

# An Analysis of Socio-Economic Impact of imprisonment in Nigeria

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## Abstract

Prison populations around the world are increasing, placing enormous financial burdens on governments. There is growing recognition that imprisonment does not achieve some of its most important stated objectives, as well as being harmful to offenders, to their families and in the long-term, to the community. The majority of inmates worldwide come from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Poverty, unemployment, broken homes, mental illness, drug and alcoholic abuse, domestic violence are realities that are likely to be noticed in most offenders' lives. Many are in prison for non-violent or minor offences. By using imprisonment as an answer to all offences committed by such individuals, not only is the issue of safety in the community not addressed in any sustainable manner, the cycle of impoverishment, loss of jobs, weakening of employment chances, damage to relationships, worsening of psychological and mental illnesses and continued or increased drug use is perpetuated. This study, therefore, is an attempt to look at socio-economic implication of imprisonment. In an attempt to achieve this, it was discovered that maintaining prisoners is not economically viable to the society at the same time it creates socio-economic handicap to the offenders and their families. The author indicted imprisonment as among one of the worst penal policy in recent times. He therefore, suggested other alternative to imprisonment as a palliative measure to the hard and harsh conditions associated with imprisonment.

**Key words:** imprisonment, prison, socio-economic, impact, poverty

## 1. Introduction

Prison punishment is the most comprehensive social control, regulation, and crime prevention mechanism. Increased number of prisoners has economical as well as negative social impacts on government, and not only need high costs to maintain inmates. It is also detrimental to the main convicted concerned, prisoners, who are the main elements of prison, since the authorities fail to classify and select them according to crime, age, the conviction time and so on. The skyrocketing public cost of incarceration in Nigeria is of great concern. Present costs overwhelm consideration of other justice and public safety spending and are a detriment to cost effective prevention and intervention programming. The inexorable increase in prison populations and subsequent costs mean that rethinking policy, reforming sentencing and realigning the management of incarcerated populations are called for. One of the pressing concerns is implementing modifications to the sentencing grid that do not compromise public safety.

According to Mohammad (2004) in the 18th century, it was believed that imprisonment could work as a lesson for the offender and potential offenders who had not yet committed crime. Here, the emphasis was put upon the offender's remorse. In the 20th century, criticism on short-term imprisonment and its deleterious effects drew attentions towards the rehabilitation and treatment theory. Yet, it seems, all those efforts and hopes have turned out in vain and imprisonment has been unable to reach the goals for which it had been projected. The following are reasons for this frustration:

- 1). Its inability to prevent recidivism by prisoners (special intimidation).
- 2). Destructive psychological and personal impact on prisoners.
- 3). Contradiction between imprisonment and the principle of "individuality of punishments" in terms of its impact on the convict's family.
- 4) In many cases, the fact that most of convicts belong to the poverty-stricken class of the society causes the same factors that worked as pretext for criminality to come up once again after the offender is released;
- 5) High costs of imprisonment. That is to say, building and maintaining prisons needs a huge amount of money, which is a burden on governments. Besides, the convict, disallowed to take part in social and economic activities, will face difficulties in compensating damages inflicted to the victim. This also entails an overall negative impact on the economic development trend of the society.
- 6) The prisoner loses sense of responsibility and, as a result, hardly commits him/herself towards the social values
- 7) Low-level health care and moral problems as well as drug-related problems and AIDS in prisons.

- 8) Congestion of the prisons' inmate population results in considerable financial and human resources to be used merely for "storing up" human beings. As such, treatment and rehabilitation of prisoners become impossible.
- 9) Methods used for imprisonment and segregation, harsh attitudes towards prisoners, and discriminations equally augment the dangerous status of violent and non-violent inmates
- 10) Discrimination against minorities and coloured inmates in some countries.
- 11) In many countries, prisons are facing lack of financial resources and experts.
- 12) In some countries, those awaiting trial (on provisional detention) constitute a high percentage of the inmate population and some of them serve longer terms than the minimum required by the law.
- 13) In some countries, adequate facilities for segregating the children and those with mental problems from other inmates are unavailable.
- 14) Often, there is no room for the drug-addicts to undergo treatment and the prison has even become a safe place for drug dealers.
- 15) In many countries, it has become practically impossible to build up more prisons in order to reduce the congestion in prisons. Similarly, it is difficult to deploy and train prison officers, and to provide more financial resources for prisons.
- 16) Cultural values within the society and inside prisons create violent, anti-social behaviours among prisoners and destroy their morality.
- 17) The myth of "the doctor healing the criminal and saving him from his criminality" has failed, so prisons are no longer of utility.

Incarceration represents an involuntary interruption of normal life for the offender and, therefore, brings different physical and psychological developmental influences to bear on the person during the period of confinement. For example, for some individuals, isolation from familiar places, friends, and family members results in depression, anxiety, and emotional withdrawal. In addition, prison usually has a long-term affect on a person and may hinder them of leading a normal lifestyle even if they have changed in positive ways. When a person is in prison, taxpayers may incur additional or indirect costs, such as the costs of social services, healthcare, and education, for example. For the most part, these indirect costs are borne by government agencies other than the department of corrections.

Incarcerated men and women bear economic and social costs associated with prison as do their families and communities. Incarceration impacts negatively on the life of a family in several important ways: it strains them financially, disrupts parental bonds, separates spouses, places severe stress on the remaining caregivers, leads to a loss of discipline in the household, and to feelings of shame, stigma, and anger. Although these costs—typically referred to as collateral costs—are important for policy deliberation. More so, it is important to note that all corrections spending represent an opportunity cost. This simply means that any state resources spent on corrections cannot be used for other purposes.

The major problem with imprisonment in Nigeria is that vast majority of inmates are males of prime working age. Adults in prison are out of the regular workforce, and once released, they are viewed less positively by employers than persons without a criminal record. However, the research evidence on whether incarceration has a negative effect on future employment is inconclusive. Ethnographic studies indicate that after release from prison individuals have difficulty finding and keeping a job. (Good, Pirog-Good, & Sickles, 1986; Majors and Billson, 1992). Economic analyses using micro- or individual data generally confirm links between incarceration and employment, although the strength of the relationships and the direction of causality vary.

## 1.1 Theoretical Frame Work

### Penological Theory of Punishment

Punishment is the infliction of some kind of pain or loss upon a person for a misdeed—*i.e.*, the transgression of a law or command. Punishment may take forms varying from capital punishment, flogging, and mutilation of the body to imprisonment, fines, and even deferred sentences that come into operation only if an offense is repeated within a specified time. The idea that punishment can result in the offense being "paid" for and that it can be expanded in the effect from the specific criminal to the general public has been around from the earliest times.

#### 1.1.1 The Treatment Theory

A major trend in correction is to approach the offender much as one would the mentally ill, the neglected, or the underprivileged. This more human ideology, reflected in the treatment model, sees criminal behaviour as just another manifestation of pathology that can be handled by some form of therapeutic activity. Although the criminal may be referred to as "sick," the treatment ideology is not analogous to a medical approach. The closest comparison with

physical illness lies in the need for offender to recognise the danger and undesirability of their criminal behaviour and then to make the significant efforts to rid themselves of that behaviour. The treatment model does not “remove” criminal behaviour, as one might remove an infected limb; rather, the “patient” (inmate) is made to see the rewards of positive behaviour and is encouraged and equipped to adopt it as a model. Allen and Simonsen (2001).

The treatment theory is the major stance that guides this dissertation; this is because the treatment model is more humane, fair and just as against the punitive measure of imprisonment. In explaining the reason for treatment approach as against incarceration policy Inciardi, (2002) opines as follows:

The reasons for community-based correctional strategies encompass a wide range of humanitarian, fiscal and pragmatic motives. **First**, along with the growth of the humanitarian movement in corrections, the notions of mercy and compassion, combined with considerations of human dignity began to infiltrate sentencing practices and correctional decision-making. For offenders who cannot help themselves, and for others who represent diminished risks to the society, it is felt that custodial coercion might be unnecessary. **Second**, for an untold number of lesser and situational offenders, many reformers hold that the unfavourable consequences of imprisonment-loss of liberty and self-esteem, placement of physical jeopardy, and the fact that penitentiaries can be “schools of crime” impede successful rehabilitation and community reintegration. **Third**, from an economic point of view, it generally costs far less to supervise criminals in the community than to maintain them in institutions. Moreover, the families of inmates often become financial burden to the state. **Fourth**, many community-based correctional strategies have the practical value of helping offenders play productive roles in their neighbourhoods and communities, as opposed to the more negative implication of imprisonment. **Fifth**, given the current trends in prison overcrowding, reducing or altogether eliminating the offender’s period of confinement has been viewed as a pragmatic approach to the management and control of the less seriously involved criminal offenders. **Sixth**, since the beginning of the 1960s, a “last resort” philosophy has developed in corrections in which the traditional avenues of punishment and correction have not been working, and new, innovative approaches must be tested. (Inciardi,2002:591).

### 1.1.2 Socio-Economic Impact of Imprisonment

Prisons are expensive. They rarely enable people to address the behaviour that puts them there, and research shows that sentencing more people to prison for longer periods does not reduce crime. The best regarded research for the US shows that every 10% increase in the prison population produces just a 2% decrease in the crime rate (The Bulletin, September 17, 2002). The situation in Nigeria today does not show any reciprocal decrease in crime for every increase in the imprisonment rate; in fact, both are steadily rising. Imprisonment rates have gone from 120 per 100,000 head of population in 1992 to almost 150 in 2002, with only a small decrease between 2001-2 (ABS), while crimes like violent assault have increased by as much as 380% over the last two decades.

According to Stephan, (1999) imprisonment wastes human force. When the work force of a society changes to cost forces, the society losses its resources. The active prisoners are usually 20 to 50 years old and they will spend their best effective time in jail. The costs of prison are irrevocable. Although they could be directly and indirectly provisioned to increase the security, level and it consequently would result in social and economical productivity and prosperity. However, round-the-clock maintenance costs of each system are very high all around the world; most of it is not regenerated, so the resources are wasted. Along with the increase in the number of prisons comes an increase in prison budgets.

Social impacts of imprisonment such as the loss of housing while in prison, difficulty in gaining employment post-release and poor health not only impact on the wellbeing of the individual, but of the society as a whole. Many ex-prisoners who return to prison claim that lack of suitable housing is one of the main reasons they end up back in prison, yet public housing in has no special provision for ex-prisoners. More often than not, ex-prisoners face difficulty in gaining employment, as they bear the stigma of being a convicted criminal. This can severely and sometimes permanently damage their employment prospects. Imprisonment can cause already marginalised people to feel even more alienated, weakening personal identity and motivation. This exclusion from the community and lack of employment leads to social isolation and poverty, which in turn significantly increases the risk of reoffending.

Consequently, economy costs of imprisonment are:

- ❖ Human resources loss
- ❖ Susceptible active population

- ❖ Maintenance and support costs
  - ❖ Prison construction
  - ❖ Family financial poverty
  - ❖ Reduction of per capita income
- 
- ❖ Job discontinuity
  - ❖ Unemployment Increase

In addition, after receiving little treatment or guidance within prison, ex-convicts are released back to the society with no savings or little money in their pocket. These individuals have not only lost precious time to build a career, family and friends but also face the stigma of being ex-convicts. As a result, it is not surprising that more than 60% of people released from prison commit a crime after being released. Majority of inmates come from poverty-stricken neighbourhoods that suffer from inadequate education, unemployment, broken families, social isolation and other factors that make criminal activity more likely. Unfortunately, prison does absolutely nothing to address these “root” causes of crime.

More importantly too, imprisonment disrupts relationships and weakens social cohesion, since the maintenance of such cohesion is based on long-term relationships. When a member of a family is imprisoned, the disruption of the family structure affects relationships between spouses, as well as between parents and children, reshaping the family and community across generations. Mass imprisonment produces a deep social transformation in families and communities.

### 1.1.3 Imprisonment and poverty

Imprisonment disproportionately affects individuals and families living in poverty. When an income generating member of the family is imprisoned the rest of the family must adjust to this loss of income. The impact can be especially severe in poor, developing countries where the state does not provide financial assistance to the indigent and where it is not unusual for one breadwinner to financially support an extended family network. Thus the family experiences financial losses as a result of the imprisonment of one of its members, exacerbated by the new expenses that must be met - such as the cost of a lawyer, food for the imprisoned person, transport to prison for visits and so on. When released, often with no prospects for employment, former prisoners are generally subject to socio-economic exclusion and are thus vulnerable to an endless cycle of poverty, marginalization, criminality and imprisonment. Thus, imprisonment contributes directly to the impoverishment of the prisoner, of his family (with a significant cross-generational effect) and of society by creating future victims and reducing future potential economic performance.

### 1.1.4 The cost of imprisonment

The monetary costs of feeding inmates alone in Nigeria prison stands at #5.585 billion per year. This translates to about #72,000 each year for every inmate in Nigeria. The cost of feeding an average offender in prison is #200 per day. In addition the Government spends around #2 billion per year on building and maintaining prisons. It is essential to note that, when considering the cost of imprisonment, account needs to be taken not only of the actual funds spent on the upkeep of each prisoner, which is usually significantly higher than what is spent on a person sentenced to non-custodial sanctions, but also of the indirect costs, such as the social, economic and healthcare related costs, which are difficult to measure, but which are immense and long-term.

Tonry and Petersilia (1999) also observed that the literature on collateral effects of prison is fragmentary. According to them at least six kinds of collateral effects can be identified:

**First**, what are the effects of imprisonment on prisoners' later lives? Sizable economic and smaller ethnographic literatures (Fagan and Freeman 1999) convincingly show that imprisonment reduces ex-offenders' subsequent incomes and employment. A policy literature shows that various State and Federal laws deny ex-offenders the right to vote or hold office in some places, the opportunity to engage in certain occupations in some places, and the right to receive various public benefits and services in some places (Fellner and Mauer 1998). Various literatures show that imprisonment often leads to the breakup of families and social relationships and to less parental involvement with their children (Hagan and Dinovitzer 1999).

**Second**, what are the effects of imprisonment on prisoners' later physical and mental well-being? A psychological literature on coping and adaptation in prison concludes, probably contrary to many lay people's intuitions, that even long-term imprisonment appears to have few lasting mental health effects (e.g. Adams, 1992), though some researchers doubt this (Liebling, 1999). It would be surprising if established adverse effects on income, employment,

and family functioning were unrelated to former prisoners' mental and physical health. However, a serious longitudinal study of ex-offenders' lives is needed to answer such questions, and none has been done.

**Third**, what are the effects of imprisonment on offenders' spouses or partners, and their children? On this subject, the literature is especially thin and fragmented, as Hagan and Dinovitzer (1999) show, and the most pressing task is to pull together existing knowledge in order to formulate plausible hypotheses and develop systematic research agenda. Hypotheses would presumably at least address the effects of imprisonment on the financial and social stability of prisoners families while they were in prison and afterwards, on the maintenance of prisoners relationships with families, and on the short-and long-term well-being and social functioning of prisoners children. These would, of course, not be simple hypotheses. No doubt sometimes families and partners benefit from the removal of abusive, disordered, or dysfunctional parents and spouses. However, given the strong negative effect on children is well-being of being raised in disadvantaged, single-parent households, Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1986) maintained that the effect of imprisonment on spouses and children are often likely to be negative.

**Fourth**, what are the effects of imprisonment on prisoners' later crime involvement? According to findings of criminal careers research, Blumstein et al. (1986), the negative effect on ex-prisoners incomes, employment prospects, and family involvement predict increased offending probabilities. In addition, for centuries, at least since the time of John Howard, the great eighteenth century English prison reformer, the proposition has been put forward that prisons are Schools for crime, that younger and less experienced prisoners are socialized into anti-social and oppositional attitudes and as a result exit the prison more likely to commit crimes than when they entered. No informed person doubts that this sometimes happens, and at least partly offsets any crime-reductive effect of imprisonment. Many European scholars accept it as proven that prison is criminogenic and that prison terms should for crime-prevention reasons be avoided whenever possible, Albrecht (2000). American research on the effect of penalties typically focuses on crime-reduction, and only sometimes treats crime-enhancing effect as an offset. If the criminogenic effects of imprisonment are large, contemporary research may be overlooking an important part of the crime and punishment puzzle.

**Fifth**, what are the collateral effects of imprisonment on the larger community? Plausible hypotheses can be offered about effect of recent prison expansion on the allocation of public resources (which are transferred from higher education particularly, but also from other public programs and services, to prisons), on economic development (transferred from inner cities to the usually rural communities where prisons are built), and on community cohesion (in many disadvantaged minority communities, large proportions of the young men are or have been imprisoned and are thereby disabled from working, parenting, marrying, or otherwise becoming Contributing members of the community). Imprisonment may have become so common an experience in some communities that it may no longer carry a stigma, and thereby may lose whatever deterrent effect it would otherwise have, (Nagin 1998), or may even cause prison styles and values to be exported to the outside community. Fagan and Wilkinson (1998).

**Sixth**, what are the immediate effects on prisoners while being confined in prison? There are sizable literatures on this one collateral effect. On coping and adapting generally, measured in terms of prisoners' physical and mental health (Adams 1992) and in relation to housing arrangements, (Gaes 1985), and specifically on prison suicide, Liebling (1999). More so, Clear (1996) observed that the expansion of the penal system has not been accompanied by an equivalent decrease in crime. The failure of this extraordinary increase in incarceration to produce a meaningful reduction in crime needs explanation. The common view of the prison is simplistic because it fails to account for the unintended consequences of imprisonment. These unforeseen effects are subtle and, in some ways, modest, but over time they combine to counteract the positive effects of prison. A broader, more complete understanding of the effects of incarceration would enable us to understand the limits of using prison as a crime-prevention strategy.

More so, in accounting for negative effects of imprisonment, Tosh (1982) observed that it has also been recognised, through simulations of prison environments, that lockups and isolation have the habit of dehumanizing prisoners by making them feel anonymous, and breeding ill feelings because of their rejection and condemnation by society as a whole. Likewise, it must be remembered that offenders have been drawn from a society in which possessions are closely linked with concepts of personal worth by numerous cultural definitions. However, in prison, inmates find themselves reduced to a level of living near bare subsistence. Whatever physical discomfort this deprivation may entail, it has deeper psychological significance as to the prisoner's conception of his personal adequacy - particularly when surrounded by other inmates, whom 20% are estimated to be mentally deficient, and 5% as psychotic.

The entire prison structure according to Tosh, (1982) is based on solitude and separatism. Firstly, the convict is isolated from the external world and everything that motivated his/her offences. Secondly, they are to a large degree



isolated from one another. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this concept was taken to the extreme whereby prisoners were even forced to wear facemasks that did not allow vision or communication during exercise periods. This concept is based on the promotion for total submission, and in older prisons dually acted as a form of buffering with which to control the outbreak of diseases. Early attempts at submission and rehabilitation were far from perfect. The use of solitary confinement was originally designed to allow prisoners to rediscover their own conscience and better voice through spiritual conversion. Unfortunately, it was later discovered that no form of torture could have been worse than solitary confinement because it ended up causing within many prisoners adverse psychological effects such as:

- ❖ Delusions
- ❖ Dissatisfaction with life
- ❖ Claustrophobia
- ❖ Depression
- ❖ Feelings of panic and
- ❖ On many instances madness.

Tosh (1982) further observed that the above are symptoms of chronophobia—a state often referred to as prison neurosis. It wasn't until 1850 that these disturbing effects of confinement to small quarters was finally abandoned, and only utilized as an instrument of potential terror to keep inmates in line. Furthermore, it brought attention to the need to redesign rooms that housed each prisoner. However, even to this day, confinement within prison, though vastly improved by comparison, continues to have similar adverse psychological effects.

Tosh, (1982) conclude that prisoners' uniforms also play a large part in destroying personal identity, and crushing individual spirits. These somewhat bland, yet repetitive outfits are a way whereby unification maybe achieved within inmates, through the portrayal that they are no longer individuals, but are part of a whole. That whole is symbolic of society. Overall, the entire prison experience with its symbolic mechanisms of justice that encompass every lock, piece of barbed wire, the thick walls, the never-ending supervision and segregation, the harsh solitude, and minimalistic lifestyles, are deliberately designed not only to incapacitate, but psychologically curb any prisoner's personality traits that have been deemed by society as undesirable or dangerous.

Bonta and Gendreau, (1990) Studies on the effects of prison overcrowding, long-term imprisonment, short-term detention, solitary confinement, death row, and the health risks associated with imprisonment provide strong evidence regarding "the pains of imprisonment." Wormith, (1985) on the other hand also observed that the physical, emotional and psychological prison environment faced by all inmates is determined by the prevailing beliefs and attitudes held by the criminal justice system and the general public concerning the appropriateness of certain types of punishment. Some maintain that in order for a punishment to be acceptable to the public, it must clearly demonstrate adverse effects. Others insist that the punishment of incarceration does not have to, and should not, be equated with harm and that the creation of a humane and effective prison environment requires the development of mechanisms with which to reduce deprivation of liberty.

An insight into the report of Legal Defence and Assistance Project (LEDAP, 2006), their report revealed the conditions in Nigerian prisons and the system of administration. According to this report, the congestion rate in the prisons is so high and this largely hampers an effective administration of the prisons. For instance in Ibara Prison, Abeokuta, Ogun State, at the death row cells, the congestion rate is as high as 400%. At Oko Prison, Benin City, Edo State that is a medium security prison, we were surprised to find death row inmates kept there. Congestion rate at the death row cells of the prison is about 300%. An account of the sanitary conditions at the prisons irrespective of their geographical location has consistently painted a grim picture of grime and poor personal and environmental hygiene. Naturally, the situation is worse in the most crowded prisons. Some of the prisons visited like Oko Prison, Benin City, Edo State and Ibara Prison, Abeokuta, Ogun State, we were very uncomfortable with the offensive odour oozing from the inmates, which bothers on personal hygiene.

In summary, the pain and suffering being experienced by detainees inside Nigerian prisons are untold and without measure. It is now at a level that when a Judge is sending an accused person to prison custody pending his trial, it is like an indirect death sentence. The inevitable agonies and mental torture he/she is going to face as a result of the terrible condition of the prisons have rubbished the presumption of his innocence before guilt and will surely reduce his life span if he is lucky to ever come out alive. Nigerian prison system and its administration are pathetic and mind blowing to know that fellow human beings are subjected to these inhumane treatment. It is assumed that every prisoner regardless of his or her offence deserves a better treatment in whatever prison environment he or she finds himself or herself.

### 1.1.5 Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this study has shows that Prisons have become vast warehouses for the dumping of people with problems society has failed to deal with especially, unemployment, poverty, those with mental health needs, with histories of neglect and abuse, with drug and alcohol addictions. Penal policy and the criminal justice system as a whole have been primarily responsible for driving up numbers of inmates. Besides, the penal system is a huge drain on the public purse. Any serious attempt at reducing crime must involve a range of departments looking at practical ways to combat crime, and working together to address crime as the social problem it is, not merely something that requires criminal justice system intervention. As it stands, the extensive use of prison is a very expensive option; not only in terms of monetary costs, but also the hidden social costs (which inevitably cause immeasurable monetary costs), and the health risks posed to prisoners and prison workers.

### 1.1.6 Recommendations

- ✓ There is an urgent need for introduction of probation and parole to mitigate the harsh penal condition of imprisonment in Nigeria.
- ✓ There is need for poverty reduction by creating avenues for more job and skill acquisition centres.
- ✓ Introduce programs that aim to reduce reoffending, "tailored" to the offence and the offender, such as drink driving, substance abuse, sex offences, violent offenders, etc.
- ✓ Establishment of more post-release centres close to community facilities which allow them to reintegrate into society and gain employment, etc, and have more contact with family members, would significantly decrease the chance of reoffending, and improve their quality of life upon release.
- ✓ Provide more opportunities for education, and teaching of basic literacy, numeracy and life skills to prisoners.

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