

Educational Attainment and Peer Group Influence as Predictors of Recidivism

Dele Joseph Tenibiaje

Department of Guidance and Counselling
Faculty of Education, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti
PMB 5363, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti-State, Nigeria
E-mail: delsuten@yahoo.co.uk

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of educational attainment and peer group on recidivism in Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive research design and the instrument used for the data collection was a self-designed questionnaire, administered on all the recidivists housed in Nigeria Prison in Ekiti-State. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics to answer research question chi-square and Pearson Product Moment Correlation for the hypotheses formulated. The study revealed that majority of the recidivists had low level of educational attainments. The findings showed that educational attainment and peer group influence were predictors of recidivism. Educational attainments were positively related to recidivism and also peer group influences recidivism. Based on the findings, it was recommended that life skills, literacy, employment and vocational programmes should be incorporated into Prisons' programmes in order to reduce recidivism.

Keywords: Crime, Recidivism, Punishment, Peer Group, Educational Attainment.

Introduction

Crime is an act that violates the law of the society or serious offence against the law of the society for which is there the punishment of incarceration in the prisons. In recent years there seems to be a global upsurge in crime rate that appears not to be gender discriminative as both male and female are involved. There are different views and opinions expressed from many criminologists concerning the causes of crimes. Since crime is a complex psychological, sociological and situational behaviour, Gibbon (1975) viewed the causes from broad dimensions. These dimensions had been tied up closely with sociological theory which is bifurked into environmental and situational causes, hence generic causes mediated through personality factors or personality characteristics. According to Eysenck (1970) personality characteristics are tied to criminality. The inability of certain individuals to tolerate frustrating situations without resorting to aggressive and violence tendency is a product of personality traits. Tenibiaje & Owuamanam (2005) in their study on personality traits of female inmates in some Nigerian prisons concluded that extroversion, neuroticism and psychoticism were significant in predicting criminality. Further, they found that psychoticism traits of inmates have the highest contributory factor to criminality. The other factors which contribute to criminal behaviour and they are only moderating factors to criminality.

Prison sentence is the punishment that judges give to someone who has been declared guilty of a crime. Walker & Padfield (1996) argued that sentencing is a complex process with several inter-linked aims of punishing offenders which are generally condensed into retribution, incapacitation and deterrence. According to McGuire (2009), the pivotal agent in the dispensation of justice is the criminal court, and the main means of doing so at its disposal is the sentence, that is able to impose. The importance of sentencing is to discourage or prevent individuals to commit crime which is similar to the one for which the offender has been sentenced. Punishment is a way to prevent the individual from committing additional crimes. The purpose of punishment is for someone to learn from what has been done wrong. Punishment is a system of correcting which depends largely on the offences. Before the advent of prisons, corporal punishments were often imposed for serious crimes. Punishments are in various forms; physical punishment like flogging, hanging, beheading, confinements, incarceration, imprisonment, probation and parole which put severe restrictions on the condemned persons from freedom of action and movement. According to McGuire (2009) punishment is a widespread and firmly established standard or mainstream approach to criminal conduct which reduces the likelihood of future or continued criminal behaviour. Observations and reports have it that at any one time, only a fraction of those committing crimes in society are apprehended and punished. Yet the public visibility of this process is held to act as a general deterrent for the remainder of the population, including those likely to offend. If general deterrence operates to an extent that justifies its central position in society, then there should be some associations between the activity of the criminal justice system and the total amount of crime (McGuire 2009).

Recidivism is understood to be a falling back or relapse into prior criminal habits especially after punishment, in other words, recidivism is the return of probationers to illegal activity after release from incarceration. Recidivism is the act of a person repeating an undesirable behaviour after they have either experienced negative consequence of that behaviour or have been treated or trained to extinguish that behaviour. Recidivism is a tendency to lapse into a previous pattern of behaviour especially a pattern of criminal habits (Rahim 1984). Many courts are now utilizing drug and alcohol treatment programme to reduce the recidivism rate of offenders who commit drug or alcohol related crime. Recidivism means the re-arrest, reconviction, or re-incarceration of former inmates (Schmallenger & Smykla 2005). Recidivism has not occurred where the relapse did not occur within a specific period. Recidivism rates vary greatly from place to place depending on the amount and quality of intervention, surveillance and enforcement (Schmallenger & Smykla 2005). Recidivist is a person who repeatedly commits crime. Recidivist is a person who repeats an unwanted behaviour even after experiencing its negative consequences. Recidivist is related to habitual crimes such as sexual offences and substance abuse.

There are certain factors contributing to recidivism, according to Gondles (2003) the executive Director of the American Correctional Association, the factors that are contributing to recidivism are the time offenders reach probation, other institutions of social control, offending behaviour, families neighbourhoods and scholars. Alberts (2000) gave reasons for getting in and going back (recidivism) which is referred to as "risk factors" "predictors" or "correlates". They are present in an individual who has not yet committed a crime, may be considered predictive of criminal involvement. They include aspects of a person's character and life experiences which have been identified as being strongly associated with criminal behaviours.

It is important to note those situational, circumstantial, personal, interpersonal, familial, structural, cultural and economic factors that are related to involvement in criminal conduct which allow certain individual to get into the prison. There are also factors which predict the eventual re-entry into prison. Gendreau, Goggin & Little (1996) identified dynamic risk factors and static risk factors as the predictors of recidivism through the use of meta-analytic technique. The dynamic risk factors fluctuate more rapidly overtime and reflect internal states

or temporary circumstances of individual such as attitudes and cognition. Static risk factor is the demographic or criminal-history variables which are determined beforehand like gender, age when first convicted of an offence, having a parent with a criminal record, present age, types of offences committed etc. They emphasized that the strongest predictors of recidivism were dynamics risk factors and criminogenic needs which are referred to as cluster of factors these include criminal peers, criminal history of antisocial behaviour, social achievement, and family factor .All these have impact on the likelihood of re-offending while the weaker predictors included intellectual functioning, personal distress and social class of origin. Hanson & Harris (1998) argued that dynamics factors predicted general recidivism as well but dynamic factors are better than static risk factors. In a similar research conducted by Brown (2002) on a three-wave prospective, came out to say that criminal companion, antisocial attitudes, current employment / education problems were among the strongest recidivism predictors (average correlations)

Peers are two or more persons that are operating at similar levels of behavioural complexity, these persons that are operating at similar levels come together and form groups which are referred to as peer groups (Tenibiaje 2011). Peer group has significant roles to play in the life of adolescents. According to social learning and differential association theories, the interactive sequences inside groups play a major role in leading individuals towards behaviour that is criminal. According to McGuire (2009) individuals may apply pressure to each other in a diffuse manner or to specific individuals who are seen as acquiescent or easily led. Direct behavioural learning through modelling and imitation is the potent factor in group influence. Some offences are particularly among young people and they are committed in a group setting. Effect of the peer group and the pressure this may exert towards experimentation and other manifestation of growing independent of youths are cases in points on criminality. The peer generation effects have to do with the quest for affiliation and the link that resides in pattern of social interaction inside such groupings (McGuire 2009). In a study of crime conducted in Sheffield by Baldwin, Bottoms & Walker (1976).found a clear age trend for this in their study of crime. Whereas 61.5% of males and 67.7% of females aged 10-14 years committed offences in pairs or larger groups, among 17- to 20- year-olds the corresponding figures were 18.6 and 48%,and among 30- and 44- year-olds, 8.8 and 10%. Several risk factors emerged as predictive of gang membership. According to McGuire (2009), these risk factors are availability of marijuana in the neighbourhood, living outside both parents and performing poorly at school.

In another research carried out by Benda (2005) it was found that men were more likely to return to prison because of criminal peer association, carrying weapons, alcohol abuse and aggressive feelings. Light, Nee & Ingam (1993) in their study at Bristol housing estate with young people and adults aged 14-35 with histories of vehicle-taking identified the influence of friends as the single most frequent motive for involvement in offending.

In the study conducted by Wright, Caspi, Moffitt & Silva (2001) on interaction effect; interdependence of levels of self-control and education versus delinquent peers on self-reported rates of offending, it was revealed that low self-control, level of educational achievement were an important factors influencing extent of involvement in crime. It is not at all uncommon to encounter adult inmates who are reading, writing and performing mathematics operations at an elementary school level. In a study conducted by Tenibiaj & Owuamanam (2010) on some prisons in south-west Nigeria on Literacy remediation for inmates found that 54% could neither read nor write in Vernacular or English questionnaire. According to Bohma & Haley (1998) two-thirds of prison inmates have such poor reading and arithmetic skills that they are unable to write a brief letter explaining a billing error or to interpret a bar graph. Many offenders enter prison with deficits in their education which makes prison education amounts to remedial schooling designed to prepare inmates.

According to Harlow (1996) cited by Schmallegger & Smykla (2005) opined that many jail inmates have poor reading skills. National studies show that more than 40 percent of all jail

inmates have less than a ninth-grade education. According to him they have substance abuse problems and few job skills. They frequently cannot find jobs after they are released or can find only low-paid or temporary work. As a result, in part, they often return to a life of crime. Though education does not guarantee that an offender will remain free of crime upon release but studies also show that inmates who earn their GED's while incarcerated are less likely to return to crime.

Statement of the Problem

Sentencing and imprisonment are ways of reducing offenders' capability to commit future offences yet, crime commission appears to be on the increase and recidivism is becoming rife. Recidivism appears to be on the increase due to new and different crimes that are rapidly increasing in Nigeria. This study investigated the educational attainment of recidivists and the influence of peer groups on recidivism.

Research Question: The following research question was proposed for this study:

(i) Is repeated involvement in crime high among the inmates in Nigerian Prison?

Research Hypotheses: The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance to guide this study.

- (i) There is no significant relationship between educational attainment and recidivism.
- (ii) Peer groups will not have significant influence on recidivism.

Methodology

This is a descriptive research of the survey type design which used a sample of 55 male and female recidivists purposely drawn from the total number of 325 inmates currently serving jail terms in Nigeria Prisons service in Ado Ekiti. Self-constructed questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire was duly validated by the researcher and the reliability coefficient of 0.67 was obtained, hence, the instrument was adjudged to be reliable and considered suitable for research use. The copies of the questionnaire were administered and collected by the assistance of worker in the prison (welfare officer)

Results

The descriptive statistical analyses were adopted to analyse the research question raised. The data obtained from the instrument was analysed by simple frequencies and percentages while inferential statistic was used to test hypotheses. The correlation coefficient (r) and chi-square were used to analyse.

Table 1: Frequency counts and percentages of Educational Attainment of Recidivists

	Value	Frequency	Percent	Cumulate percent of Recidivists
Primary Six Certificate	1	26	47.3	47.3
Senior Secondary Certificate	2	15	27.3	74.6
OND Certificate	3	8	14.5	89.1
HND Certificate	4	4	7.3	96.4
NCE Certificate	5	2	3.6	100
Total		55	100	

Table 1 showed the educational attainment of recidivists under study, out of 55 recidivists in the prison, 26 had primary six leaving certificate while 15 had attempted and dropped out from senior secondary schools. From observation 74.5 percent cannot read fluently and write correctly. The number of recidivists with OND and HND were 8 and 4 respectively. The level of educational attainment is low, this may be responsible for recidivism.

Table 2: Frequency counts of number of time remanded

Time Remanded	Value	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative %
1 Time	1	12	21.8	21.8
2-4 times	2	32	58.2	80.0
5-7 Times	3	7	12.7	92.7
8-10 Times	4	4	7.3	100
Total		55	100	

From the table 2 above, only 12 inmates 21.8 percent had never been remanded in prison custody but once, 43 (58.2) had been remanded in prison for one crime or 4 times 12.7 percent had been remanded between 5 and 7 times in prison.

Research Question: Is repeated involvement in crime high among the inmates in Nigerian prisons?

Table 3: Frequency counts and Percentage of number of time convicted

Number of Times convicted	Value	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
2 times	1	17	30.9	30.9
3 – 5 times	2	32	58.2	89.1
6 – 10 times	3	5	9.1	98.2
Above 10 times	4	1	1.8	100.0
Total		55	100	

Out of 55 recidivists, only 17(30.9) percent came back to the prison for the second time, 58.2 percent of recidivists came back to prison either the third or fourth or the fifth time and 5 inmates responded that they come back to prison between 6 and 10 times, record had shown that one of the recidivists had been convicted 10 times and returned to prison ten times. Record has shown that there is high involvement of repeated crime in Nigerian prisons.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between educational attainment and recidivism.

Table 4: Analysis of Educational attainment of recidivists

Variable	N	\bar{X}	S.D	r cal	r tab
Low educational attainment of recidivists	41	8.6	2.08		
				0.136	0.28
High educational attainment of recidivists	14	13.98	2.24		

In the testing of hypothesis one, correlation coefficient (r) was employed so as to determine the level of relationship between recidivists with low educational attainments and high educational attainments. The results obtained indicated that r -calculated = 0.136 and r -table =

0.28. Since the calculated “r” is less than the critical “r” value, the hypothesis is therefore accepted. There is low relationship between the relationship is positive. It implies that educational attainment of recidivists is related to recidivism.

Hypothesis Two: Peer group will not have significant influence on recidivism

Table 5: X² chi-square analysis of influence of peer group on recidivism

Response	YES	NO	Total	df	Table value	X ² Cal P
Observed	19	36	55			
%	34.5	65.5	100			
				1	3.84	5.25
Expected	27.5	27.5	55			
%	50	50	100			

Cells have expected frequency less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 27.5.

Given P= 0.05, df= 1

Accept Ho2, if X2 Cal is 5.25 > than 3.84 (table value) .Ho2 is therefore rejected. Table 5 indicates that calculated X2 was 5.25 while the critical value was 3.84 this showed that the hypothesis which states that peer group will not have significant influence on recidivism was rejected In other words, the findings showed that peer group will have significant influence on recidivism.

Discussion

The study revealed that 58.2percent of the recidivists came back to prison either the third or fourth time. Repeated involvement in crime is high among the recidivists. The findings of this study revealed that 47.3 percent of the recidivists in Nigeria prisons were not able to read and write, while 27.3 percent attempted and dropped out from senior secondary schools. The low educational attainment of the inmates might have contributed to recidivism. There is relationship between low and high educational attainment. It implies that educational attainment of recidivists is positively related to recidivism. Bohma &Haley (1998) in their study said that two-thirds of prison inmates have poor reading and arithmetic skills that they are unable to write a brief letter, explaining a billing error or to interpret a bar graph. This finding corroborated the finding of Tenibiaje & Owuamanam (2010), that large number of prison inmates, in South –Western Nigeria were illiterates. Wright, Caspi, Moffitt &Silva (2001) in their study conducted on interaction effect, interdependence of levels of self-control and education versus delinquent peers on self-reported rates of offending found that low self-control, level of educational achievement was an important factor influencing extent of involving in crime. In a research conducted by Zamble &Quinsey (1997) they reported that attitude and cognition, everyday companions or associates and the pattern or extent of substance misuse were risk predictors. Also Gendreau et al (1996) identified dynamic risk factors and static risk factors as the predictors of recidivism and found they were on average more closely correlated with recidivism than were demographic. Research conducted by Zamble&Quinsey1997; Benda, 2005; Gendreau et al1996,corroborated the results of this finding that peer groups have significant influence on recidivism.

Hypothesis two that stated that peer groups will not have significant influence on recidivism was analysed using chi-square. The results of the findings showed that peer groups will have significant influence on recidivism. The finding is consistent with some existing literatures such reports like that of Andrews & Bonta 2003,Lilly,Cullan & Ball (2002), Jamieson, McIvor & Murray(1999), Zamble & Quinsey (1997), Benda (2005) in their finding said that men were more likely to return to prison because of criminal peer associates with carrying

weapons alcohol abuse and aggressive feelings. The finding also agreed with Light, Nee & Ingain (1993) on the influence of friends on criminal behaviour.

Conclusion

Sentencing and imprisonment are ways of reducing offenders capability to commit future offenses, yet the rate of crime continues to increase daily, despite the fact that punishment is attached to the crime being committed by offenders. Punishment is a way of dissuading people from their planned course of action. Yet, punishment and incapacitation have not reduced the rate of crime and recidivism. The researcher hereby advocates for some programmes in prison, such as literacy, though literacy alone, will never be a vaccine against criminality, but it is one of many skills needed for inmates to reposition them to be useful, responsible, and law-abiding.

Recommendations

Prisons should offer inmates a wide range of structural educational and vocational programmes designed to occupy the short time stays in prison. Wilson et al (2000), emphasized the impact of education and vocational programmes and allied programmes with adult offenders. Job readiness and placement services should be accorded to inmates who participate in those programmes. This will help the inmates to boost self-esteem. Counselling and therapy are needed in Prisons. Counselling techniques and therapy modalities in Prisons would reduce deep-seated problems peculiar to inmates.

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