

The Socioeconomic Consequences of Inmates Congestion in Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre, Ondo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study employed a quantitative research design to examine the socioeconomic consequences of inmate congestion at Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre in Ondo State, Nigeria. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to inmates and correctional officers to capture both experiential and administrative perspectives on overcrowding. A stratified sampling technique ensured fair representation, resulting in 31 valid responses from an initial sample of 40 participants. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, means, and standard deviations, with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25.0).

Findings revealed that inmate congestion significantly undermines inmates' physical health, contributing to the spread of infections, epidemics, and skin diseases. Overcrowding was also found to increase institutional stress, promote tension and dehumanization among awaiting-trial inmates, and heighten the likelihood of jailbreaks and breakdown of discipline. Furthermore, congestion limits access to welfare services and rehabilitation programs, thereby weakening reintegration outcomes and exposing inmates to criminogenic influences. Although moderate agreement was observed regarding its role in worsening criminal behavior, respondents expressed divergent views on its relationship with inmates' sexual behavior. Importantly, non-custodial measures were widely recognized as effective alternatives for promoting rehabilitation and reducing congestion.

The study concludes that inmate congestion is a structural and operational challenge with far-reaching implications for correctional efficiency, inmate welfare, and societal reintegration. It recommends integrated reforms, including infrastructural expansion, strengthened policy implementation, capacity building for correctional officers, and increased adoption of non-custodial sentencing measures.

Keywords: Inmate congestion, Socioeconomic consequences, Correctional centres, strain theory, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Prison congestion commonly described as inmate overcrowding remains a pressing global concern with serious implications for justice systems, human rights, and the goals of rehabilitation. In many parts of the world, correctional facilities house far more people than they were designed to hold, creating harsh living conditions, exposing inmates to health risks, and undermining efforts at reintegration (Walmsley, 2023). The situation is particularly severe in developing regions, where chronic underfunding and institutional inefficiencies make it difficult to manage custodial populations effectively. Across Africa, and especially in Nigeria, overcrowded prisons have become a structural crisis that compromises both inmate welfare and the stability of correctional management (Ogbanga & Bukie, 2024).

Nigeria's experience illustrates the depth of this challenge. Reports suggest that many correctional centres operate at more than twice their intended capacity, a condition driven by infrastructural decay, excessive reliance on pre-trial detention, and a sluggish judicial process (Akinfenwa, 2022; NCoS, 2022). Such conditions have produced widespread deprivation among inmates – poor food quality, inadequate healthcare, and substandard sanitation, all of which erode constitutional guarantees of human dignity. While scholarship has long emphasized the human rights violations associated with congestion (Obioha, 2020; Alemika & Chukwuma, 2019), much less attention has been directed at its wider social and economic repercussions for families, communities, and state institutions.

This study addresses that gap by examining the socioeconomic consequences of congestion in Nigeria's correctional system. Overcrowding not only strains daily custodial operations but also inflates state expenditure, worsens public health risks, destabilizes family relations, and contributes to insecurity through rising recidivism and frequent jailbreaks (Fazel, Seewald, & Yu, 2025). Yet, little empirical research has investigated how these consequences manifest within specific local contexts. The Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre in Ondo State provides a useful case study, reflecting many of the systemic and managerial difficulties that confront custodial institutions across the country.

Against this background, the research asks a central question: What are the socioeconomic consequences of inmate congestion in Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre, Ondo State? The study focuses exclusively on this facility to provide a detailed and grounded analysis, while also drawing broader lessons for correctional policy in Nigeria. By highlighting the socioeconomic costs of congestion, the study seeks to enrich criminal justice scholarship, inform judicial and correctional reform, and deepen public understanding of how custodial challenges intersect with broader patterns of social and economic stability in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

The concept of inmates' congestion and socioeconomic consequences were clarified for the ease of analysis and understanding of this paper.

Inmates' Congestion

Inmate congestion refers to the situation where the number of people held in correctional facilities exceeds their official capacity. When this happens, living conditions deteriorate and prison management becomes ineffective. Walmsley (2023) notes that this is not just a Nigerian problem but a global challenge that compromises security, limits access to health and education, and makes rehabilitation more difficult. In Nigeria, the issue has particular roots and consequences. Obioha (2020) explains that congestion arises when inmate populations grow far beyond available resources such as food, sanitation, and healthcare. This mismatch creates daily hardships for prisoners and mounting difficulties for custodial staff. Ogbanga and Bukie (2024) add that reliance on custodial sentencing, widespread pre-trial detention, and decaying prison infrastructure have left many facilities operating at more than twice their intended capacity. Oladipo and Akinyemi (2021) approach the matter from another angle, linking congestion to weak judicial processes and socio-political pressures that overstretch correctional centres. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that the problem is not merely a question of overcrowded space. Rather, it reflects deeper structural and judicial shortcomings that weaken the constitutional and rehabilitative role of Nigeria's correctional institutions.

Socioeconomic Consequences

The effects of inmate congestion are not confined to prison walls; they spill into society in multiple ways, affecting health systems, institutional efficiency, families, and community stability. Fazel, Seewald, and Yu (2025) emphasize the health dimension, observing that overcrowded facilities accelerate the spread of infectious diseases, worsen mental health problems, and drive up treatment costs for both correctional services and public health institutions. At the level of administration, Adebayo and Abiodun (2021) point out that congestion increases operational expenses, lowers staff efficiency, and undermines rehabilitation programmes. These

institutional weaknesses in turn erode the broader effectiveness of correctional management. From a household perspective, Western and Pettit (2010) stress that families often bear the brunt of imprisonment under harsh conditions. Beyond losing income earners, they face stigma that reduces their chances of upward social mobility. The community is not spared either. Okunola (2022) links congestion to rising insecurity, particularly jailbreaks and violent unrest, which place additional financial burdens on government through heightened spending on policing and emergency responses. Within this study, the term “socioeconomic consequences” therefore captures a wide spectrum of impacts health burdens, financial pressures, family disruptions, and community instability that collectively weaken the broader goals of Nigeria’s criminal justice system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Strain Theory, developed by Robert K. Merton (1938), explains deviant behaviour as a reaction to the gap between societal expectations and the limited means of achieving them. Merton argued that modern societies emphasise material success, but access to legitimate opportunities is unequal. This imbalance creates “strain,” which may push some individuals toward crime. He identified five ways people adapt to this pressure: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion (Merton, 1938; Cullen, Agnew, & Wilcox, 2021). Robert Agnew’s General Strain Theory (1992) expanded this idea. He noted that strain does not come only from blocked economic goals. It may also result from the failure to achieve other valued goals, the loss of something positive, or exposure to negative conditions. When combined with emotions like anger, frustration, or despair, these pressures increase the risk of deviant outcomes (Agnew, 1992; Agnew & Brezina, 2019). Although influential, Strain Theory has been criticised. Merton’s version focused too much on money and ignored other cultural or personal goals (Messner & Rosenfeld, 2012). Critics also point out that not everyone under strain turns to crime. It also struggles to explain white-collar or non-economic crimes (Paternoster & Mazerolle, 1994). Further, the theory pays little attention to how class, gender, and race shape the experience of strain (Broidy, 2019).

In Nigeria, criminologists have applied strain-based thinking to explain rising crime and prison congestion. Alemika (2011) shows how poverty and social inequality create frustration that leads to crime. Otu (2015) notes that weak judicial processes and corruption also produce structural strain, trapping many in prolonged pre-trial detention. Obioha (2020) links overcrowded prisons to systemic exclusion, arguing that poor access to justice reflects deeper social and economic divides. This perspective is useful for understanding Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre. The facility faces severe congestion, with more inmates than it was designed to hold. Overcrowding has led to poor living conditions, limited healthcare, and few opportunities for rehabilitation. These challenges create frustration among inmates and strain correctional officers who manage them. Families of inmates also suffer loss of income, while communities live under the risk of insecurity from jailbreaks and recidivism.

Strain Theory, despite its shortcomings, therefore provides a strong framework for this study. It explains how structural barriers within Okitipupa correctional service generate pressure on inmates, staff, and families. These pressures translate into wider social and economic burdens for the community and Nigeria at large.

Empirical Review on Socioeconomic Consequences of Inmates’ Congestion

Prison overcrowding has increasingly drawn scholarly attention because of its wide-ranging socioeconomic implications for inmates, correctional institutions, families, and society at large. Over the past decade, researchers have examined its effects across health, rehabilitation, security, and systemic justice outcomes. Yet, much of this literature is situated in broad national or multi-centre contexts, leaving notable gaps in location-specific analyses, especially in smaller facilities such as Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre. Joseph, Olanrewaju, and Adebajo (2021), in their study *Prison Overcrowding Trend in Nigeria and Policy Implications on Health*, explored how congestion affects prison health services. Drawing on a mixed-method approach that combined surveys with focus group discussions, they found that overcrowding accelerates the spread of communicable diseases, worsens inmates’ mental health, and overstretches already limited healthcare budgets.

The authors argued that prison congestion undermines rehabilitation and proposed reforms such as community service and alternative sentencing as pathways to decongesting facilities.

In a similar vein, Ogbanga and Bukie (2024), writing on *Correctional Institutions (Prison) Congestion and the Health Implication of Inmates in Nigeria*, examined the relationship between congestion and inmates' physical well-being. Using quantitative surveys across three correctional centres, their results pointed to a strong link between overcrowding and poor sanitation, malnutrition, and frequent disease outbreaks. They concluded that congestion places additional strain on public health systems and recommended infrastructural investment alongside health-focused reforms in the correctional sector.

At the level of rehabilitation, Olabamiji (2025) assessed the *Implications of Overcrowding for Offender Rehabilitation at the Ado-Ekiti Correctional Center*. Drawing on responses from 200 inmates and correctional officers, the study indicated that congestion limited access to educational, vocational, and psychological programmes, thereby diminishing the chances of successful reintegration. The author further argued that overcrowding contributes to persistent recidivism and weakens community stability, recommending expanded infrastructure and the adoption of non-custodial sentencing options.

Beyond health and rehabilitation, overcrowding also poses direct risks to community security. Okunola (2022), in his study *Prison Congestion and Community Insecurity in Nigeria*, employed qualitative interviews with correctional staff and community leaders to trace how prison conditions spill over into society. The findings revealed that overcrowding increases jailbreaks, heightens fear within host communities, and compels higher government expenditure on policing. He concluded that congestion is both an institutional and a public security challenge, calling for stronger inter-agency collaboration and judicial reforms.

Aghedo and Eke (2022), in *Prison Congestion, Justice System Failure, and Socioeconomic Instability in Nigeria*, interrogated the broader justice and inequality dimensions of overcrowding. Using documentary analysis and surveys, they showed that congestion reflects systemic weaknesses in Nigeria's justice system that perpetuate poverty and inequality, especially among inmates' families. Their study highlighted how overcrowding erodes public trust in judicial institutions and recommended holistic reforms coupled with welfare support for dependents of incarcerated persons.

It is glaring that the works of Joseph et al. (2021), Ogbanga and Bukie (2024), Olabamiji (2025), Okunola (2022), Aghedo and Eke (2022) provided important insights into the socioeconomic consequences of prison congestion. They illuminate its effects on health, rehabilitation, community security, and systemic stability. However, much of this scholarship remains generalized and often multi-centre, with limited focus on smaller facilities such as Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre. Moreover, few studies have simultaneously combined inmate and community perspectives within one empirical framework. These gaps underscore the relevance of the present study, which contributes by situating the socioeconomic consequences of prison congestion within a focused, underexplored context through a rigorous quantitative approach.

Methods And Demographic Characteristics

This study adopted a quantitative research design to explore the socioeconomic consequences of inmate congestion at Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre, Ondo State, Nigeria. Primary data were gathered through structured questionnaires administered to both inmates and correctional officers. This approach was deliberately chosen to capture perspectives from individuals who directly experience the effects of overcrowding and those responsible for managing its challenges. The use of a quantitative method made it possible to generate measurable and comparable insights into the relationship between congestion and its broader socioeconomic impacts. To ensure fairness in representation, a stratified sampling technique was employed. Forty participants were initially selected, and of these, 31 returned valid responses, which formed the basis for analysis. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical tools such as frequency distribution, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25.0). These techniques

provided a clear and systematic summary of the findings, allowing for an evidence-based discussion of the research problem and drawing of conclusion.

Table 4.1: Demographic Distributions of Respondents at Federal Correctional Service, Okitipupa (N = 31)

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Department/Section	Admin/Reception	18	58.06%
	Armed Guard/Armory	7	22.58%
	Medical/Legal Unit	2	6.45%
	Others	4	12.90%
Length of Service	01–10 years	11	35.48%
	11–20 years	16	51.61%
	21 years and above	4	12.90%
Rank	Private–Inspector	10	32.26%
	ASP–CP	18	58.06%
	DCP and Above	3	9.68%
Total Respondents for each category		31	100.0%

Source: SPSS Analysis Results.

The demographic profile of respondents is presented in Table I. Findings reveal that the majority of respondents work in the admin/reception section (58.06%), followed by those in the armed guard/armory (22.58%), medical/legal unit (6.45%), and other units (12.90%). With respect to years of service, more than half of the respondents (51.61%) have served between 11–20 years, 35.48% have 1–10 years of service, and only 12.90% have more than 21 years of service. This distribution underscores the participation of a predominantly experienced workforce with considerable exposure to correctional operations. Similarly, the distribution by rank shows that ASP–CP officers dominate (58.06%), followed by personnel within the Private–Inspector cadre (32.26%) and a smaller proportion of senior officers at the DCP and above level (9.68%). The preponderance of mid-level officers, alongside representation from both junior and senior cadres, strengthens the credibility of the dataset by providing perspectives across the hierarchy of correctional administration. Collectively, these demographic characteristics affirm that the study draws on insights from a knowledgeable and experienced population, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings on the socioeconomic consequences of inmates' congestion in Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The results of data gathered on the socioeconomic consequences of inmate congestion on rehabilitation in the Okitipupa, Federal Correctional Service Centre are thematically presented in **Table II** and interpreted.

Table II: Socioeconomic Consequences of Inmate Congestion at Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre

Statement	Strongly Agree f (%)	Agree f (%)	Disagree f (%)	Strongly Disagree f (%)	Mean ($\bar{x}$)	SD
Overcrowding often leads to frequent jailbreaks	12 (38.7)	15 (48.4)	3 (9.7)	1 (3.2)	3.23	0.78
Inmate congestion damages inmates' physical health (infections, epidemics, skin diseases)	18 (58.1)	10 (32.3)	2 (6.5)	1 (3.2)	3.45	0.80
Overpopulation leads to violation of inmates' rights, especially due to untimely trials	11 (35.5)	9 (29.0)	6 (19.4)	5 (16.1)	2.84	1.07

Inmate congestion leads to rioting and breakdown of discipline	14 (45.2)	9 (29.0)	3 (9.7)	5 (16.1)	3.03	1.08
Overcrowding promotes homosexuality/lesbianism, rehabilitating negating	6 (19.4)	7 (22.6)	8 (25.8)	10 (32.3)	2.29	1.09
Congestion exposes detainees to criminogenic influences and pre-trial detention worsens offending	8 (25.8)	13 (41.9)	5 (16.1)	5 (16.1)	2.77	1.00
Inmate congestion pressures facilities, creating tension and dehumanization of awaiting-trial inmates	10 (32.3)	16 (51.6)	3 (9.7)	2 (6.5)	3.10	0.85
Overpopulation trains minor offenders awaiting trial to commit more serious crimes	12 (38.7)	8 (25.8)	7 (22.6)	4 (12.9)	2.90	1.05
Non-custodial programs promote successful rehabilitation	17 (54.8)	11 (35.5)	3 (9.7)	0 (0.0)	3.45	0.66
Imprisonment promotes effective reintegration, reformation, and rehabilitation	9 (29.0)	10 (32.3)	6 (19.4)	6 (19.4)	2.65	1.09

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The analysis of Table II reveals varying levels of consensus among respondents regarding the socioeconomic consequences of inmate congestion. Items with higher mean scores ($\bar{x} \geq 3.0$) and relatively low standard deviations ($SD \leq 0.85$) indicate strong agreement and a relatively uniform perception among respondents. For instance, inmate congestion damages inmates' physical health, including infections, epidemics, and skin diseases ($\bar{x}=3.45$, $SD=0.80$) and non-custodial programs promote successful rehabilitation ($\bar{x}=3.45$, $SD=0.66$) received the highest mean scores, reflecting a strong and shared recognition that congestion adversely affects health while non-custodial alternatives enhance rehabilitation outcomes. Similarly, items such as overcrowding often leads to frequent jailbreaks ($\bar{x}=3.23$, $SD=0.78$) and congestion pressures facilities, creating tension and dehumanization for awaiting-trial inmates ($\bar{x}=3.10$, $SD=0.85$), demonstrate high agreement, highlighting critical institutional stress and risks to inmate welfare.

Items with moderate mean scores ($\bar{x} \approx 2.65-2.90$), such as overpopulation trains minor offenders to commit more serious crimes ($\bar{x}=2.90$, $SD=1.05$) and congestion exposes detainees to criminogenic influences ($\bar{x}=2.77$, $SD=1.00$), indicate moderate agreement with some variability in responses. The larger standard deviations suggest a diversity of opinions among respondents, likely reflecting differences in exposure to congestion or perceptions of its impact on inmate behavior.

Conversely, the item overcrowding leads to the practice of homosexuality and lesbianism, negating rehabilitation recorded the lowest mean score ($\bar{x}=2.29$) and highest SD (1.09), reflecting significant disagreement and wide variation in respondents' views. This indicates that while some respondents perceive a link between overcrowding and sexual behaviors, the majority do not consider it a prominent consequence affecting rehabilitation.

In summary, the mean and standard deviation analysis demonstrates that respondents consistently recognize the adverse impacts of inmate congestion on health, institutional stress, and rehabilitation outcomes, while there is greater disagreement regarding its influence on inmates' sexual behavior or minor offenders' criminal trajectory. The low SD values for most items suggest consensus on core issues, strengthening the reliability of the findings for policy and practice interventions in Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that inmate congestion at Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre creates several socioeconomic challenges. These challenges affect welfare, healthcare, and rehabilitation outcomes. Congestion

strains available resources, lowers the quality of healthcare, and limits inmates' chances of successful reintegration into society. These results align with Adebayo and Olatunji (2021), who noted that overcrowding undermines correctional services and fuels recidivism. Similarly, Ojong (2020) found that poor resource allocation in crowded facilities weakens the reformatory role of prisons.

However, this study offers a broader perspective than Obioha (2022), who focused mainly on policy gaps such as weak sentencing frameworks and limited non-custodial options. While policy shortcomings matter, the present study shows that structural issues like inadequate infrastructure and staffing imbalances also drive congestion in Okitipupa. This underscores the multidimensional nature of the problem. Solving it requires more than policy reform; it demands investment in infrastructure, staff development, and operational efficiency.

The findings also support strain theory. Structural barriers within institutions create systemic stress and dysfunction. In Okitipupa, this strain shows up as overcrowding and its negative effects on inmates, staff, and operations. The study illustrates that congestion is not just a policy failure but a structural reality that undermines welfare, security, and rehabilitation goals.

On the whole, the evidence highlights the urgent need for integrated reforms. Policymakers must combine legal adjustments with improvements in infrastructure, staffing, and institutional operations. Only then can Nigeria's custodial institutions effectively manage inmate populations while safeguarding welfare and security.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that inmate congestion at Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre has serious socioeconomic consequences. These challenges affect both inmate welfare and the overall goals of correctional institutions. Congestion reduces the quality of healthcare, overburdens welfare services, and limits rehabilitation opportunities. As a result, the reformatory purpose of incarceration is undermined. The effects of congestion extend beyond the prison. Families, communities, and society at large experience ripple effects, including higher recidivism and increased strain on public resources. The study shows that congestion in Okitipupa stems from a mix of structural and operational factors. Inadequate infrastructure and limited staffing contribute heavily. Policy gaps, such as low adoption of non-custodial measures, are also relevant but secondary to systemic underfunding and operational inefficiencies. The predominance of responses from mid-level officers (ASP-CP) highlights that those managing day-to-day operations view congestion as a serious challenge. Therefore, it can be argued that inmate congestion is not just a policy problem. It is a structural and operational issue that demands urgent attention. Addressing it requires integrated reforms, including policy innovation, infrastructural development, and improved human resource management. Only through such comprehensive action can correctional facilities in Nigeria achieve their welfare and rehabilitation objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, which show that congestion at Okitipupa Federal Correctional Centre severely affects healthcare, welfare services, and rehabilitation, the following recommendations are proposed:

Infrastructural Expansion

The Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) should prioritize expanding and upgrading prison facilities. This includes constructing new custodial centres in Ondo State and improving existing ones to meet international standards. The Federal Ministry of Interior, together with the Budget Office of the Federation, should allocate dedicated funding to ensure that facilities keep pace with population growth and incarceration needs.

Capacity Building for Correctional Officers

Congestion-related stress affects officers' ability to deliver services effectively. To address this, the NCoS should implement ongoing training and stress-management programs. This could include periodic workshops, provision

of essential resources such as healthcare kits and digital monitoring tools, and welfare incentives. Strengthening officers' capacity will improve resilience and service delivery in overcrowded environments.

Adoption of Non-Custodial Sentencing

To reduce reliance on incarceration, the Federal Government, through the judiciary and Ministry of Justice, should promote non-custodial measures like community service, probation, and parole, as outlined in the Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019). Successful implementation requires judicial training, public awareness campaigns, and monitoring frameworks to ensure compliance.

Strengthened Policy Frameworks

Systemic underfunding and staffing gaps are key contributors to congestion. Policymakers should enforce stronger budget allocations, recruit staff periodically, and establish independent oversight mechanisms. The National Assembly should legislate stricter accountability measures to ensure that funds for correctional centres are used effectively.

Collaborative Rehabilitation Partnerships

To address limited rehabilitation opportunities, the NCoS should partner with NGOs, faith-based organizations, and community stakeholders. These partnerships can provide skills acquisition, psycho-social counseling, and post-release reintegration programs. Formal Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) should be established to sustain these interventions and reduce recidivism.

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