

# **The Role of Religious Groups in Offender Reformation: A Study of the Port Harcourt Prison in Rivers State, Nigeria**

by

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## **Abstract**

This study examined the role of religious groups in offender reformation in Port Harcourt, Rivers State in Nigeria. It provides an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the association between religious group activities and character (offender) reformation; and the challenges faced by the religious groups in reforming offenders. The study was anchored in hell fire theory, and rehabilitation theories. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and survey questionnaires. The findings indicate that genuine character reformation among inmates in the Port Harcourt prison is depends on the involvement of religious groups in reforming offenders. Also, challenges such as “limited time for religious activities, insufficient fund and release re-integration” were discovered as barriers against religious groups in the Port Harcourt prison. The study contributes to an understanding of how religion influences individual personality and psyche to recover from criminality in order to prevent a relapse into anti-social behaviour.

**Key words:** religious groups, reformation, hell fire theory, offender, rehabilitation theory, prison, prisoner release re-integration.

## **Introduction**

Prison is generally perceived as very negative, the receptacle of society’s worst and wayward members. Yet, for whatever other reasons society imprisons its felons, an expectation (if not implicit aim) has been to return them to civil life in a better state than they were before - to rehabilitate them (Bolkas 2000). The rehabilitation of prisoners has always been vital, though a quarrelsome aspect of the modern prison system. Indeed, the western model of the prison, the penitentiary, was first founded by religious (Christian) leaders who wanted to reform the offender through a strict administration that included religious edification.

Ever since the apparent failure of these early reformatory measures, there have been ongoing attempts to alter the criminal character by using similarly intrusive techniques, only now under the guise of rehabilitation (Bolkas 2000). However, the notion of rehabilitation appeared doomed. In his landmark research, Martinson (1974) rehabilitation confirmed what many believed. The study concluded that with few and isolated exceptions, the rehabilitative efforts had no appreciable effect on recidivism. A history of this apparent failure, however, does not appear to have daunted the rehabilitative ideal, which remains a central and enduring principle of imprisonment (Gendreau and Ross 1987; White 1989; Gartner, O' Connor, Larson, Write, & Young, 1990).

The fundamental problem is that corrections/prisons services are meant to keep inmates, reform, re-orientate, and rehabilitate them to avoid recidivism, and empower them to be law abiding and productive members of the society on release from prison. But the situation on ground today in much of Africa is the opposite. In several African nations, not only is there no rehabilitation and empowerment, several inmates go back to crime soon after discharge from prison to terrorize the society, despite the vocational trainings (carpentry work, electrical work, shoe making etc.) and thereby return to prison to worsen the financial crisis of the prisons (Nwolise 2010).

It is believed that in any rehabilitation process there should be a medium that helps an individual to develop his self-confidence and increase his social recognition. Further, it should be able to inculcate new set of values into the inmate and also develop the ability to foster social relationships. For this reason does Durkheim (1912), in his *Elementary forms of religion* asserts:

*“Religion being a cultural phenomenon can exist independently of morality; that is social or secular ethics and norms of behaviour. But if morality remains separated and distinctive from religion, if it has not derived from religion proper but remains secularistic, its value as a process of achieving social integration and solidarity will be eroded. This being the case, it becomes necessary to root morality in religion”.*

According to the American Correctional Association (2000), “religion plays a very vital role in the rehabilitation process as it helps to integrate the individual back into the society as he or she was before; it does not make him feel unwanted”. Religious programs facilitate the development of inmate’s personality. In initial interviews conducted by Gunathilake & Edirisinghe (2010:3) the researchers found out that the inmates have developed anger against the society at the initial phase of conviction. All inmates in the sample revealed that they were suffering from a psychological trauma.

To counter all these psychological conditions the religious programs were of immense help to the inmates. O'Connor (1995a:16) argues that despite its historical and practical role in the penal system religion has been a neglected variable in criminal justice research, especially research on adult criminality and reformation. Indeed, it has been neglected across the social sciences.

In Nigeria, scholars have been appraising the various aspects of reformation among inmates in prisons (Attere, 2000; Okunola, 1986; Nwolise, 2010), however, these studies have not been able to exhaustively examine the effectiveness and challenges of religious groups in reforming offenders in prison. More so, neglect of the religious variable is all the more dismaying given that in the National Economic Empowerment and development strategy (NEED's) original review of rehabilitation studies from 2004 to 2010, no mention was made of religion as a rehabilitative intervention. "Thus, there seems to be a significant gap in literature about the role, influence and challenges of religious groups in reforming offenders in the Nigerian prisons". Hence, the need to investigate the influence and challenges of religious groups in reforming offenders in the Nigerian prisons, using the Port Harcourt prison as a reference point. And in summation, the objective of this study is to examine the role of religious groups, effects, and the challenges faced by religious groups in reforming offenders in Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, correctional ideas and practices might vary, but they all share similar goals-the taking of vengeance, the reduction of crime, and the protection of self and society. Sanction for outlaws focused on retribution, banishment, isolation and death and were based on the reasoning that the offenders were enemies of the society that they deserved punishment and that extreme approach will eliminate the potential for future crime. This punishment ideology has endured throughout recorded history (Inciardi, 2005). During the 18<sup>th</sup> century-the age of enlightenment-a new ideology began to emerge. It was a reform movement that stressed the dignity and imperfection of human condition, it recognized the crudity of criminal law and procedure, and it fought against the cruelty of many punishment and conditions of confinement (Inciardi, 2005).

The Quakers of Pennsylvania, under William Penn, saw imprisonment as a sufficient severe penalty in itself and they insisted that prisoners should be assisted in their effort to become rehabilitated (Sutherland and Cressey, 1978). They criticized the association of all types of criminals in prison as disastrous and proffered alternative approach of criminal punishment, which is prisoners, be kept in solitary confinement. In their view, hand work, moral and religious instructions, solitude for contemplation and penitence were basic for the reformation of the criminals. Apart from the Pennsylvania system, there is the Irish system.

The system is called the progressive stage system and was design to provide a powerful incentive to the prisoners. Prisoners earned marks for good behaviours and in addition they were placed in an improved diet, provided with better dresses and special commendation badges, were given more liberty etc. this system place more emphasis on reformation of criminals (Igbo, 2007). However, Inmates hoping to better themselves during their incarceration, normally have the opportunity to participate in a number of rehabilitating programs. The programmes offered vary across jurisdiction and institutions. Examples are self-improve programs offered by religious institutions and civic groups, work programs, educational and vocational training, counseling and therapy (Bohm and Haley. 1999). The idea captured in this new thinking is that prisons should be for reformation, correction and rehabilitation of offenders, thus the prisoners are no longer treated as social misfits. Imprisonment therefore becomes a process of preparing such offenders towards reintegration into the society at the end of their sentence, as such curbing the problem of recidivism.

In Nigeria, the rate at which released inmates return into the prisons (recidivate) few months upon release have attracted the attentions and interest of criminologists, sociologists and scholars from other disciplines. Recidivism is the reversion to criminal acts of an offender who has been subjected to punitive sanctions/acts (Okunola 1986). Recidivism is now a common phenomenon in the Nigerian prisons. Soyombo (2009) reported that the prevalence rate of criminal recidivism in Nigeria in 2005 was 37.3%. Also, Abrifor (2010) estimated the prevalence of recidivism in Nigeria prisons at 52.4% in 2010. Since then, there has not been any indication that the trend has declined. Wilson (2009) also reported that studies conducted in Nigeria have documented that 81% of male criminal inmate offenders and 45% of female criminal inmate offenders were re-arrested within 36 months of discharge/release from the prison custody. This trend in the high prevalence of recidivism shows that in Nigeria and in many other countries, prison has either lacked or had inadequate reformatory tools (programmes) which do not only empower, but also certifies that prisoners return to the society (morally) changed. Thus, it becomes objectively imperative to examine the desired impacts (influence), of religious groups: and the barriers they face in reforming offenders. And in this examination, Travis Hirschi's and Stacks' hell fire theory, and the rehabilitation theory of Siegel provides appropriate explanation for the reformation of offender in Port Harcourt prisons, thus, these interactive perspectives seek to explain the processes through which criminal behaviour can be un-learned.

## **Hell Fire Theory**

Hirschi and Stack in 1969 published their seminal article "Hellfire and Delinquency" which questioned the link between "hellfire" and crime. Hellfire theory states that religion deters individual-level criminal behavior through the threat of supernatural sanctions and promotes normative behavior through the promise of supernatural rewards. Hellfire theory measures the extent to which individuals who condemn an act on religiously based moral grounds are unlikely to contemplate engaging in delinquent behavior.

Belief in hellfire is typically measured using one or more of a number of indicators: by beliefs regarding whether or not a certain act is a sin or considered morally wrong, by the frequency of church attendance, and by religious salience (i.e., how important religion is in an individual's daily life) (Sloane and Potvin, 1986; Cochran, 1988; Cochran, 1989; Burkett and Ward, 1993; Evans, et al, 1995). Within criminology, hellfire theory falls under the domain of social control theories. Social control theories assert that the impetus toward crime is uniform or evenly distributed across society. Individuals will break rules unless controlled. With regard to religion, social control theories assert that religious doctrine and participation reinforce and strengthen internalization of moral beliefs that help regulate behavior and reduce the likelihood that one will turn to criminal behavior.

The relevance of the hellfire theory to this study is quite obvious as religious groups in prison; help to instill the feeling of guilt on inmates, and revealing to them the wrong in the act they have committed; and how it negates moral principle, especially as set by the supernatural. Religious groups do this through sermons and preaching, thus bringing to inmates the knowledge and belief in the supernatural, its principles and standards; and the consequences on defaulters. Again, religious group activities in the prison, such as, church/mosque services, in-prison seminars, etc.; helps in instilling morality in inmates through the prison fellowship rules and regulations which they are expected to abide as members of the group. Religious group activities in prison also give inmates the opportunity to come in contact with conventional people and activities, thereby building a bond with them. Thus, making them unlikely to contemplate engaging in delinquent behaviour

## **Rehabilitation Theory**

The assumption of rehabilitation theory is that people are not natively criminal and that it is possible to restore a criminal to a useful life, in which they contribute positively to the development of themselves and the society. This theory of punishment is based on the notion that punishment is inflicted on an offender so as to reform him/her, or rehabilitate them so as to make their re-integration into the society easier. Punishments that are in accordance with this theory are community service, probation orders and any punishment with a program guidance and after care towards the offender, (Wikipedia, 2009; philosophy 120, n.d.).

In addition, Siegel (2005:371) affirmed that rehabilitation embraces the notion that given the proper care and treatment, criminals can be changed into productive, law-abiding citizens. Influenced by the positivist criminology, the rehabilitation school suggests that people commit crime through no fault of their own. Instead criminals themselves are product of social injustice; poverty and racism, these are responses to a society that has betrayed them and because of their disturbed and improvised upbringing, they may be suffering psychological problems and personality disturbances that further enhance their committing capacities.

The hallmark of this theory is the retraining of convict so that he/she can live an independent and lawful life on release. The view of this justice system is portrayed as a method for dispensing treatment to needy patients. Offenders are seen as people who, because they have failed to exercise self-control, need the help of the state to return to the right track.

The application of this, to the study is hinged on the rehabilitative perspective by Siegel (2005:371). This theory indeed captures the thrust of this study as it correlates the justification of religious groups involvement in prison and rationale behind the treatment of the convict by “reforming the attitude and behavior of offenders so that they will be able to feel guilt, repent and choose lawful means, in satisfying their needs” (Dinitz & Dine, 1979:51). The hall mark of this theory as I have mentioned earlier is to reform the convict so that he can live an independent life which is lawful upon release. This theory advocates some cause of action, not just vocational training but also religious programmes designed to transform the mental setting of the offenders towards their perception of crime by inculcating the knowledge and believe in the supernatural being “God”

## **Methodology**

The study was carried out in Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State in Nigeria. The state has three federal prisons, one convict prison and two maximum prisons located in Degema, Ahoada, and Port Harcourt the state capital respectively. This study was conducted in Port Harcourt maximum prison which is a multi-purpose and the largest in Rivers State. It is located in Bundu Street near Lagos bus stop in Port Harcourt Township. Originally, the prison was built to house 804 inmates but today, it houses up to 3000 inmates including women and minors. The prison has several blocks of old structures, all built in 1918 by the British colonial rulers, which serves as cells, infirmary, workshops and offices for the officials. It also has gallows which qualifies it to retain condemned criminals.

The study population comprised all inmates in the Port Harcourt maximum prison who are adherents faithful’s of either Christianity or Islamic religion. Inmates serving a sentence of one year imprisonment, to those serving life-term imprisonments, were involved in the study. They include those serving prison terms for the first time and those who have returned to prison after their first prison term. They were carefully selected to ensure representativeness of the study.

The sample population of this study comprised the 2,801 prisoners in the Port Harcourt prison, out of which only ten percent 10% was selected for the study. In other words, the sample size is constituted by 280 inmates. The sample was drawn from the 23 blocks (cells) in the prison. They were selected on the basis of simple random sampling using balloting method through their sample frame, while the religious leaders and prison officials were purposively selected based on the positions they occupy.

A total of 280 respondents were sampled. At the end of the data collection, a total of 268 questionnaires were returned, giving a completion rate of (96 percent). For the qualitative part, 5 key informant interviews with prison officers, and 15 in-depth interviews with religious groups leaders were conducted.

Furthermore, the study employed the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. Essentially, the collection of quantitative data involved the use of semi-structured questionnaire (open and closed ended), while the collection of qualitative data involved the use of key informant interview with the prison staff and an In-depth interview with the prison religious group leaders purposively selected for such. Response from the key informants was used to buttress some of the information gathered through the questionnaire method. This method involved the random selection of 280 respondents to ensure access to unbiased information on the perceived influence/effects of religious groups/programmes in reforming offenders. The informants were those considered to be knowledgeable in prison religious affairs.

The validity and reliability of the instrument was asserted by selecting ten prisoners for a pre-test. At the end of the fieldwork, the questionnaires were collected in readiness for processing. The questionnaires, which included both close and open-ended questions, were all edited to check for those that were not properly filled. In the end, only questionnaire's found to have been filled appropriately were coded and machine-imputed using the SPSS data entry software.

With regard to data analysis, the quantitative data were analyzed through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) using frequency distribution tables and simple percentages, pie chart and bar chart, cross-tabulation and chi-square. The qualitative data were processed through content analysis and ethnographic summaries.

## **Results**

These sections contain the results of the study. Discussions were done based on the objectives of the study. A combination of both the qualitative and quantitative methods was employed. Within the context of the presentation of quantitative data were discussed, qualitative analysis was also done in which case, the responses derived from the officers and religious group leaders were sometimes reported verbatim to make for a comprehensive understanding.

## The Nature of Religious Groups Activities in the Port Harcourt Prison

Table 1 Types of Religious Groups Activities in Port Harcourt Prison

TYPES OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS' ACTIVITIES	FREQUENCY	PERCENT
Counseling	18	6.8%
Seminars	21	7.8%
Bible studies & Cell group prayers	87	31.8%
Quiz competitions (scriptural)	45	17.5%
Religious Services	95	35.4%
Total	266	99.3%

Source: Field survey, May 2013.

Table 1 shows that almost all 266 (99.3%) of the respondent indicated that the religious groups in the Port Harcourt prison organized programmes such as, Counseling (6.8%), Seminars (*Anger resolution seminar*) (7.8%), Bible studies (31.8%), Quiz competitions (17.5%) Religious worship services (35.4%), for the inmates. However, 2 (.7%) of the respondents objected that none of these programmes was being provided by the religious groups in the prison. The statement of an interviewee which agreed with the findings in table 4.4 gave more insight into the types of religious group activities available in the Port Harcourt prison:

*The success of reformation in this prison can be credited to the religious group activities. Many inmates have left this prison as licensed pastors having graduated from the seminary school in the prison. Also, some who used to be very aggressive both to the prison officials and other inmates have now become friendly and obedient having attended seminars and services conducted by religious groups in this prison. (KII/Male respondents/official/May 24, 2013).*

This findings align with the models of intervention which holds that rehabilitation regimes around the world comprise a number of different types of interventions which are employed in varying degrees to provide purposeful activity for prisoners, challenge offending behaviour, provide basic education to tackle illiteracy and innumeracy and equip prisoners with life and work skills (House of Commons home Affairs Committee on Rehabilitation of prisoners; 2004 &2005).

## The Impacts of Religious Activities on Prisoners

TABLE 2 The Compliance effects of Religious Group activities on Inmates (N=268)

Impact of Religious groups		Ways in which religious activities affected inmates					
		Ability to resist temptation	Highly dedicated to religious activities	Obedient to rules	Redirection towards God	Reduced Temper	Total
Yes	249 92.9%	39 14.5%	29 10.8%	58 21.7%	49 18.3%	74 27.6%	249 92.9%
No	19 7.1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
% Total	100.0%	14.5%	10.8%	21.7%	18.3%	27.6%	92.9%

Source: Field survey, May 2013.

Table 2 shows that the majority 249 (92.9%) of the respondents indicated that religious groups activities in the Port Harcourt prison have made them to comply with prison rule, while 19 (7.1%) had a contrary view; stating that it did not cause them to comply with prison rules. The table further shows the changes that respondents claimed to have noticed in their lives as a result of the activities of religious groups in the prison to include: ability to resist temptation (14.5%), highly dedicated religious activities (10.8%), obedient to rules (21.7%), redirection towards Christ Jesus (18.3%), and reduced temper (27.6%). The statement of an interviewee, in response to the question "Do you think the religious groups in this prison have been able to achieve their aims?" gave insight in to thus:

*We are truly achieving our aims to a very great extent. I am a living proof of this achievement; I was an inmate in this prison until the last six years. It was during my stay in prison that I truly came to a better knowledge of God and the need to obey him. As a result, I became highly involved in religious activities which further helped my faith to grow. Today, as you can see, I am a Pastor; not just a Pastor, I also lead one of the most committed religious groups in this prison. Apart from me, so many other colleagues who were also devoted and dedicated to religious programmes, upon release have been doing greatly well in their various ministries and work places. On the contrary, most of these inmates who you saw hailing me; were fellows, who left this place before me, but were not seriously involved in religious activities; such that they left without being morally reformed. Today, here they are again in the prison.*

*Thank god most of them are now getting to know God more than they did in their first time. I cannot say more than this, but the way things are going, I trust God that very soon, it will be difficult to find a recidivist in this prison. (IDI respondent/Religious leader/May 23, 2013).*

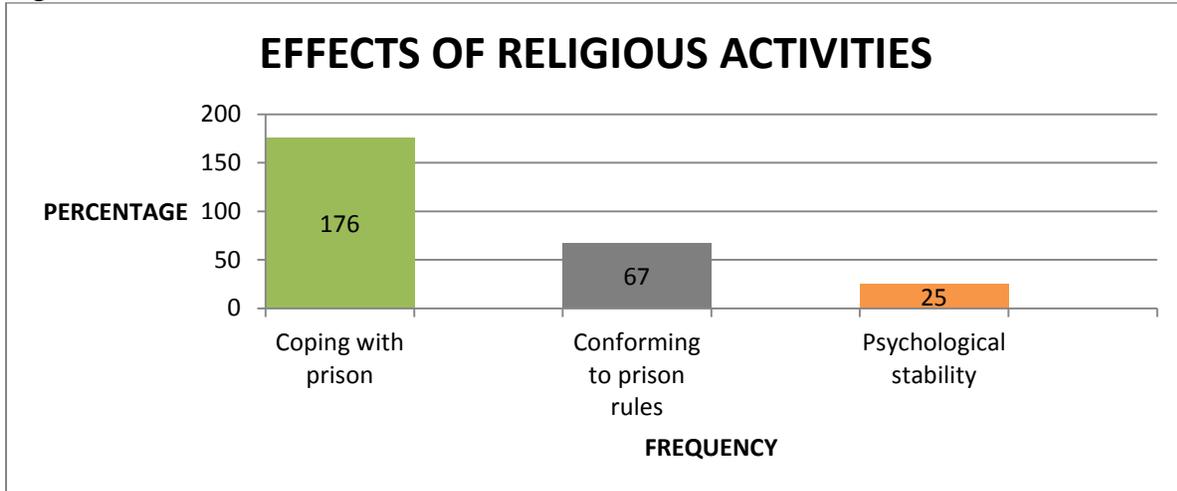
Another interviewee gave this submission:

*Yes of course, they are and have been achieving their aims! At least I can assure you that with the kind of changes I have noticed in the lives of many of these inmates, they have a high tendency of not returning to this place after release. Again, in my 26 years of doing this job, I have served in several prison units and can tell you with all honesty that this is one of the most peaceful yard I have been to; this is as a result of the high and growing number of religious groups in this prison. Once again, I say they are really achieving their aims. (KII respondent/official/May 25, 2013).*

These findings corroborate Silverman and Oglesby's study on the 'new birth' phenomenon where they assert that convert experiences a feeling of well-being, a curious sense of peace, and completeness never really felt before. There may be added for some others much more outward behavior, but it is generally an inward experience. Along with these are experience of a forgiveness of sins, a sense of belonging and identity as a 'child of God,' victory over death, and the feeling of finding the answer to a lifelong quest (1983:181).

## The Effects of Religious Groups Activities

Figure 1



Source: Field survey, May 2013.

The bar chart shows that the majority 176 (65.7 percent) of respondents indicated that religious activities also helped them to cope with prison, 67 (25.0%) indicated that it helped them in conforming to prison rules, in that it affected values and morals; determining what is important in life and between what is right and wrong, and 25 (9.3%) stated that it helped them balance psychologically (Appendix 27).

This finding was in consonance believes of some of the interviewees. Two of them gave their submission below:

*There is a high level of guilt and remorse in me now than when I recently entered this place. This was because I never saw anything wrong in what I did; but know, through the help of religious groups and their activities; I have known where I went wrong and wished I never did! Now, I know the standards of God and what follows them, I can never do such a thing again. (Open ended questionnaire/ male respondent/inmate/ May 20, 2013)*

Another interviewee buttressing this:

*Whenever a new inmate enters this prison, the first thing one notice on him/her is a form of 'derangement' caused by stress and tension. The next thing is that they start doing some life threatening things in an attempt to kill themselves; justifying hopelessness. However, when they gradually begins to get in contact with these religious groups, and getting involved in their activities, one begins to notice a feeling of re-assurance in them, thereby reducing this tendency of committing suicide.(IDI/Male respondent/official/May 22,2013).*

This finding confirms the works of Peck (1988) who found a positive correlation between religious inspired hope and coping among habitual offenders faced with a prison sentence of life without parole. This has been observed in the works of Durkheim (1972). Kennedy (1983 & 1984). Kennedy & Homant (1988). The research, "Transition to custody as a factor in suicide, A theory of suicide while in police custody and Predicting Custodial suicide" essentially suggests that those persons most committed to religion are less likely to report suicidal impulses in the first place and also are more likely to have much more negative attitudes toward suicidal behavior than the less-committed.

## **Barriers Faced by Religious Groups in Reforming Offenders**

Away from the inmates, the religious groups leaders responded to the question "What other factors do you consider as hindrance to effective rehabilitation of inmates?" thus:

*Rehabilitating the inmates is not the major challenge we have! The issue is about returning them to the society. When the society refuses to accept these reformed ex-inmates as changed members of the society, thereby refusing them the right to education, housing, employment and other public benefits, this act of dejection pulls off the infused reformations, thereby re-enacting criminal tendency. (IDI respondent / Clergy/May 25, 2013).*

Another interviewee gave this submission:

*...It boils down to finance, or the readiness of religious people, NGO's, private and cooperate organizations, and individuals to assists in raising funds for the prison departments of various religious groups to enable them provide and run an effective reformatory programmes in the prisons. In fact, I get scared preaching to a physically sick or mentally deranged prisoner because their hopeless conditions can make them react unruly to you; besides, how can one expect them to listen when one cannot reassure their health and psychology. (IDI respondent/Chaplain/May 24, 2013).*

This finding concurs with Wines (1895:305) who believed that post-release support was crucial because, the most terrible moment in a convict's life is not that in which the prison door closes upon him, shutting him out from the world, but that in which it opens to admit of his return to the world..." For it is from a predominantly deviant culture that the 'ex' will have emerged; at worst, one in which processes of criminalization and prisonization have been assimilated to the degree that a prison sentence may not results in a new and improved law-abiding citizen, but one who has crystallized his thinking about his deviant lifestyle and becomes a "better criminal" (Bartol 1995; see also Hawkins 1976). It also confirms the assertions that the provision of health care to offenders is one of the most significant problems arising from the growth in prison populations today (McDonald, 1995).

## **Discussion**

It was evident from the study that religious groups in the Port Harcourt prison had significant impact on the material needs (welfare), spiritual needs (change in moral value; as most of the inmates left the prison becoming pastors and evangelists who preach the need to obey both societal and supernatural laws), psychological need (stable state of mind), ability to cope with prison and the act of conformity to prison rules. Again, religious groups in the prison impacted substantially on the education needs of the inmates by attracting a Centre of the National Open University into the prison (Port Harcourt Prison Centre), and also sponsored inmate's education in that most inmates were in their second year of study as at the time of this interview. Furthermore, religious groups in the prison were making serious efforts to attract a Centre of WAEC and NECO examinations in the prison yard. This achievement justifies the prison as a sink where dirty plates are not broken, but cleansed.

Despite these huge efforts made by the religious groups in reforming offenders in the Port Harcourt prison, the study revealed that they had challenges such as Insufficient Time as they were restricted from visiting the prison as often as they would love to do. Also, Post-Release Re-Integration was noted as a big challenge as reformed convicts upon release returns to their old (criminal) way of life sequel to stigmatization, segregation, deprivation and other in-humane treatment offered them by the society. In addition, Insufficient Fund was also found to be a vital challenge as every aspect of their reformation programmes involved huge amount of money to be effective.

## **Conclusion**

The present research findings generally confirm the prison-religion literature. The overall and ultimately important consensus reached in the literature is that prisoners who actively engage in religious activities and/or consider themselves religious are likely to derive significant benefits both while incarcerated and post-release. These benefits are reformative in nature as they foster positive socialization and moral/spiritual development in offenders who, given the opportunity, commit to 'working through' personal and faith related issues within a framework of religious support (Halleck 1971, Goldfarb and Singer 1972, Colson 1980b, Phillipy 1983, Croake et al. 1986, Forsythe 1987, Smarto 1987, Peck 1988, Gartner et al. 1990, Scarnati et al. 1991, Clear et al. 1992a, Young et al. 1994, O'Connor 1995a, Skotnicki 1996, O'Connor et al. 1997, Ahrens 1998, Hallundbaek 1999, Johnson 2000, Clear et al. 2000, Bolkas 2000). Indeed a viable support network is vital to the process of individual change and social integration; prisoners without appropriate support find it harder to live out their faith in the community. The most complete embodiment of a viable support network is a religious-run prison/programme providing 'holistic' care (tending a person's mental, physical, and spiritual needs) both pre *and* post-release.

## **Suggestion/Recommendations**

Having discovered the effects of religious groups activities (programmes), it is therefore pertinent to advocate and encourage all religious establishments on the need to getting involved in offenders reformation; especially in the prison. Rehabilitation programmes within the prison should be encouraged especially for the female convicts in the Port Harcourt prison who reported not to have any vocational training programme. Also, religious groups should endeavor to create and introduce their own vocational training programmes to encourage prisoners participate adequately in such activities so that they can do better off with post-imprisonment adjustment; as the inadequate or deterioration of reformatory training such as workshop has been made voluntary. One vital form of encouraging and reforming prisoners is the monetization of prison work or what is regarded as earning schemes in the prison (Motunrayo, 2008).

More so, religious groups should increase their zest in educating prisoners; since it has been known that education can significantly contribute to the reformation of prisoners and to reduce the rate of re-offending after release. An educated prisoner is more likely to succeed, rather than fail, in his integration back to the society. Education builds confidence and makes prisoners industrious who no longer can be a burden to the society. Interestingly, skilled and educated prisoners are more likely to earn more income above poverty level and serve to add to the tax base rather than drain it. Education is an instrument of human empowerment and does more to produce firm moral character than any other programme apart from religion (which also imparts through education).

Having studied and unraveled the influence of religious groups on offenders' reformation within the prisons, it becomes imperative to suggest that intending researchers should investigate the role of religious groups in post-prison reformation.

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