

Full Length Research

Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Prisoners' At the Medium Security Prison In Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State

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This study is designed to give an insight into the information needs and seeking behavior of prisoners in medium security prison, Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. The researchers collected data through the use of focus group interview which was conducted using a number of ninety (90) respondents from the convicted and awaiting trial inmates. Basically, opinion leaders were used and their responses have been used as basics for generalization. The researcher discovered from the findings that a number of factors inhibit access to information. These factors include among others, high cost of information materials, high rate of illiteracy, lack of awareness on the part of the people, 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. Recommendations were made in order to ameliorate the identified problems.

Keywords: Information Needs, Seeking Behaviour, Prisoners, Medium Security Prison and Makurdi Local Government Area.

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INTRODUCTION

Information is power. People need information so as to be able to play active roles in life. Libraries therefore exist to meet users' basic need for information by acquiring information materials-print, non-print audio-visual materials to users in the community. The public library is therefore, mandated to serve all kinds of users. But in

Nigeria, the public library is unable to adequately meet the needs of all users among them is the disable people (disadvantaged users). Every citizen in the society is to be given free access to information.

According to Aina (2004) the disadvantaged users are the handicapped people, who are in one form or the other

incapacitated to go to the library either physically or intellectually. The physically handicapped are those users who are crippled, visually or hearing impaired patients and prisoners. The intellectually handicapped are those that are mentally retarded. This paper concerns the prisoners.

As earlier mentioned, public library is to preserve and make available the recorded knowledge of man to all categories of users in the community. The blind persons, hospital patients and prisoners need information like any other person in the community. The accessibility of information to these persons will go a long way in helping them to solve their immediate information problems, speed up their reformation and make them better citizens of the nation.

Philosophy of Library Service to Prisoners

Inmates may be in jails or prisons. Prisons are federal or state institutions for offenders who have been convicted of crimes. Prison library service is generally outside the purview of local public libraries because state and federal prisons have their own libraries. Brenda Vogel's 1995 prison library handbook, *Down for the Count*, provides the philosophy of service to prisoners, procedures, resources, and a thoughtful commentary for librarians working in state or federal institutions. Sadly, prison library service has an ever-large constituency. In 2000 there were 1,668 adult correctional facilities – a 14 percent increase from 1995. These included 94 federal, 1,320 states, and 264 private.

A jail is a local (city or country) facility that receives individuals pending arraignment and holds them awaiting trial, conviction, or sentencing. A jail also holds inmates sentenced to short terms (generally under one year). The median sentence for all inmates sentenced to jail is 8.7 months. The public library focus on serving people in jail was very high in the 1970s and 1980s. The work of Rhea Joyce Rubin, director of the Cook County Corrections Library Project (1973-75), helped to frame the rationale for public libraries to serve people in jails. A Library Services and Construction Act grant to the Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA) in 1979-80 for the project improving jail Library Service resulted in a guide for jail library service and a workshop that trained one hundred librarians. This was the last profession-wide initiative to formulate values and develop skills and techniques to deliver library services to local detention centers. During this time the American Library Association developed the policy on library service to detention centers and jails.

Role of Library Service to Prisoners

"The United States incarcerates more people than any other nation in the developed world." These people are

cut off from the world and meaningful access to information is vital (Marshall, 2011, p. 24). Research shows a correlation between education and reduced recidivism, and libraries play an important role in supporting education. In fact, in some states, prisoners are sentenced to a literature discussion group in lieu of prison time. In 1991 the first group in Massachusetts saw a 19 percent recidivism rate as compared to 42 percent in a control group" Education allows inmates to obtain the skills they need to transition back into society once they are released and libraries can play an important role in helping inmates earn these skills. Some programs prison libraries offer include, instruction, literacy classes, life skills classes, typing instruction, and classes on how to use a library.

In addition to educational opportunities, prison libraries can help prisoners have positive and meaningful contact with family. For example, the Jessup Correctional Institute in Maryland started a program that provided books for prisoners to read to their children or grandchildren on visiting days. Other prison libraries have programs in which prisoners are recorded reading stories, and the tapes and books, along with a coloring book and crayons, are sent to their children, some inmates try to read the same materials their children are reading, so they have something to talk about with them. Finally, prison libraries act as positive influences in inmates' lives. It is a safe place within prison and is seen as a valuable place by many inmates. It provides a place of escape from the harsh realities of prison, a place to reflect on one's life, grow, and find peace, and a place to productively spend free time. Some prison libraries also seek to alter behavior by having book discussion groups.

Information needs of prisoners

For public libraries to be able to meet the information needs of their users they need to identify who are the users of the library in order to determine the information needs of the users, their information seeking behaviours and sources of information to be used in meeting their information needs.

David (2000 p.59) opined "better libraries mean better inmates". Prison library services have been accepted by the world as one of the ways to achieve the objective of prisons, which is to educate and rehabilitate the inmates. Therefore, prisoners need information for religious and the prison yard will afford them the opportunity to know and worship God better than before, to improve their education and also to seek for legal redress. As prisoners they have equal right to information and legal refers person on the street.

Womboh (1991) stressed that one of the ways of training a criminal is to make his new environment similar to his natural habitat. This can be possible through library

services in the prison yards. Through provision of library services in the prison yards, the prisoner is also exercising equality of man and free access to information as declared by civil library organization (CLO, 1991) the library is a reformatory center where prisoners read books, newspapers and magazines to rehabilitate and reform themselves during their prison terms and after the walls.

This could be done through two ways either establishing a library in the prison yard or providing reading materials to inmate through information outreach services of the library.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to find out the information needs and seeking behavior of prison inmates in Medium Security Prison Makurdi, Benue State. The study will specifically find out:

- i. The information needs of the prison inmates.
- ii. How they seek for these information.
- iii. How information needs of those people are provided.
- iv. The problems militating against access to information by the prison inmates
- v. The possible solutions to these problems.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study will help government functionaries to plan better in order to meet the information needs of this group of people. The findings of the study will also help the inmates to be aware of what is available for them, and perhaps make effective use of available information for enhanced productivity.

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study is survey method. This is because of the large population involved. The sample for this study comprise of ninety inmates selected from the medium security prison Makurdi. The persons were selected from the awaiting trials, and those convicted.

Histology of Prisons

Prisons have existed from time immemorial. In Old Testament we read that Joseph was imprisoned in Egypt. In the ancient world, prisons were used as a means of self custody and as a form of punishment. But when

Justinian enacted imprisonment as part of Roman law in the 5th century AD, prison became an institution for the treatment of offenders. (VanNess, 2007).

Prisons in Nigeria have their history divided into three distinct periods-pre-colonials, colonial and post independence. For reasons of this works, we shall take a cursory dekho at the colonial and post independence eras.

When the British assumed power of administration in 1861 in Lagos, they had no difficulty in establishing prisons. This was because Africans had already an idea of imprisonment as a form of punishment and as a form of disposal. It was in Lagos that the first prison administration was modeled on British tradition and staffed by officers trained in the same tradition started.

In 1916, the Native Authority ordinance had empowered the Native Authority to establish a police force to check offences, apprehend criminals and arrest them. This thus set the pace for the establishment of Native prisons at the local levels.

What is today medium security prison Makurdi was established by the Tiv Native Authority in 1930. And began operation in a store house inherited on the South Bank of the Benue River from the builders of the old, Makurdi Bridge after the construction work was completed.

With the coming of independence on the 1st of October, 1960, the federal prisons were placed under the minister of internal affairs under a new prisons Act that replaced the 1916 prisons ordinances No 21. Under the new prisons Act, federal prisons were established throughout the country and the Native Authority prisons were unified into the federal ones in 1968.

The medium security prison Makurdi operated from the temporary site until in 2001 when it moved to its present site under the leadership of D.C.P. N.K. Nandeve. With a capacity for 240 inmates bed Space. As at the time of our visit, the facility had about 490 inmates out of which 80 were convicted and the other 410 on awaiting trial status.

Data Presentation and Analysis

13.5% respondents claimed that they seek information on legal issues, 31.5% respondents seek for health related information, 9% respondents reported that they need information on their religious faith, while 13.5% claimed that they need information to tackle educational related problems. 5.4% respondents reported that they seek for recreational related information. It is evident from this result that in order of need, health related information form the bedrock, closely followed legal and educational information. Table 1

Also, we sought for sources of information available to the respondents in the question: How do you get information in the areas of your need? And the responses

Table 1: Information Needs of the Respondents

Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Legal	15	13.5
Health information	35	31.5
Religious information	10	9
Educational information	15	13.5
Recreational information	6	5.4
Vocational information	9	8.1

Table 2: Sources of Information

Sources of Information	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Newspapers	-	-
Magazines	-	-
Billboards/posters	6	5.4
Radio broadcast	-	-
T/V broadcast	28	25.2
Lawyers	30	27
Health works	10	9
Religious bodies	4	3.6
Prison waders	12	10.8

Table 3: Problems of Access to Information

Barriers	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High cost of information materials	3	2.7
High rate of illiteracy	20	18
Lack of awareness	10	9
Radio/TV programmes in English language-local language	30	27
Absence of prison library services	12	10.8
Absence of information centers	15	13.5

are contained in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that 25.2 % of the respondents rely on T/V broadcast, 27% claim they rely on lawyers for their information needs. The table also shows a 10.8% response indicating that the prison waders are also a vital source of information for prison inmates. The above table shows how information is provided to the inmates and also how they seek information.

Problems Militating Against Access to Information Needs of Rural Dwellers

Having looked closely at some areas of information needs, the researchers then wanted to know from the respondents if there were any problems associated with

information seeking behavior or not.

From Table 3, it can be observed that 2.7% respondents attributed failure to access to information in their areas of need to 'high cost of information materials'. There is no gain saying that it is a matter of fact that information materials in any form in Nigeria are very expensive. Most especially for the rural dwellers who hardly earn up to one US dollar a day. High rate of illiteracy contributes to 18%. 'Lack of awareness attracts another 9%, the use of 'English language' for TV programmes constitutes 27% responses. 13.5% respondents points to absence of information centers as a factor. 10.8% reported 'absence of prison libraries' as a factor.

The respondents were asked to indicate in their opinion possible solutions to these problems. Seven items were

Table 4: Frequency distribution of possible solutions

Sources of Information	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Creation of awareness	3	2.7
Repackaging information	20	18
Radio/TV programmes translated into local languages	10	9
Adult education classes established	30	27
Information centers provided	12	10.8
Prison libraries be provided	15	13.5

Table 5: Specific Educational Information Needs

Educational Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Basic Literacy	5	4.5
Vocational education	20	18
Legal education	34	30.6
Health education	21	18.9
Religious education	10	9

Table 6: Specific Recreational Information Needs

Recreational Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sports information needs	47	42.3
Entertainment information needs	24	21
National events	13	11.7
World events	6	5.4

Table 7: Sources of Information

Sources Information Needs	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Newspapers	-	-
Magazines	-	-
Billboards/posters	6	5.4
Radio broadcast	-	-
T/V broadcast	28	25.2
Lawyers	30	27
Health works	10	9
Religious bodies	4	3.6
Prison waders	12	10.8

presented to them to select from.

An analysis of Table 4 indicates that 2.7% respondents proposed creation of awareness as a solution, while 18% opined that 'information be repackaged' to meet their needs. 9% are of the opinion that radio/television programmes should be translated into local languages, establishment of adult education classes' form 27%.

10.8% provision of information centers and 13.5% says 'prison libraries' be provided.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

It is clear from Tables' 5-7 that prison inmates equally

have information needs on multiplicity of issues ranging from legal, education, health etc. this agrees with Bowe, (2011). Who affirms that disadvantaged areas require information on multiplicity of issues bordering around their health problems of daily existence of water supply, good roads, employment, etc. they also need information on how to improve on their farms, fishing, education, adult education classes, etc.

The findings of the study also collaborate Utor (2004), positions that the problems militating against access to information by rural dwellers (disadvantaged groups) are high cost of information materials, high rate of illiteracy, lack of awareness, lack of radio/TV programmes in the local language, absence of extension services, absence of information centers amongst others. Clark, Sheila, and Erica MacCreaigh. (2006), Utor (2002), Utor (2004), in their various studies collaborate this study that creation of awareness in the minds of disadvantaged groups, repackaging of information to meet with the people's need, provision of radio/television programmes in local languages, establishment of adult education classes, establishment of public libraries/viewing centers as possible solutions in an attempt to make information more accessible to disadvantaged groups. Having identified these problems and probable solutions, it is then left for the policy makers and implementer to take appropriate action aimed at ameliorating these problems with the view to making information accessible to the prison inmates.

CONCLUSION

Based on the presentation so far, the writers strongly advocates that government at the three tiers should support library development and provide adequate funds to public libraries so as to perform their functions and services to all users (including handicapped users) effectively. The provision of adequate funds will also afford public libraries to acquire materials for blind people and also to reach out i.e. the use of mobile vans to prisons and hospital patients. Librarians in public libraries need to go for training in areas of special education so that they will be able to serve the handicapped users better.

Conclusively, Benjamin Disraeli, a onetime British Prime Minister, once said, 'As a general rule, the most successful man in life is the man with the best information. Provision of library and information services to all is the key to the door of information, which is an essential ingredient of individual basic needs. The absence of information services to the disadvantaged group like the blind people hospital patients and prisoners will amount to neglect and discrimination which will be contrary to the dictates. For the three categories of users discussed in this paper to be useful citizens to

themselves and the nation is to provide them with the right information at the right time. And also for libraries and librarians to achieve the goals and objectives of their establishment is to provide all with adequate information so as to bring personal and national development.

The writers have noted from the study that the study population is not attended to in terms of their information needs. There is thus a need for a policy statement and framework towards prison library services to cater for the information needs of this group as there is none in existence as at the time of this study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since most of the study subjects are not literate, which is a true reflection of disadvantaged areas dwellers in Nigeria, providing information in its original form may not be useful to them. Rather, such information should be repackaged in such a way that consumption will be easier.
2. Awareness programmes be made so that the prison dwellers will know about the existence of information centers and libraries and their contents so as to patronize them.
3. Radio/TV progroammes intended for the prison dwellers be translated into the local languages rather than it is hitherto done.
4. Information centers and prison libraries be provided to the prison dwellers.
5. Television viewing centers be established in strategic places in these prison communities.
6. Change agents like traditional rulers, political leaders, and teachers should be encouraged to continue assisting prison dwellers in providing information since they are in a better position to access information.

List of Abbreviations

1. **ASCLA.**- Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies.
2. **CLO.** - Civil Liberties Organization.
3. **DCP.** - Deputy Comptroller of Prisons.
4. **TV.** - Television

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