

FEMALE INMATE MENSTRUAL PHENOMENON IN NIGERIA CORRECTIONAL CENTRES: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Atiku Abdullateef Abiodun¹; Jimoh Buhari Edun²

¹Department of Social Work, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

²Department of Sociology, Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Abstract

A number of the Nigerian correctional centres are in a state of disarray, placing the female inmates in a disastrous health position. Procuring quality health care services to the inmates is far beyond reach due to serious anomalies operating within the system such as corruption, feeble policies, delay in government programs, 'Oga' at the top syndrome, nonchalant attitudes of the officials, and weak criminal justice system among host of other factors. This article cross-examined and explained problems such as menstruation, sexual abuse, congestions and incompatible structures, unhygienic environment and infectious diseases, and other social issues facing female inmates in Nigeria correctional centres. To guarantee sustainable and standard health services to the female inmates in particular, there is need for all hands to be on board to reassess the ongoing crisis on the well-being of the inmates and by aiding uncomplicated approach towards making life meaningful when it comes to health matters of these inmates. Thus, social workers play conspicuous and outstanding roles in administrative and practice positions in correctional centres with the law enforcing bureaus to avert this type of social problem in the society and as well work on the rehabilitation process through a safe and secured social justice system. It therefore, recommends that the Nigeria government and the administration of Nigeria correction centres should key into social Policies by various organizations in promoting health and social welfare of the inmates, In addition is the need for the training of correctional officials on best methods of dealing with inmates of the 21st century and engaging social workers in the Psycho-social and therapeutic interventions.

Key Words: Correctional Center; Facilities; Female Inmate; Menstruation; Social Work

INTRODUCTION

Correctional 'centre' like any other home is a total institution where both male and female offenders are kept or remanded. Female inmates in most part of the world, particularly in Nigeria are faced with the complexity that enshrouded in the life they lived before becoming a prisoner (Parkinson, 2003). A key aspect of this complication on female inmates is that, they are naturally deceitful and socially secret minded (John, 2010; Alex, 2015). The needed attentions for female inmates are specific and gender based compared to their male counterparts. Thus, the Nigeria criminal justice system

has no unique program and policies put in place to reckon with the various needs of these female inmates (Agbaegbu, 2011). An increase in the demand for health service among inmates is becoming normal and alarming in Africa and particularly in Nigeria. Women in correction centres inclined to see correctional physicians more timely and take more prescribed medications than their male counterparts and mostly in correctional environments. Home Office (1997) reported that female inmates get sick twice the number of male inmate and often demand health needs.

In African, several complaints by female inmates are peculiar to reproductive and sexual harassment health issues such as menstruation, pregnancy, breastfeeding, menopause and the likes. They most often times have health issues relating to mental health crisis which amounts to depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and self-injuries, that can eventually result to suicide and other harms (World Health Organization, 2009). According to the British department of health, many female inmates in sub-Sahara African prisons had high increase in emotional stress, sleeplessness and depression, and in Nigeria for instance, 75% of female inmates undergo different neuroses which include depression, anxiety and phobias compared to 58% of male inmates that are affected (British Department of Health Report, 1998).

Maruschak and Berzofsky (2015) argued that female inmate health issues has been on the increase over time in the state jails and federal prisons notably in the United State, stating that 67% of female inmates in jails and 63% of them in the prisons are afflicted with very severe health crisis and, with 20% of female inmates in state jails and 25% of female inmates in the federal prisons had infectious diseases that are on the increase. This indicate an increase in a higher cases of illness among women in correctional centres, and the reasons why women were reportedly to be sick may likely relate not only to the ongoing medical problems but also, to a number of factors: such as unfriendly correctional environment, and stress experience as a result of female menstrual flow. Situations like these most often times complicate issues for female inmates and medical care practitioners. An inmate under duress due to unhealthy environment, poor sanitary care and lack of secrecy based on personal lifestyle during this period tend to have one or more pains.

According to correctional health care staff, menstrual trauma among female inmates takes more attention of medical doctors because, most reoccurring problem presented for consultation includes but, not limited to pre- menstrual tension, painful menstruation, excessive menstruation and menstrual cessation (Vetten, 2008; Catrin, 2009; Smith, 2017). Going by the poor condition of Nigeria correctional centre, female inmates are deprived the privilege of certain famine needs that has to do with their menstruating statutory condition (Osude & Imoka, 2008). Catrin (2009) asserted that female inmates during menstrual flow do experience menstrual blood flowing through their legs, and correctional officers were found with questionable character of humiliating and berating female inmate with downgrading comments despite their condition. Amnesty international (2012) reported that studies have shown that most female inmates in correctional centres in south Africa and in Nigeria often use toilet paper or unclean rags as means to sanitize themselves while menstruating and later

resulting to infectious diseases or ailment. This is the more reason why female inmate menstrual phenomenon has become a challenge in Nigeria correctional centres and a societal problem that calls for urgent attention.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Female Inmate Health Condition in Nigeria Correction Centre

The Nigeria correction centre over the years was planned and structured with facilities to cater for male inmates, and it was lately that fewer female inmates were absorbed into the correction centres along with their male counterparts and in a separate quarters, with the belief that they will be able to cope with the system in place as men. Vetter (2008) argued this fact by positing that since foundation of the correction centres in Nigeria, female inmates have been sharing male inmates building with less consideration pertaining to their status quo. Several effects of these anomalies had led to different situational mishap on the female inmates' health condition. Most times, female inmates lack attention to their feminine needs as women and were deprived of some legitimate human rights as inmates, due to disregard to international recommendations and social injustice (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights ACHPR, 2001). Nigeria as a country had suffered over the years and in the hands of time, had gone through several social disorders. Gender inequality, disparity, sexual humiliation and neglect have cut across all facets of the society resulting to failures in ameliorating the social welfare of women as at when needed. The government and officials of the correctional centres had in turn paid deaf ears to the female inmate's 'health' sufferings.

Personal hygiene in correctional centre cannot be practice because, the rooms are not well kept and their clothes are only change on laundry days alone. Hardly can there be a cross ventilation while irritating smells and odours are not left out. Hygiene products such as liquid disinfectants and soaps are unavailable and many female inmates described the discomfort and unpleasant smells fusing out from every locks and croons especially during the summer, from women alike who are often menstruating simultaneously without hygiene or safety measures (Maya, 2010; Micheal, 2017). Women in Nigeria correctional centre are going through difficult time and are more exposed to high risk factors aside health care services. Most female inmates are impoverished of their human rights and are frequently harassed by male warders of sexual abuse and molestations (Durosaro, 2002). A prolonged sexual harassment by male officers may result to female inmate pregnancy and child delivery while still being incarcerated, a deplorable condition that further hiked their health challenges to depression, insomnia, and mental illnesses (Durosaro, 2002; Ramsbotham, 2004).

Amnesty International reported that many female inmates themselves bought menstrual sanitary pads from correctional officers who sell it rather than issuing out freely to these worried and helpless inmates. However, these pads sold to them are substandard and are wingless, it hardly can absorb flows as at when due and used over required period of time, leading to stains and droplet of bloods on the floor, coupled

with odours (Amnesty International, 2012). This indicates that some female inmate in the correctional center menstruate for the number of days that they have to bleed on their clothes and staying with it for over some weeks. The risk of infection caused by unhealthy environment cannot be over emphasized as this is a matter of basic health and dignity in view of their health position. Subsequently, female inmate health condition in Nigeria correctional centre has been infringed and not properly cared for in line with the global standard across board.

Menstrual Challenges in Nigeria Correctional Centres

Individual female inmate deserve to have their menstrual periods treated confidentially like any other issues relating to famine matters irrespective of their jail term and with little or no shame of fear of repercussions - health hazards. However, incarcerated female inmates are facing the greatest barriers in accessing menstrual product or supplies due to the fact that their fraction is minute among the inmates in Nigeria correction centres and going by the statistical report issued by the Assistant Controller General of Prison in 2018, he revealed that female inmate population remain minimal and therefore, making their prominent and various demands most times inconsiderable due to the fact that they are a group of people with diminish concern in the correction centre (Prisons' Rehabilitation and Welfare Action, 2018). It is sadden to note that, female inmate in Nigeria correction centres uses their money to buy sanitary pads and tampons from the centres' commissary, instances whereby, any of the inmates has no money at hand during her menstrual flow; it becomes frustrating and unhealthy. Thus, Maya (2010) posited that most correctional service system in Africa and particularly in Nigeria does not provide free female hygiene products to inmates in their various zones. However, the cruel attitude of correctional (prison) officers is becoming obvious that they show no concern to female inmate on requesting for sanitary supplies. The officials always claim that they are out of luck has no supply is available so, they better not bleed on the floor, giving them no option than to menstruate on their clothes and body (Osude & Imoka, 2015). The actions of correctional officers towards inmates can be said to be intentionally determined, to molest and devalue them as a result of cost saving measures (Smith, 2017). However, a female inmate in one of the Nigeria correction centres asserts how bad it made her feel to be there without pads or tampons holding to what she went through (Vetten, 2008; Amnesty International, 2012; UN, 2013).

Menstruation in Nigeria correction centre is as worse as hell. Female inmates assert that it makes a lot of them hate a part of their selves as a result of unsafe menstruation period being experience while at the centre (ACHPR, 2001; Osude & Imoka, 2015). Although, the callous act of prison personnel's (officials) cannot be over emphasized as it cut across the sub-Saharan Africa region on how female inmates are been maltreated especially, when it comes to their menstrual period. For instance, prisons located in Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Cameroon are all reported to have been abusing the human rights of female inmates (Mission on prison and conditions of detention, 2001; Todrys

& Amon 2011; Twea, 2013; Makarati, 2013; Fontebo 2014, Dixey, Nyambe, Foster, Woodall & Baybutt, 2015; Solomon & Nwankwoala, 2015; Agboola, 2016; Nangia & Fontebo, 2017).

The experiences given by each of these female inmates in their various localities was nothing to write home about, female inmates in Ethiopia and Malawi prisons lamented that they use improvised rags time and again for their menstrual flow (Twea, 2013). Zambian female inmates expressed that friends and family aided them with sanitary deliveries and at times, through church donations (Topp, Moonga, Mudenda, Luo, Kaingu & Chileshe, 2016). Zimbabwean female inmates report using pieces of blankets, tissues, newspapers, and oftentimes their uniforms in place of sanitary pads (Makarati 2013). Prison officials in South Africa were reported by female inmates that, they make demand to see stained sanitary towels, before issuing replacements (Agboola 2016). More so, Female inmates in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi frowned at the unsafe disposal of used sanitary pads and the havoc it entails (Makarati 2013; Twea 2013; Agboola 2016; Topp et al., 2016). Therefore, it is germane to state that menstruation among the female inmates in most Nigeria correction centres is as one amidst several others in Sub-Sahara Africa countries, and Nigeria being the most populous black nation in the public demine should deem it fit by caring, providing and abiding by virtues of human rights of the inmates as enshrined in the Nigeria 1999 Constitution.

CONCLUSION

The Nigeria correction centre over the years had become a criminal nurturing centre. This ugly incident solely rest in the hands of Nigerian correctional officers. Severe humiliations are melted on the lives of inmates and it makes them more miserable, vulnerable and even more harden. The tragedies are just too difficult to be assess in monetary values, it remain an oblivious fact to most Nigerians who had not for once visited these centres. Inmates are made to get rot, damaged and condemned overnight in the hands of untrained officers. Instance of female inmates going through similar anguish like their male counterparts is inhumane, especially when it comes to their menstrual cycle that demands health and sanitary care. Different committee reports, regional and international human right conventions on inmates' health and social wellbeing, particularly the "female inmates" had been heard but, all to no avail. It is therefore, pertinent to note that government and correctional centre administrators should do the needful by bringing the centre and her inmates into lime light from the shadow of itself amidst global prison system of the 21st century.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

From the previous sections, it can be deduced that female inmates' health status in most prisons and correctional centres in Africa are in shambles and in a horrifying condition. Different scholars, agencies and organizations such as: the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Amnesty International, the United Nation High Commissioner for Human Right (OHCHR), US State Department on human right

(USSD) and National Human Right Commission (NHRC) among others, have made a lot of effort on the state at which most of the correctional institutions are, and the hazardous wreck it causes to the inmates rather than the vision and mission correctional centres are made to function. Prisons are places where culprits or criminals are expected to be redressed, redefined and rehabilitated both in behaviours and attitudes before reintegrated back into the society. Thus, the small percentage of female inmates has been enforced to contend with similar arrangement and procedures just as the male inmates and in Nigeria, the situation of correctional centre has ended up in a disarray where female inmate needs are unaccounted for and their rights are misplaced.

Female inmates form an out numbered group in correctional centres and their exceptional welfare needs are detailed to feminine or gender awareness, conceptive health, and prevention of infectious diseases that are usually ignored (Dolan et al., 2016), and unaddressed by correctional centre's health providers and put in jeopardy by the majority male inmates within prison environment (Bastick & Townhead, 2008; WHO, 2009). In view of these, several reforms and committee reports had been taken as pathway to mitigate the challenges and abnormalities facing correctional centre in Nigeria. From all facets of these struggles, social workers had little or no impact either as participant, committee members or policy pa taker and rather, are the reports taken into use than involving social workers at a point in time nor are social workers role seen significant at each centres. However, the significance of social work in the womb of time as a discipline with dual opportunity either as an educator or a practice based professional that is prompt in assisting the welfare of individuals, families, groups and communities in a progressive manner.

It is grounded by social science theories and accompanied bylaws and standards of social justice, respect for diverse culture, collective responsibility and human right principles. Social work implicates interplay between people and social structures in a bid to ameliorate challenges of life and social well-being (Forde & Lynch, 2013). By promoting and aiding socioeconomic growth and development, supporting grass root empowerment of people and facilities, social cohesion, liberation from oppression and abuses are all attributed of social work practice. Social workers' are people who practices as a professional with a degree in social work. The sole responsibility of social workers is to care for people or group of individuals and families that are confronted by problems affecting their livelihood. A practicing social worker must be skillful in knowledge to teach and develop methods or approaches in which clients' will find suitable in easing his/her plight and enhancing their lives and knowledge (Cipolle, 2010). Social workers are recognized as worthwhile game players in the society and as well as a very important agent of change who sees all inmates as clients and ensure that they are well cared for by making them to understand their plights and also willing to put an end to their suffering (Dziegielewski, 2013).

Cowles (2012) posited that aside counselling of individual, group of individuals and families, social workers responsibilities goes beyond these, as it often extend to addressing legal matters, such as court hearings and testimonies relating to

clients where need be, supporting other health officials in health related issues concerning patients recovery and wellbeing, liaison for clients between different organizations and most often times, they get used to clients conditions and refer them to community resource centers. Be it as it may, social workers are involved in policy development, advocacy services and as well engage in research work (Cipolle, 2010). Furthermore, it is the duty of a social worker to keep to records and make reports as at when due on daily basis and on cases handled.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The federal government should separate female inmate centres from the male and provide their various needs as at when due.
- The federal government/Nigeria correctional centre should adhere to the use of recreational opportunity such as arts and crafts, television sets, indoor and outdoor sports games etc. To maintain orderliness and to serve as therapy to the inmates.
- Administration of the Nigeria correctional centre should be able to provide for inmate's, there medical facilities especially, to the neediest inmates.
- The Nigeria government and the administration of Nigeria correction centre should key into social Policies by various organizations in promoting social welfare of the inmates.
- Psycho-social and therapeutic interventions by social workers should be introduced to support the transition and development of some inmates in addressing factors associated with offending behaviour and other related challenges.
- There should be constant training of officials and personnel's of the Nigeria correction centre on programs that will evaluate their horizons on best methods of dealing with inmates of the 21st century..
- Social workers should be involve in inmate care and more visible with offenders through the circle of their journey from the sentencing till release stage due to the fact that social worker are keen to what they are passing through while in prison.

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Contact:

Atiku Abdullateef Abiodun; Jimoh Buhari Edun, Department of Social Work, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria; Department of Sociology, Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria.
atiku.aa@unilorin.edu.ng; jimohbuhariedun@gmail.com