration imposes direct and indirect costs on

prison inmates, e.g., loss of income, stigmatization (Nagin, 1998; Orsagh & Chen, 1988; Pyle, 1995; Wood & Grasmick, 1999). That is to say that, prison inmates having experienced life in prison, the rational individual would choose not to engage in further criminal activities. Incarceration also has psychological 'cost' implication in that, if prison life is degrading, dehumanizing experience, then it must be considered as an additional psychological cost of serving time which in most cases leads to psycho-social problem such as depression, a feeling of alienation paranoia and neurosis (Gendreau, Goggin, & Smith, 2002) The specifics deterrence theory is related to this study because prison inmates during incarceration are mandatorily engaged in different treatment programmes. The implication is that prison authorities, while administering treatment programmes on inmates must first, identify causes of crime committed and, based on individual information needs, library information resources are provided.

The Ellis' Behavioural Model of Information Seeking postulated by Ellis (1989), Ellis & Haugan (1997), is a general model of information seeking behaviour crafted from studies in the literature on information seeking patterns of social scientists, research physicists, chemists, engineers, research scientist to mention but a few. Today, this same theory can be used to study individuals in different fields as well as prisoners. Ellis derived eight generic characteristics of the information seeking patterns of humans and they includes; starting, chaining, browsing, differentiating, monitoring and extracting. **Starting** is the first step employed by a user to begin seeking information, for example asking knowledgeable colleagues, going online etc. **Chaining** involves following and connecting new leads in an initial source, **Browsing** has to do with scanning content of identified sources for subject affinity, **Differentiating** is the process of filtering and assessing sources for usefulness, **Monitoring** involves keeping up to date of an

area of developments in a given subject area, **Extracting** involves systematically working through a given source for material of interest, **Verifying** is the process of checking the accuracy and reliability of information, while **Ending** is concluding all activities.

The Dervin's Sense making approach was propounded by Dervin (1983) which focuses on behaviour and as such assumes that the important things that can be learned about human use of information and information systems must be conceptualised as behaviour: the "step-takings", or "communicating", that humans undertake to construct sense of their worlds (Dervin, 1992). This kind of communicating behaviour is then the link between individuals and structures, institutions, and cultures (Dervin, 1992). As such the Sense-making approach can be used to acquire an understanding of information, communication, and meaningful relationships in these forms of behaviour (Tidline, 2005).

Research Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and the instrument adopted to elicit data from the respondents was a structured questionnaire with the aid of five research assistants that assisted in distributing and explaining aspects of the questionnaires not clear as well as interviewing some respondents who were not capable of filling the questionnaire independently. The population of the study comprises inmates in the five prisons in Delta State already convicted in jail for various offences. The total population of the study is 1,154 inmates in Delta State prisons. Total enumeration sampling technique was adopted to study the entire population of the study and the sample size was 1,154 inmates in Delta State prisons. The researcher studied the entire population and was able to retrieve 937 questionnaires, all the research assistants helped in guiding some of the inmates with low literacy level. Hence there was a 73% response rate. The data collected for this study were analyzed using simple percentage and frequency counts.

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Gender

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	699	75%
Female	238	25%
Total	937	100%

Table 1 shows that 699(75%) of the respondents represents the gender distribution of the were male while 238(25%) were female. This respondents involved in the survey.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Prisons in Delta State, Nigeria

Prisons	Frequency	Percentage
Warri, Prison	421	45%
Sapele, Prison	61	6%
Ogwashi-Uku, Prison	336	36%
Agbor, Prison	82	9%
Kwale, Prison	37	4%
Total	937	100%

Table 2 revealed that 421(45%) of the respondents were from Warri Prison, 61(6%) of the respondents were from Sapele Prison, 336(36%) of the respondents were from Ogwashi-Uku Prison, 82(9%) of the respondents

were from Agbor Prison and 37(4%) were from Kwale Prison.

Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Prisoners in Delta State, Nigeria

What are the information needs of Prisoner in Delta State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Information needs of Prisoners in Delta State, Nigeria

Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage
Legal Information on how to be set free	937	100%
Health Related Needs	819	87%
Financial information needs	778	83%
Information about Family Members and Well Wishers	937	100%
Spiritual and Moral Needs	421	45%
Rights in the Prison	211	23%
Skill Acquisition	118	13%
Prison Rules	714	76%
Literacy/ Educational Needs	101	11%
Life after Prison	91	10%
Information about news and current happenings	644	69%

It is clear from Table 3 above that 937(100%) of the respondents indicated Legal Information on how to be set free as their information, 819(87%) indicated health related needs, 778(83%) of the respondents indicated financial needs, 937(100%) indicated information about family and well-wishers, 421(45%) indicated spiritual and moral needs, 211(23%) indicated rights in the Prison,

118(13%) indicated skills acquisition, 714(76%) indicated prison rules, 101(11%) indicated literacy/ educational needs, 91(10%) indicated life after prison, and 644(69%) indicated information about news and current happenings as their information needs.

What are the preferred information sources of prisoners?

Table 4: Preferred information sources of prisoners

Preferred Information Sources	Frequency	Percentage
Family Members/ Friends	891	95%
Lawyers	441	47%
Library	74	8%
Radio/ Television	841	90%
Physicians/ Nurses	97	10%
Prison Warden	621	66%
Church/ Mosque	117	12%
Newspapers	21	2%
NGOs that Visit the Prison	531	57%
Online Sources	-	-

Table 4 above shows that 891(95%) of the respondents indicated family members/ friends as their preferred information source, 441(47%) indicated lawyers, 74(8%) indicated library, 841(90%) indicated radio/ television, 97(10%) indicated physicians/ nurses, 621(66%) indicated prison warden, 117(12%) indicated church/mosque, 21(2%) indicated newspapers, and 531(57%) indicated NGOs that visit the prison. None of the respondents indicated they have access to online information resources.

Table 5: Availability of library services in your Prison

Are you provided library services in your prison?

Availability of Prison Library Services	Frequency	Percentage
YES	937	100%
NO	-	-

From Table 5, it is glaring that all the respondents 937(100%) indicated they are aware of the availability of Prison library services in their various prisons.

Table 6: Adequacy of library information resources and services in your Prison Library

How do you describe the adequacy of library information resources and services in your Prison Library?

Adequacy of Library Resources and Services	Frequency	Percentage
Very Adequate	-	-
Adequate	-	-
Inadequate	266	28%
Grossly Inadequate	671	72%

Table 6 revealed that none of the respondents indicated that the library resources and services rendered in their prison are very adequate or adequate. 266(28%) of the respondents indicated that the library resources and services rendered in their prison is inadequate while 671(72%) indicated that the library resources and services render in their prison are grossly inadequate.

Table 7: Factors militating against the accessibility and use of information by prisoners

What are the factors militating against the accessibility and use of information by prisoners

Factors Militating against accessibility and Use of Information	Frequency	Percentage
Restriction of Family members and Friends	937	100%
No one to ask questions	813	87%
Poor Prison Policies	351	37%
Inadequate library materials	887	95%
No access to Internet Facilities to go online	751	80%
Uncomfortable nature of prisons	877	94%
Uncomfortable nature of Prisons	619	66%

Insufficient funds to access Legal Help	499	53%
Hostile nature of Prison Workers	914	98%

Table 7 reveal clearly that 937(100%) of the respondents indicated restriction of family members and friends as the factor militating against their accessibility and use of information, 813(87%) indicated no one to ask questions, 351(37%) of the respondents indicated poor prison policies, 887(95%) indicated inadequate library materials, 751(80%) of the respondents indicated no access to internet facilities to go online, 877(94%) of the respondents indicated uncomfortable nature of prisons, 499(53%) indicated insufficient funds to access legal help, and 914(98%) indicated hostile nature of prison workers as the factor militating against their accessibility and use of information.

Discussion of Findings

From the study, 100% of the respondents indicated legal help on how to be set free and information about family members and well-wishers as their information needs, 87% indicated health related needs, 83% indicated financial information needs, 76% indicated prison rules, 69% indicated information about news and current happenings as their information needs among others. This finding is in agreement with the study of Eze (2014) revealed that prisoners have a good number of information needs ranging from educational, legal, vocational, spiritual, to recreational and financial information needs which are not provided for adequately through library and other information providers.

It was also found that the main sources of information preferred by prisoners include family members/ friends (95%), radio/television (90%) and prison prison wardens (66%). This finding does not align with the findings of Mwuese, Terfa and Victoria (2015) which found that the preferred information source of prison inmates is their lawyers. The findings do not also agree with the study of Rafedzi and Abrizah (2014) on information needs of male juvenile delinquents, that revealed that internet and informal networks among inmates were the most preferred source of information. With regards to the use of internet observation results showed that the prisons in Delta state do not make internet facilities available for prisoners and this could account for the different findings.

The study further revealed that 100% of the respondents indicated they are aware of the availability of Prison library services in their various prisons, although observation results showed that prison library services and resources are largely inadequate. This was further confirmed as none of the respondents indicated that the library resources and services rendered in their prison were very adequate or adequate. A total of 28% of the respondents indicated that the library resources and services rendered in their prison are inadequate while 72% indicated that the library resources and services render in their prison are grossly inadequate. This finding is in agreement with the study of Ozioko, Uzoamaka and Jacinta (2012) on provision of library and information resources and services to meet prisoners information needs in South-East Nigeria which revealed that the varieties of library resources and services as well as human resources provided are grossly inadequate considering the population of the prisoners.

It is clear from the study that 100% of the respondents indicated restriction of family members and friends as the factor militating against their accessibility and use of information, 98% indicated hostile nature of prison workers, 95% indicated inadequate library materials, 94% indicated uncomfortable nature of prisons, 87% indicated no one to ask questions, among others. This finding does not agree with the study of Sambo, Usman and Rabi (2017) which revealed that the major factor affecting the prisoner's information seeking behaviour is the problem of uncomfortable nature of prisons/ long periods of awaiting trial.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study surveyed the information needs and seeking behaviour of prisoners in Delta State, Nigeria. Prisoners though in incarceration require information for their psychological, health and legal needs. Information accessibility and use plays a critical role in the lives of prisoners. The study has made it clear that the prisoners in Delta State Nigeria rely majorly on their family members and friends to meet their various information needs. Although there is presence of libraries in the prisons understudy, the resources and services available are grossly inadequate. A lot of factors are militating against the

accessibility and use of information by prisoners in Delta State some of which includes; restriction of family members and friends, hostile nature of prison workers, inadequate library materials, uncomfortable nature of prisons, no one to ask questions, among others.

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations were made:

- ✓ Family members and friends to prisoners should be allowed to visit regularly to enable free flow of information from them to their ward in the prison.
- ✓ Government should fund properly the prison libraries to enable them acquire current titles and carry out services that meet the information needs of prisoners.
- ✓ Government should try to make Delta State, Nigeria prisons more comfortable for living as this uncomfortable nature of prisons has hindered their access to information.

- ✓ Although there is radio set in all prisons visited, government should try to ensure there is television set in all the rooms so that prisoners can watch programmes that enhance their access to information.
- ✓ Prisoners should be allowed to access the internet and other online sources to enable them gather useful information that meets their needs.
- ✓ Prison workers should not be hostile to prisoners to enable them feel free to request information relevant their needs.
- ✓ NGOs should ensure they visit prisons regularly with a view to meeting the information needs of prisoners.
- ✓ Physicians and other health expert should either reside within the prison premises or visit often in order to meet the health information needs of prisoners.

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