

Investigation of Social Support as Predictor of Happiness among Prison Inmates in Makurdi Prison

REVIEW ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the investigation of social support as predictor of happiness among prison inmates in Makurdi prison is presented. The study adopts the cross-sectional survey design. Using purposive sampling technique, 257 prison inmates who were within the age range of 20-52 years, mean age of 32.21 (SD=7.870) were selected. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) were used for data collection. Using simple and multiple linear regression analyses, the findings revealed that, all the three dimensions of perceived social support (i.e. family, friends & significant others) significantly influenced happiness positively among inmates in Makurdi prison. It was concluded that social support strategies are important factors that enhance the level of happiness of prison inmates and as such, it was recommended that family members and friends of prison inmates should endeavour to provide them with adequate support in order to enhance their happiness.

Keywords: Social support, Predictor, Happiness, Inmates.

INTRODUCTION

The attainment of happiness is of great interest to millions of people in different circumstances of life across the globe. Until recently however, research literature on happiness had unfortunately remained neglected for several decades, with research concentrating on aspects of human unhappiness, such as depression, anxiety, and emotional disorders. Today, ample studies have been published on the definitions, correlates, and predictors of happiness in many western countries particularly in the United States of America [1-3].

The recent upsurge of interest in happiness and related constructs, according to researchers, is due to the realization that happiness is correlated with quality of life and functionality [4] and it

is associated with decreased morbidity and symptomatology [5]. Positive emotions have also been found advantageous during the process of recovery from negative life experiences such as stress from imprisonment [6], thus, making happiness a highly cherished and desired experience. Consequently, there has been a quantum leap in the research literature on happiness and some of its antecedents using different populations. Additionally, there is little doubt that being incarcerated is a stressful experience for many prisoners which is capable of ruining their happiness in and out of the prison environment. The authors [7] in a review of diverse literature on the field of correctional facilities noted that prison environment does play a significant role in the development of stress and psychiatric problems among prison inmates. Other research studies also suggest that imprisonment is associated with an increased risk for psychological problems, including anxiety and depression and consequent unhappiness [8-10]. The 'pains of imprisonment' which include isolation from family and friends, boredom and fear of other violent inmates are some of the sources of distress among prisoners during incarceration. Prisoners' response to these stressful events determines to a large extent, what they make of their life during and after their incarceration.

One aspect that has been found to impact upon how individuals respond to stressful events is the actual or perceived support available to them [11]. A number of studies have demonstrated that social support functions as a buffer for psychological distress, and so a lack of it may lead to adverse outcomes such as a relapse into depression, emotional distress in physically ill patients, and adverse health and psychological impacts due to stressful life experiences [12-14]. Social support may act as a buffer against stress and trauma through the supportive actions of others and even just the belief that such support is available [15].

Social support not only helps us feel better or helps us cope with challenges; it also may lead to improved health including physical health, psychological health and overall well-being. This means that having access to adequate social support is essential to a healthy life and happiness. Much research link social support to healthy outcome [16-18] including psychological adjustment, improved efficacy, better coping with upsetting events, resistance to disease, recovery from disease and reduced mortality.

Studies within prisons have also demonstrated that social support helps to diminish the impact of violence and other prison hardships upon prisoners' psychological wellbeing [19-21]. Pro-social support mechanisms—particularly those originating outside the prison—may ameliorate a constellation of negative intra-institutional forces collectively called the "pains of imprisonment" [22]. One of the focal areas of this study is to put to test, the relationship

between social support and happiness so as to see if the former predicts the later among inmates in Makurdi prison.

Inmates face a lot of challenges in the prison environment that affect their happiness. The author in [23] reported a rise in mental issues among incarcerated persons such as depressive symptoms which may result from chronic feelings of unhappiness. Despite the arrays of studies on the correlates of happiness, empirical literature bordering on happiness shows that not much has been done on social support strategies as predictors of happiness especially among inmates in the Makurdi prison. The lack of indigenous literature on the topic explains why most of the empirical studies considered for review in this study are foreign based. To this end, this studies aims to investigate social support as predictor of happiness among prison inmates in Makurdi prison.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Design

This study adopted the ex-post facto cross-sectional survey design to investigate perceived social support strategies as predictors of happiness among inmates in Makurdi prison. This design is preferred because all the variables were already in existence and were therefore not manipulated by the researcher. The independent variable in this study is perceived social support while the dependent variable is happiness among inmates in Makurdi prison.

Setting

This study was conducted in Makurdi Medium Security Prison. The prison is one of the three Nigerian prisons sited in Benue State including one each in Gboko and Otukpo. The Makurdi Medium Security Prison is situated along Makurdi-Aliade Road in Benue State. It has the capacity of about 280 but presently has a lock-up rate of around 763 inmates. The prison is occupied by both remand inmates and convicts serving short - term sentences.

Participants

The participants for this study were 257 prison inmates who were within the age range of 20-52 years, mean age of 32.21 (SD=7.870). An overwhelming majority of them which were 245(95.3%) were males while only 12(4.7%) were females. Out of the total inmates surveyed, 230(89.5%) were awaiting trial while only 27(10.5%) were convicted; 38(14.8%) had spent more than five years in the prison at the time of data collection while 219(85.2%) stayed less than five years. Only 12(4.7%) lived alone in isolated apartment while an overwhelming 245(95.3%) of the inmates lived with many other inmates.

Sample Size Estimation

The sample size for this study was determined using [24] sample size estimation table for known populations. From the table, the ideal sample size for the population of 750–799 is 254. Report on the statistical open out of inmates as at June 24th 2016 showed that there were a total of 763 inmates in the Makurdi medium security prison. Therefore, the ideal sample size based on the population of 763 inmates is 254 prison inmates.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the participants for this study. Purposive sampling also known as judgmental sampling is a sampling technique in which the researcher chooses the sample based on who he or she thinks would be appropriate for the study. This is used primarily when there is a limited number of people that have expertise in the area being researched, or when the interest of the research is on a specific field or a small group. This sampling technique was used in this study because most of the prisoners were not literate and getting them to complete the questionnaire was difficult. Therefore, the researcher purposively selected those who were capable of completing the questionnaire.

Instruments

This study used questionnaire for the purpose of data collection. The questionnaire include items from two different scales which are: (i) the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and (ii) Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. In addition to these, a section of the questionnaire contained information on the demographic data of the respondents such as age, category of prisoner, sex and duration of stay in prison.

Oxford Happiness Questionnaire

The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was developed by [25] at the Oxford University to measure happiness. The questionnaire has 29 items which are scored on a 6-point rating scale ranging from 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Moderately disagree, 3=Slightly disagree, 4=Slightly agree, 5=Moderately agree to 6=Strongly agree. It also has some reverse items marked 'R' and are scored in a reverse order. For instance, items such as 'I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am' were scored '1= strongly agree' instead of '1=strongly disagree'. The researcher adopted this scale to measure happiness among prison inmates. High scores on this scale indicate high levels of happiness while low scores indicate low levels of happiness. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire had a Cronbach's alpha correlation of .88 when examined on the population of prison inmates in the present study.

Multidimensional scale of perceived social support

For the purpose of measuring social support in this study, the researcher adopted the Multidimensional scale of perceived social support (MSPSS) developed by [26] which has been widely used in both clinical and non-clinical samples. The MSPSS is a brief, easy to administer self-report instrument containing 12 items rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale. It is meant to measure an individual's perception of how much he or she receives outside social support from family, friends and significant others. The scores are summed up to form total scores of an individual's perceived social support. Possible total scores range from 12-84 and the scoring system indicates that total scores of 69-84 implies high perceived social support; 49-68 means moderate perceived social support while 12-48 shows low perceived social support [27]. For the purpose of this study, the sum of all the scores on each of the three subscales (family, friends and significant others) were used as continuous scores. In the same vein, high scores on this scale indicate high perceived social support while low scores will indicate low or lack of social support.

Most investigations have revealed MSPSS to be a three-factor construct which demonstrates good to excellent internal consistency and test-retest reliability (with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 to 0.98 in nonclinical samples, and 0.92 to 0.94 in clinical samples) [27-28]. The reliability of the MSPSS was examined in the present study using the sample of prison inmates and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .81 was obtained.

Procedure

In this study, a letter of introduction from the appropriate authorities was obtained after which the inmates were contacted and their consent sought to take part in the study in line with the ethical requirements in carrying out research with humans. The selected inmates who agreed to participate were given the questionnaire which they completed and returned to the researcher. Two hundred and seventy (270) questionnaire copies were distributed in all. However, only 257(95.2%) were retrieved and valid while 3(1.1%) were not retrieved and 10(3.7%) were retrieved but not valid due to incomplete information on the scales.

Method of data analysis

Data for this study were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, the mean and standard deviation were used in summarizing data on the demographic information of the respondents such as age, sex, living category of prisoner, living arrangement and duration in detention. Also, inferential statistics including multiple regression and simple linear regression were used in testing the four hypotheses. The multiple linear regression analysis was used to examine the influence of the various dimensions of the

independent variables that is social support (family, friends and significant others) and demographic variables on happiness of inmates. On the other hand, simple linear regression was used to test the influence of hope on happiness of the inmates.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: This hypothesis stated that social support (from family, friends & significant others) will have a significant influence on happiness among inmates in Makurdi prison. Multiple linear regressions were used in testing this hypothesis and the result obtained is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Multiple linear regression showing influence of social support (from family, friends & significant others) on happiness among inmates in Makurdi prison

Predictors	R	R ²	df	F	B	t	p
Constant	.802	.643	3,253	151.857		11.545	.000
Social support (family)					.468	5.349	.000
Social support (friends)					.498	5.474	.000
Social support (SO)					.160	2.048	.042

SO=Significant Others

The result presented in Table 1 revealed that there is a significant joint influence of social support on happiness among inmates in Makurdi prisons [$R=.802$, $R^2=.643$; $F(3,253)=151.857$; $p<.001$]. This result further indicates that the three dimensions of social support (family, friends and significant others) jointly accounted for 64.3% of the total variance observed in happiness of the prison inmates surveyed. Going by the individual dimensions, the results showed that support gotten from friends made the highest positive influence ($\beta=.498$, $p<.001$) on happiness of the prison inmates, followed closely by support from family ($\beta=.468$, $p<.001$) while support from significant others ($\beta=.160$, $p<.05$) had the least significant independent influence on happiness of prison inmates respectively. Based on this finding, hypothesis one was confirmed. The aforementioned hypothesis asserts that social support (family, friends & significant others) will have a significant influence on happiness among inmates in Makurdi prison. This hypothesis was tested and confirmed. It was found from testing the hypothesis that the three dimensions of social support jointly influenced happiness among inmates in Makurdi prisons. The findings indicated that social support contributed a reasonably high percentage (64.3%) to the happiness

of prison inmates. What this means is that prisoners who adopt different coping strategies experience different levels of happiness which is directly determined by their coping strategies. Details of the finding further indicate that support gotten from friends had the highest positive influence on happiness of the prison inmates. This means that prison inmates who perceive that they have friends who are always there for them, always trying to help them and who they can count on anytime they need help, tend to experience higher levels of happiness compared to those who do not perceive their friends in this way. Furthermore, the finding indicates that support from family members had the second largest positive influence on happiness of prison inmates which also implies that, getting emotional help from family members, sharing problems and having the active participation of family members in time of making important decisions are important factors that determine the happiness of prisoners. Finally, the support from significant others had the least significant independent influence on happiness of prison inmates. This also means that the support received from other important persons who are neither friends, nor family members is equally of importance to the prison inmates. This category of people may include religious leaders/members, aid from charity organizations and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

This finding is in tandem with [29] who reported among other findings that perceived social support collectively and relatively contributed to prison inmates' level of happiness and that social support predicted happiness above and beyond big five personality and emotional intelligence. Similarly [30] tested how the two types of leisure—social and solitary—contribute to a person's subjective sense of well-being and found that only social, not solitary, leisure has a positive and statistically significant association with subjective well-being which suggests that social relations are important source of subjective wellbeing. The finding also tallies with [31] who explored conceptions of the elements or ingredients that lead to long-lasting happiness and found that an overwhelming majority of responses referred to social relationships such as with family, friends and partners as sources of happiness supporting the assertion that relationships are necessary for happiness.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the support from family, friends and significant others is important to the lives of prison inmates. This is because it will give them hope which is also an important determinant of their wellbeing. Adopting positive coping strategies such as cognitive restructuring and problem solving are necessary steps towards enhancing happiness of the prison inmates.

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