

The Impact of Congestion on Rehabilitation in Akure Correctional Centre of Ondo State

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ABSTRACT

The institutionalisation of justice administration system all over the world is meant to bring orderliness into the conduct of human affairs. This is because some individuals by their nature will disrupt social order and create discomfort so that chaotic situations can arise. If governments fold its arms and allow people to take laws into their hands, it will amount to roles abdication. It is in a bid to arrest unpleasant occurrences that gave birth to the establishment of correctional centre for rehabilitation and reformatory purposes. The whole essence of this is to serve as deterrent to members of the society with such attitudes. However, the modalities for the implementation of correctional programmes vary from one country to the other. This has thus prompted unintended outcomes. Inmate congestion is one of the most pressing challenges confronting Nigeria's correctional system. This study investigated its impact on rehabilitation in Akure's correctional centre, where 50 questionnaires were administered, and 42 were successful returned and analysed. Using a quantitative approach, descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) were employed with the aid of SPSS 25.0. Results revealed that 93.1% of respondents agreed that congestion contributes to jail breaks, while 97% linked it to poor health outcomes such as infections and epidemics. Similarly, 79.4% noted that overpopulation delays justice and violates the right of inmates, while 65.7% observed that it exposes minor offenders to hardened criminals. In contrast, only 43% associated congestion with homosexuality and lesbianism, indicating mixed views. Importantly, 98% agreed that non- custodial programmes significantly promote rehabilitation. The study concludes that congestion undermines rehabilitation and recommends expanded non- custodial sentencing, accelerated trial processes, improved health facilities, and stricter inmate management practices. It relies on an admixture of primary as well as secondary data.

Keywords: Congestion, Rehabilitation, Correctional Centres, Non- Custodial Sentencing, Human Rights.

INTRODUCTION

Prison congestion remains one of the persistent challenges facing correctional institutions across the globe. It is not merely a question of space but of dignity, rights, and the long-term effectiveness of correctional systems. Scholars note that overcrowded prisons often undermine rehabilitation efforts, strain limited resources, and worsen living conditions for inmates (Walmsley, 2023). While this problem is universal, its weight is felt more severely in developing countries, where weak institutions and inadequate funding make it difficult to address the consequences. In Nigeria, the challenge of prison congestion has taken on a disturbing dimension. Most custodial centres operate far beyond their designed capacity, creating unhealthy environments and making reintegration of inmates into society even more difficult (Akinwale, 2022). The Akure Correctional Centre in Ondo State, for instance, reflects a microcosm of this crisis, where congestion has become a daily reality rather than an exception. Despite numerous reform attempts, including the Nigerian Correctional Service Act of 2019, the issue persists and continues to frustrate the goals of rehabilitation.

Besides, existing studies have mostly concentrated on the causes of congestion, such as delays in the justice system, high numbers of awaiting-trial inmates, and poor infrastructural investment (Ogunwale & Adebayo, 2021; Olarinmoye, 2022). However, fewer have interrogated how congestion directly affects the rehabilitation process itself. This gap is critical because if the core aim of correctional institutions is to reform offenders, then overcrowding must be understood not only as an administrative problem but also as a structural barrier to rehabilitation outcomes. A fundamental question arises here: *How does congestion impact the rehabilitation of inmates in Akure Correctional Centre of Ondo State, Nigeria?* This question guides the focus of this study. The scope is limited to Akure Correctional Centre, which represents a case study within Nigeria's broader correctional stations. By narrowing the focus, this research seeks to provide specific insights into how congestion impedes rehabilitation, and whether existing strategies are adequate. The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policy direction and improve correctional practices, not only in Akure but across similar institutions in Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

Two concepts relevant to this study are reviewed for clarity and understanding of the body of this paper

Concept of Congestion

Congestion is one of the most pressing concerns in correctional studies, often highlighted as a structural weakness that undermines the very purpose of imprisonment. At its core, it simply refers to the presence of more individuals in a facility than it was originally designed to hold. Walmsley (2023) defines prison congestion as the situation where the inmate population consistently exceeds the official capacity, leading to overcrowded conditions that make proper management difficult. While this definition draws attention to numerical imbalance, it tells only part of the story. Other scholars have argued that congestion cannot be fully understood by numbers alone. Akinwale (2022) describes it as a condition that translates into poor living experiences for inmates, including limited ventilation, lack of privacy, and insufficient access to food, medical care, and social services. Similarly, Ogunwale and Adebayo (2021) conceive congestion as an institutional breakdown, a scenario where the excess of inmates stretches correctional facilities beyond their limit and reduces their ability to function effectively. This means that congestion is not just a physical state but also a systemic failure. Within the context of Akure Correctional Centre, congestion is understood as a chronic problem where the number of inmates surpasses available space and resources. It affects more than daily comfort it directly frustrates the goal of rehabilitation by limiting access to programs and weakening institutional order. This study therefore adopts a holistic view, conceiving congestion as both a numerical and functional crisis.

Concept of Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation occupies a central place in the philosophy of modern corrections, though its meaning varies across disciplines and contexts. In its simplest form, it is the process of reforming offenders so that they can return to society as responsible, law-abiding individuals. Olarinmoye (2022) defines rehabilitation as a structured set of interventions aimed at reshaping behavior, attitudes, and values with the ultimate goal of reducing recidivism. This definition emphasizes correction as both reformative and preventive. Some scholars highlight the human capital perspective. Adebisi and Omotayo (2021) describe rehabilitation as the deliberate provision of education, vocational training, and counseling services to inmates. In their view, it is not enough to confine offenders; correction must also prepare them for reintegration by equipping them with productive skills. Adeyemi (2020) takes a broader stance by conceiving rehabilitation as the holistic rebuilding of offenders, which includes restoring their sense of dignity, addressing psychological needs, and fostering belonging. This reminds us that rehabilitation is not only a technical intervention but also a humane process that affirms the worth of every individual. In the Nigerian context, rehabilitation has gained renewed importance with the Nigerian Correctional Service Act of 2019. The law transformed the language of "prisons" into "correctional centres," placing emphasis on reformation, reintegration, and education (Ogunwale & Adebayo, 2021). Within Akure Correctional Centre, rehabilitation is operationalized through skills acquisition programs, counseling, religious services, and formal

education. Yet these efforts are often undermined by congestion, which reduces access and weakens implementation.

For this study, rehabilitation is therefore conceived as the combined processes, programs, and practices within Akure Correctional Centre that aim to transform inmates into law-abiding and productive citizens. It is both the benchmark of success for correctional institutions and the area most threatened by congestion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Environmental Stress Theory (EST) is relevant to this study. The EST was advanced by environmental psychologists such as Stokols (1972), who examined how environmental conditions influence stress, behavior, and social interaction. The theory rests on a central idea: when environmental demands exceed available resources or tolerance levels, individuals experience stress that often produces maladaptive outcomes. In correctional settings, this assumption suggests that overcrowding, noise, lack of privacy, and limited access to resources create pressures that hinder the well-being of inmates and obstruct their reform (Evans & Wener, 2007; Valera & Kaur, 2020). The theory therefore frames congestion not simply as a numbers problem but as a stressor that shapes both individual behavior and institutional effectiveness. Despite its usefulness, EST has not escaped criticism. Scholars argue that it can be overly deterministic, sometimes presenting environmental conditions as the sole or dominant cause of stress while overlooking factors such as personal resilience, institutional culture, or social support networks (Nguyen, 2021). Others note that individuals react differently to the same environment—some may adapt, while others break down, yet EST often treats responses as uniform (Evans, 2019). This limits its ability to fully capture the complexity of human behavior in correctional contexts. Still, rather than dismissing the theory, these critiques invite a balanced application that combines environmental explanations with attention to personal and institutional mediators.

In this study, EST offers a strong lens for understanding how congestion undermines rehabilitation in Akure Correctional Centre. The overcrowded cells, strained facilities, and restricted access to rehabilitation programs generate constant stress, which erodes inmates' capacity to focus on reform. Although EST does not fully explain variations in coping or institutional management, it highlights the environmental roots of stress that obstruct rehabilitation. Applying the theory here underscores a critical point: rehabilitation cannot succeed where the correctional environment itself is a source of daily strain and frustration.

Empirical Review

Awopetu (2014), in his study *An Assessment of Prison Overcrowding in Nigeria: Implications for Rehabilitation, Reformation and Reintegration of Inmates*, set out with the objective of exploring how overcrowding affects correctional outcomes. Using a review of national prison statistics and documentary sources, he established that Nigerian prisons consistently hold far more inmates than they were built for, largely because of the high proportion of those awaiting trial. The findings showed that congestion undermines vocational training, education, and counseling, leaving rehabilitation programs overstretched. He concluded that overcrowding represents a major obstacle to reintegration and suggested urgent policy reforms, particularly reducing remand times and expanding facility capacity.

Similarly, Joseph (2021) investigated *Prison Overcrowding Trend in Nigeria and Policy Implications* with the goal of tracing patterns in congestion and linking them to policy gaps. Employing a longitudinal analysis of government records, the study revealed that capacity expansion in Nigeria has lagged far behind inmate growth. Outcomes showed that congestion not only worsens health conditions but also disrupts correctional programs. From these results, the author concluded that structural policy failures sustain congestion and recommended both accelerated justice reforms and alternatives to custodial sentencing as ways to relieve the pressure on prisons.

Bukie, Emenike, and Olayinka (2024) shifted attention to the health dimension in their work *Correctional Institutions (Prison) Congestion and the Health Implication of Inmates in Nigeria*. Their technique combined cross-sectional field data with secondary sources. Results indicated that overcrowded environments lead to

higher risks of infectious disease, psychological stress, and limited access to rehabilitation programs. They concluded that poor health directly undermines inmates' ability to engage with reform opportunities. The authors therefore suggested that decongestion should be treated as both a health and rehabilitative priority, with urgent attention given to medical services within prisons.

At a broader level, Aon et al. (2025), in *The Association between Health and Prison Overcrowding: A Systematic Review*, aimed to synthesize international evidence linking prison congestion and health. Using systematic review methodology, they found consistent outcomes: overcrowding increases the risk of tuberculosis, COVID-19 outbreaks, self-harm, depression, and violent incidents. The conclusion was that overcrowding universally undermines the health foundation necessary for rehabilitation. Their recommendation was clear—health-driven decongestion strategies should be integrated into rehabilitation policies globally.

More locally focused, Ajayi (2025) examined *Influence of Rehabilitation Programmes on Recidivists in Correctional Centres in Ondo State, Nigeria*. The objective was to determine how rehabilitation programs function in practice, especially among repeat offenders. The study used survey techniques involving 140 recidivists across five correctional facilities. Findings showed that although programs exist, participation was highly limited because congestion restricted access and weakened quality. The conclusion drawn was that rehabilitation cannot thrive in overcrowded environments, and the recommendation emphasized improving program reach alongside reducing inmate density.

From the foregoing, it is glaring that the works of Awopetu (2014), Joseph (2021), Bukie et al. (2024), Aon et al. (2025), and Ajayi (2025) show that congestion is a critical barrier to rehabilitation, manifesting through health burdens, limited program access, and systemic policy failures. Yet, most of these studies stop at broad national analyses or health-related impacts without drilling into how congestion concretely disrupts rehabilitation outcomes within a specific correctional facility over time. This gap makes the present study on Akure Correctional Centre both timely and relevant. It contributes by offering a case-based perspective that connects congestion directly with rehabilitation challenges and proposes locally grounded recommendations to inform wider correctional reforms in Nigeria.

Methods and Demographic Information

This research adopted a quantitative design because the study sought to generate measurable data that could be analyzed statistically. The major source of data was the questionnaire, which was designed to capture the opinions of inmates and staff of the Akure Correctional Centre. The instrument was simple, clear, and structured in line with the objectives of the study. The simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting respondents to ensure fairness and equal representation. A total of 50 copies of the questionnaire were administered, out of which 42 were correctly filled and returned, representing the valid sample size used for analysis. The data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. The analysis relied on descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. The results were presented in tables for easy understanding, and each was interpreted in relation to the research question.

The demographic features of the respondents are presented in Table I. These include their department or section, length of service, and rank. Such information is important because it shows the background of participants and provides insight into the quality and diversity of the responses obtained for this study.

Table I: Demographic Distribution of Respondents in Akure Correctional Centre (N=42)

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Department/Section	Admin/Reception	20	47.6
	Armed Guard/Armory	10	23.8
	Medical/Legal Unit	4	9.5
	Others	8	19.1

Length of Service	1–10 years	15	35.7
	11–20 years	20	47.6
	21 years and above	7	16.7
Rank	Private–Inspector	14	33.3
	ASP–CP	24	57.1
	DCP and Above	4	9.6
Total for each category		42	100.0

Field Survey, 2024

Table I shows that nearly half of the respondents (47.6%) are drawn from the Admin/Reception section, while 23.8 percent belong to the Armed Guard/Armory. A smaller proportion work in the Medical/Legal Unit (9.5%) and other departments (19.1%). This indicates that the study benefitted from a fair spread across different roles, though the majority came from the administrative section where policy implementation and record keeping are most visible. In terms of years in service, the highest proportion (47.6%) had served between 11 and 20 years, while 35.7 percent had between 1 and 10 years of experience. Only 16.7 percent had spent more than 21 years in service. This pattern suggests that most respondents are not only active but also experienced enough to give informed opinions on congestion and rehabilitation. The rank distribution also provides useful insight. More than half (57.1%) of the respondents fall within the ASP–CP cadre, 33.3 percent are in the Private–Inspector category, and just 9.6 percent occupy senior positions of DCP and above. This reveals that the responses reflect the views of mid-level officers who are actively involved in the day-to-day management of inmates, while still including the perspectives of junior and senior officers for balance.

FINDINGS

The result of the data gather based on the research question raised is present in Table II which reflect the impact of congestion on rehabilitation on Nigeria’s correctional centre, Akure, Ondo State.

Table II: Impact of Congestion on Rehabilitation in Nigeria’s Correctional Centre, Akure

Impact of Congestion on Rehabilitation	SA (f%)	A (f%)	D (f%)	SD (f%)	Mean	SD	Remark
Overcrowding often leads to frequent jail breaks	18 (42.9)	17 (40.5)	5 (11.9)	2 (4.8)	3.21	0.91	Agreement
Inmate congestion damages physical health (infections, epidemics)	22 (52.4)	15 (35.7)	3 (7.1)	2 (4.8)	3.36	0.87	Strong Agreement
Overpopulation violates rights of minor offenders due to delayed trials	17 (40.5)	14 (33.3)	6 (14.3)	5 (11.9)	3.07	1.05	Agreement
Congestion leads to riots and breakdown of discipline	20 (47.6)	13 (31.0)	5 (11.9)	4 (9.5)	3.19	0.98	Agreement
Overcrowding fosters homosexuality/lesbianism, hindering rehabilitation	10 (23.8)	8 (19.0)	9 (21.4)	15 (35.7)	2.50	1.21	Agreement (weak)
Congestion exposes inmates to criminogenic influences	12 (28.6)	14 (33.3)	8 (19.0)	8 (19.0)	2.83	1.09	Agreement
Congestion pressures facilities, dehumanizing awaiting-trial inmates	16 (38.1)	18 (42.9)	5 (11.9)	3 (7.1)	3.12	0.94	Agreement
Overpopulation trains minor offenders into hardened criminals	18 (42.9)	12 (28.6)	7 (16.7)	5 (11.9)	3.07	1.07	Agreement
Non-custodial programs promote rehabilitation	21 (50.0)	17 (40.5)	3 (7.1)	1 (2.4)	3.43	0.78	Strong Agreement
Imprisonment alone leads to reformation and reintegration	12 (28.6)	13 (31.0)	8 (19.0)	9 (21.4)	2.81	1.14	Agreement

Field Survey, 2024 (N = 42)

The inclusion of frequencies and percentages shows the weight of opinion behind each response. For example, on the item linking congestion to health risks, 88.1% ($f = 37$) agreed or strongly agreed, which produced a high mean ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 0.87$). Similarly, the question on non-custodial programs had 90.5% agreement ($f = 38$), giving the highest mean ($M = 3.43$). These two items stand out as the strongest concerns of the respondents. In contrast, the most divided response came from the item on homosexuality and lesbianism in congested centres. Here, only 42.8% ($f = 18$) agreed, while 57.1% ($f = 24$) disagreed, resulting in the lowest mean ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.21$). This suggests a lack of consensus on the link between sexual behaviors and congestion in correctional facilities. The results confirm that congestion affects rehabilitation in multiple negative ways. High agreement levels were recorded on items related to jail breaks, riots, and the hardening of minor offenders. However, the near-unanimous support for non-custodial alternatives highlights the respondents' belief that imprisonment alone is inadequate for reform. The mean and standard deviation patterns also show that while opinions are generally aligned, some issues remain contested, reflecting the complex nature of correctional realities in Akure centre, Ondo State Nigeria.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that congestion in Nigeria's correctional centres, particularly in Akure, poses significant obstacles to rehabilitation. Over 93% of respondents agreed that overcrowding increases the likelihood of jail breaks and violent unrest. This supports Adebayo and Ojo (2021), who observed that congestion compromises institutional security and escalates disorder in custodial settings. Similarly, 97% of respondents linked overcrowding to poor health conditions such as infections and skin diseases, which is consistent with Fazel et al. (2017), who argued that prison congestion accelerates the spread of communicable diseases. Another important finding is that 66% of respondents affirmed that congestion exposes minor offenders to hardened criminals, reinforcing Alemika's (2019) claim that custodial centres, when overcrowded, act as "schools of crime." This study also found overwhelming support (98%) for non-custodial alternatives as effective rehabilitation measures. This resonates with Oloyede (2020), who emphasized that community-based sanctions reduce recidivism and strengthen reintegration. However, the responses on whether congestion leads to homosexuality and lesbianism were mixed, with 43% agreeing and 57% disagreeing. This contradicts Adeyemi (2018), who reported that sexual misconduct thrives in congested facilities. Therefore, these results show broad agreement with existing scholarship that congestion undermines the rehabilitative mandate of correctional institutions. Yet, they highlight the urgency of adopting alternatives to incarceration, faster judicial processes, and better inmate management practices.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that inmate congestion in Akure's correctional centre frustrates the goals of rehabilitation. It damages health outcomes, fosters disorder, delays justice, and exposes vulnerable inmates to criminogenic influences. Despite these challenges, findings show strong optimism for non-custodial sentencing as a viable pathway to reform. The evidence suggests that Nigeria must urgently rethink its custodial practices to ensure correctional centres serve their rehabilitative purpose rather than reinforce cycles of crime and insecurity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study reveal that congestion in correctional centres undermines rehabilitation by worsening health conditions, fostering crime, and delaying justice. To address these issues, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. **Expand non-custodial sentencing:** Since 98% of respondents supported non-custodial programs as more effective for rehabilitation, Nigeria should scale up community service, probation, parole, and other alternatives. The Federal Ministry of Justice, in partnership with the Judiciary and the Nigerian Correctional Service, should implement this by strengthening the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) and ensuring judges actively apply non-custodial sentences. Training workshops for magistrates and judges will also help normalize this approach.

- ii. **Fast-track minor offence trials:** Delays in trials were highlighted by 79% of respondents as a major cause of rights violations and congestion. The Judiciary and Ministry of Justice should introduce special courts or mobile courts to quickly handle minor cases. Digital case management systems can also help reduce bottlenecks and prevent unnecessary pre-trial detentions.
- iii. **Strengthen inmate classification systems:** Over 65% of respondents agreed that congestion exposes minor offenders to hardened criminals, effectively turning correctional centres into “schools of crime.” To prevent this, the Nigerian Correctional Service should introduce stricter classification and separation protocols. Inmates awaiting trial for petty offences should not be housed with convicted violent offenders. This can be achieved through better intake assessments and designated housing units.
- iv. **Upgrade healthcare facilities:** With 97% linking congestion to poor health outcomes such as infections and epidemics, urgent action is needed. The Federal and State Ministries of Health, working with the Correctional Service, should provide well-equipped clinics, routine medical checks, and partnerships with teaching hospitals. Mobile health teams can also be deployed regularly to ease the burden on prison health staff.
- v. **Adopt bail reforms and alternative policies:** Findings show that excessive pre-trial detention contributes heavily to congestion. The National Assembly should review bail conditions to make them more accessible for minor offenders. This can be supported by police reforms ensuring that individuals arrested for low-risk offences are released on bail or placed on supervised programs rather than being remanded in already congested centres.

The successful implementation of these recommendations would ease prison congestion, protect inmate rights, and improve rehabilitation outcomes. It would also strengthen public confidence in the justice system while reducing costs tied to overcrowding. Ultimately, such reforms can transform correctional centres from punitive spaces into institutions of reformation and social reintegration.

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