

## **UNEMPLOYMENT, PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMAS AND RECIDIVISM IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study investigated unemployment, psychological traumas and recidivism and their relationships in Port Harcourt Maximum Security Correctional Centre in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two objectives and two hypotheses were generated for the study. Survey design was adopted for the study. The population was all recidivists in Port Harcourt Maximum Security Correctional Centre. A sample of 600 respondents was randomly selected for the study through the use of simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. A questionnaire was used for data collection. The instrument was face validated by professionals in Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Choba. A reliability value of 0.86 Correlation Co-efficient was established for the study. Bolographic data of the respondents were analyzed using percentage and a frequency table while the hypotheses for the study were tested at .05 level of significance using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The results of the analyses revealed that unemployment among recidivists significantly related to recidivism and as well psychological traumas on recidivists significantly related to recidivism. Based on the findings, the study recommended, among others that the State Government should, through its intervention agencies work to improve on the socio-economic life of the recidivists as well as the entire society, and also the recidivists should be encouraged to uphold and exhibit positive values and behaviours such as honesty and respect for dignity of labour in the study area. In other words, they should be encouraged to show decency in their behaviours and also work to earn their living.*

**Keywords: Unemployment, Psychological Traumas, Recidivism, Port Harcourt, Maximum Security Correctional Centre**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Recidivism means to "relapse or to return" into certain behaviour, sin or crime. According to the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2023), recidivism is one of the most fundamental concepts in criminal justice. It refers to a person's relapse into criminal behaviour, often after the person has received sanctions or undergone intervention for a previous crime. The NIJ (2023) also notes that, recidivism is measured by criminal acts that resulted in nearest, reconviction or return to prison with or without a new sentence during a three-year period following the person's release.

It is strongly upheld in many quarters that recidivism does not just happen, but is caused by some factors in society. In many instances, recidivism is noted to be caused by a number of factors, ranging from lack of income, depression, lack of reintegration into society, unrepentant negative lifestyle, to discrimination of offenders etc. Mario and Marino (2002) in their study entitled Comparative Analysis of the Effects of Socio - Economic Status, Crime Types and Prison Conditions on Criminal Recidivism affirm the causative factors as their study revealed that socio - economic dimensions explains 32% of recidivism, crime type explains other 9% of recidivism, and prison conditions explain an additional 16%, suggesting a wide margin of recidivism reduction by prison policies.

Also, the Rutgers University (2023), notes that poor physical or mental health increases the chance that formerly incarcerated individuals to commit more crimes and return to prison. Recidivism is not limited to any one country in the world, and it is also observed to be on the increase across the world. For instance, it was reported that the prevalent criminal rate of recidivism in Nigeria was 37.3% as of 2005 (The Punch, 2021); today, this has increased to 70% if not more in Nigeria. This shows that like other countries, Nigeria is battling with the increasing rate of recidivists whether it is caused by unemployment and psychological traumas or cultural factor or a combination of all these factors. As one of the states that make up Nigeria, Rivers State is not spared of the incidences of recidivism.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the 1960s and a little beyond, crime rate and re-arrest of criminals for one form of crime or a similar crime were minimal in Nigeria. But, with passage of time, the Nigerian population continued to increase, the number of people craving for jobs also increased. This affected most youths negatively, as they could not gain employment in the petroleum industry which supported the Nigerian macro economy heavily at the time. Moreover, some youths who could not secure employment opportunities in the petroleum industry or go back to the farm or secure some other legitimate and reasonable means of livelihood took to crime. Naturally too, some of the unfortunate ones were caught and found their way to the prison where they served some terms and were later released, with many of them being taught some skills to earn a decent living.

However, some of these ones could not lead normal crime-free life which makes them keep committing crimes that causes them to move back and forth from prison yards or correctional centres. Thus, from the 1970s to date there are evidences of recidivism for which the criminal justice system in Nigeria is battling with in many correctional centres in the country.

Based on the situations, some studies were carried out to find the link between unemployment and criminality, especially recidivism. Oruta (2016) conducted a research entitled Socio-economic Factors that Influence Recidivism in Kakamega County in Kenya and found that socio-economic factors such as age, gender, level of education, employment status and housing influence the possibility of reoffending. Adeyemi (2021) carried out a research on Level of Income, Mental Status and Home-Background Variables as Predictors of Criminal Traits among Nigerian Prisoners. Among other things, the study found that unemployment income inequality, poverty and hereditary factors as well as peer group influence are some predictors of crime traits among Nigerians. In the same manner, Adeyemi (2021) also explains that there is a significant relationship between home background variables and nature of crime committed ( $\chi^2 = 85.197, P < 0.05$ ).

Of these studies, none has addressed the concern of the present study which is Unemployment, Psychological Traumas and Recidivism in Rivers State. It is against this backdrop that this study was carried out to fill the identified gap in this area.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives are set to guide the study:

- i. To investigate the relationship between unemployment among recidivists and recidivism in Port Harcourt Maximum Security Correctional Centre, Rivers State.
- ii. To investigate the relationship between psychological traumas on recidivists and recidivism in Port Harcourt Maximum Security Correctional Centre, Rivers State.

### **Hypotheses of the Study**

The following null hypotheses are posed for the study:

- i. There is no significant relationship between unemployment among recidivists and recidivism in Port Harcourt Maximum Security Correctional Centre, Rivers State.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between psychological traumas on recidivists and recidivism in Port Harcourt Maximum Security Correctional Centre, Rivers State.

## **Literature Review**

### **Unemployment among Recidivists and Recidivism**

Unemployment is a major cause of crime in society. It is in this respect that it is appropriate to identify the nexus between unemployment and recidivism in society. It was based on this that a study on the Nexus between Unemployment and Recidivism was conducted by Ramakers, *et. al.* (2016). The study showed that the bivariate analyses indicate that overall unemployed ex-prisoners were more likely to re-offend than those employed, and that a higher occupational level seems to be related to a lower risk of reoffending.

In line with the results of the study carried out by Ramakers, *et. al.* (2016), the data from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), show that 67.8% of released state prisoners were arrested for a new crime within three years, 76.7% ex – prisoners were arrested within five years (Durose, *et. al.* 2014). Commenting on the likely cause of this type of situation, Yu (2020:2) expatiates that:

Ex-prisoners face tremendous difficulties in obtaining employment opportunities post-released. Such disadvantaged situation may be attributable to multiple reasons. First, most of the offenders may simply lack the necessary job skills for specific positions, keeping them from those usually higher paid and more stable jobs. Second, many employers are reluctant to hire these people due to the stigma imposed by their previous criminal records.

In consonance with the above views, the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) (2022:4) also explains that "one 2008 study, estimates that the unemployment rate for formerly incarcerated persons (FIPs) in that year was about 27 per cent, compared to just over 5 per cent for the general population". Also, in a study carried out by Centre for Justice Research Texas Southern University (CJRTSU) (2022) entitled an Analysis of Incarceration, Crime, Unemployment and Rural Spaces, it was found that the proportion of individuals experiencing prison sentences, including for non-violent crimes at both the congressional District and State level varies. Additionally, JRTSU (2022:1) among other things found that:

...prison sentences for non-violent crimes predict unemployment for both urban Black and rural White communities. The long-term impact of incarceration for non-violent crimes increases the chances of unemployment and child poverty.

The above facts show that recidivism is caused by unemployment, especially where the employed are not assisted with any form of employment opportunities. This is regrettably the case in African countries where job opportunities are slim and government paid employment is a mirage. So, in the spirit to survive, a large population of youths is lured into gangs of separatism and terrorism. This has in most cases, accounted for the high number of crimes committed and instances of recidivism in many African countries, including Nigeria. These situations are, to a large extent, unlike what obtain in developed nations like the US Britain, Russia, China, France, etc. In these countries, policies are formulated and implemented to curtail recidivism, even though there are still evidences of it among unrepentant criminals in these countries.

Apart from the researches so far discussed in respect of unemployment and recidivism, Siwach (2018) in his study entitled Unemployment Shocks for Individuals on the Margin: Exploring

Recidivism Effects found that the two – stage least squares (2SLS) estimates suggest that increased unemployment has large effects on re-arrests for individuals with criminal records who are now active in the labour market, with substantial heterogeneity by race and sex. Also, in relation to the issue of unemployment as it concerns ex-prisons, Couloute and Kopf (2018) explain that estimate of the unemployment rate establishes that formerly incarcerated people want to work, but face structural barriers to securing employment, particularly within the period immediately following release. For those who are Black or Hispanic – especially women – their status as formerly incarcerated reduces their employment chances even more.

In what appears to be against a normal position, D, Alession, *et. al.* (2014) explain that while it is certainly plausible that burgeoning unemployment rate inspires more initial than repeat offending, some scholars remain unconvinced. Supporting this contrary position, Blumstein, *et. al.* (1998) note that:

The reason for thus doubt is the fact that it is just as plausible that a rise in the unemployment rate acts to amplify repeat rather than first time offending because criminality during period of economic distress is probably more likely to transpire among individuals already exhibiting a propensity for such activity.

### **Psychological Traumas on Recidivists and Recidivism**

According to Vitopoulos, *et. al.*(2019), differing understandings of the relationship between trauma and offending are also reflected in framings of the role of trauma in rehabilitative interventions in the criminal justices system. As a matter of fact Vitopoulos, *et. al.* (2019:18) in their study entitled “The Relationship between Trauma, Recidivism Risk and Reoffending in Male and Female Juvenile Offenders” came up with the following analysis:

Due to the relationship found between physical and sexual abuse and youths criminogenic needs, follow-up analyses were conducted to determine if two of these forms of maltreatment, alone, might contribute to the prediction of reoffending in models containing gender and the criminogenic needs. Neither models, containing physical abuse alone ( $\chi^2_{10} = 15.29$ ,  $P = .12$ ) or sexual abuse alone ( $\chi^2_{10} = 12.65$ ,  $P = .124$ ), were found to be significant overall. However, in the physical abuse model, criminal history ( $B = .29$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 3.83$ ,  $P = .05$ ) was significant and physical abuse ( $B = .89$ , Wald's  $\chi^2 = 3.26$ ,  $P = .07$ ) approached significance.

It is thus apparent from this analysis that criminal history is a significant predisposing factor to recidivism. The two forms of physical and sexual abuses did not yield to any significant level of trauma that could engender recidivism among ex-convicts. However, in another study conducted by Jung and Lee (2021:20) entitled “Influence of Childhood Trauma on Former Prisoners Attribution’ Style and Recidivism in Three Years”, it was found that:

The higher childhood trauma was associated with higher possibility for recidivism. This indicates that individuals with multiple experiences of childhood trauma tend to show repetitive criminal behaviours and become recidivist.

This investigation links trauma to recidivism, and supported previous studies that reported childhood trauma experiences predicted the risk of re-offending among former – prisoner (Bowen, *et. al.* 2018; Moore and Tatman, 2016). Also in line with the above findings, Baglivio, *et. al.* (2016) aver that former-prisoners with childhood trauma have a higher recidivism rate than those not with childhood trauma. It is most likely that it is because of these conclusions that Evans and Burton (2013) state

that in the maltreatment literature, trauma is viewed as both a way of understanding the causes of offending and as a primary target for treatment regardless of genders.

Also, among the various forms of induced trauma, trauma resulting from mental disorder is seen to be another cause of recidivism. Sadeh and McNeil (2014) in their study entitled Risk of Criminal Recidivism among Justice – involved Persons with Mental Disorder found that Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) increases risk for both general and serious recidivism and suggested it should be considered in interventions to reduce justice – system involvement. In a similar investigation, entitled Mental Health Disorders and Recidivism among Incarcerated Adult Offenders in a Correctional Facility in South Africa: A Cluster Analysis, Shishane, *et. al.* (2013) found that offenders with untreated mental illness have a higher recidivism rate and a greater number of criminogenic risk factors than those with mental illness. Apart from mental disorders and illnesses, individual personality traits are also enticed to recidivism, Ahmed (2019:107) in his study entitled “Big Five Personality Traits and Criminal Recidivism: Mediating Effect Framework” found that:

There is clear relationship between individual personality traits and criminal recidivism, especially among the ex-prisoners who have prison experiences. ...ex-prisoners who happened to possess agreeableness and conscientiousness personality traits are more prone to continue with their previous criminal act. ...These types of ex-prisoners are always on transit of going back to prison custody as criminal recidivists.

Apart from the fact that individual personality traits could be a serious factor of recidivism, it is obvious that a good number of the recidivists are traumatized in one way or the other. These traumatized individuals, according to Law Care Nigeria (2020), struggle with keeping their behaviours, emotions thoughts, and even spirituality in check. In general, youths who suffered a lot of psychological traumas and have engaged in crime earlier, are most likely to become recidivists, and thus vent their anger on members of a society.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Survey design was used for the study. The population of the study covered all recidivists in Port Harcourt Maximum Security Correctional Centre in Rivers State, and other Port Harcourt Security Correctional Centres. A sample of 600 respondents was selected for the study. The selection was done by the use of simple random sampling and purpose sampling techniques. The simple random sampling technique was also used to select one correctional centre out of the four correctional centres, namely; Port Harcourt Maximum Security Correctional Centre, Degema Medium – Security Correctional Centre, Ahoada Custodial Centre and Elele Custodial Centre in Rivers State. In the selection process, the four correctional centres were written on pieces of paper and each of these pieces was wrapped up by the researcher. The wrapped up papers were then put in a basket for picking. One research assistant was called to shake the wrapped papers for the purpose of picking one out of the four. Through this process, the research assistant called upon to do the picking, picked Port Harcourt Maximum Security Correctional Centre. Also, purposive sampling technique was used to select 300 recidivists from male dormitory and 300 from female dormitory, making a total of 600 respondent recidivists. This was done independently by the researcher and his two paid research assistants.

The instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. It was structured into Section A: Biographic data with multiple questions (items) based on age, sex, educational status, levels of income earned for livelihood, levels of psychological traumas of recidivists at the time of this study; and Section B: field responses from respondents based on the relationship between unemployment among recidivists and recidivism as well as responses on relationship between psychological traumas

on recidivists and recidivism in the study area, using modified four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) rated 4, Agreed (A) rated 3, Disagreed (D) rated 2 and Strongly Disagreed (SD) rated 1.

The face validity of the instrument was established in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Choba. Apart from this, test-retest method of reliability value of 0.86 Correlation Co-efficient was used for the study. The researcher administered the copies of the questionnaire with the help of his paid research assistants; and they collated same immediately after the responses were completed by respondents. The percentage, a frequency table and Pearson product Moment Correlation were the statistical methods used. Percentage and a frequency table were used to analyse biographic data of respondents while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyse the tested hypotheses for the study.

### Results

The results of the study are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Table 1 results deal with biographic data of respondent recidivists while Tables 2 and 3 results deal with tested hypotheses for the study.

**Table 1: Biographic Data of Respondents**

<b>Biographic Data</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
<b>Age</b>		
20-39	336	56
40-59	226	38
60-79	36	6
<b>Sex</b>		
Males	300	50
Females	300	50
<b>Educational Status</b>		
Non-formal Education	504	84
Formal Education	96	16
<b>Levels of Income Earned for Livelihood</b>		
Low Class Income	528	88
Moderate Class Income	36	6
High Class Income	36	6
<b>Levels of Psychological Traumas on Recidivists</b>		
Low level of Psychological Traumas on recidivists	60	10
Moderate level of Psychological Traumas on Recidivists	60	10
High level of psychological Traumas on recidivists	480	80

**Source:** Oriji's (2023), Fieldwork

The results of age show that 336 respondents, representing 56% were between the ages of 20 years and 39years, 228 (38%) were between the ages of 40years and 59years, while 36(6%) were between the ages of 60years and 79years. The results clearly showed that youths between ages 20

years and 39 years were recidivists, and those were in the majority during the course of this study. What is more is the fact that for ages 40 years to 59 years when you add the youths and adults, it is also true that majority of recidivists were adopted for the study if you consider the youth bracket of 18 years and 45 years where insignificant number of adults who had repeatedly committed crimes and had been in Port Harcourt Maximum Correctional Centre until old age serving sentences.

For sex, the results indicate that 300 respondents, representing 50% were male recidivists, while 300 (50%) were female recidivists adopted for the study. In this case, there was equal representation of male and female recidivists for the study. The results of educational status showed that 504 respondents, representing 84% of recidivists had non-formal education, and do not have knowledge of the dangers of recidivism on them and on the society. Based on this ignorance, they commit crimes repeatedly to survive. On the contrary, 96(16%) of recidivists had formal education, but indulged in repeated crimes, not because they are not aware of the associated dangers but due to their habitual and genetic influence in the study area.

Furthermore, for the results of levels of income earned for livelihood, 528 respondents, representing 88% had low class income for livelihood, and hence they took to repeated and/or similar crimes to survive in the study area. On the other hand, 36(6%) of recidivists were in the moderate income class, while 36(6%) were in high income class. This means that the moderate class income earning recidivists are greedy and have genetic evidence of repeated crimes on release from correctional centre, in the study area. Thus, they commit repeated crimes impulsively no matter the amount of money they earned. The same is applicable to 36(6%) of high class income earners who were rather considered worse than the moderate class income earners because they also indulged in repeated white collar crimes, in the study area.

Finally, for the levels of psychological traumas on recidivists, the results depicted that 60 respondents, representing 10% had low level of psychological traumas that spurred them to repeated crimes, 60(10%) also had moderate level of psychological traumas that made them commit repeated crimes as well. Those respondent recidivists who were 480 (80%) had high level of psychological traumas; hence they committed more repeated crimes than the others in the study area.

**Table 2: Analysis of the Relationship between Unemployment among Recidivists and Recidivism in Rivers State**

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	$r$
Unemployment Among Recidivists	10705	23344		
Recidivism	10999	54655	266653	*0.44

\*Significant at 0.05 level, critical  $r = .062$ , degree of freedom (df) = 598.

**Source:** Oriji's (2023), Fieldwork

The result of the analysis as presented in Table 2 depicts that calculated  $r$  value of 0.44 is higher than the critical  $r$  value of 0.062 at significant level of .05 with 598 df. In this regard, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between unemployment among recidivists and recidivism is rejected. Based on this result, it means that there is a significant relationship between unemployment among recidivists and recidivism in the study area.

**Table 3: Analysis of the Relationship between Psychological Traumas on Recidivists and Recidivism in Rivers State**

Variables	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	$r$
Unemployment Among Recidivists	10706	23443		
Recidivism	10989	54754	267652	*0.45

\*Significant at 0.05 level, critical  $r = .062$ ,  $df = 598$ .

**Source:** Oriji's (2023), Fieldwork

The result of the analysis as presented in Table 3 depicts that the calculated  $r$  value of 0.45 is higher than the critical  $r$  value of .062 at significant level of .05 with 598  $df$ . With this result, the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between psychological traumas on recidivists and recidivism is rejected. With this result, it means that there is a significant relationship between psychological traumas on recidivists and recidivism in the study area.

### Discussion of Findings

The result of the first hypothesis revealed that there is a significant relationship between unemployment among recidivists and recidivism in the study area. This result is in consonance with Siwach (2018) in his study entitled Unemployment Shocks for Individuals on the Margin: Exploring Recidivism Effects which found that the 2SLS estimates suggest that increased unemployment has large effects on re - arrests for individuals with criminal records who are now active in the labour market, with substantial heterogeneity by race and sex.

In addition, the result of the second hypothesis showed that there is a significant relationship between psychological traumas on recidivists and recidivism in the study area. The result of the second hypothesis is consonance with the finding of Jung and Lee (2021:20) who explained in their study entitled "Influence of Childhood Trauma on Former Prisoners Attribution Style and Recidivism in Three Years" that:

The higher childhood Trauma was associated with higher possibility for recidivism. This indicates that individuals with multiple experiences of childhood trauma tend to show repetitive criminal behaviours and become recidivists.

Also, the result of the second hypothesis is supported by Ahmed's (2019) view which states that it is apt to argue that ex-prisoners who happened to possess agreeableness and conscientiousness personality traits are more prone to continue with their previous criminal act. They thereby become criminal recidivists as a result of their personality predispositions which evidence shows that such personality predispositions enhance their re-offending of their criminal behaviour (Ahmed, 2019).

### CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it is obvious that unemployment among recidivists and psychological traumas on them have relationships with recidivism in the study area. In order to appreciate more intimately the volcanic dangers of recidivists and recidivism, in the hope to avert them the study urges that more studies be carried out, especially on the relationship between government policies on employment of recidivists and the level of recidivism as well as on the relationship between ineffective management of recidivists and the level of repeated crimes in Rivers State; and indeed in Nigeria.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In line with the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. The State Government should, through its intervention agencies work to improve on the socio-economic life of the recidivists as well as the entire society, and also, the recidivists should be encouraged to uphold and exhibit positive values and behaviours such as honesty and respect for dignity of labour in the study area. The government should make the socio-economic environment in the state more conducive so that everybody including the recidivists could participate meaningfully to actualize their ambitions.
- ii. Religious organization should, through their different programmes teach and inculcate in the recidivists and ex-prisoners the need to live purposeful life. They should be encouraged to embrace the word of God so that they could shun crime and other unsparingly lifestyles. Also, religious organizations should not only help the recidivists to achieve virtue and / or moral character, they should also support them with some financial assistance and as well encourage them to go into businesses. They could also give them paid employments. With this, the recidivists would not go back to the same or similar crimes in society.
- iii. Corporate organizations like multinational companies whether in partnership with State Government or on their own should help to fund the training of recidivists for technical skills that would enable them to fend for themselves as well as provide for the needs of their family members. To optimally achieve this, the multinational companies as well as State Government should also fund the employment of qualified inmate correctional officers and as well provide adequate facilities and equipment for the training of serving inmates and released inmates as well, in order to make sure crimes are minimized to the lowest level in society.
- iv. State Government should establish a unit of government owned hospitals for the care of recidivists who are very much affected by psychological traumas that impact very negatively on their actions. Also, State Government should ensure that recidivists pass through psychological test before they are reintegrated back into their families in the study area.

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