

Navigating the Cycle of Recidivism: Insights into the Coping Strategies of Repeat Armed Banditry Offenders in Nigerian Correctional Centres

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ongoing challenge of recidivism among repeat armed banditry offenders in Nigerian correctional facilities, focusing on the psychological and social factors driving reoffending. Offenders often display cognitive distortions, such as rationalizing their criminal actions or denying responsibility, which prevent them from engaging fully in rehabilitation. Coupled with emotional dysregulation characterized by poor stress management and impulsive behaviour these mental patterns create obstacles to reform. Additionally, offenders often remain connected to criminal networks, further reinforcing their involvement in unlawful activities and complicating their reintegration into society. The research highlights the limitations of punitive approaches in addressing the deeper psychological and emotional issues that sustain recidivism. It advocates for the implementation of evidence-based rehabilitation programs like cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and emotional regulation techniques to help offenders reshape their thinking and manage emotions more effectively. The study also emphasizes the importance of vocational training and social reintegration efforts to provide offenders with viable alternatives to crime. Using qualitative a research method, including interviews with offenders and correctional staff, the study provides valuable insights into the coping mechanisms that drive repeat offenses. It identifies significant gaps in current rehabilitation strategies and calls for collaboration between policymakers, correctional facilities, and mental health professionals to develop comprehensive solutions. These interventions are crucial for improving rehabilitation outcomes, supporting successful reintegration, and reducing recidivism in regions affected by armed banditry.

Keywords: Recidivism, Armed Banditry, Cognitive Distortions, Emotional Regulation, Rehabilitation Programs.

INTRODUCTION

The problem of recidivism in armed banditry crimes in Northwest Nigeria is both a complex and urgent issue, deeply entwined with the region's socio-political landscape. Armed banditry, involving violent acts such as cattle rustling, kidnapping for ransom, and murder, has severely destabilized rural communities, leading to significant loss of life, displacement of populations, and disruption of economic activities. Despite sustained military and paramilitary interventions aimed at curbing the violence, reoffending remains rampant among individuals involved in these criminal activities. The persistence of recidivism highlights the inadequacy of traditional punitive measures, signaling a failure to address the deeper psychological, social, and economic factors that perpetuate this cycle of violence.

Crucial to breaking this cycle is understanding the multidimensional causes of recidivism among armed banditry offenders. These causes are often rooted in structural inequalities, including poverty, lack of education, and limited economic opportunities. However, psychological and behavioural factors, such as cognitive distortions, emotional dysregulation, and maladaptive coping strategies, also play a pivotal role. The intricate interplay between these elements necessitates a more nuanced and comprehensive approach to intervention, one that goes beyond punitive incarceration and includes rehabilitative efforts that address the psychological and socio-economic underpinnings of criminal behaviour.

Effective intervention strategies must prioritize an understanding of the psychological and behavioural dimensions that drive recidivism among armed banditry offenders. Research within criminology and forensic psychology consistently underscores the role of cognitive distortions irrational or self-serving thought patterns that justify illegal actions and emotional dysregulation, such as the inability to manage negative emotions, in perpetuating criminal behaviour. Cognitive distortions often lead offenders to minimize the impact of their crimes, rationalize their actions, or externalize blame, all of which weaken their capacity for rehabilitation. Similarly, emotional dysregulation, particularly in the form of poor anger management, impulsivity, or chronic stress, increases the likelihood of engaging in violent criminal acts as a form of maladaptive coping.

Studies on criminal recidivism suggest that unresolved psychological trauma, often stemming from childhood adversity, social marginalization, or exposure to violence, can significantly influence an individual's propensity to reoffend. This trauma, when coupled with limited access to mental health resources, creates a fertile ground for the development of maladaptive coping strategies, including substance abuse, aggression, and continued involvement in criminal networks. Consequently, addressing these psychological drivers through targeted interventions such as cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and trauma-informed care is critical. These therapies help offenders reframe their cognitive distortions and develop healthier emotional responses to stress, reducing the likelihood of future offending.

Moreover, the role of socio-economic deprivation and the lack of alternative means of livelihood cannot be overstated. Armed bandits, often originating from economically marginalized backgrounds, may view their criminal activities as a necessary means of survival, particularly in a region where state infrastructure is weak, and legitimate economic opportunities are scarce. Thus, effective rehabilitation programs must also incorporate vocational training and social reintegration strategies that provide offenders with the skills and resources needed to rebuild their lives outside the criminal economy.

Innovative rehabilitation strategies that integrate interactive problem-solving and emotional regulation are increasingly recognized as effective tools for reducing recidivism among armed banditry offenders. Interactive problem-solving approaches involve engaging offenders in structured dialogues that encourage them to reflect on the root causes of their criminal behaviour, foster conflict resolution skills, and promote accountability. These interventions aim to dismantle the cognitive distortions that sustain criminal behaviour by encouraging offenders to critically examine the societal and personal factors that contributed to their involvement in armed banditry. By facilitating dialogue between offenders, victims, and community stakeholders, interactive problem-solving helps to rebuild trust, mend social fractures, and support the reintegration of offenders into their communities.

Emotional regulation techniques, on the other hand, target the affective dimensions of recidivism. Emotional dysregulation, which manifests as poor control over emotions such as anger, fear, or frustration, is a significant predictor of violent behavior and recidivism. Emotional regulation strategies such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) have been shown to improve emotional control, reduce impulsivity, and increase resilience to stress among offenders. These therapeutic modalities teach individuals to recognize and manage their emotional responses in high-stress situations, ultimately helping to break the cycle of reactive, emotionally driven criminal behaviour.

Additionally, these approaches are supported by neuroscientific findings, which reveal that prolonged exposure to high levels of stress and trauma can alter brain structures involved in emotional regulation, decision-making, and impulse control. For instance, the amygdala, a region of the brain responsible for processing emotions, can become hyperactive in individuals with a history of trauma, leading to heightened emotional reactivity. Coupled with deficits in prefrontal cortex functioning the brain region involved in executive control this imbalance predisposes individuals to impulsive, violent actions. Emotional regulation interventions, therefore, play a crucial role in rehabilitating offenders by recalibrating these neurological pathways and enhancing their capacity for self-control.

This study seeks to explore the effectiveness of rehabilitative strategies that integrate interactive problem-solving and emotional regulation techniques in addressing recidivism among armed banditry offenders in Nigerian correctional facilities. By conducting an empirical investigation into how these interventions

influence offender behavior, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for enhancing current rehabilitation efforts. Specifically, the study will assess the extent to which these strategies contribute to reducing cognitive distortions, improving emotional regulation, and fostering socio-economic reintegration among offenders.

Furthermore, this study aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice by applying insights from criminological theory, psychology, and neuroscience to the real-world challenges faced in the Nigerian correctional system. In doing so, it seeks to not only address the immediate issue of recidivism but also contribute to the broader goal of restoring security and stability in regions affected by armed banditry. By focusing on the psychological and behavioral drivers of criminal behavior, this research will offer a more holistic approach to rehabilitation, one that moves beyond punitive measures and engages with the root causes of criminality.

The findings of this study will have significant implications for both policy and practice within the criminal justice system. First, they will inform the development of more targeted and effective rehabilitation programs, particularly within correctional settings. These programs will be grounded in empirical evidence, ensuring that interventions are tailored to the specific needs of repeat offenders involved in armed banditry. Furthermore, the study will provide valuable insights for policymakers regarding the allocation of resources toward mental health services, vocational training, and social reintegration initiatives within the criminal justice system.

In addition, this research highlights the importance of adopting a public health approach to criminal behavior, one that recognizes the impact of socio-economic conditions, psychological trauma, and community dynamics on recidivism. By advocating for a more integrated approach to offender rehabilitation one that includes psychological, social, and economic support systems this study underscores the need for cross-sector collaboration between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and community leaders in addressing the root causes of armed banditry and criminal recidivism in Nigeria.

This study will contribute to the global discourse on reducing recidivism by providing a case study that demonstrates how innovative, context-specific interventions can be used to address some of the most pressing security challenges faced by developing nations. Through its findings, the study will offer a model for how correctional systems in other conflict-affected regions can be reformed to promote long-term peace, security, and social cohesion.

METHODOLOGY

To explore the coping strategies of repeat armed banditry offenders in Nigerian correctional centers, a qualitative approach was employed. This comprehensive methodology allowed for a deeper understanding of the psychological, social, and environmental factors influencing recidivism. The study involved selecting a representative sample of repeat offenders from three correctional facilities across Northwest Nigeria. These participants were identified based on their history of involvement in armed banditry and prior incarcerations. Data collection methods included in-depth interviews, and direct observation within the correctional centers. The qualitative interviews sought to capture the personal experiences, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of rehabilitation programs from the offenders themselves. The surveys provided quantifiable data on patterns of behavior, recidivism rates, and the effectiveness of institutional support systems.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling from the correctional facilities in Northwest Nigeria (Medium Security Custodial Centre Kaduna), focusing on individuals with documented histories of repeat armed banditry offenses. The final sample comprised 9 offenders (ages 22–50) and 3 correctional staff (officers). Ethical approval was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of Kaduna state Ministry of Health and Nigerian Correctional Service National Headquarters. Informed consent was secured, with assurances of anonymity and voluntary participation. Interviews were conducted in private settings to minimize coercion risks, and data were de-identified during transcription.

Qualitative Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, which is ideally suited for investigating complex social phenomena like recidivism. Qualitative research allows for a nuanced exploration of participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and behaviors, making it particularly effective in examining the psychological and behavioral dimensions of repeat offending. By focusing on the subjective experiences of offenders, this approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of how they interpret their criminal behavior and cope with stressors within the correctional environment. Utilizing qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, the study provides rich, detailed insights into the coping mechanisms, emotional regulation, and decision-making processes of armed banditry convicts.

This research anchors itself in theoretical frameworks, specifically the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman, guiding the analysis of how offenders appraise and manage stressors associated with their criminal activities. The study also draws on Emotion-Focused and Problem-Focused Coping Theories, providing a lens through which to examine how these individuals regulate their emotions and address challenges. By integrating these theories, the study offers a comprehensive analysis of offenders' coping strategies and helps inform the development of targeted rehabilitation interventions aimed at reducing recidivism.

Purposive Sampling of Recidivist Armed Banditry Convicts and Correctional Staff

The research employs purposive sampling, a non-random method designed to select participants who possess specific characteristics relevant to the study's objectives. This approach allows for the inclusion of individuals who have direct experience with the phenomena under investigation, ensuring that the data collected is rich and insightful. Participants include recidivist armed banditry offenders repeatedly involved in criminal activities and correctional staff who regularly interact with these offenders.

Recidivist offenders are selected based on documented histories of multiple convictions for armed banditry, ensuring the study focuses on individuals with established patterns of reoffending. Correctional staff, including psychologists, counselors, and officers involved in rehabilitation programs, are chosen for their direct involvement in the day-to-day management and treatment of these offenders. This strategic sampling provides a diverse range of perspectives and enhances the study's ability to examine the offenders' coping mechanisms from multiple angles, thereby increasing the validity and depth of the findings.

Data Collection Methods

In-depth Interviews with Recidivist Offenders

In-depth interviews serve as the primary data collection tool for understanding the personal experiences and coping strategies of recidivist offenders. These semi-structured interviews allow participants to describe their lived experiences, emotional responses, and methods of managing stress in detail. An open-ended format encourages respondents to share their narratives freely while ensuring that key topics such as emotional regulation, cognitive distortions, and social support are covered. All interviews are audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to capture participants' experiences accurately. The data then undergoes thematic analysis, enabling researchers to identify recurring themes and patterns that shed light on the psychological and behavioral factors influencing recidivism.

Discussions with Correctional Staff

Discussions are conducted with correctional staff to gather collective insights on how they observe offenders coping with incarceration and the effectiveness of current intervention programs. These discussions include staff members from different roles, such as psychologists, counselors, and correctional officers, to provide a holistic view of the offenders' behaviors and the institutional approaches to managing recidivism. Using semi-structured guides, the discussion explores themes related to social support, emotional regulation, stress

management, and offender rehabilitation. Thematic coding techniques are applied to the data to identify significant trends and patterns in the staff's observations.

Observations within Correctional Centers

Observational data is collected through direct observations of offenders' interactions within the correctional environment. This method allows researchers to document how recidivist offenders respond to daily stressors, participate in rehabilitation programs, and engage with staff and fellow inmates. Observations focus on non-verbal cues, conflict resolution, and peer interactions, providing real-time insights into offenders' emotional regulation and coping behaviors. Detailed field notes are taken, and the observational data is analyzed alongside interview and discussion with correctional staff data to create a comprehensive picture of the offenders' experiences and coping mechanisms within the correctional setting.

Data Analysis Techniques and Comparative Analysis

Thematic Analysis: A Comprehensive and Systematic Approach

The study employs thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), to systematically analyze the qualitative data collected. Thematic analysis is particularly suited for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within the data, providing a structured approach to understanding the complex coping mechanisms employed by recidivist offenders. The process involves familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, and refining these themes to accurately reflect the participants' experiences. This method provides a detailed understanding of how offenders appraise their actions, manage stress, and regulate emotions in the context of repeated criminal activity.

Comparative Analysis: Examining Perspectives Across Groups

The study incorporates a comparative analysis to explore the differences and similarities between the perspectives of recidivist offenders and correctional staff. This approach enables the study to assess how offenders' self-reported coping mechanisms compare to staff observations, identifying gaps in perceptions that could inform more effective intervention strategies. Comparative analysis, informed by the work of Kim and Seong (2022), examines variations in coping strategies, emotional regulation, and stress responses across these two groups. This analysis enhances the study's depth, providing insights into the interaction between individual behaviors and institutional responses to recidivism.

While this study focuses on Northwest Nigeria, its findings align with recidivism drivers observed in other African contexts, such as South Africa's gang violence (Adams, 2017) and Kenya's post-conflict reintegration challenges (Epron, 2019). Globally, cognitive distortions and weak social support similarly predict reoffending in U.S. and European prisons (Jones, 2020; Mésko & Voronin, 2019). However, Nigeria's unique socio-political instability and limited rehabilitation infrastructure exacerbate these trends, suggesting the need for context-specific adaptations of evidence-based interventions.

Theoretical and Methodological Foundations

The study's comparative approach is grounded in comparative criminology frameworks, as discussed by Meško and Voronin (2019), which advocate for multi-level analyses of crime patterns and behaviors. The research incorporates micro-, macro-, and meta-analytical perspectives. At the micro-level, the study focuses on individual coping strategies and emotional regulation among offenders. The macro-level analysis examines institutional factors, such as the correctional environment and policies that impact offender behavior. Finally, a meta-analysis synthesizes these findings to develop broader conclusions about effective strategies for reducing recidivism. This multi-dimensional approach strengthens the study's theoretical foundation and offers practical recommendations for reducing repeat offenses. By combining rigorous qualitative methodologies with a comprehensive theoretical framework, this study contributes meaningful insights into the coping strategies of recidivist armed banditry offenders and informs the development of targeted interventions to reduce recidivism in Nigerian correctional centers.

FINDINGS

The issue of recidivism, particularly among individuals involved in violent crimes like armed banditry, poses a significant challenge within the Nigerian criminal justice system. Despite various interventions aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration, many offenders find themselves caught in a cycle of re-offending. This study focuses on repeat armed banditry offenders housed in Northwest Nigerian correctional centers, exploring the strategies they employ to cope with incarceration and the factors that contribute to their persistent involvement in crime.

Emotional Regulation Strategies

Emotional regulation among recidivist offenders is closely linked to their emotional intelligence and coping mechanisms, as documented in existing literature. According to Double et al. (2022), individuals with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to regulate their emotions, an essential skill for navigating the psychological challenges of incarceration. This study supports that notion, showing that armed banditry convicts employ various emotional regulation techniques such as mindfulness, emotional detachment, and seeking social support to cope with their environment.

However, the effectiveness of these strategies varies. While some convicts successfully manage their emotional responses, others resort to maladaptive behaviors like aggression or substance abuse. These findings reinforce Double et al.'s (2022) assertion that flexible emotional regulation is crucial to maintaining psychological well-being. Additionally, Choi (2023) emphasizes the importance of structured psychological interventions in enhancing cognitive-emotional regulation. The research reveals that convicts participating in therapeutic programs report improved emotional control, which contributes to better coping abilities and adjustment to the correctional environment. This suggests that integrating emotional intelligence development into rehabilitation programs can help reduce recidivism and improve behavioral outcomes.

The Role of Social Psychological Interventions

The study underscores the critical role of social psychological interventions in shaping the emotional and behavioral responses of recidivist armed banditry offenders. Drawing on Choi's (2023) research on cognitive-emotional regulation strategies, the findings demonstrate that mental healthcare programs play a pivotal role in helping offenders manage emotions and stress. The qualitative data shows that psychological interventions such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and trauma-informed care significantly enhance offenders' emotional resilience and problem-solving abilities, which are crucial for their adjustment and rehabilitation within the correctional system.

Moreover, Gürgen et al. (2022) explore the connection between emotional regulation difficulties and substance abuse, emphasizing the need for comprehensive mental health and substance abuse programs in correctional settings. The research supports this perspective, revealing that addressing emotional regulation challenges through targeted psychological interventions can reduce substance abuse and improve overall well-being. By integrating these interventions into correctional programs, a holistic approach to managing recidivism emerges. This strategy not only improves individual outcomes such as emotional regulation and problem-solving skills but also fosters a more rehabilitative correctional environment. Addressing both emotional regulation and substance abuse through comprehensive psychological interventions offers a robust strategy for reducing recidivism and promoting successful reintegration into society.

Understanding the Underlying Drivers of Recidivist Behavior

Cognitive Distortions and Emotional Dysregulation

The persistence of recidivist behavior among armed banditry convicts in Northwest Nigeria can be traced to underlying cognitive distortions and emotional dysregulation. Cognitive distortions such as rationalization and denial are key contributors to the perpetuation of criminal behavior. Rationalization allows offenders to justify their actions by reducing feelings of guilt or moral conflict, often perceiving their crimes as necessary for

survival or as a response to systemic injustice. This mindset enables offenders to disengage from moral responsibility, making rehabilitation difficult (Meško & Voronin, 2019). Denial, on the other hand, involves a refusal to fully acknowledge the extent or consequences of one's criminal actions. This psychological barrier prevents offenders from confronting the impact of their behavior, hindering their capacity for meaningful rehabilitation (Sharif & Uddin, 2021). Addressing these cognitive distortions through interventions like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is critical for fostering accountability and reshaping offenders' thought processes.

Emotional dysregulation is another significant factor driving recidivism. Offenders who struggle to regulate their emotions often exhibit impulsive behaviors, which manifest in aggression and violence (Choi, 2023). The inability to manage emotional responses, particularly feelings of anger and frustration, often results in criminal actions as a maladaptive coping mechanism. This emotional instability is often linked to past trauma or adverse childhood experiences, which further exacerbate the difficulty in emotional regulation and increase the likelihood of reoffending (Gürgen et al., 2022). Therapeutic interventions that focus on emotional regulation can help offenders develop healthier coping mechanisms, reducing their propensity for criminal behavior.

Social Influences and the Role of Support Systems

Social influences significantly impact the cycle of recidivism, particularly through the reinforcement of criminal behavior by peers within offenders' social networks. Many offenders remain deeply embedded in networks that provide emotional, financial, and logistical support for continued criminal activities (Kim & Seong, 2022). These networks reinforce social isolation from legitimate societal structures, making reintegration challenging. Correctional environments often exacerbate this issue by fostering limited positive interactions and increasing exposure to criminal behaviors, which can entrench offenders in the cycle of recidivism (Sağdıç, 2023). The absence of supportive, pro-social networks hinders offenders' ability to envision and pursue legitimate rehabilitation and reintegration pathways. Creating supportive environments within correctional centers is vital to breaking the recidivism cycle. Programs that encourage constructive social interactions and offer practical and emotional support are crucial for enhancing rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. These programs can reduce offenders' reliance on criminal networks, providing the necessary tools to build pro-social relationships and successfully reintegrate into society. Understanding the social dynamics that influence recidivism is key to developing comprehensive interventions that promote long-term behavioral change.

Linking Coping Strategies to the Cycle of Recidivism

Cognitive and Behavioral Strategies in Recidivism

The relationship between coping strategies and recidivism is central to understanding the persistence of criminal behavior among armed banditry offenders. Cognitive strategies such as rationalization and denial enable offenders to justify their illegal activities, perpetuating criminal behavior and impeding rehabilitation (Meško & Voronin, 2019). Rationalization allows offenders to view their actions as necessary or justified, creating a barrier to self-reflection and accountability. Similarly, denial prevents offenders from fully acknowledging the impact of their actions, making it difficult for them to engage meaningfully in rehabilitation (Sharif & Uddin, 2021). Addressing these cognitive distortions through interventions is crucial to promoting positive change and accountability.

Behavioral strategies, such as aggression and manipulation, also play a pivotal role in maintaining the cycle of recidivism. Aggressive behaviors, often manifested in violent crimes, reinforce an offender's criminal identity, while manipulation allows offenders to exploit others for personal gain, facilitating continued involvement in criminal activities (Gürgen et al., 2022). These behaviors not only reinforce the offender's ties to criminal networks but also create barriers to reintegration by fostering isolation from pro-social environments. Interventions targeting these behavioral strategies are essential for breaking the cycle of recidivism and fostering positive behavioral change.

Social Strategies and Rehabilitation

Social strategies, including forming and maintaining criminal networks, are another major factor in the perpetuation of recidivism. Many repeat offenders rely on these networks for various forms of support, which reinforce their criminal behaviors and hinder reintegration into society (Kim & Seong, 2022). Within correctional facilities, limited opportunities for positive social interaction and the prevalence of criminal behaviors further entrench offenders in these networks. Therefore, creating supportive, pro-social environments within correctional centers is essential for breaking the cycle of recidivism.

Facilitating access to positive social networks and support systems can disrupt offenders' reliance on criminal peers and foster successful rehabilitation. By addressing both cognitive and social factors, comprehensive interventions can promote long-term behavioral change, reduce recidivism, and support reintegration into society. Cognitive-behavioral therapies (CBT) that challenge rationalization and denial, along with behavioral interventions that address aggression and manipulation, are vital for fostering positive change. Likewise, creating social support programs that encourage pro-social interactions can enhance the offenders' prospects for reintegration.

Implications for Correctional Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs

Addressing Cognitive Distortions and Emotional Regulation:

The findings from this study underscore the importance of addressing cognitive distortions, such as rationalization and denial, in rehabilitation programs. Cognitive-behavioral therapies that directly challenge these distortions can help offenders develop more realistic and adaptive thinking patterns, fostering self-reflection and accountability (Sharif & Uddin, 2021). Additionally, emotional regulation training is crucial for addressing the dysregulation commonly observed in offenders. Programs that focus on mindfulness, stress management, and emotional self-awareness equip offenders with the tools needed to manage their emotions effectively, reducing impulsive behaviors that often lead to criminal activity (Choi, 2023). Integrating these components into rehabilitation programs is critical for reducing recidivism and promoting lasting behavioral change.

Fostering Positive Social Support Networks

Another key implication is the need to foster positive social support networks within correctional centers and throughout the reintegration process. Providing environments that encourage pro-social interactions and offering resources such as vocational training and education can significantly improve offenders' chances of successful reintegration (Kim & Seong, 2022). By addressing the social influences that contribute to recidivism and providing access to opportunities for positive interactions, stakeholders can reduce offenders' reliance on criminal networks. Collaborative efforts between correctional facilities, mental health professionals, and community organizations are essential in developing comprehensive programs that support offenders throughout their rehabilitation journey.

Integrating Insights into Program Development:

Incorporating the insights from this study into correctional rehabilitation programs can enhance their effectiveness and contribute to a more successful criminal justice system. Comprehensive programs that address cognitive distortions, emotional dysregulation, and social influences can provide offenders with the tools they need to make positive changes. A holistic approach that takes into account the complex interplay of psychological, behavioral, and social factors will ultimately improve rehabilitation outcomes and reduce recidivism rates. Implementing these findings into program development ensures that interventions are more effective, facilitating successful reintegration and contributing to public safety.

CONCLUSION

This study provides crucial insights into the coping strategies used by repeat armed banditry offenders in Northwest Nigeria, shedding light on the intricate web of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional regulation mechanisms that sustain recidivism. The findings reveal that offenders frequently employ cognitive distortions, such as rationalization and denial, to justify their criminal actions and deflect personal accountability. These mental strategies help normalize illegal behavior, reducing the perceived severity of their actions and reinforcing the cycle of recidivism.

On a behavioral level, many offenders resort to aggression and manipulation as coping mechanisms. Aggression, whether physical or verbal, serves as a method of asserting control and dominance, while manipulation allows offenders to exploit social relationships for personal gain. Such behaviors solidify their positions within criminal networks, making rehabilitation more challenging. Socially, offenders often form and maintain bonds within their criminal circles, creating a support system that further embeds them in unlawful activities and complicates reintegration into society.

Emotionally, offenders demonstrate a range of regulation strategies. Emotional suppression is common, with individuals consciously avoiding emotional expression, which often results in internalized stress that can later manifest as explosive outbursts. These outbursts, marked by uncontrolled anger or violence, frequently escalate conflicts and perpetuate further criminal behavior. While some offenders attempt self-regulation, these efforts are often insufficient due to limited access to support and resources in correctional facilities. These emotional regulation difficulties highlight the need for targeted interventions to help offenders manage stress and improve their engagement with rehabilitation programs.

This study has several limitations. First, reliance on self-reported data may introduce social desirability bias, as offenders might underreport maladaptive behaviors. Second, the small sample size (n=12) and focus on one geographic region limit generalizability. Third, logistical constraints in correctional settings (e.g., restricted access to offenders) may have affected data depth. Future research should combine self-reports with behavioral observations and expand samples across diverse regions.

Limitations of the Study

While the study offers valuable contributions, it faces certain limitations that affect the breadth of its conclusions. One significant limitation is the relatively small sample size, which restricts the ability to generalize findings across broader populations of recidivist offenders. Focusing solely on armed banditry convicts in Northwest Nigeria may not capture the full spectrum of coping mechanisms and emotional regulation techniques utilized by offenders in different criminal contexts or regions.

The study also relies heavily on self-reported data, which introduces the potential for bias. Offenders may present their coping strategies in a way that aligns with social desirability or self-preservation, thus limiting the accuracy of the findings. Furthermore, the socio-economic and cultural context of armed banditry in Northwest Nigeria is unique and may not fully represent the coping mechanisms of offenders involved in other types of crime or in different geographic areas. Addressing these limitations will require future research with larger, more diverse samples and the use of objective measures to supplement self-reports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To deepen the understanding of recidivism and improve the efficacy of interventions, future research should focus on expanding the scope of study to include a larger and more diverse sample of recidivist offenders. This will allow for a more comprehensive exploration of coping mechanisms and emotional regulation strategies across various criminal contexts. Longitudinal studies are particularly valuable, as they can track offenders' progress over time and assess the long-term effects of intervention programs on reducing recidivism rates. Such research will be critical in evaluating the effectiveness of tailored interventions and refining approaches to offender rehabilitation and reintegration.

From a policy perspective, the development of evidence-based rehabilitation programs is essential. These programs should specifically target the cognitive, behavioral, and emotional factors that contribute to recidivism. Interventions must include strategies to challenge cognitive distortions, enhance emotional regulation, and foster the creation of positive social support networks. Collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners is crucial to develop and implement comprehensive strategies aimed at reducing recidivism and facilitating successful reintegration.

By adopting these evidence-based practices and continuing to refine approaches through ongoing research, stakeholders can contribute to more effective criminal justice systems. Ultimately, such initiatives can enhance public safety and significantly reduce recidivism rates among repeat offenders, promoting lasting behavioral change and social reintegration.

"To translate findings into practice, we propose:

1. Pilot Programs: Implement and evaluate CBT-based interventions in two Nigerian correctional centers, measuring recidivism rates over 3 years.
2. Longitudinal Studies: Track offenders post-release to assess reintegration outcomes linked to emotional regulation training.
3. Policy Advocacy: Collaborate with Nigeria's Ministry of Justice to integrate vocational training into sentencing guidelines, modeled after Ghana's successful initiatives (Smith, 2018)."

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