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Prisoners and Their Information Needs: Prison Libraries Overview

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**PRISONERS AND THEIR INFORMATION NEEDS: PRISON LIBRARIES
OVERVIEW**

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Abstract

The study aims at identifying the prisoner's information needs. The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The census sampling technique was adopted for this study. Four objectives were set for the study and the interview was used to elicit information from respondents. As of the time of collecting data for this study, there were 936 prisoners in the four selected prisons. Findings showed that 95% were male while 5% were female. Findings also reveal that the information needs of prisoners covered health conditions, financial (99%), spiritual and moral (88%), life after prison/ information on legal issues (86%), family/friends (68%), literacy education (65%), skill acquisition (63%), right in prison (42%), prison rules (34%), and others information needs (26%). The majority of the respondents found libraries condition inadequate (85%). The study revealed that mosque/church were the popular ways of meeting information needs of the prisoners (75%). This is followed by family/friends (65%), physician/Nurses (56%), radio/television broad cast (23%), prison staff (22%),

books/newspaper/magazine (20%), others (15%) and libraries (11%). Factors affecting information seeking behaviour of the prisoners include, problem of uncomfortable nature of the prison/ long delay before trial (97%), poor funding of the library and prison as a whole (95%), building used for library is unfavourable (85%), among others.

The paper concludes that State and Federal Government should take into consideration the prisoners information needs amongst us, thereby provide adequate funding, current information and conducive reading room. Recommendations were put forward to enhance access to information by the prisoners.

Keywords: Prisoners information behaviour, Information needs, Awaiting trial Prisoners, (ATPs) Prison Libraries

Introduction

Information need is seen by LisWiki (2008) as a recognition that one's knowledge is inadequate to satisfy a goal. This leads to seeking for the information from required sources so as to satisfy the need. Generally, Hjørland (2007) saw people's information needs as needs relating to people's educational activities (educational needs), research activities, professional and vocational activities (vocational needs), cultural activities and personal development – spiritually (religious needs) and physically. Both free people in regular society and incarcerated ones have the same information needs (Shirley 2006). These needs range from basic information for survival, for educational purposes, healthy living and recreation to spiritual growth. Prisoners just like other persons have information needs. Most of the prisoners who are in prison today, will go back to the society after serving their sentences. For this reason, they will need information for various purposes both for coping with the prison situation and for when released. Providing for their information needs will help in re-socializing them into the society to become better citizens for themselves and the society. Lehmann (2000) made it clear that incarcerated persons generally have the same reading interests and information needs as individuals in the free world; they can, however, be considered disadvantaged in this regard by the fact that they do not have access to libraries in the outside community. This was recognized in IFLA (2005) which said that an incarcerated person has not relinquished the right to learn and to access information. Though restrictions are imposed on the access to certain information usually when such access is known to present a danger to prison security, the fact remains that prisoners have their own information needs. Ajogwu (2005) maintained that the prisoners' information needs range from legal needs, religious needs, health needs, educational needs, vocational needs, recreational needs and financial needs.

Health is another area that the prisoners need information. The World Health Organisation (1999) stressed the need for prisoners to have access to health care, including prevention measures equivalent to that available in the community. This denotes the prisoners' health information needs. The condition of most prisons; for instance overcrowding make the prisoners prone to a lot of health hazards. This obviously makes information about health and hygiene, prevention and cure of common diseases like air-borne and water-borne diseases vital to the prisoners and essential for their survival in the prison. Campbell (2006) further maintained that any legal information, that an inmate can apply to his/her situation can mean relief from poor conditions if not from incarceration itself. The prisoners are usually inquisitive and this prompts their search for information. They want to know more about their health condition, financial information, current happenings around them, technologies that could assist them etc. Bruce (2005) states that, "information plays a significant role in our daily professional and personal lives and we are constantly challenged to take charge of the information that we need for work, fun and everyday decisions and tasks". The prisoners like other counterparts requires information to meet their day-to-day needs. This study is therefore aimed at determining the information seeking behaviour of the prisoners with a view to improving their condition, identify the challenges they face while meeting their needs and proffer possible solutions to them.

Objectives of the Study

This study sought to establish ways of enhancing the information- seeking behaviour of the Prisoners. To attain this goal, the study stipulated the following objectives:

- To determine the information needs of the prisoners.
- To examine the condition of the Kwara State prison libraries.
- To know the extent to which the prison libraries are meeting the information needs of the prisoners.
- To establish the problems that the prisoners encounter in information seeking.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this research, the following questions have been formulated:

- What are the information needs of the prisoners?
- What are the condition of the Kwara State Prison Libraries?

- To what extent are the prison libraries are meeting the information needs of the prisoners?
- What are the factors militating against the available and accessibility of information by the prisoners?

Literature Review

The prison population in Nigeria is made up of the convicted persons and those awaiting trial (ATPs), but in the advanced countries like the United States, state and federal prisons house convicted inmates who are incarcerated for longer periods than inmates in jails and detention centres (Shirley,2006). Offenders in jails and detention centres are either waiting judicial determination or serving short-term sentences. Shirley (2004) addressed some peculiar features of prisoners in her study of prison libraries and cultural diversity in most correctional libraries in the United States. Likewise, Curry, Wolf, Boutilier and Chan (2000) in their study of the Canadian prisons, looked at the gender of the prisoners. They noted that as expected and as is the case in most prisons, 81% of correctional institutions housed male prisoners while 11% housed female. Shirley (2006) in her own study of adult prisoners in the United States, noted that in 2005, a small percentage of the state inmates were women while the rest were male. All these confirm that male prisoners outnumber female prisoners in most prisons worldwide (probably because the unemployed and low educated males are economically subjected to crime than the females). The picture is the same in the Nigerian context with more male than female prisoners (about 96% males and 4% females) according to Ikuteyijo and Agunbiade (2008) and Etuk in Nigerian Congress of Catholic Prisons Pastoral Care (NCCPPC) (2005) report. Coming to Nigeria, as there are more males than female inmates. This was confirmed by Amnesty International (2008) report on Nigerian prisons as well as Omagbemi and Odunewu (2008). This has been attributed to unemployment and associated frustration among youths with low socio-economic status. It is seen that poverty is a key factor associated with imprisonment most of the people who find themselves in prisons are poor. According to Freeman (1995) in a study in North America, unemployment and poverty problem, especially of the youth (15-35 years) lead them to criminal acts and incarceration. The situation is the same in Nigeria, as confirmed by the Amnesty International report (2008). According to Lehmann and Locke (2005) as well as Campbell (2006), in most countries around the world, the majority of individuals who make up the prison and jail population have limited education, poor reading and life skills and do not come from a background where reading was a frequent

or popular pursuit. According to the Medina (2000) from an inmate's point of view said that prisoners often lack interest, motivation, intellectual hunger, drive and desire to learn.

The prisoners also have need for educational and vocational training information. This as noted before, exposes them to having serious educational and vocational information needs to further their education and gain employability skills. In the case of Nigeria, Womboh (1991) revealed that most of the prisoners (about 76%) were not educated beyond school certificate. Only about 24% of them acquired education higher than that. The inmates' educational level is a major factor to be considered in providing library and information services to them. The prisoners in the different groups from all the prisons alike, admitted having dire need for information that can give them spiritual and emotional stability so as to be in good terms with God and man and become better citizens of the society. Ajogwu (2005) in Nigeria noted, that the prisoners' information needs include religious and spiritual needs amongst others. Just as Dike (2002) and IFLA (2005) noted, the prisoners need spiritual information materials to attain emotional stability and better life style. According to Dike (2002), providing for the spiritual information needs helps the prisoners improve in their emotional stability and spiritual growth.

The World Health Organization (1999) and Ajogwu (2005) stressed, that prisoners need to have access to health care and health information on preventive measures and other related issues. This should be equivalent to that available in the community. In the Western world perspective, Visher and Lattimore (2007) as well enumerated educational needs amongst the re-entry (into the society) needs of the prisoners. This is the case although the workers saw educational and spiritual information as the most highly needed by the prisoners. They are also in high need of recreational information. Most of the prisoners agreed that recreational information resources will help them overcome boredom associated with prison environment. Ajogwu (2005) as well as Singer (2000) maintained that prisoners need recreational information for leisure and overcoming of boredom during incarceration.

Furthermore, the prisoners from the various groups indicated that enlighten them on hiring lawyers and getting free legal aid so as to exercise their basic human right, access to court and eventually, freedom. This is particularly needed by the prisoners who are awaiting trial. They lamented the long delay before trial, which has become a common feature of the prisons in Nigeria. The prisoners also highly need information on getting more skills to learn or support a career. This will enable them to fix themselves usefully back to the society, keep themselves busy and away from crime. On vocational information need, IFLA (2005) stressed that the prisoners need vocational training programmes and informative materials to help them find useful occupation after release.

Findings further showed that the uncomfortable nature of prisons coupled with prison policies and laws militate against meeting of the prisoners' information needs through library and information resources and services. This is in line with what Lehmann (2000) and Singer (2000) stressed, that the library programme does not function independently but operates within the larger prison environment, whose mission and security policies often conflict with the library professional code of ethics and its belief in free access to information. The prisoners also complained bitterly about the strictness of the prison security policies on reading materials. They said that many information resources are not allowed into the prison because of security and this affects their reading rights. This agreed with what Singer (2000); Shirley (2003) and (2007) lamented, that many prison functionaries whimsically try to stop entry of materials in the library on the basis that it may be harmful to the security of the institution and mental health of the inmates. Womboh (1991) earlier on noted that Nigerian prison libraries lacked professional librarians. This is still the case in Nigerian prison libraries. For instance four out of the seven libraries studied do not have library staff at all; the libraries are being looked after by welfare workers. IFLA's Section for Libraries Serving Disadvantaged Persons (LSDP) survey (2005) identified lack of professional staff as a major problem to the provision of library and information resources and services to the prisoners. Shirley (2006) also agreed that many prison libraries do not meet up the standard minimum staffing as specified by American Library Association (ALA); Becker (2007) and Singer (2000) further supported that prison libraries world over lag behind other libraries in the area of staffing, in terms of number, qualification and training. Lack of accommodation, standard library building and space also pose problems in this regard. Womboh (1991) maintained that though many federal prisons in Nigeria had libraries, these were small and ill-equipped. Lehmann (1994) noted that prisons have limited options for space utilization with libraries that are often overcrowded and have limited storage facilities.

The first prison library was established by Alexander Macconochie in the early nineteenth Century in Australia (Wilhemus, 1999). The development of prison libraries continued even up to the present 21st Century. The recognition of the prisoners' right to information is contained in the United Nations (Rule 40) Standard Minimal Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners of 1955 (IFLA 2005). This states that every institution shall have an adequately stocked library for use of all categories of prisoners and the prisoners shall be encouraged to use it. The International Book Committee and UNESCO (1994) in their Charter for the Reader assert that "all including prisoners are entitled to have access to information and libraries to provide this access should be located within the prison premises". The prison library is a

substitute for the library at home (Kaiser, 1992), a good reason why it should be developed into one of the best libraries; hence, the development of notable standards to guide its operations. Shirley (2006) supported this by stressing that effective library service is reflected in programmes, services and collections (resources). While Lehmann (2000); Dike (2002); Mayrink da Costa (2003) all made it clear that prison libraries through their information resources and services, play a significant role in the rehabilitation of prisoners. A prison library according to IFLA (2005), provides resources for prison education, rehabilitation programs and specific requirements like legal collections. The prison library also provides the inmates the opportunity to develop literacy skills, pursue personal and cultural interests and life-long learning. IFLA (2005) stated that the prison library collection should include materials in print and other formats to meet the informational, educational, cultural, recreational, and rehabilitative needs of the prison population. The collection should include a wide variety of current print and non-print materials, audio and video recordings and gadgets to play them similar to those found in a public or school library. These reading resources, according to Dike (2002), should include a wide range of materials – fiction and other literature; general non-fiction; magazines and textbooks. Effective library service according to Shirley (2003), is reflected in programmes, services and collections. When the prisoners are provided with certain services and materials, they will find ways of keeping themselves busy, even while still in custody. The recognition of the place of the prison library in providing for the prisoners' information needs contributed to the development of prison libraries.

Becker (2007) also revealed that in spite of the fact that the prison library is to be funded for the provision of facilities and services for the prisoners, unfortunately, the library programmes are usually the first to be reduced or done away with when the prison's overall budget is cut. In some areas, little or nothing is left for the library and its services and materials in the prison budget. The prison library cannot do without sound facilities and resources – both human and material in meeting up the prisoners' information needs.

Prison library services are largely funded by the government. Shirley (2004) reported that libraries have budget constraints. She further maintained that some libraries have no budget, but a collection based on donations. Other libraries, because of this, develop relationships with their local systems and use interlibrary loans to enable the prisoners a wider access to materials so as to satisfy their needs. Shirley (2006) remarked that when there are budget constraints, the library and education programmes are the most likely departments to have their services reduced or eliminated. She further maintained that there have been a few cases where library space was taken over and converted to living quarters for new prisoners and budgets were cut;

thus many prison libraries globally report that their collection consists mainly of donated items, just as Dungey (2008) reported.

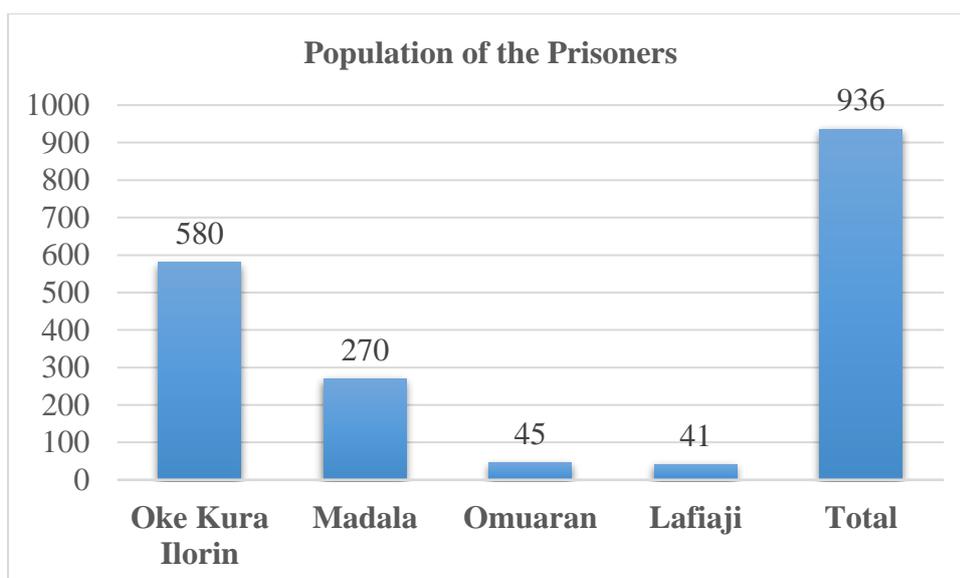
Conclusively, Becker (2007) revealed that prison librarianship is not without its unique challenges. Along with a shaky budget, uncooperative administration, and limited resources, he said, the prison librarian has to rely on intuition and professionalism in order to provide service within the correctional facility.

Studying the information needs of prisoners and disseminating findings of such study will be of immense value to government in formulating policies and looking inward for the prisoners in this country. Therefore there is the need for increased attention to the life of the prisoners after prison in our society. This has necessitated this study. There is relative dearth of literature on the information needs and seeking behaviour of the prisoners in Nigeria. Thus this study is an attempt to fill this gap by identifying the information needs of the prisoners in Oke Kura Ilorin, Madala, Omuaran and Lafiaji Area in Kwara State, Nigeria, and suggest possible ways of resolving identified challenges.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey using questionnaire and interview to collect data. A total of nine hundred and thirty six respondents comprise of four prisons in Kwara State were selected for the study. The four prisons are: Oke Kura Ilorin, Madala, Omuaran and Lafiaji. As shown in table 1 was the population of the study.

Fig 1: Population and Sample of the Study



2015/2016 Kwara State Prison Service Annual report.

The purposive sampling technique was used for this study. This technique also known as judgmental, selective or subjective sampling is that sampling technique where the units that are investigated as based on the judgement of the researcher (Egbule and Okobia, 2001). Therefore the sample size is 936. The data collected for the study were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Simple percentage was used to analyze the respondents' characteristics and the research questions.

A total of 936 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 761 (81%) copies of the questionnaire were retrieved. The response rate of (81%) is considered adequate for the study because the standard and acceptable rate for most studies is 60%.

Research Findings and Discussion

Fig 2: Distribution of Respondents by Sex

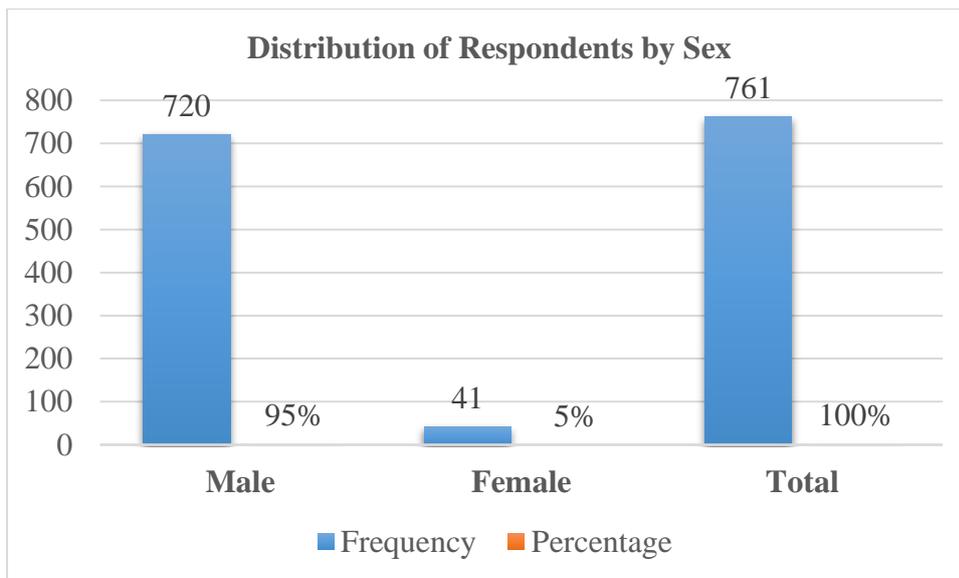
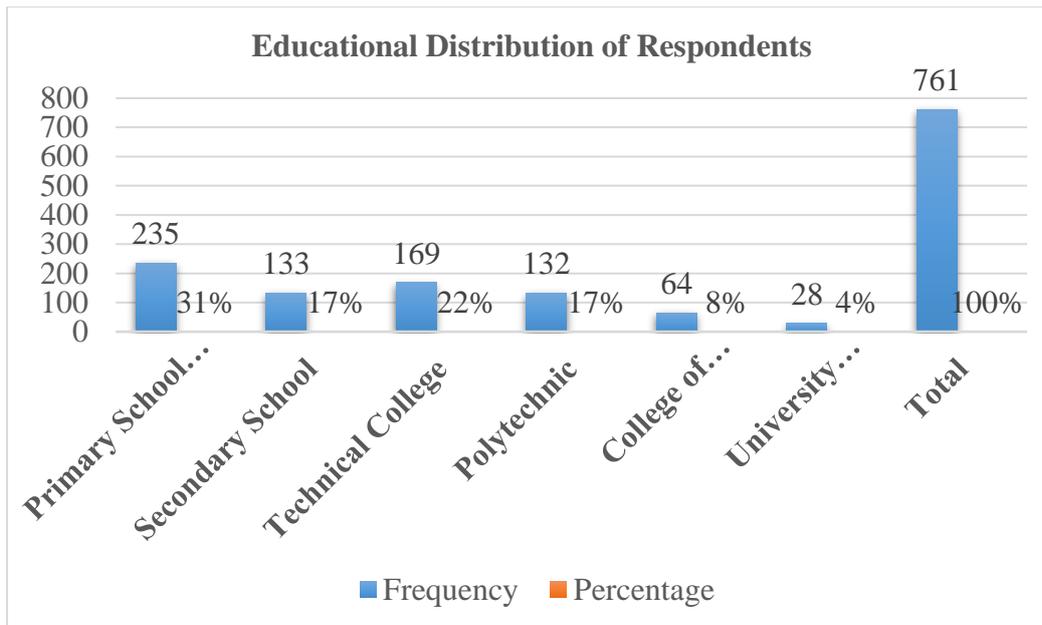


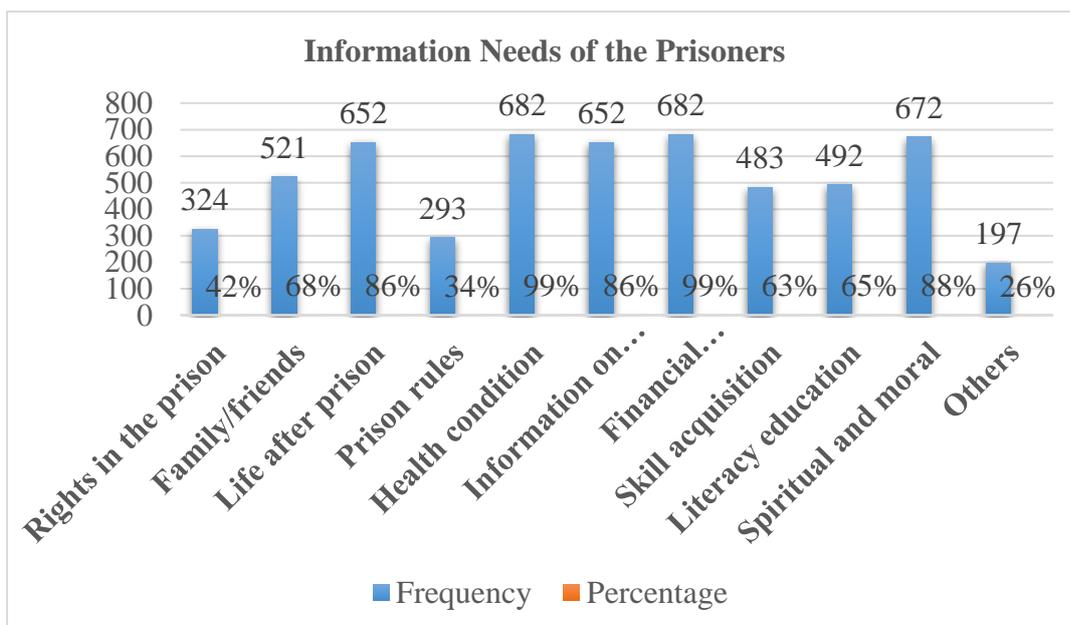
Fig. 2, shows that (95%) of the respondents were male while (5%) were female. This represents the gender distribution of prisoners involved in the survey. There are more male prisoners in Kwara State prison than their female counterparts. This is in line with the founding of Ikuteyijo and Agunbiade (2008) and Etuk in Nigerian Congress of Catholic Prisons Pastoral Care (NCCPPC) (2005) report, that the picture is the same in other prisons in Nigerian context with more male than female prisoners (about 96% males and 4% females).

Fig 3: Educational Distribution of Respondents



Results in **Fig 3**, shows that majority 31% of the respondents had primary school certificate, 22% technical college, 17% secondary school and polytechnic, 8% college of education, 4% university degree. This is supported by Womboh (1991) revealed that most of the prisoners (about 76%) were not educated beyond school certificate. Only about 24% of them acquired education higher than that. The inmates' educational level is a major factor to be considered in providing library and information services to them.

Fig 4: Information Needs of the Prisoners



As indicated in **Fig. 4**, 99% of respondent’s information is health condition and financial information, 88% spiritual and moral, 86% life after prison/ information on legal issues, 68% family/friends, 65% literacy education, 63% skill acquisition, 42% right in the prison, 34% prison rules, 26% others information needs. This is in consonance with World Health Organisation (1999) stressed the need for prisoners to have access to health care, including prevention measures equivalent to that available in the community.

Fig 5: Prison Libraries Condition

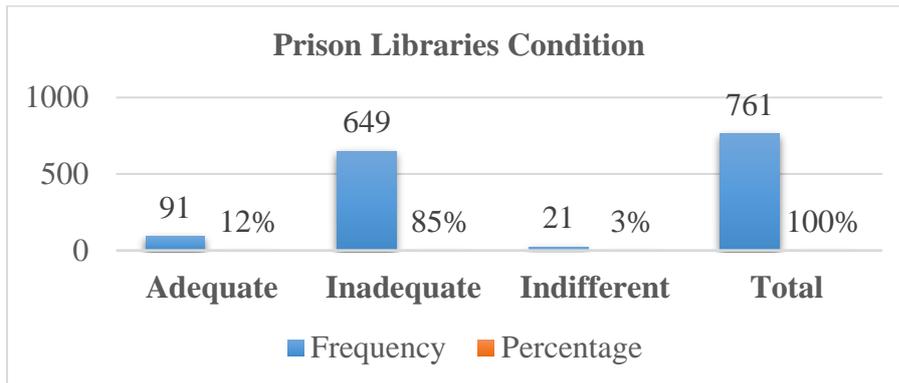


Fig. 5, shows that majority 85% of respondents found prison libraries condition inadequate for meeting their needs, 12% found them adequate and 3% remained indifferent in their opinion. This is against prisoners rules. The recognition of the prisoners’ right to information is contained in the United Nations (Rule 40) Standard Minimal Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners of 1955 (IFLA 2005). This states that every institution shall have an adequately stocked library for use of all categories of prisoners and the prisoners shall be encouraged to use it.

Fig 6: Ways of Meeting Prisoners Information Needs

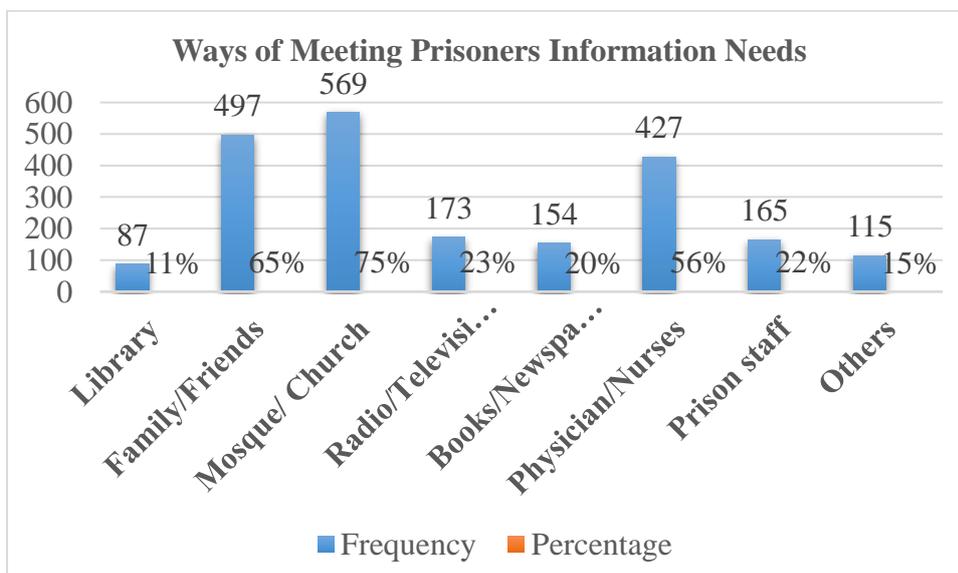
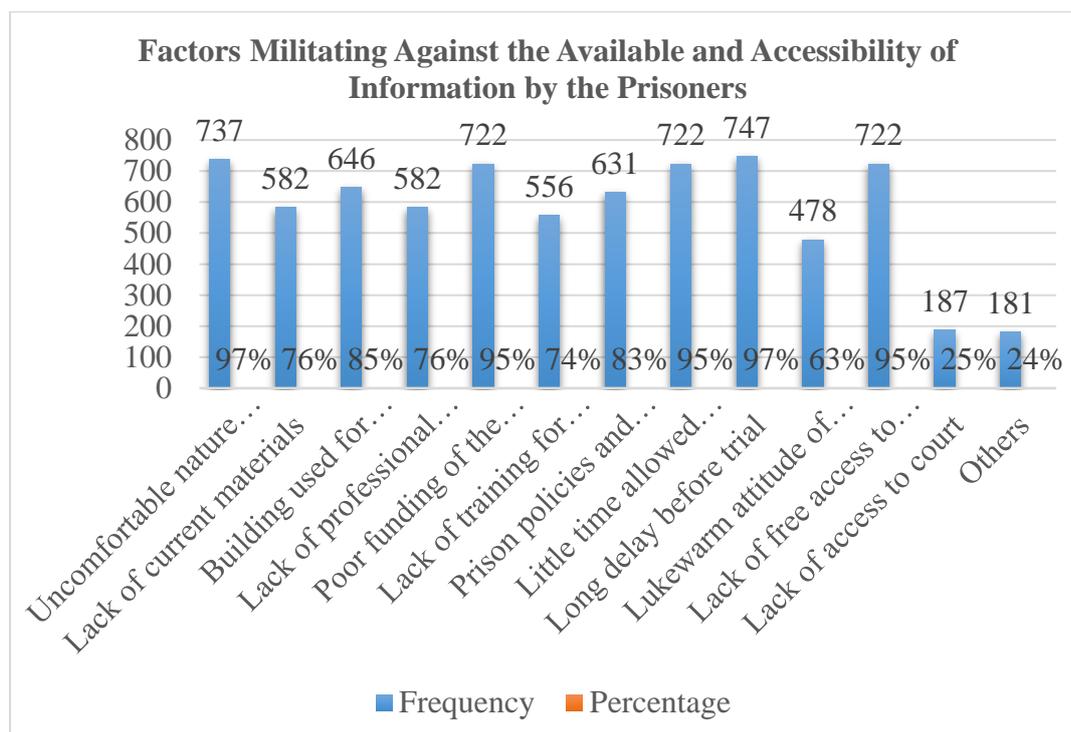


Fig. 6, revealed that mosque/church 75% are the popular ways of meeting information needs of the prisoners, 65% family/friends, 56% physician/Nurses, 23% radio/television broad cast, 22% prison staff, 20% books/newspaper/magazine, 15% others and 11% libraries. Libraries which supposed to be the highest information providers are lack. This could be as a result of poor funding of the libraries and prisons as a whole.

Fig 7: Factors Militating Against the Available and Accessibility of Information by the Prisoners?



From **Fig 7**, it is clear that the factors affecting the prisoner’s information seeking behaviour is problem of uncomfortable nature of the prison/ long delay before trial 97%, 95% poor funding of the library and prison as a whole, little time allowed prisoners for interaction with outside information providers and lack of free access to the libraries, 85% building used for library is unfavourable, 83% prison policies and law that restrict certain reading materials, 76% lack of current materials and lack of professional staff, 74% lack of training for available workers, 63% lukewarm attitude of staff, 25% lack of access to court, 24% other factors.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Certain conclusion can be drawn from the study: the prisons and the prison libraries in Oke Kura Ilorin, Madala, Omuaran and Lafiaji Area in Kwara State, should be improve and properly

funded since the prisoners found libraries condition inadequate and the value of information cannot be underestimated as majority of the prisoner's use mosque/church as their popular ways of meeting their information needs. They need information to understand their health better and source for finance for their upkeep among others. Factors affecting the prisoners' information seeking behaviour in Nigeria is similar to other prisoners in other parts of the world, in this study we identified some factors which include the problem of uncomfortable nature of the prison, poor funding of the library and prison as a whole, little time allowed prisoners for interaction with outside information providers, lack of free access to the libraries, building used for library is unfavourable, prison policies, among others. In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations are made:

- There should be proper funding of the prisons and prison libraries as a whole.
- There is need for the federal government together with the prison service to improve the general wellbeing of the prisoners by reducing overcrowding, long delay in trial, renovating the cells, improving in healthcare and other related issues, so as to make the prison environment comfortable for the prisoners to seek and use information resources provided for them.
- Life after prison: Prisoners should never be left isolated, showing love to them goes a long way in keeping them healthy and feel as part of the society.
- The prisoners should be encouraged to use libraries by making libraries conducive and adequately stocked with current materials for all categories of prisoners.
- Training programmes should be organized for prison officers so that they can be more effective in meeting the information needs of the prisoners.
- Education and vocational training programmes and informative materials to help them find useful occupations after release are necessary.
- The recognition of the prisoners' right to information is contained in the United Nations (Rule 40) Standard Minimal Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners of 1955. Should be abided in to Nigeria constitution.
- The prison authorities should map out time for the prisoners to consult library and information resources and services as part of the prison's daily schedule of activities.
- Guidelines to prison library services in Nigeria should be developed by the Prison Service in collaboration with library associations and stakeholders.

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