

Differential Treatments of Prison Inmates and Implications on Nigerian Criminal Justice System

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Abstract

In recent years, series of protests have broken out from various prisons across Nigeria as fallout of differential treatments of prisoners and poor condition of correctional facilities. Questions have been raised about the rationality of the disparate treatment of inmates along socioeconomic lines. This present study examined the reported segregation of inmates within the context of the correctional good of prison system. From the inductive analysis of 49 qualitative interviews with ex-inmates of prisons, prison officials and legal practitioners, a pattern of unofficial discrimination of prisoners along socioeconomic lines emerged. Findings reveal that selection of inmates for disparate treatment is corruption-laden. It is submitted that in order to progressively realise and improve the administration of justice and the prison system in Nigeria, the government and other stakeholders should review reports of panel of inquiry into the country's prison system, establish prison-reporting scheme for inmates, and rehabilitate prison facilities.

Keywords: differential treatment, inmates, nigeria criminal justice system, segregation, very important prisoners

INTRODUCTION

In many ways, Nigeria has made significant progress over the last decades towards the objective of ensuring equal treatment under law for all citizens. However, the effect of this progress is yet to be seen in one critical arena – criminal justice, as social inequality continues to rise and have come to play significant role in the justice system. Although, Nigeria’s criminal laws appear to be facially neutral, the enforcement is done in a manner that is massively and pervasively biased (Opara, 2014; Dada, Dosunmu, & Oyediji 2015; Osasona, 2016). Disparate treatment of the lower class people starts from the very first stage of the criminal justice system during the investigation of suspected criminal activity by law enforcement officials (Okeshola, 2013). The manifestation of a criminal justice system that *de facto* distributes separate, unequal standards of justice for lower class citizens and citizens of high economic class has created a mushrooming prison population that is overwhelmingly poor and socially disadvantaged (Daudu, 2009).

In recent years, there have been series of protests breaking out from various prisons across the country as fallout of the differential treatments of prisoners. For instance, on the 7th August, 2013, protest broke out at the Kuje Prisons near Abuja over alleged preferential treatment of three Lebanese inmates by officials of the prison facility (The Punch Newspaper, 2013). According to the account of The Punch Newspaper, the three inmates who are suspected members of an international terrorist group, Hezbollah, were allowed to use a particular area of the prison ground for the *Eid-fitri* prayers while other inmates, including Boko Haram suspects, were restricted to another place. In the ensuing melee, properties of the prison facility were destroyed while officials and prisoners were severely injured.

Similar protest was recorded at the Kirikiri Medium Security prison, Lagos on the 10th October, 2014. Investigations by The Nation Newspaper (October, 2014) indicated that the prison riot was caused by a move by the newly posted Deputy Comptroller of Prison, Kayode Odeyemi to strip some privileged prisoners of their privileges. Five inmates were reported to have been killed while 24 of them injured during the fracas (p. 27). In Kaduna prison, two prisoners were reported to be killed in a riot that followed the protest by the prisoners over the preferential treatment being given to Reverend Emeka Ezeugo, a.k.a. Rev. King, the Lagos-based Christian cleric condemned to death for the murder of one of his church members (Vanguard News, 2016).

Meanwhile, in its reaction, authorities of the Nigerian Prison Service justified the segregation of inmates according to their social standing, as they stated that it is necessary in order to safeguard the lives of some inmates

whose lives may be in danger if they are thrown into the general prison population (Daily Trust, 2015). According to the Public Relations Officer of the Nigerian Prisons Service, DCP Enobore Francis:

The VIP system is derived from profiling and is designed to safeguard the lives of those prisoners. If you throw these prisoners along with other inmates, you may open the cell in the morning and find them dead. How do you explain that?... the prison is not meant to punish people, the punishment ends with the judge's pronouncement, thereafter correction begins. (Daily Trust 2015, 21)

As enunciated, the segregation of inmates in the prison along the lines of social class may seem rational, however, unequal targeting and treatment of inmates of low and average socio-economic background through every stage of the criminal justice process, from arrest to sentencing, reinforces the perception that drives the inequality in the first place (Omale, 2011). The result is a vicious cycle that has evolved into a self-fulfilling prophecy, as higher rate of recidivism is recorded among ex-inmates of low income status which perpetuates the belief that low-income poor people commit more crimes (Penal Reform International, 2014), this in turns lead to social class profiling and more arrest of poor people in the society.

Questions have been raised about the rationality of the disparate treatment of high profile inmates of the prisons as against those with low socio-economic standing (Omale 2011, Otu, Otu and Eteng, 2013). This is based on the general conditions of the prisons in the country which are characterised by several physical and psychological deprivations (Obioha, 2011). The feeding and healthcare system of the prisons have been questioned and adjudged to be grossly inadequate and unbecoming of even condemned criminals (Aduba, 2013). This has been largely attributed to corruption in high places within the prison system as contractors in collaboration with prison officials perpetrate the malnourishment of inmates in various correctional facilities across Nigeria (Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014). Therefore, the social stratification of the inmates in respect of their socio-economic standing is being considered as an advancement of the systemic corruption of the prison service of the country (Otu, Otu, & Eteng, 2013). Prison officials are alleged to offer high profile prisoners special cells for N50,000, own private generators for power supply, sleep with women for a fee, own mobile phones, hire other inmates as domestic servants, receive raw food from relatives and cook their own food (Daily Trust, 2015).

Indeed, there are appreciable literature that have examined and exposed the deplorable state of prisons facilities in the country (Obioha, 2011; Aduba,

2013; Ojo & Okunola, 2014), highlighting the negative effects of corrupt prison officials on the welfare of the inmates (Agbaegbu, 2011; Okeshola, 2013), discussing the need for reform (Obioha, 2011) and re-evaluating the effectiveness of prisons in meeting the correctional objectives of the system (Okwendi, Nwankoala, & Ushi, 2014). However, recent events have opened up new subjects of inquiries into prison systems in the country. This present study therefore is informed by the need to examine the reported segregation of inmates across prison facilities in the country within the context of the correctional good of prison system. This is with a view to advance knowledge on the profile of the *Very Important Prisoners* (VIPs) and growing protests by inmates across Nigerian prisons as well as document the pattern, scope and mechanism of the differential treatment across beneficiaries. In addition, it is the intention of this study to bring to the fore the implications of such differential treatments to the Nigerian criminal justice system.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Proponents of radical criminology hold that the cause of crime is the social and economic forces of society (Johnson, 1978; Maguire, Morgan and Reiner, 2012). They further postulated that ‘functioning’ of the society is channelled towards the serving of the general interest of the ruling class rather than serving the interest of the entire society. Rather than this leading to conflict, the ruling class makes use of the power within its reach to neutralise the intention of the masses to revolt. Radical criminology is abolitionist, which is directed at calling for the abolition of all statist criminal justice systems. The systems of exploitation and domination cannot be reformed as there is no legitimate basis for the reforming and revision of policies and practices that are at heart founded in and based upon exploitation.

Though there is no reasonable level of oppression, it is not just enough to criticise such system, but the radical criminology is aimed at opposing and confronting all statist institutions of criminal justice with a view of bringing them to a halt. This is the same with the institutions and relationships of capitalist exploitation.

In Nigeria, the radical criminology will frown at the practices of the wealthy citizens against the poor which is prevalently oppressive. It is difficult for the poor to get justice whenever their rights are being breached or trampled upon by the affluent citizens (Osasona, 2016). Meanwhile, the administering of unequal justice has severally been recorded for the rich against the poor (Daudu, 2009; Ogunode, 2015), with substantial evidences that indicate the prevalence of differential categorisation of justice to the rich and the poor (Esiemokha, 2010; Obioha, 2011; Okeshola, 2013; Ogunode,

2015). Indeed, there is little doubt about applicability of the theories of radical criminologists to Nigeria's administration of justice. The gap between the cases of high profiled people and lowly placed citizens in the country is usually wide and this mainly determine the path of the administration of justice. Therefore, commonly held belief in the society indicates that the laws that governs the affluent differs significantly from that of the lowly placed people (Ogunode, 2015).

At every stage of the chain of the Nigerian criminal justice, corruption abounds. Its prevalence is visible in various police stations, prosecutors' offices, the judiciary and in prisons (Aborisade & Fayemi 2015; Ogunode 2015). The prisons are often considered as places with little transparency or public oversight, making them high risk environments for corruption (Esiemokha, 2010). In some cases, detainees are actively involved in and initiate corrupt practices in a prison. Some prisons are home to large black markets and can become havens for criminal groups operating from behind bars (Daily Trust, 2015). Prison guards cooperate with prisoners to smuggle in contraband items, such as cell phones or drugs, and help a gang culture to thrive – or even dominate – inside prison (Penal Reform International, 2014). In corrupt prison systems, “everything has its price” (The Nation, 2014). It is quite common for prisoners to be forced to buy commodities that they are entitled to, such as water, food items, medical care, living space – or to receive family visits (Daily Trust, 2015). The most highly valued ‘good’ inside such corrupt systems is probably safety, with many reports of money being extorted in exchange for safety. For instance, there have been reports of families paying money for their family member who is an inmate to be relocated to safer zones within the prison in order for them to be safe from physical and sexual abuse by both prison guards and fellow inmates (Penal Reform International, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA

Research Sites and Sampling

The analyses presented in this article are drawn from a larger study of differential treatment of prison inmates across prison settings. Prior to the commencement of the study, approval for the collection of data from six purposively selected prisons in Lagos and Ogun States were sought. The selection of these prisons was informed by geographical proximity, security level, and preliminary information available to the researcher on the availability of privileged facilities. Although, permission was granted to take a tour around the prison facilities, the involvement of prison inmates in the research was declined by prison authorities based on the ‘sensitivity of the subject of the study.’ Therefore, the researcher resorted to the use of

snowballing technique to draw 28 ex-inmates of the selected prisons to inform the study. Purposive sampling was used to draw a sample of 16 prison officials and five legal practitioners that specialises in criminal law and human rights. Approvals for the study were obtained from the Ethics Committee of Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State. The respondents were duly informed about the purpose of the study and other rights as respondents of the study including confidentiality while both written and verbal consents were obtained from them before the interviews took place.

Data

The selection of the study site and sampling strategies adopted for this study were designed to gather data from respondents who are both comparable to and distinct from one another in ways believed to be relevant to their experiences as former inmates of the selected prisons. In addition, the distinction and similarity in the experiences of the prison official relevant to managing inmates, as well as fair representativeness of treatments of prison inmates across the country (since all prison facilities are owned and managed by the Federal Government), informed the study site selection and sampling strategies. Data for this study consist primarily of in-person interview data collected during March and April of 2016; interview data were supplemented with official data from prison codes and treatment of prison inmates, as well as fieldnotes taken from observation of the prison facilities. The conduct of all interviews was strictly confidential, as pseudonyms are used throughout this article to make reference to the participants. Audio recording and note taking were used to collect information depending on the preference of the participants.

Methods of Analysis

Data collected from the field was analysed in order to meet with the research objectives and answer the research questions raised. The analysis followed the iterative process that usually characterises qualitative research in general and grounded theory in particular (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). At the time of collecting the data, extensive field notes were taken on the interviews, interactions and observations that are relevant to the study of differential treatment of prisoners. After the completion of data collection, content analysis of the interviews with the use of a qualitative software program (NVivo) was made. Content analysis has to do with the probing of content and themes of text to uncover both definitions contained in the text and those that emerge through the analysis (Krippendorff, 2012). Derivations of thematic categories are from both theoretical constructs and the data they emerged from.

Research Findings

Nature of Disparate treatment and Profile of VIPs in Nigeria Prisons

Eleven out of the 16 prison officials interviewed for this study agreed that there are indeed privileged prisoners in their various correctional facilities that enjoy differential treatments outside the stipulations of the Nigeria Prison Code. The remaining five officials maintained that they are unaware of prisoners, outside of those recognised by the Prison Code, benefiting from any form of preferential treatments in the prison. However, the entire 28 ex-inmates interviewed expressed that there are privileged prisoners in the prisons they served in.

Nature of preferential treatments: The accolades used to describe the privileged prisoners include “VIPs,” “super prisoners,” “big boys,” “big men,” “untouchables” among others. These sets of prisoners are separated from other prisoners not only by virtue of their prison blocks that are separated from other prisoners’ blocks by distance, but also in terms of the facilities included and maintenance of such blocks. Observation of the researcher shows that unlike the cells of ‘ordinary’ prisoners that have toilet seats within the perimeter of each cell and barely covered, the toilets for cells within the ‘VIP’ blocks are usually separated from the sleeping space of their rooms. In addition, participants stated that the condition of the rooms within the VIP blocks appears better than that of other blocks as the floors are covered in ceramic tiles, sole occupancy of rooms are allowed, they have cooking utensils and are allowed to do their cooking, and they are also allowed to have convenience such as power generating set, television and radio set, phones, laptops and other electronic consumables in their rooms (which are all against the norms of prison settings). Meanwhile, the cells that are inhabited by these privileged inmates are referred to as “big man cells” “VIP suite” “upper house” and “upper class estate” depending on the prison in question.

Profiles and privileges of VIP prisoners: Though official categorization of prisoners stipulates that celebrities whose life may be at risk if they are put together with common prisoners should be segregated, information received from respondents suggests that such reservations are not restricted to such category alone. In profiling those that enjoy preferential treatment, the ex-inmates of the selected prisons debunked the allocation of VIP cells and treatments to political elites alone as they stated that the VIP cells are usually open to all those that can afford to pay for such treatment in cells. All manner of inmates including armed robbers are allowed to ‘purchase’ rooms within the VIP blocks of prisons and enjoy disparate treatments. One of the prison officials reacted to this by saying

“... after all they are all criminals so what difference does it make?”

For the prison officials, though the key driving factor of offering such differential treatments remains the material or financial gratifications that they stand to benefit, however, another strong factor that makes them to be partial in their dealings with prisoners is the fear of reprimand that could come if they refuse to provide such favoured treatments to the “special inmates.” In this respect, the prison officials stated that experiences of the past have shown that officers that fail to acknowledge the high profile status of certain highly placed and connected prisoners may get sanctioned in form of redeployment, suspension or even loss of job. In buttressing this point, Salau, an official of Ikoyi prison volunteered:

... to be candid, it will be difficult to stop such high profile prisoners from enjoying such privileges. To tell you the truth, some of them (VIP Prisoners) have highly connected relatives that determine who is posted to which command. They control things whilst in prison. So how will you be rude or hostile to those kinds of special prisoners that can determine whether you will keep your job or lose it?

This position was reiterated by seven other interviewed officials. They expressed that the connections that the VIP prisoners wields within the context of Nigeria where you hardly get anything done on merit makes it inevitable for prison officials to go to the extreme to satisfy the highly connected inmates in order to be in their good book. Therefore, the bid to curry favours and avoid reprimand from superior authorities that may be associates of the imprisoned VIPs makes differential treatments difficult to do away with.

Thomas, an ex-inmate that served in Kirikiri Maximum Prison stated that VIP cells and treatments are open to anyone that can afford such treatments. According to him:

This is not a matter of protecting the lives of the celebrities. It is a matter of ‘cash and carry’. Privileges that go beyond normal segregation of prison cells are accorded to these people. They enjoy far too much of such special treatments. The prison officials are often at the beck and call of these inmates and they make their stay in prison home away from home for them.

Kolawole, another ex-inmate that claimed he benefited as an ex-occupant of a VIP cell at Kirikiri Medium Prison volunteered:

I stayed in a VIP cell for 5 months until I ran out of money and was ejected. I paid N40,000 to secure the room and subsequently paid N10,000 every month until I couldn't pay again. Staying in VIP cells was great as I became connected to some highly influential people in the society. In fact, that is why I could leave the prison on time as my connection of friends assisted me.

Other inmates that enjoyed the benefit of staying in the privilege cells also relayed their experiences which include smoking, drinking alcohol, eating preferred meals, having women smuggled into their cells for sexual pleasures, engaging other inmates as aides to do menial work for them, exempted from manual labour or other forms of physical exercises, allowed possession of mobile phones and media pads. Ajani, an ex-inmate, claimed that he served a social activist while he was in Abeokuta prison in 2003. He stated that those that are not buoyant enough to secure special cells for themselves often try to serve the occupants of the VIP cells for the purpose of getting connected to them in order to benefit from their assistance in one way or the other. According to him, some awaiting trial inmates who may find it difficult to secure the services of a good lawyer or buy fuel into the prison vans to convey them to the court often get help from the VIPs in the prisons.

Implications of Preferential Treatments of Prisoners on Nigerian Criminal Justice System

Apart from the fact that this study was inspired by news of series of protests that followed the maltreatment of prison inmates and differential treatment of so-called VIP prisoners, the researcher also moved to engage five legal practitioners on the implications of disparage treatment of some inmate on the entire criminal justice system of the country. All the legal practitioners who are experts in criminal law asserted that corruption occurs at every stage of the criminal justice chain in the country.

Therefore, it is difficult to serve justice where corruption thrives. One of them expressed:

Prisons are one of public places of work with little transparency or public oversight. There is no doubt that they are high risk environments for corruption. The officials freely engage in corrupt practices with the knowledge that their acts will not be exposed since the prisoners may not have what it takes to effectively report them. However, it should be noted that some of these prisoners are the ones that initiate corrupt practices in

the prisons. But the corrupt acts of the officials cannot be excused.

Mr Paul/Lawyer/KII/Lagos

All other legal practitioners interviewed echoed the position of Mr. Paul. They provided different instances where they faced problems seeing their clients in prison custody, or where their clients told them tales of woes of their experiences in prisons. Four of them who volunteered that they have had clients that enjoyed such special treatments while they were in prison corroborated the claims of the officials that it is near impossible for officials to be defiant in providing special treatments to the wealthy and politically connected individuals that are admitted into the prisons. They posited that the prison cannot be singled out as the only corrupt organ of the criminal justice system as such corruption starts from the police as gateway of criminal justice system.

Extortion of prison officials bothering on the justice system: The ex-inmates and legal practitioners were requested to provide information based on their experiences on cases and rates of extortion of prison officials in correctional facilities in the country and its implication on justice system. Several cases of extortion and corrupt practices that are capable of impacting negatively on justice system were pointed out by the respondents. Prisons officials start extorting prisoners' right from their entry into correctional facilities by demanding for money to put them in favourable cells. Thereafter, inmates face a lot of denials of rights except they are able and willing to pay for them. For example, awaiting trial inmates that cannot afford to pay demanded amount for 'fuel for prison van' will not be conveyed to court for their trials. This has made some less privileged prisoners to be on awaiting trial list in their various prisons for years without being given fair hearing. In some cases, such prisoners hinge their fate on charitable organisations to provide such money to fund prison vans to convey them to court. Ex-inmates relayed how prison officials converted food items, toiletries and other personal effects that were donated to them by Churches and nongovernment organisations to their personal use. Abu, an ex-inmate of Kirikiri Maximum prison offered some details:

Whenever, individuals and religious bodies bring anything to us, the warders don't normally allow them to give it to the inmates directly. Normally, they will collect and share it among themselves. On the recent riot, a religious body brought food for the inmates and kept it at the gate (prison welfare officer's office) to the knowledge of all inmates. One of the inmates who happen to be a Christian leader visited the welfare officer who was in custody of the items

to beg for the things (food). When he wasn't given the stuff, he complained and was locked up in the punishment room.

Other respondents described how safety for example assume a position as 'one of the most high valued good' inside the prisons. Many of them reported how money was extorted from them in exchange for safety. If they fail to pay such amount, they will be put inside same cell with notorious inmates where they will be physically harassed.

Implication of differential treatments on justice system: The legal practitioners engaged for the study stated that offering differential treatment in favour of those within societal upper class negates the principles that correctional facilities stands for as a total institution. They were equivocal in discussing how prisoners' human rights have been severely trampled upon in a systemic manner due to corrupt practices of prison authorities. Mr Oladejo shared his experience:

...I have seen instances where food is not prepared for prisoners just because a good number of them in the cells can afford to cook for themselves. In some other instances, white rice will be offered to inmates without stew as the prisoners are expected to make their own stew. This puts the inmates in compromising situations and many of them will have to serve notorious criminals that are rich and pampered by prison officials in order to get fed...

The experience and sentiment of Mr. Oladejo was shared by all the other four legal practitioners and echoed by ex-inmates as they expressed that rich inmates gets to control affairs in the prisons and makes both fellow inmates and officials to answer to their biddings. Inequality in prison is the height of failure of justice system, a "drawback in Nigeria's attempt to keep criminals off the street," "a manifestation of the failure of the Nigeria state." They were emphatic to state that the supposed lessons of incarcerations cannot be ensure if the rate of discrimination is that high in the system. In addition, they opined that such differential treatments that facilitate deprivation accounts for the high rate of recidivism within the Nigerian prison system. As illustrated by Mr. Adesomo, "when prisoners witness massive discrimination and injustice in prison, it is difficult for them to get back into the society and wants to do something positive as they would have lost hope in the entire social system."

The legal practitioners also stated that 'justice' only appears to be served in Nigeria just because of the unpleasant reaction that could emanate if

certain people were seen to be walking freely while they are meant to be in prison. Mr. Adelowo, who is a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) buttressed this point:

That explains the only reason why some of them end up in prison and not necessarily because the system wants them to get punished for the infractions and breach of criminal code. How do you explain someone under punishment living such luxury life? What message will that send to other inmates? Isn't it going to be a message that bigger crime pays? Since armed robbers with a lot of money get such disparate treatment in prison against mere pickpockets who witness such discrimination. Therefore, when the inmate that pickpocket gets released, he simply delve into bigger crime with the belief that even if he is apprehended, he will be returning to prison with a bigger status than his previous sojourn in prison.

The legal practitioners submitted that there is need for revamping of the entire prison system to limit such discrimination to its barest minimum by effectively catering for the welfare of inmates and respecting the rights and privileges of all prisoners. This will reduce the urge from the wealthy prisoners to try and buy comfort for themselves thereby creating a wide gap between them and the inmates from lower rung of the social ladder.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented above explores the patterned nature of inequality in Nigerian prisons, the profile of VIP prisoners and the effect that differential treatment has on criminal justice system of the country. Suggestions from this study indicate that preferential treatments do not just abound in Nigerian prisons alone, it is in fact systemic. There are both official and unofficial discriminations that have remarkable impact on nature and process of delivering justice in the correctional facilities. It is evident from the findings of the study that prison facilities in the country have deviated from administering punishment and reformation while treating offenders equally, to becoming a mere reflection of the grossly socioeconomically stratified Nigerian society. This finding agrees with earlier studies that posited that the poor conditions of Nigerian prisons have served to widen the gap between inmates along socioeconomic lines (Omale, 2011; Otu et al., 2013). Wealthy inmates are able to acquire comfortable living arrangements for themselves while those that are poor are left in a state of physical and psychological deprivations (Aduba, 2013).

The findings of this study have equally awakened the need for deeper reflections on existing theories on social inequality to include social stratifications, preferential treatments in correctional facilities, so as to drive a wider understanding of class systems in corrections and its implication on criminal justice system. Current theoretical positions of radical criminologists subsumed disparate treatments of prison inmates under general explanations of social inequality as a factor of crime causation (Maguire, Morgan and Reiner 2012; Shantz, 2012). The relative inattention paid to class systems in correctional facilities, especially deprivations experienced by lower class inmates portends grave consequences to the justice system. Scholarship in the sociology of punishment, criminology, and social stratification offers both theory and evidence linking disparate treatment in correctional facilities, prison conditions reformation outcomes and effective justice system (Pettit & Western 2004; Western 2006; Wheelock & Uggen 2008). Questions have been asked about whether imprisonment is a reflection of societal disadvantage or its cause in Nigeria (Esiemokha 2010; Aduba 2013; Opara 2014; Dada, Dosunmu & Oyedeji 2015).

It is clearly established from the outcomes of this study that corruption defines the pattern of relationship between inmates and prison officials as well as among inmates. This goes to support positions that corrupt practices have ravaged the entire criminal justice system in Nigeria (Daudu 2009; Esiemokha 2010; Dada, Dosunmu & Oyedeji 2015). Selective administration of prison rules abound in correctional facilities and the socioeconomic status of prisoners prior to being incarcerated play major roles in determining the way inmates are treated.

Some common problems in prison facilities across the country are that most of the prisons are old, dilapidated, poorly ventilated, lacking in good sleeping space, food, medical care and sanitary conditions (Araromi 2015; Dada, Dosunmu & Oyedeji 2015; Aborisade 2016). This is largely responsible for the reason that many celebrity and upper class prisoners will be desperate to provide comfort for themselves at all cost while they sojourn in Nigerian prisons. The high level of deprivations in Nigerian prisons will be too much for them to bear considering their socioeconomic background prior to their incarceration. However, as against the position of most reviewed literature (Daudu, 2009; Esiemokha, 2010; Araromi, 2015; Dada, Dosunmu, & Oyedeji, 2015; Ogunode, 2015), this present study also found that the provision of differential treatment by prison officials is not only premised on financial or material reward. The fear of consequences that may trail their denial of highly connected or placed inmates of such disparate favours also accounts for the reason why prison officials concede to such differential treatment.

The prison officials and administrators were found to truncate many of prisoner's human rights. Prisoners in different prisons are denied their rights across correctional facilities as an outcome of their low socioeconomic positioning within the society. The study found that basic rights of prisoners to welfare issues such as food, water, sanitary care, medication, living space, family visitation, and transportation to court for hearing are not made available to them by prison authorities except they are in the 'good books' of the officials by offering financial, material or sexual favours. In the time past, reports from the National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria, indicated that on several occasions, human rights of prisoners in Nigeria have been denied and the situation of the inmates is quite appalling (Araromi, 2015). There were also observations made by the Commission on the failure of the Federal Government to implement the recommendations of several studies carried out on the situations of Nigeria prisons. In addition, several presidential committees have submitted reports and made cases for reforms in the past, but the government have not done a lot to the fundamental challenges being faced by the prison system.

CONCLUSION

As against the rules, standards and popular belief that imprisonment is meant to punish and not for punishment, this study concludes that the prison system in Nigeria is presently primed to punish lower class inmates while it presents comfort above any reasonable measure of penal system to the wealthy and powerful inmates. In order to progressively realise and improve the administration of justice and the prison system in Nigeria, it is evident that the government and other major stakeholders should concertededly work towards complete revamping of the entire system. First, there is need for the government to review reports of both local and international panels of inquiry into the operationalisation of prison system in the country. In addition, outcomes and suggestions offered by independent studies in educational institutes and NGOs should be considered and appropriate reformation implicated. It is equally evident that government has not been making use of panel reports of aftermaths of prison unrests in the country. This lukewarm attitude of the government should be reconsidered and such panel reports taken more seriously to avert future trouble.

There is also a need to establish a prison-reporting scheme that will provide the channels for all prisoners to forward their needs and grievances. As a result, a neutral body should be set-up to receive and consider such grievances and thereafter make appropriate recommendations to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the supervising Ministry of Nigerian Prison Service). This measure should be undertaken with the required sincerity of purpose in order for all prisoners to have appreciable sense of belonging that will reduce

inequality in correctional facilities. The government should also protect the prison system from interferences by political elites in the country who are in the habit of exerting subtle force and intimidations on prison officials to provide authorised favours to their associates in prisons. Meanwhile, the manner of differential treatment that can be enjoyed by any category of prisoner should be limited, clearly defined and regulated.

In view of the above, it is imperative for government administrators in charge of prisons to prevent overcrowding of prison facilities while adequate facilities that will make prison life worth living be provided. Government should exhibit deep sense of purpose in developing policies that could address poor physical and health conditions of prisoners. Doing this will reduce the level of desperation of wealthy prisoners to buy comfort for themselves at all costs and at the detriment of lower class inmates. Finally, there should be more transparency in the operations of prison officials and administrators to ensure accountability of government and nongovernment provisions for prisoners.

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