

RECIDIVISM AND PUBLIC ORDER IN NIGERIAN CORRECTIONAL CENTRES IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

Recidivism remains a major challenge confronting criminal justice systems worldwide, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. Despite policy reforms, the Nigerian correctional system continues to emphasise punishment over rehabilitation, resulting in high rates of reoffending. This study critically examined the causes and consequences of recidivism, with a focus on Akwa Ibom State and explores its implications for public order. Drawing on qualitative data from secondary sources and content analysis, the research was anchored on Social Contract Theory and supported by Sherman's Defiance Theory to explain the failure of correctional centres to rehabilitate offenders and the subsequent erosion of public trust and safety. Findings revealed that institutional deficiencies such as overcrowding, lack of rehabilitation programmes and ineffective reintegration strategies contribute significantly to repeat offending. Societal stigma, unemployment and absence of post-release support further complicate the reintegration process. The study established a clear nexus between high recidivism and declining public order in Akwa Ibom State, as ex-offenders often return to criminal activity, leading to increased insecurity and social instability. The study has contributed to the growing body of knowledge on correctional failure by framing recidivism as both a symptom and driver of systemic injustice and public disorder. It calls for a reorientation of Nigeria's correctional philosophy towards restorative justice, community reintegration and inter-agency collaboration. The study recommended policy interventions focused on rehabilitation, post-release support and public education to mitigate the cycle of reoffending and strengthen social stability in Akwa Ibom State and beyond.

Keywords: *Recidivism, Nigerian Correctional Centres, Setting Agenda, Public Order*

Introduction

Globally, recidivism remains a persistent challenge to the effectiveness of criminal justice systems. Many countries continue to grapple with the difficulty of achieving meaningful rehabilitation due to complex social, economic and institutional barriers. While developed nations have implemented strategic reintegration efforts that have modestly reduced reoffending rates, developing countries, particularly in Africa, face more daunting obstacles. These include endemic poverty, overcrowded prisons, inadequate funding and under-resourced correctional systems (Okorie, 2023; Bassey *et al.*, 2023).

In Nigeria, the problem is particularly serious. Despite the enactment of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act in 2019 (Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2029), which mandates a shift from a punitive to a rehabilitative correctional model, the reality remains one of institutional neglect and systemic failure. The Nigerian correctional system continues to function primarily as a punitive apparatus, with limited capacity to reform or reintegrate offenders. This has led to a vicious cycle of incarceration and reoffending that undermines national security, social order and public trust in the justice system.

Akwa Ibom State, though often regarded as one of the more peaceful regions in southern Nigeria, is not exempt from these challenges (Asangausung, 2024). Recent trends reveal a disturbing increase in repeat offenses among formerly incarcerated individuals, signalling serious lapses in the rehabilitation and post-release reintegration processes, (Islam & Goswami, 2019). Recidivism, in its most general sense, refers to an individual's relapse into criminal behaviour following intervention, sanction, or completion of a correctional programme (Ugwuoke & Igbo, 2003). Although definitions may vary slightly, they typically include three key components: a starting event such as release from custody; a failure event such as a new arrest or

conviction. Government agencies typically measure recidivism through rates of re-arrest, reconviction, or re-incarceration within this designated post-release window (Oyewo, 2017).

Numerous scholars have contributed to the discourse on recidivism in Nigeria and beyond. For instance, Adegoke (2017) examined the role of prison education in reducing reoffending, while Ugwuoke and Igbo (2003), as well as Igbo and Ugwuoke (2003), explored the structural and institutional failures of Nigeria's penal system. Tenibiaje (2013) investigated the socio-psychological factors influencing inmates' return to crime and Oyewo (2017) focused on the policy challenges associated with implementing inmate rehabilitation in Nigerian correctional centres. Similarly, Otu (2015) offered a broad review of the causes and consequences of recidivism and Islam and Goswami (2019) discussed the impact of the justice system's initial response to crime on subsequent offending behaviour.

While these studies have significantly enriched understanding of the recidivism phenomenon, they tend to approach the issue either from a national perspective or through sector-specific lenses such as education, policy, or psychology. There is a paucity of state-level analyses that link the systemic failures of the correctional system with the broader issue of public order, particularly in subnational contexts like Akwa Ibom State, which, despite its relative stability, faces rising rates of repeat offending and related security concerns.

Against this backdrop, the present study investigates recidivism within the Nigerian correctional system with a specific focus on Akwa Ibom State. It explores the underlying causes and consequences of recidivism, assesses its implications for public order and proposes context-specific, actionable strategies for its prevention and control. In doing so, the study bridges an important gap in the literature by connecting correctional

inefficiencies with community-level outcomes, thereby contributing to ongoing debates on criminal justice reform, post-release reintegration and sustainable public safety in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Lawrence W. Sherman's Defiance Theory (1993) and Social Contract Theory of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Defiance Theory

At the core of Defiance Theory is the argument that the way individuals interpret their punishment largely determines whether they will be deterred, unaffected, or further emboldened to reoffend. When an offender perceives a sanction as unjust, when the punishment is delivered by an authority viewed with hostility or mistrust and when the offender refuses to internalise shame or accept responsibility, the punishment may produce the opposite of its intended effect. Rather than discouraging criminal behaviour, the experience of punishment becomes a catalyst for further law-breaking as the offender seeks to assert autonomy, retaliate against perceived oppression, or rejects the legitimacy of the state's authority.

Applied to the Nigerian correctional context and more specifically to Akwa Ibom State, the theory explains why many former inmates return to crime after release. Correctional centres in Nigeria are often under-resourced and operate with a punitive philosophy that offers little in the way of rehabilitation or dignity. Inmates frequently experience harsh conditions, prolonged pre-trial detention, overcrowding, abuse and systemic neglect. These realities cultivate feelings of alienation and anger. Upon release, ex-inmates are subjected to societal stigma, unemployment and lack of reintegration support—conditions that reinforce their sense of injustice and marginalisation. Rather than deterring them from future offenses, their incarceration

reinforces an oppositional identity and a mindset of resistance toward formal authority, making recidivism more likely. This cycle of defiance and re-incarceration destabilises communities and contributes to the erosion of public order, particularly in areas already burdened by youth unemployment and social discontent.

While Sherman's Defiance Theory offers valuable insights, it is not without critique. One limitation is that it tends to focus more on individual-level psychological processes than on broader structural factors such as poverty, inequality, or institutional failure, which also significantly shape patterns of reoffending. Furthermore, not all offenders react to perceived injustice with defiance; some may instead experience internalisation of guilt or disengagement from deviant behaviour. The theory may also underestimate the role of peer influence and criminogenic environments in sustaining criminality. Nonetheless, it remains useful for explaining why punitive sanctions, in the absence of procedural justice, may fail to deter and instead provoke repeat offending.

The adoption of Sherman's Defiance Theory for this study is justified by its explanatory relevance to the Nigerian correctional experience, where offenders often view legal punishment not as a moral corrective but as a form of social repression. It sheds light on the behavioural and emotional reactions of ex-inmates who perceive the justice system as illegitimate or biased. By focusing on how perceptions of justice, respect and reintegration influence offender behaviour, the theory aligns well with the goals of this study, to understand the drivers of recidivism and propose reforms that promote public order through fairer and more effective correctional practices in Akwa Ibom State.

Social Contract Theory

This study is anchored on Social Contract Theory, a classical framework in political and legal philosophy that explains the origin of

state authority and the basis of law, justice and civil obedience. Rooted in the writings of philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the theory holds that individuals consent, either explicitly or implicitly, to surrender certain freedoms to the state in exchange for protection, order and the enforcement of rights. The legitimacy of state institutions, including the criminal justice system, thus rests on their capacity to uphold this contract by ensuring security, justice and the common good.

Within the context of the Nigerian correctional system, Social Contract Theory provides an important interpretive lens for understanding the dynamics of recidivism and its implications for public order. The theory assumes that once individuals violate societal rules; thereby breaching the contract, they are legitimately subjected to punishment as a corrective mechanism. However, the social contract also imposes a reciprocal obligation on the state: to administer justice fairly, to rehabilitate offenders and to reintegrate them as responsible citizens. When the state fails in this regard, the moral and legal foundations of its authority are eroded.

In Nigeria and specifically in Akwa Ibom State, the high rate of recidivism reflects this failure. Correctional centres often emphasise punishment over rehabilitation, with inmates experiencing neglect, poor living conditions and limited access to reformatory programs. These institutional deficiencies violate the implicit agreement that offenders, once punished, should be given an opportunity for reintegration and transformation.

Moreover, when ex-offenders return to a society that offers little support, characterised by unemployment, stigmatisation and exclusion, the social contract is again broken, not by the individual this time, but by the state and community. This breach fuels resentment and disillusionment, pushing many into criminal

behaviour. Consequently, recidivism becomes a manifestation of systemic breakdown and contributes to public disorder, eroding citizens' trust in the criminal justice system and increasing reliance on extrajudicial measures such as jungle justice or vigilante enforcement.

Despite its explanatory power, Social Contract Theory has been critiqued for assuming a level playing field where all individuals are equal participants in the contract. In reality, Nigeria's socio-economic landscape is marred by inequality, poverty and marginalisation, which disproportionately expose the poor to criminalisation and imprisonment. The theory also presumes that state institutions are neutral and benevolent, yet in many cases, they function with bias, corruption, or inefficiency, thus undermining the principles of justice and equity the contract is supposed to guarantee.

Nonetheless, the adoption of Social Contract Theory in this study is justified because it provides a normative framework for assessing the legitimacy and responsibility of the state in managing offenders. It underscores the mutual obligations between individuals and institutions, framing recidivism not only as a personal failure but as a symptom of institutional neglect and social imbalance. By using this theory, the study highlights the need for reforms that restore the social contract, through effective rehabilitation, reintegration policies, fair treatment of offenders and the creation of an enabling environment for lawful living, thus, contributing to sustainable public order in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria at large.

Theoretical Synthesis and Adoption

The challenge of recidivism within Nigerian correctional centres and its broader implications for public order requires a theoretical framework that addresses both the psychological dynamics of criminal

behaviour and the institutional legitimacy of punishment. In this regard, the synthesis of Sherman's Defiance Theory (1993) and Social Contract Theory (as advanced by Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau) offers a multidimensional perspective that captures both the individual response to punishment and the structural responsibility of the state.

Sherman's Defiance Theory asserts that criminal sanctions can lead not to deterrence, but to defiance when punishment is perceived as unjust, disrespectful, or delegitimising. According to this theory, offenders who feel stigmatised or alienated by their treatment within the justice system may respond with increased hostility, leading to repeated offenses. This behavioural response is shaped by the offender's relationship with authority and the perceived fairness of the sanction. In a context like Nigeria, where correctional systems are often characterised by overcrowding, brutality, corruption and systemic neglect, many inmates interpret their punishment not as a just consequence of wrongdoing, but as an oppressive experience. Upon release, the absence of reintegration support and social acceptance further amplifies their sense of exclusion, resulting in a cycle of recidivism.

In contrast, Social Contract Theory provides a normative and institutional lens, emphasising that the legitimacy of laws and punishment is rooted in a mutual agreement between individuals and the state. Hobbes emphasised the need for a strong sovereign to maintain peace and prevent chaos, while Locke and Rousseau highlighted the importance of justice, natural rights and collective will. This theory implies that the state has a duty not only to punish offenders but also to protect their rights, promote rehabilitation and ensure equitable reintegration. When the state fails to fulfill these obligations by imposing punitive measures without reform, or by neglecting post-release support, it breaches the social contract, thereby undermining public trust and the rule of law.

The theoretical synthesis of these frameworks is particularly relevant to understanding recidivism in Akwa Ibom State. From the defiance perspective, recidivism is a behavioural consequence of perceived injustice and social alienation. From the social contract perspective, it is the outcome of institutional failure and broken state-citizen relationships. Together, these theories explain why individuals reoffend (defiance) and why the system repeatedly fails to correct them (contractual failure). The interaction of both perspectives reveals that recidivism is not simply an issue of offender behaviour but a symptom of deeper institutional and relational breakdowns within the justice system.

For the purpose of this study, Social Contract Theory is adopted as the dominant theoretical framework, due to its emphasis on state responsibility, institutional legitimacy and the normative basis of justice. While Defiance Theory offers valuable insights into individual reactions to punishment, Social Contract Theory provides a more comprehensive framework for policy reform, governance accountability and public order, the core concerns of this research. It allows for the evaluation of how well the Nigerian correctional system aligns with its social mandate and what structural changes are needed to restore justice, dignity and security in society.

By anchoring the study in Social Contract Theory, the research is able to move beyond behavioural explanations of recidivism to a broader critique of institutional arrangements, thereby informing policy strategies that can effectively rebuild the trust between the state and its citizens, reduce reoffending and enhance public order in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria at large.

Materials and Methods

This study adopted a qualitative approach, which is appropriate for exploring the complex socio-institutional dimensions of

recidivism and its implications for public order in Nigeria, particularly Akwa Ibom State. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon through the interpretation of existing literature, legal frameworks, policy documents and scholarly works.

The study relies primarily on secondary data obtained from a range of credible sources. These include academic journals, textbooks, official publications of the Nigerian Correctional Service, reports by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), legal documents (such as the Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019), media reports and statistical data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Relevant international reports from bodies such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and Amnesty International were also consulted to provide comparative insights. The data were analysed using content analysis, a systematic technique that involves identifying, interpreting and categorising themes and patterns within qualitative data. Key themes such as the causes of recidivism, institutional challenges of correctional centres, consequences of repeat offending and the connection to public order were critically examined.

While the study is national in scope, it focuses specifically on Akwa Ibom State as a case for contextual analysis due to its emerging trends in youth-related crimes, cultism and repeat offenses. The paper does not rely on primary data (e.g., interviews or surveys), which is a limitation, but compensates for this by drawing extensively from existing empirical and theoretical literature. The qualitative and documentary approach is justified given the exploratory nature of the research topic. Understanding recidivism requires the interpretation of social structures, institutional processes and normative behaviours, which are best captured through qualitative inquiry. Moreover, the use of secondary data allows for a broad synthesis

of diverse perspectives, enhancing the depth and validity of the study's findings.

Empirical Review of Related Literature

Oyewo (2017) investigated the difficulties surrounding the implementation of rehabilitation policies within Nigeria's correctional system. Although the transformation of prisons into rehabilitative institutions is not entirely new, the passage of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act in 2019 marked a significant shift by formally embedding rehabilitation as a central objective of incarceration. Notably, Section 14 (1 & 2) of the Act mandates the rehabilitation of inmates as a statutory responsibility of the correctional service. Using secondary data and a desk research approach, the study assessed the historical and contemporary landscape of rehabilitation policies and found that despite the legislative framework, practical implementation remains hampered by systemic challenges. These include weak institutional capacity, poor staff training, inadequate classification and assessment procedures, limited funding and insufficient collaboration with non-governmental organisations. The study concluded that achieving meaningful rehabilitation in Nigerian prisons requires a coordinated, well-resourced and multi-stakeholder strategy that addresses both legal and social barriers.

While Oyewo's work provides critical insights into the policy and institutional dimensions of inmate rehabilitation in Nigeria, it falls short of examining the broader societal consequences of failed rehabilitation, particularly the implications of recidivism on public order. Moreover, the study adopts a general national perspective without offering state-specific insights into how these issues play out at the subnational level. This current study addresses that gap by focusing on Akwa Ibom State, offering a localised analysis of how systemic failures in rehabilitation contribute to high rates of recidivism and how this, in turn, threatens public order. It moves beyond policy critique to explore the societal impact of correctional inefficiency,

thereby setting an agenda for integrated, context-sensitive reforms.

Adegoke (2017) explored the role of educational access in curbing recidivism within Nigerian correctional centres, using the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) prison special centres as a case study. A survey research design was employed and data were collected from 123 inmates across three correctional facilities in the Kirikiri axis of Lagos State, including both male and female prisons. The study used questionnaire and interviews to gather data from purposively selected participants. Findings indicated that, despite the availability of education programs, many ex-convicts still reoffended due to deep-rooted post-incarceration challenges. These include difficulty securing employment, stigmatisation by society and the absence of sustained reintegration support, all of which contribute to the high rate of recidivism in Nigeria.

While Adegoke's (2017) study provides valuable insight into the role of prison education and the socio-economic barriers ex-offenders face after release, it remains focused on Lagos State and primarily emphasises individual-level reintegration challenges. It does not fully interrogate the broader implications of recidivism on social stability or public order at the community or state level. The current study fills this gap by shifting the analytical focus to Akwa Ibom State and examining recidivism not only as a rehabilitation failure but as a public safety concern. By connecting systemic correctional inadequacies with rising insecurity and social unrest, the study contributes to the formulation of context-specific strategies aimed at both reducing recidivism and enhancing public order. Otu (2015) conducted a scholarly exploration into the causes, consequences and potential strategies for preventing and controlling recidivism in Nigeria's prison system.

Relying exclusively on secondary sources, the study synthesised existing literature to identify a range of factors contributing to repeat offending. These included social stigmatisation, absence of reintegration or aftercare programs, family-related issues, structural inequalities, substance abuse and peer influence. The study also underscored the broader implications of recidivism, noting its burden not only on correctional facilities and offenders but also on society at large, particularly taxpayers who fund the criminal justice system. In terms of solutions, the research highlighted the importance of humane treatment of inmates, alongside the implementation of educational and vocational training programs within prison facilities, as key strategies for reducing reoffending.

While Otu, (2015) work offers a comprehensive overview of the causes and consequences of recidivism, it remains largely theoretical and generalised. The study does not provide empirical data or a state-specific focus, nor does it engage deeply with how recidivism affects public order and community safety in specific regional contexts. Additionally, it stops short of offering practical policy frameworks tailored to local realities. The current study addresses this gap by providing a context-specific analysis of recidivism in Akwa Ibom State, linking correctional inefficiencies not only to repeated offending but also to broader threats to public order and social cohesion. By moving beyond literature review to critical content analysis and regional focus, the study contributes practical insights for localised intervention and correctional reform.

Concept of Recidivism

Recidivism is one of the most basic ideas in criminology. Recidivism is the term used to describe a person's return to criminal behaviour for which they have previously received punishment or been the target of intervention. Recidivism is defined as a criminal act that, after being released from prison, leads to a re-arrest, a re-conviction, or

a return to jail with or without a new sentence. Chronic criminal behaviour that results in multiple re-arrests and re-incarcerations is a measure of recidivism (Islam & Goswami, 2019).

Recidivism is typically quantified by re-arrest, reconviction, or re-incarceration rates. Any new arrest after release, including parole or probation violations, is considered a re-arrest. While re-incarceration entails either new prison terms or revocations of supervised release, reconviction specifically refers to arrests that result in formal judgments of guilt (Bassey *et al.*, 2023). Criminal justice policies are greatly influenced by these metrics, especially when it comes to sentencing, parole, offender classification and reintegration planning (Okorie, 2023).

Concept of Public Order

In the context of criminal justice, public order is the preservation of social harmony and peace (McKee, 2023). It is an all-encompassing term that covers a wide range of social stability-related topics, such as crime prevention, public protest management, law enforcement and property protection. The idea of social contract theory, which maintains that people in society give up some liberties and freedoms in return for the safety and security that the government provides, is closely related to the idea of public order. Since it guarantees that people can live their lives without fear of violence, chaos, or disorder, public order is an essential part of the social contract in this context.

Public order is maintained in the criminal justice system through a number of strategies, including the application of law enforcement organisations like the police, the courts and the prison system. The police are in charge of preventing and identifying crime, catching criminals and upholding law and order on the streets. The penal system is in charge of punishing those who break the law, while the judiciary is in charge of interpreting and applying it. Preventing crime is one of the

most important parts of upholding public order. This includes a variety of tasks, such as intelligence collection, community policing and proactive law enforcement tactics like stop-and-search authority and surveillance camera use. Effective crime prevention measures are critical to ensuring that citizens feel safe and secure in their communities.

Another crucial element of maintaining public order in the context of criminal justice is the control of public protests. Although they are a necessary component of democracy, demonstrations can also lead to stress and conflict. In order to keep protests peaceful and prevent them from upsetting the peace, the police are essential. Upholding public order also depends on the enforcement of the law. Laws are made to make sure that people and institutions act in ways that are in line with social norms and values. By looking into, prosecuting and punishing those who violate these laws, the criminal justice system is in charge of upholding them.

Lastly, the protection of public order depends on the protection of public property. Buildings, infrastructure and other assets owned by the public or the government are considered public property. The criminal justice system is in charge of making sure that these resources are shielded from harm or devastation.

Causes of Recidivism

Several interrelated factors contribute to high rates of recidivism, particularly in developing countries such as Nigeria:

Inadequate Rehabilitation Programme

Comprehensive rehabilitation and vocational training programmes are lacking in the majority of Nigerian correctional facilities. The skills and psychological preparation required for a lawful reintegration into society are frequently lacking in released inmates. The cycle of crime and incarceration is strengthened by this failure (Oyewo, 2023). Stravinskan (2009) asserts that the Nigerian government does not adequately prepare its

inmates for life outside of prison. They are always released without the ability to handle social challenges or have the mental capacity to reintegrate into society. A normal prisoner has very few job options, no savings, no entitlements and no employment benefits when they are released from prison. When an inmate is released, he has no money. He must find a job, purchase necessities and decide where to live. Additionally, Ugwuoke, *et al.* (2003) support the conclusion that recidivism rates are significantly impacted by prison conditions. They claim that the Nigerian prison system's rehabilitation is antiquated, ineffective and comatose. They also stress that Nigerian prisons lack facilities for inmate reformation and rehabilitation.

Socio-Economic Marginalisation

Socio-economic marginalisation plays a critical role in perpetuating the cycle of recidivism in Nigeria. Upon release, most ex-inmates return to communities already grappling with deep-rooted issues such as widespread poverty, high unemployment rates and fragile social welfare structures. These environments offer minimal support for reintegration, leaving former offenders with limited pathways to lawful livelihood. In the absence of structured post-release support systems, many ex-convicts struggle to meet basic needs such as shelter, food and healthcare. As a result, the pressure to survive in hostile and resource-deprived settings often pushes them back into criminal activities, not necessarily out of volition, but as a means of coping with structural exclusion.

The situation is worsened by the general lack of access to education and marketable vocational skills, both prior to and during incarceration. Without employability or entrepreneurial capacity, ex-offenders find it extremely difficult to compete in the formal labour market. Furthermore, societal stigma remains a formidable barrier. Many employers are unwilling to engage individuals with criminal records, regardless of whether they have served their time or

undergone reform. As Adegoke (2017) notes, the inability of ex-convicts to secure employment, combined with negative public attitudes and social rejection, significantly contributes to their relapse into crime. The label of being an "ex-convict" not only affects access to economic opportunities but also undermines self-worth and identity, which are essential for successful reintegration and personal transformation.

This socio-economic exclusion creates a dangerous feedback loop where recidivism is both a consequence and a reinforcer of marginalisation. As former inmates are recycled through the criminal justice system without meaningful rehabilitation or reintegration, the state's failure to address the socio-economic roots of crime becomes increasingly evident. Therefore, tackling recidivism requires more than just prison reforms; it demands holistic, community-based interventions aimed at eradicating poverty, enhancing education and vocational training and fostering inclusive social attitudes toward ex-offenders.

Stigmatisation and Social Exclusion

Stigmatisation and social exclusion constitute formidable barriers to the successful reintegration of ex-offenders in Nigeria. Former inmates often encounter widespread rejection from family members, religious groups, employers and community networks. This societal alienation reinforces feelings of shame, low self-worth and helplessness, all of which significantly impede the reintegration process. Once labelled an "ex-convict," individuals are frequently denied access to essential social capital, supportive relationships and networks that could otherwise facilitate lawful reintegration. They are often viewed through the lens of suspicion and distrust, regardless of the nature of their offense or any rehabilitation efforts they may have undergone while incarcerated.

The consequences of such social stigma are far-reaching. Former prisoners may struggle

to find stable housing, gainful employment, or even form meaningful personal relationships such as marriage. The label becomes an enduring identity that traps individuals in cycles of exclusion and marginalisation. In many cases, this exclusion serves as a push factor back into criminal behaviour, not necessarily due to intent, but as a result of limited alternatives and eroded self-agency. As Solomon *et al.* (2004) argued, breaking the cycle of recidivism requires not only institutional support but also societal willingness to reintegrate former offenders into the workforce, family units, educational systems and religious communities. When such support is lacking, the risk of relapse into crime increases significantly.

Interestingly, while the absence of positive social support contributes to reoffending, Murray and Farrington (2010) caution that associating with deviant peers; including family members or friends who engage in criminal activity may exacerbate the likelihood of recidivism. Thus, the quality of social relationships is crucial. It is not merely the presence of family or community ties that matters, but their moral and behavioural orientation. This highlights the dual role of social networks: they can serve either as protective factors or as accelerators of criminal relapse, depending on the nature of the association.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Issues

Substance abuse and untreated mental health disorders are critical but often overlooked drivers of recidivism in the Nigerian correctional system. A considerable proportion of incarcerated individuals enter prison with existing psychological conditions or addiction problems that remain unaddressed during incarceration. Nigerian correctional facilities, in most cases, lack the resources, personnel and infrastructure to provide adequate mental health care or substance abuse treatment. As a result, inmates with such issues receive little or no specialised support and many continue to

deteriorate mentally or remain addicted even while serving their sentences.

Upon release, the absence of continuity in care, such as post-release therapy, drug rehabilitation, or mental health counselling further compounds the problem. Many ex-offenders, left without coping mechanisms or support systems, relapse into substance use, which in turn becomes a pathway back to criminal behaviour. Otu (2015) noted that the lack of targeted intervention in Nigerian prisons contributes significantly to recidivism, particularly among individuals with addiction histories. Without intervention, substance-dependent individuals tend to return to the environments and habits that initially led them to offend, making re-incarceration a likely outcome.

This finding is consistent with the observations of McKean and Ransford (2004), who identified substance abuse as one of the most prominent and persistent causes of reoffending globally. A growing body of research supports this position, indicating that individuals with untreated drug dependencies are significantly more likely to commit crimes upon release than those who receive consistent therapeutic intervention. Mental health issues, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and psychosis, often exacerbated by incarceration also contribute to impulsivity, aggression and antisocial behaviour, all of which increase the risk of recidivism.

In essence, the failure of correctional institutions to provide mental health and substance abuse treatment reflects a broader institutional neglect that compromises both rehabilitation and public safety. Effective recidivism prevention requires the integration of mental health and addiction services into correctional programs, as well as sustained post-release follow-up. Without addressing the psychological and behavioural health needs of offenders, any rehabilitation effort remains incomplete and the cycle of

crime and re-incarceration continues unbroken.

Weak Post-Release Supervision and Reintegration Mechanisms

One of the most critical yet neglected aspects of correctional reform in Nigeria is the lack of structured post-release supervision and reintegration mechanisms for ex-inmates. Upon release, most former prisoners are discharged into society without any form of institutional follow-up, counselling, or guidance to help them reintegrate. Parole systems, which are widely used in developed correctional models to monitor and support offenders after incarceration, remain largely undeveloped or inconsistently applied in Nigeria. Similarly, transitional programs such as halfway houses or community-based rehabilitation centres are either severely limited in number or completely non-existent (Umeobika & Ejimofor, 2024). As a result, ex-convicts are left to navigate reintegration alone, often returning to the same social and economic conditions that contributed to their initial incarceration.

This lack of formal support contributes significantly to the high rate of recidivism, as reintegration into society, already fraught with stigma and limited opportunities becomes an overwhelming challenge. Ex-offenders without social support or institutional guidance are more susceptible to relapsing into criminal behaviour, either due to survival needs, peer pressure, or psychological distress. Tenibiaje (2013) identified a range of interrelated factors that predict both entry into and return to prison, including situational, personal, interpersonal, familial, structural and economic determinants. These factors, when unaddressed post-release, continue to shape the ex-inmate's life trajectory in ways that heighten their vulnerability to reoffending.

Furthermore, the institutional culture within many Nigerian correctional facilities often reinforces criminal identities rather than rehabilitating them. Chukwudi (2012)

critically referred to the prison environment as a "school of crime", a setting where inmates are more likely to be exposed to criminal values, networks and survival tactics that deepen their criminal orientation. Without post-release programs to challenge and reverse these tendencies, former inmates are more likely to re-engage in crime, not because of an inherent propensity to offend, but due to the structural failures of the correctional and post-correctional systems.

Therefore, the absence of comprehensive and functional reintegration frameworks reveals a critical weakness in Nigeria's criminal justice system. Reintegration must be viewed as a continuum that begins during incarceration and extends into post-release life. This requires proactive planning, including pre-release assessments, development of reintegration plans, access to psychological counselling, community mentoring and employment linkages. Without such interventions, the prison gate becomes merely a revolving door and the state continues to recycle individuals through a failing system, ultimately undermining public safety and the credibility of the justice system.

Institutional Corruption and Systemic Inefficiency

Institutional corruption and systemic inefficiencies within Nigeria's criminal justice framework significantly exacerbate the problem of recidivism. Corruption is pervasive across various stages of the criminal justice process from arrest and trial to incarceration and release and often undermines the principles of justice, fairness and rehabilitation (Asangausung & Brown, 2025). Many inmates serve prolonged sentences without benefiting from court-mandated rehabilitation or reintegration programs due to bureaucratic bottlenecks, misappropriation of resources, or outright negligence. In some cases, access to vocational training, legal counsel, or healthcare is contingent upon bribery or personal connections, leaving a large portion

of the inmate population marginalised and unserved.

Delay in cases processing further compound these issues. Prolonged pretrial detention, in which individuals languish in prison for years without formal conviction, fosters a deep sense of frustration and alienation. This procedural injustice often fuels resentment and distrust toward legal institutions, undermining any rehabilitative intent the correctional system might hold. When inmates perceive the system as unjust or exploitative, they are less likely to internalise legal norms and more likely to reoffend as a form of defiance or survival. The lack of procedural fairness thus not only erodes individual morale but also delegitimises state authority in the eyes of offenders.

Moreover, poor prison management, including overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure and understaffing, reduces the capacity of correctional facilities to serve any meaningful rehabilitative function. Inmates are subjected to inhumane conditions and denied opportunities for personal development or reform. Igbo and Ugwuoke (2003) affirm that such harsh prison environments, combined with the negative societal attitudes toward ex-convicts, significantly influence the likelihood of reoffending. In such circumstances, prison becomes not a space for correction but a breeding ground for deeper criminalisation, where inmates adopt more hardened behavioural patterns and criminal networks.

This convergence of institutional failure, procedural injustice and corruption contributes to a correctional system that is not only inefficient but also counterproductive (Asangausung & Brown, 2025). When offenders exit such a system, they are often more disillusioned, poorly equipped and socially alienated than when they entered. Without reforms aimed at improving transparency, accountability and institutional efficiency, Nigeria's correctional system will continue to function as a revolving door, recycling individuals back

into crime and perpetuating insecurity in society.

Initial Criminal Act:

The way the criminal justice system responds to an offender's initial criminal act plays a crucial role in shaping the individual's future behaviour, particularly in relation to recidivism (Bassey & Asangausung, 2023). The severity or fairness of the punishment meted out during the first encounter with the justice system can either deter future crimes or, conversely, entrench criminal tendencies. Islam and Goswami (2019) argue that when first-time offenders receive disproportionately harsh punishments, especially for minor or non-violent crimes—the experience may foster feelings of resentment, alienation and injustice. Rather than serving as a corrective intervention, such punishment can produce anger, defiance and a hardened criminal identity, increasing the likelihood of subsequent offending.

This observation aligns with Sherman's (1993) Defiance Theory, which posits that when individuals perceive the criminal justice process as unfair, illegitimate, or excessively punitive, they are more likely to respond with defiance rather than compliance. The theory explains that the social meaning attached to sanctions, how they are perceived rather than just their objective severity can be a powerful determinant of future conduct. For many first-time offenders, particularly in under-resourced or overburdened correctional systems such as Nigeria's, the absence of proportionality and procedural justice often results in a loss of faith in the law and its institutions.

Moreover, incarceration for minor first offenses often exposes individuals to hardened criminals and adverse prison conditions, facilitating criminal socialisation and reducing the prospects of rehabilitation. Instead of being diverted or rehabilitated, first-time offenders may adopt more serious criminal behaviours during imprisonment, especially when they perceive their initial

punishment as unjust. In this way, the punitive handling of an initial criminal act can serve as the gateway to deeper involvement in crime and subsequent recidivism.

Criminal Tendency:

Asangausung (2024) asserts that criminal tendency significantly contributes to recidivism, as offenders often develop and maintain strong bonds within organised criminal networks. These networks are not merely associations of convenience; they are structured by shared values, mutual protection and collective loyalty. Within such groups, members are socialised into criminal norms and behaviours, creating a subculture that discourages withdrawal from crime. This sense of belonging fosters an identity rooted in deviance, making disengagement from the criminal lifestyle particularly challenging. As a result, even after release, ex-offenders may feel compelled out of loyalty, pressure or necessity to re-join these networks, thereby increasing the likelihood of reoffending and complicating efforts at reintegration into mainstream society.

Operational Challenges of Correctional Centres

The Nigerian correctional system faces operational challenges that hinder its effectiveness in achieving rehabilitation and reducing recidivism (Asangausung, 2024, Bassey *et al.*, 2023). Despite the implementation of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act of 2019, most centres operate under punitive frameworks, lacking infrastructure, resources and trained personnel. Overcrowding, inadequate funding, staff shortages and insufficient training impede rehabilitation efforts. Many inmates are held in congested and poorly ventilated cells, fostering disease and violence. The lack of proper classification of inmates increases the likelihood of criminal socialisation rather than reform. Insufficient funding limits the availability of educational, vocational and psychosocial programs essential for inmate transformation. Staff shortages and insufficient training further impede rehabilitation efforts. Poor

infrastructure, including dilapidated facilities, broken sanitation systems and out-dated security equipment, reflect years of underinvestment in the correctional sector (Bassey *et al.*, 2023).

Overcrowding and Poor Infrastructure:

One of the most persistent challenges is prison overcrowding. Many correctional centres in Nigeria operate far above their designed capacity, with some facilities housing up to three times their intended population. This congestion results in unsanitary living conditions, limited access to medical care and heightened risk of violence and disease outbreaks. Inmates in overcrowded conditions are often deprived of space for recreation, vocational training, or educational activities, thereby defeating the core objectives of rehabilitation.

Inadequate Funding and Resource

Allocation: The Nigerian correctional system suffers from chronic underfunding. Budgetary allocations are often insufficient to provide basic necessities such as food, medical supplies, uniforms and educational materials for inmates. Correctional officers also operate under harsh working conditions, with inadequate salaries, training and equipment. These constraints foster institutional fatigue and contribute to low morale and inefficiency among staff.

Limited Rehabilitation and Skills Development Programmes:

Most Nigerian correctional centres lack structured rehabilitation programs. Vocational training workshops, counselling services and literacy classes are either non-functional or limited to a small number of inmates. The result is that the vast majority of prisoners leave correctional centres with no significant improvement in skills or behaviour, making them vulnerable to reoffending.

Staff Shortage and Poor Training: There is a significant shortfall in the number of trained correctional personnel relative to the inmate

population. Many correctional centres lack qualified psychologists, social workers and vocational trainers who are critical to the rehabilitation process. Furthermore, most correctional officers receive training that is largely custodial rather than reformative, reinforcing a punitive rather than transformative culture.

Inefficient Legal and Judicial Processes: A substantial number of inmates in Nigerian correctional centres are awaiting trial. The slow pace of judicial proceedings leads to prolonged detention of individuals who have not been convicted, thereby exacerbating overcrowding and straining prison resources. Some detainees spend years in custody without formal charges or trial, contributing to a sense of injustice and institutional distrust.

Lack of Post-Release Support Mechanisms: The absence of a structured aftercare system is a critical weakness in the Nigerian correctional framework. Upon release, many former inmates are left without housing, employment, or psychological support. The lack of post-release follow-up or parole supervision creates a vacuum that often results in reoffending and re-institutionalisation.

Corruption and Human Rights Violations: Reports of bribery, exploitation and abuse within correctional facilities further compromise their reformative capacity. Inmates are often subjected to physical and psychological abuse, extortion and neglect. Such human rights violations not only contravene international correctional standards but also reinforce criminal behaviour, anger and distrust in legal authority. In conclusion, the operational challenges of Nigeria's correctional centres reflect a broader crisis in governance, justice and human development. Until these systemic issues are addressed through sustained policy reform, institutional investment and community-based collaboration, the correctional system will continue to function

as a warehouse of criminality rather than a hub for rehabilitation and reintegration.

Consequences of Recidivism

Recidivism has far-reaching implications that affect not only the individual offender but also the correctional system, communities and the broader society. In the Nigerian context—particularly in Akwa Ibom State, repeat offending undermines the objectives of rehabilitation, increases the burden on public institutions and disrupts social order.

Threat to Public Safety and Expenditure on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice:

High rates of recidivism pose a direct threat to public safety. When individuals return to criminal behaviour after serving time, it contributes to persistent insecurity and public anxiety, especially in urban and semi-urban areas (Okorie, 2023). Communities in Akwa Ibom State have reported increases in burglary, cultism, petty theft and violent crime, much of which has been traced to ex-inmates who were not successfully reintegrated (Bassey *et al.*, 2023). Solomon *et al.* (2004) submitted that inmates who relapsed into criminal activities require ongoing expenditures on law enforcement and prisons and reduce the public monies (funds) available for other important services such as education and community development. They also impose a tremendous cost on individuals, families and communities. McKean and Ransford suggested that although the measurement of recidivism may lack clarity, it is clear that the incidence of recidivism jeopardises public safety and escalates expenditure on law enforcement and criminal justice (McKean & Ransford, 2004).

Overcrowding and Financial Strain on Correctional Facilities:

Recidivism places an additional burden on already overcrowded and under-resourced correctional centres. Many Nigerian prisons operate above their intended capacity, resulting in deplorable living conditions that hinder any meaningful attempt at rehabilitation. The cyclical return

of offenders not only increases congestion but also drains limited financial and human resources.

Erosion of Public Confidence in the Criminal Justice System: When recidivism remains high, it reflects the failure of the justice system to rehabilitate offenders. This erodes public trust in the efficacy of correctional institutions and in the principle of justice itself. Citizens may perceive incarceration as a revolving door, fostering cynicism toward legal procedures and promoting extrajudicial responses such as jungle justice.

Social Stigmatisation and Intergenerational Impact: Recidivism perpetuates the stigmatisation of offenders and their families. Ex-offenders often face rejection from their communities and struggle to gain employment, housing, or even familial acceptance. This marginalisation increases their vulnerability to reoffend and can also negatively influence younger family members, creating a cycle of intergenerational criminality.

Economic Consequences: The economic cost of recidivism is considerable. The government must allocate funds repeatedly for the arrest, trial and incarceration of repeat offenders. Additionally, ex-inmates who remain unemployed or unemployable are unable to contribute productively to the economy, representing a loss of human capital. The broader society bears the indirect costs of crime in the form of lost property, security expenditures and emotional trauma.

Policy Inefficiency and Institutional Fatigue: Persistently high recidivism rates can lead to policy fatigue, where lawmakers and stakeholders become disillusioned with reform efforts that yield limited results. Correctional staff may also experience burnout due to the repetitive nature of dealing with the same offenders, undermining morale and institutional effectiveness.

Implications of Recidivism on Public Order

Recidivism has far-reaching implications for public order, especially in countries like Nigeria where criminal justice institutions face systemic inefficiencies and correctional facilities struggle to fulfil their rehabilitative mandate. Public order is the bedrock of a stable society—it encompasses the maintenance of peace, security and the effective enforcement of law. However, the continuous return of offenders to criminal activities after incarceration severely undermines this order.

One of the most immediate implications is the deterioration of community safety. When ex-convicts reoffend, it leads to repeated cycles of criminal acts such as theft, assault, kidnapping and cult-related violence. These not only increase crime statistics but also erode the sense of security that communities rely on for day-to-day living. In Akwa Ibom State, cases of violent re-offenses by known ex-inmates have led to increased public anxiety, fear-driven migration from certain neighbourhoods and the disruption of economic and social life.

Another critical implication is the weakening of public confidence in legal institutions. Recidivism often signals the failure of the correctional system to reform offenders. This perceived ineffectiveness delegitimises the criminal justice process and encourages alternative, often unlawful, means of maintaining order—such as jungle justice or vigilante enforcement. Such practices not only violate human rights but also contribute to the normalisation of violence in conflict resolution.

Furthermore, recidivism burdens security agencies and the judiciary, diverting limited resources to managing repeat offenders rather than addressing new or emerging security threats. The police, courts and prison systems become overburdened with cyclical cases involving the same individuals, thus reducing institutional efficiency and stretching public budgets. The consequence is an overwhelmed system that is reactive rather than preventive.

Additionally, the socioeconomic fabric of society is adversely affected. High recidivism undermines efforts toward inclusive development, especially in communities where youths are disproportionately affected by incarceration and repeat offending. The return of ex-offenders to crime often exacerbates unemployment, school dropouts and social deviance, thereby fuelling a cycle of instability and weakening societal norms.

In terms of governance, persistent recidivism can also hinder effective public policy implementation. When public order is threatened by crime, government efforts toward urban planning, investment promotion, tourism and infrastructure development are stalled or diverted. Investors may avoid areas perceived to be unsafe, while citizens lose faith in public programs meant to ensure their welfare and protection.

Setting Agenda towards Prevention and Control of Recidivism in Nigerian Correctional System

Effectively preventing and controlling recidivism requires a multi-pronged, evidence-based approach that addresses both institutional failures within the correctional system and the broader structural conditions that predispose ex-inmates to reoffend. In the Nigerian context, where correctional centres

are under-resourced, rehabilitation is poorly implemented and reintegration is largely unsupported there is a pressing need to set a strategic agenda that reorients the correctional system from punitive containment to restorative transformation.

Institutional Reforms and Rehabilitation Programming:

A central agenda should be the comprehensive reform of correctional facilities, with a shift in focus from punishment to rehabilitation. Correctional centres must be equipped with vocational training workshops, educational programs, counselling services and spiritual development initiatives. These efforts should be tailored to inmates' individual needs and matched with post-release opportunities (Okorie, 2023). Rehabilitation must begin at admission and be consistently monitored and evaluated throughout incarceration.

Strengthening Post-Release Supervision and Community Reintegration:

Recidivism often occurs when ex-offenders are released into communities without adequate guidance or support. Establishing parole boards, halfway homes and community-based supervision programs can provide structured re-entry plans that include employment assistance, housing support and regular psychological check-ins. Religious institutions, civil society groups and traditional councils in Akwa Ibom State can play a critical role in this process by facilitating reintegration and reducing stigma.

Multi-Sectoral Collaboration:

Preventing recidivism is not the sole responsibility of the correctional service. A national agenda should encourage collaboration between the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Productivity, law enforcement agencies, private sector actors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Programs like "second chance" employment schemes and microcredit support for ex-inmates can reduce the lure of returning to crime.

Data Collection and Evidence-Based Policy:

Nigeria currently lacks a centralised and reliable database for tracking recidivism rates. Developing a national recidivism monitoring system will help policy makers design data-driven interventions, identify high-risk groups and evaluate the effectiveness of correctional strategies. This database should include biometric records, rehabilitation program histories and post-release monitoring data.

Legislative and Policy Support:

There is a need to review and amend laws and policies that inhibit successful reintegration. For instance, ex-offenders are often denied access to employment, education and credit due to their criminal records. Policies that promote the expungement of minor records after demonstrated good behaviour can remove barriers to reintegration. Legislative frameworks should also make rehabilitation a mandatory and enforceable component of sentencing.

Public Awareness and Stigma Reduction:

Stigmatisation remains one of the most significant drivers of recidivism. Public enlightenment campaigns aimed at reshaping perceptions about ex-convicts can foster more inclusive communities. Media, schools and religious organisations must educate the public on the value of second chances and the importance of restorative justice in ensuring long-term public order.

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:

Every anti-recidivism program should include clearly defined goals, performance indicators and mechanisms for accountability. Correctional authorities should partner with universities and independent evaluators to conduct longitudinal studies that assess the long-term impact of rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

In sum, setting a viable agenda for the prevention and control of recidivism in Nigeria requires political will, institutional

reform, societal support and sustainable investment. The long-term stability and public order of states like Akwa Ibom depend not merely on incarcerating offenders but on transforming them into productive, law-abiding citizens. Solomon *et al.* (2004) stated that success in reducing recidivism can translate into improvements in public safety and reintegration of former prisoners into the labour force, families, communities, schools and religious organisations.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that the phenomenon of recidivism in Nigerian correctional centres, particularly in Akwa Ibom State, is a complex and systemic issue rooted in the structural failures of the correctional system, the socio-economic environment and institutional neglect. The recurrence of criminal behaviour among released inmates is not simply a matter of personal choice or moral weakness; rather, it is significantly influenced by the conditions of imprisonment, the absence of rehabilitative programmes and the failure of post-release reintegration mechanisms. Correctional centres, as observed in this study, remain largely punitive, with limited emphasis on transforming inmates into productive and law-abiding citizens. Inmates are subjected to overcrowded cells, inadequate healthcare, lack of education and vocational training and minimal psychosocial support, all of which reinforce deviant behaviour rather than correct it (Bassey *et al.*, 2023).

These findings are consistent with earlier research by Ugwuoke and Igbo (2003), which emphasised that the Nigerian prison system functions more as a holding facility than a reform institution. Inmates are rarely offered opportunities for personal development or societal reintegration and upon release; they are thrust back into environments that originally contributed to their criminal conduct, poverty, unemployment, family disintegration and community rejection. In line with the arguments of Umeobika and

Ejimofofor (2024), this study confirms that without structural support and community inclusion, the likelihood of reoffending remains high. The failure to provide meaningful second chances further entrench a cycle of criminality that prisons are meant to interrupt.

Another critical dimension of the findings is the link between recidivism and the erosion of public order. In Akwa Ibom State, repeat offenses contribute to the instability of neighbourhoods, the proliferation of youth gangs, the resurgence of cultism and the rise of mob justice, particularly in urban centres like Uyo and Ikot Ekpene. This connection underscores the fact that correctional failure is not isolated within the walls of the prison; its consequences ripple into the wider society. Public confidence in the justice system is weakened when known offenders are repeatedly arrested for similar crimes.

The theoretical framing of this study through Social Contract Theory provides an interpretive lens through which these findings can be understood. The theory suggests that the state, in exchange for the obedience of its citizens, has a duty to ensure justice, security and rehabilitation. However, when the state fails to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders, treating them instead with neglect, cruelty, or indifference, it effectively breaks the social contract. Offenders, in turn, may feel alienated and disconnected from societal norms, leading to further defiance and deviance. This aligns with Sherman's (1993) Defiance Theory, which postulates that individuals who perceive the criminal justice process as unjust are more likely to reoffend out of anger, resentment, or a desire to retaliate against the system that failed them.

The implications of these findings are substantial. Not only is the correctional system ineffective at reforming offenders, but it also contributes to the persistence of insecurity and the weakening of lawful authority. The recurrence of crime among ex-convicts frustrates law enforcement efforts,

overburdens the judiciary and imposes additional costs on the state, both financially and socially. Communities become unsafe and the thin line between criminal justice and mob retaliation becomes blurred. The findings of this study therefore support the thesis that recidivism in Nigerian correctional centres is a systemic failure with direct consequences on public order. By failing to meet its rehabilitative obligations, the state contributes to a self-reinforcing cycle of criminality and social instability. The study calls for a reconceptualisation of correctional philosophy in Nigeria, with a shift from punitive containment to transformative rehabilitation grounded in justice, human dignity and social reintegration.

Conclusion

This study critically examined the persistent challenge of recidivism in Nigerian correctional centres, with specific focus on its causes, consequences and implications for public order in Akwa Ibom State. The findings demonstrate that recidivism is not merely an outcome of individual criminal tendencies, but rather the result of a complex interplay of systemic, institutional and socio-economic factors. Foremost among these are the failure of correctional facilities to rehabilitate offenders, the absence of post-incarceration support, widespread stigmatisation of ex-convicts and limited access to lawful means of survival after release.

The research established a strong correlation between recidivism and the breakdown of public order, especially in Akwa Ibom State where recurring criminal behaviour contributes to rising insecurity, public fear and the growing incidence of mob justice. Inadequate correctional policies and under-resourced facilities have contributed significantly to a revolving-door pattern of incarceration that undermines both the justice system and the community's sense of safety.

These findings affirm the central thesis of the study: that recidivism in Nigeria is not solely

the failure of individuals, but rather a reflection of deep-rooted institutional weaknesses and the state's failure to fulfil its social contract of justice, rehabilitation and reintegration. Addressing recidivism, therefore, requires not only legal reform but a transformative approach that prioritises inclusive development, institutional accountability and community-based reintegration mechanisms.

The implications of this study are multifaceted. They highlight the urgent need for systemic reforms in Nigeria's correctional system, improved funding for rehabilitation programs and a stronger commitment to restorative justice. Furthermore, it calls for inter-agency collaboration and public education aimed at reducing stigma and facilitating social reintegration of ex-offenders as a pathway to sustainable peace and order.

In terms of contribution to knowledge, the study offers a localised understanding of recidivism by focusing on Akwa Ibom State—an area that has received limited scholarly attention in correctional studies. It also enriches criminological theory by applying Social Contract Theory as a normative framework that emphasises the reciprocal responsibilities of the state and the individual. By doing so, the study bridges theory and practice, presenting recidivism as both a justice system failure and a public order concern.

For further research, the study recommends deeper empirical investigations using qualitative and mixed-methods approaches that engage directly with former inmates, correctional officials and community members. Comparative studies across Nigerian states or with other developing countries could also provide broader insights into effective correctional models. Additionally, research into the gender-specific experiences of recidivism and the role of community-based, faith-driven, or traditional support structures in

rehabilitation would offer more inclusive and culturally relevant policy solutions.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proposed to reduce recidivism and promote public order in Nigeria, with a focus on Akwa Ibom State:

- i. *Strengthen Rehabilitation and Skills Acquisition Programmes: Correctional centres must prioritise inmate rehabilitation by establishing functional vocational training, adult literacy, entrepreneurial education and psychological counselling services. These programmes should be aligned with labour market demands to ensure employability upon release.*
- ii. *Develop a Structured Post-Release Reintegration Framework: Government agencies, in collaboration with civil society, should establish post-release support systems such as halfway homes, supervised parole programs and community-based reintegration centres. These institutions should provide housing, job placement, mental health care and social reintegration services.*
- iii. *Improve Funding and Infrastructure in Correctional Facilities: The federal and state governments must increase budgetary allocations to the Nigerian Correctional Service. Investments should focus on decongesting facilities, improving living conditions, providing basic medical care and updating training equipment and workshops.*
- iv. *Train and Retrain Correctional Personnel: Correctional staff should be regularly trained on modern correctional practices, human rights and inmate rehabilitation techniques.*

The service must shift from a custodial to a correctional model, emphasising reform and social re-entry rather than punishment.

- v. *Reform Judicial and Legal Processes: Efforts should be made to reduce the number of pretrial detainees through speedy trial mechanisms, non-custodial sentencing (e.g., community service) and restorative justice approaches. This will reduce prison congestion and promote individualised justice.*
- vi. *Combat Stigmatisation of Ex-Offenders: Public enlightenment campaigns should be launched to educate communities about the importance of accepting reformed ex-offenders. Religious leaders, traditional institutions and the media should promote messages of forgiveness, reintegration and second chances. Addressing recidivism requires the coordinated efforts of the Nigerian Correctional Service, judiciary, police, ministries of education and labour, NGOs, community-based organisations and private sector actors. Joint efforts can enhance service delivery and promote sustainable reintegration.*
- vii. *Legislative Review and Policy Support: The National Assembly should review outdated prison regulations and make rehabilitation legally binding within the correctional framework. State governments, including Akwa Ibom, should domesticate and enforce the Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019, to reflect local realities.*

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