

## Religious Services and the Rehabilitation of Inmates in Correctional Centres in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The Correctional Centres in Akwa Ibom State face persistent challenges in effectively rehabilitating inmates, with limited structured programmes to address emotional instability, behavioural relapse and reintegration, thereby necessitating an evaluation of the role of religious services in supporting inmate transformation. This study assessed how religious services contribute to the rehabilitation of inmates in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Guided by Don Andrews and James Bonta's theory of effective correctional intervention, the study adopted a descriptive survey design with a mixed-method approach. Structured questionnaire, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were methods of data collection. Purposive and cluster sampling techniques were used with 384 inmates and correctional officers. According to the findings, 89.6% of respondents agreed that religious programmes like scripture study, prayer and worship, religious counselling, faith-based group activities and mentoring are beneficial for fostering social cohesion, emotional stability, behavioural change and spiritual renewal. Inmates who participated in religious services reported improved mental health, reduced aggression and a revitalised sense of purpose in life, while correctional officers saw improved discipline, reduced tensions and stronger interpersonal relationships. In order to improve successful rehabilitation and post-release reintegration, the study suggested that the Nigeria Correctional Service and faith-based organisations form formal partnerships. The study expands the discussion on effective inmate rehabilitation and offers helpful insights into faith-based correctional reform in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** religious services, rehabilitation, inmates, correctional centres

## **Introduction**

Correctional institutions play a significant role in the criminal justice system (CJS) globally. The core responsibilities for this aspect of CJS include reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders (Asangausung, 2024; Nigerian Correctional Service [NCoS], 2022). Global statistics show that more than 11.5 million inmates are in the correctional centres, 1.4 million of them are in Africa and 81,011 are in Nigeria, where 65.9% are awaiting trial (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2021). To assist inmates in overcoming their criminal tendencies and effectively reintegrating into their communities, rehabilitation programmes which include religious services, vocational training, and educational opportunities become essential.

In the US and other developed countries, inmates are engaged in structured rehabilitation programmes like vocational, technical, skill development, educational courses and religious services. These programmes have changed inmates' moral and psychological perspectives in addition to assisting with their economic reintegration (Inciardi, 2009). In most correctional centres, faith-based interventions including prayer, worship, spiritual counselling and mentoring have been embraced as crucial strategies for addressing spiritual reformation and behavioural change (Robinson-Edwards & Kewley, 2018).

In Africa, the value of rehabilitation of inmates has been acknowledged in the criminal justice system. However, issues like overcrowding, inadequate funding and a shortage of qualified staff still make it difficult to implement rehabilitation programmes effectively. In order to give inmates a sense of hope, morality and purpose, faith-based rehabilitation is a reliable strategy frequently supported by religious institutions and non-governmental organisations (Bassey, 2024).

The statutory security organisation in charge of the reformation, rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates in Nigeria is the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS), formerly the Nigerian Prison Service (Bassey et al., 2023). Section 14(1) of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act (LFN, 2019) states that inmates must have access to opportunities for moral reform, education and employment, as well as religious and spiritual support. For inmates to become responsible members of society after their release, adequate reformation, rehabilitation, and reintegration are essential (Adebumtimi, 2020; Bassey et al., 2023).

Religious services are essential to the rehabilitation of inmates due to the high rates of recidivism, according to empirical research conducted in Nigeria. These services, which greatly aid in behavioural change, hope restoration and psychological healing, frequently involve worship, biblical study, counselling and the giving of moral guidance (Effiong & Asangausung, 2023; Ogbaka et al., 2017). In a setting where other official services might be scarce or irregular, faith-based rehabilitation has become especially important.

Given the social and cultural importance of religion in Akwa Ibom State, the role of religious services in the rehabilitation of inmates in the correctional centres is especially significant to reduce recidivism. To provide inmates with opportunities for moral and spiritual development, correctional centres throughout the state have worked with religious institutions and faith-based organisations. However, the effect of these religious services on the behavioural and psychological rehabilitation of inmates in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State has been neglected in the body of knowledge. In light of the aforementioned, the purpose of this study was to assess how religious services contribute to the rehabilitation of inmates in Correctional Centres in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In spite the constitutional mandate of the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS), which emphasises the reformation, rehabilitation, and reintegration of inmates, many correctional centres including those in Akwa Ibom State continue to struggle with high rates of recidivism, behavioural relapses and poor post-release reintegration outcomes (Bassey 2024; Bassey et al., 2023). These challenges are exacerbated by corruption, overcrowding, underfunding, inadequate professional support services, and an institutional culture that remains largely punitive rather than reformatory (Asangausung et al., 2024).

Given this, religious services have become a potentially important, yet little-studied aspect of inmate rehabilitation. There is a lack of empirical data in the context of Akwa Ibom State to support the claims that prayer, worship, counselling, scripture study and faith-based mentorship may provide emotional stability, foster moral transformation, reduce aggression and promote social cohesion, despite anecdotal evidence and isolated observations to the contrary. Little is known about the precise rehabilitative outcomes, perceived efficacy and organised implementation of religious interventions in available correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State. Although Akunesiobike (2016) investigated the function of religious organisations in the rehabilitation of prisoners in Port Harcourt, this study did not employ a mixed-methods approach and was not conducted in Akwa Ibom State. The question of whether religious services are merely customary or effective rehabilitation tools that can meet the profound psychological, moral and social needs of those who are incarcerated is brought up by this knowledge gap. Therefore, to determine their potential to supplement formal rehabilitation strategies and inform policy direction for sustainable inmate reform and reintegration, a thorough investigation is required to assess how religious services contribute to the rehabilitation of inmates in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of this study was to assess how religious services contribute to the rehabilitation of inmates in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- i. assess the effectiveness of religious services in the rehabilitation of inmates within correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. examine the specific contributions of religious services to the moral, psychological and social rehabilitation of inmates in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Research Questions**

- i. How effective are the religious services within the correctional centres of Akwa Ibom State?
- ii. In what ways do religious services contribute to the rehabilitation of inmates in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State?

### **Literature Review**

A study by Said and Butler (2023) examined the connection between religious activity and experiences both before and during incarceration in the United States. The study used information gathered by the United States Census Bureau of Justice Statistics from the 2004 Survey of Inmates in State and Federal Correctional Facilities (SISGCF). The results showed that inmates' involvement in faith-based programmes had a major positive impact on their behaviour and personal development while they were incarcerated. Although this study supports the importance of religious services in the rehabilitation of prisoners, it was not carried out in Africa and was based on secondary data collected more than ten years ago. Its contextual relevance to Nigerian

correctional institutions was limited because it lacked current primary data collection and direct observation. Therefore, the current study fills this gap by assessing the function of religious services in rehabilitation using current primary data in a correctional setting in Akwa Ibom State.

A quantitative study evaluating the role of religion in inmate rehabilitation was carried out in Texas by Jang & Johnson (2022). The study, which used a convenience sample of 109 male prisoners from two prisons, found that religious programs decreased the levels of aggression, anxiety and depression among the inmates. The conclusion that faith-based rehabilitation enhances psychological well-being was corroborated by descriptive and factor analysis techniques. This study was restricted to a quantitative male-only sample, despite the fact that it demonstrated a strong correlation between improved inmate behaviour and religious participation. A thorough grasp of the lived experiences of prisoners is hampered by the lack of qualitative insights and female perspectives. To ensure a more inclusive and context-specific analysis, the current study closes this gap by using a mixed-method approach that includes both male and female inmates and correctional officers in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State.

Using an interpretive methodology, Robinson-Edwards & Kewley (2018) investigated the effects of faith-based interventions on prisoners in the United Kingdom. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data, which were then narratively analysed. The results demonstrated that religious interventions had a positive impact on prisoners, their families and correctional staff, fostering a transformational environment inside the prison. Although this study effectively illustrated the multifaceted advantages of religious services, it was limited to the United Kingdom and did not address the difficulties ex-offenders face in reintegrating into society after being released from prison. Its cultural background is also very different from Nigeria's experience. Thus, by evaluating the impact of religious services on reintegration and societal acceptance within the sociocultural context of Akwa Ibom State, this study seeks to localise the analysis.

Akunesiobike (2016) investigated the function of religious organisations in the rehabilitation of prisoners in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study combined a questionnaire and interviews to gather data. The findings showed that inmates' moral realignment and behavioural change were significantly influenced by their religious participation. Despite being carried out in Nigeria, this study only considered Rivers State and did not employ a mixed-method research design to assess the viability of religious rehabilitation initiatives in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State. The current study fills these gaps.

It is clear from the reviewed literature that religious services are widely accepted as effective instruments for the rehabilitation of inmates (prisoners) in both domestic and international correctional systems. Akwa Ibom State receives little attention in these studies, which are mostly either carried out outside of Nigeria or concentrate on other Nigerian states. Furthermore, not many studies take a thorough approach that takes into account the effectiveness and outcomes of religious services from the inmates' and correctional officers' perspectives. To close these important gaps, this study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine how religious services contribute to the rehabilitation of inmates in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study was guided by the assumptions of Don Andrews and James Bonta's Theory of Effective Correctional Intervention, developed in 1990 (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). The concepts of risk, need and responsivity (RNR), which together seek to maximise the rehabilitative results of correctional

programmes, form the foundation of the theory. Fundamentally, the theory states that interventions are most successful when they are responsive to the offender's learning style, motivation and cognitive abilities (Responsivity Principle), target criminogenic needs—dynamic factors that are directly linked to criminal behaviour, such as substance abuse or antisocial attitudes (Need Principle) and are customised to the offender's risk level (Risk Principle). These claims stress that rehabilitation should not be standardised but rather should represent a customised, evidence-based strategy meant to lower recidivism.

In application, the theory offers a useful framework for understanding the efficacy of religious services in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State. By attending to the fundamental psychological and behavioural needs of inmates, religious interventions like prayer and worship, counselling, scripture study and mentorship are consistent with the RNR principles. For example, religious counselling frequently addresses negative emotional states and cognitive distortions, which the theory identifies as criminogenic needs. Furthermore, the responsivity principle is reflected in religious facilitators' mentoring because these interactions are usually sympathetic, culturally relevant and spiritually in line with the values of the inmates, which improves receptivity and internalisation of prosocial norms. Importantly, the combined impact of these services promotes social reintegration, emotional control and behavioural modification - all of which the theory views as signs of a successful intervention.

The theory has been criticised, though, especially for its over-reliance on cognitive-behavioural paradigms and propensity to downplay the role of environmental, social and structural factors in criminal behaviour. Critics contend that the theory may ignore more significant problems that also impact rehabilitation outcomes, such as systemic inequality, institutional abuse, or deprivation at the community level, by concentrating too much on individual characteristics and behaviours. Furthermore, some have criticised the RNR model for not placing enough emphasis on the importance of identity reconstruction, personal narratives and intrinsic transformation; all of which are frequently at the heart of faith-based rehabilitation.

Notwithstanding these objections, the theory of effective correctional intervention was chosen for this study because of its solid empirical basis and applicability in evaluating the efficacy of the rehabilitation programmes. The theory provides a methodical, empirically supported framework for analysing the effects of religious services, especially as regards lowering recidivism and improving offender reintegration. Additionally, the study's findings are given credibility by their conformity to international correctional best practices, which bolsters the claim that well-crafted religious interventions can function as successful correctional tactics in the Nigerian setting.

## **Materials and Methods**

**Research Design:** A descriptive survey design was used in the study. Giving a thorough and accurate picture of the population or phenomenon under study, as well as describing the connections, patterns and trends found in the data, are the objectives of descriptive research. This design helped the researchers to gather primary data quantitatively and qualitatively.

**The Research Area:** The study was conducted Akwa Ibom State, where four (4) correctional centres, viz: Medium Security Custodial Centre, Uyo; Medium Security Custodial Centre, Ikot Ekpene; Medium Security Custodial Centre, Eket; and Medium Security Custodial Centre, Ikot Abasi served as study locations. In 1942, the Medium Security Custodial Centre (MSCC) was founded as a Native Authority prison in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. At the moment, 1,820 prisoners,



2 detainees and 58 death row inmates are there. There are currently 262 correctional officers employed at the facility, which is separated into administrative, medical, work, industry, welfare, records and arm squad units. The Medium Security Custodial Centre (MSCC), Eket, was formerly a slave trade camp and was established in 1941. The facility consists of infirmaries, pavilions, inmate cells, administrative blocks and barracks. Court cases and community concerns have resulted from trespassing issues.

The Medium Security Custodial Centre (MSCC), Ikot Ekpene was built in 1919. It was originally a British colonial prison and housed inmates who were primarily engaged in political activities against the colonial government. Currently, the correctional centre has a better outlook. In 2015, the Nigerian Prisons Service reported that the prison held 457 inmates when it should only hold 150. On Wednesday, December 27, 2017, some 36 dangerous inmates escaped from the Ikot Ekpene Prison in Akwa Ibom State after attacking the personnel on duty (Daily Trust Editorial, 2018). The Medium Security Custodial Centre (MSCC), Ikot Abasi was established during the colonial era as a detention camp for people sold to the colonial masters as slaves. It was established in 1912 with a capacity of 230 inmates (Bassey et al., 2023).

**Study Population:** The study population comprised 4,056 people (3,407 prisoners and 649 correctional officers).

**Table 1: Population of Inmates and Officers in Correctional Centres in Akwa Ibom State**

Correctional Centre	Inmate	Officer	Total	Capacity
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Uyo	1820	262	2,082	613
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Eket	251	111	362	123
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Ikot Ekpene	916	176	1092	400
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Ikot Abasi	420	100	520	200
Total	3,407	649	4056	1,336

**Source: The Department of Planning, Research and Statistics, Nigeria Correctional Service, Akwa Ibom State Command (2025)**

Table 1 reveals that the correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State were overcrowded. The facilities are functioning well beyond their designated bounds, as evidenced by the fact that there are 3,407 inmates overall compared to the 1,336 total official capacity. With 1,820 inmates, Uyo Custodial Centre has more than twice as many inmates as it can hold (613). Ikot Ekpene and Ikot Abasi are next in line, both of which exhibit significant overcrowding. There are 649 officers in all centres, which seems inadequate in comparison to the number of inmates, casting doubt on the efficiency of management, supervision and rehabilitation initiatives. The information revealed structural stress on staff, infrastructure and resources, which could have an adverse effect on security, living conditions and the state's overall correctional rehabilitation objectives.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

The sample size for the study was 384. This sample size was determined using Bill Gorden's (2004) finite sample size determination statistics. Purposive and cluster sampling techniques were used to choose participants. The clusters were the four medium security custodial centres in Akwa Ibom State: Uyo, Eket, Ikot Ekpene and Ikot Abasi. Purposive sampling was used to specifically

choose inmates and correctional officers who were actively participating in or had been exposed to religious rehabilitation programmes within each of these clusters. In order to ensure a balanced and contextually relevant dataset for analysis, participants were chosen based on their willingness to participate, mental fitness and representation of both male and female perspectives.

**Table 2: Sample distribution according to instruments of data collection**

Correctional Centre	Population	Proportional Sample
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Uyo	2,082	$2082/4056 \times 384 = 197$
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Eket	362	$362/4056 \times 384 = 34$
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Ikot Ekpene	1092	$1092/4056 \times 384 = 103$
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Ikot Abasi	520	$520/4056 \times 384 = 49$
Total	4056	384

**Source: Field data (2025)**

According to their respective population sizes, Table 2 displays the proportionate distribution of the research sample among the four medium security custodial centres in Akwa Ibom State. To ensure that the contribution of each facility to the overall population is fairly represented in the sample of 384 respondents, the sample allocation follows a statistically proportional approach. Eket contributes the fewest respondents, while Uyo, with the largest combined population of officers and inmates, receives the largest share of the sample. More accurate generalisations and comparative analysis between the various custodial centres are made possible by this proportional sampling technique, which improves the data's representativeness and balance.

**Table 3: Distribution of Research Sample by Method and Correctional Centre in Akwa Ibom State**

Correctional Centre	Questionnaire (50%)	FGD (35%)	IDI (15%)	Total Sample
Uyo	99	69	29	197
Eket	17	12	5	34
Ikot Ekpene	52	36	15	103
Ikot Abasi	25	17	8	50
Total	193	134	57	384

**Source: Field data (2025)**

Based on three different data collection techniques: questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and In-Depth Interview (IDI), Table 3 displays the distribution of the research sample among the four correctional facilities in Akwa Ibom State. The questionnaire had 50% of participants, 35% participated in focus group discussions and 15% took part in IDIs. The sample was distributed proportionately. As expected, given its smaller population, Eket received the smallest share of the total sample, while Uyo Correctional Centre, with the largest population, received the largest share. By ensuring equal representation from all facilities, this proportional approach improves the data's depth and credibility and enables comparisons between different centres and methodologies.

**Table 3: Distribution of Research Participants by Category and Method of Data Collection in Akwa Ibom State Correctional Facilities**

Category	Questionnaire (50%)	FGD (35%)	IDI (15%)	Total
Inmates	150	115	47	312
Correctional Officers	43	19	10	72
Total	193	134	57	384

**Source: Field data (2025)**

The distribution of research participants in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State by category and data collection method is shown in Table 3. The table shows that 50% of participants completed the questionnaire, 35% participated in focus group discussions (FGDs) and 15% participated in in-depth interviews (IDIs) as part of a carefully planned data collection strategy that ensured balanced representation and depth of insight. The majority of responders across all methods were inmates, which is indicative of their importance to the rehabilitation focus of the study. Although they took part in smaller numbers, correctional officers also offered insightful opinions on inmate behaviour and institutional procedures. By including both administrative and experiential perspectives from the correctional system, this distribution not only guaranteed a wide variety of responses but also strengthened the validity of the results.

**Table 4: Distribution of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Participants by Correctional Centre and Group Composition in Akwa Ibom State**

Correctional Centre	FGD	No of Participants
Uyo	Group 1 (Inmates)	12
	Group 2 (Inmates)	12
	Group 3 (Inmates)	12
	Group 4 (Inmates)	12
	Group 5 (Senior Officers)	12
	Group 6 (Junior Officers)	9
<b>Total</b>		<b>69</b>
Eket	Group 7 (Inmates)	6
	Group 8 (Senior and Junior Officers)	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>12</b>
Ikot Ekpene	Group 9 (Inmates)	12
	Group 10 (Senior Officers)	12
	Group 11 (Junior Officers)	12
<b>Total</b>		<b>36</b>
Ikot Abasi	Group 12 (Inmates)	10
	Group 13 (Senior and Junior Officers)	7
<b>Total</b>		<b>17</b>

**Source: Field data (2025)**

Table 4 shows the distribution of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participants within the correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State, which reflects an attempt to gather a range of viewpoints from both correctional officers and inmates. With the largest number of participants, the Uyo custodial centre may have the largest inmate population and facility size, providing a wider range



of experiences and perspectives. Ikot Ekpene trailed closely behind, demonstrating a fair representation of both officers and prisoners. Eket and Ikot Abasi, on the other hand, had fewer participants, which might be a reflection of their smaller institutional capacities. A layered understanding of administrative and rehabilitative dynamics was ensured by the inclusion of both senior and junior officers in the FGDs. By including a variety of perspectives from individuals who are directly involved in or impacted by religious services within the correctional setting, this stratified approach improves the richness of qualitative data.

### **Procedure for Data Collection**

Three separate but complementary methods comprised the data collection process for this study: questionnaire distribution, focus group discussions (FGDs) and in-depth interviews (IDIs). First, formal authorisation to enter the four chosen Medium Security Custodial Centres in Uyo, Eket, Ikot Ekpene and Ikot Abasi was acquired from the NCoS, Akwa Ibom State Command. Following access, each correctional facility's inmates and officers who had first-hand knowledge of or active involvement in religious rehabilitation programmes were identified through purposive sampling.

The study designed a semi-structured questionnaire and employed Open Data Kit (ODK) software to collect the qualitative data from the selected participants in each correctional centre. Trained research assistants provided guidance to the respondents, particularly the prisoners with low literacy levels. Confidentiality was maintained at all times, and participation was completely voluntary. After completing the questionnaire, groups of inmates (separated by facility and gender) participated in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to promote candid and interactive discussion about their experiences with religious services, perceived effects on their lives and difficulties they saw in the criminal justice system. A semi-structured guide was used to moderate each FGD session, which lasted roughly 30 to 45 minutes.

Lastly, a few inmates and correctional officers who had substantial knowledge of the execution and results of religious programmes inside the detention facilities participated in In-Depth Interviews (IDIs). A deeper comprehension of the institutional dynamics, personal perceptions and contextual realities impacting rehabilitation efforts was made possible by these interviews. With the participants' permission, all interviews and conversations were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. This multi-method approach strengthened the validity of findings about the role of religious services in the rehabilitation of inmates in Akwa Ibom State and ensured a rich triangulation of data.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics, including frequency tables and simple percentages, were used to analyse the questionnaire data to compile the responses and spot patterns and trends. Thematic analysis was used to examine the qualitative information transcribed from FGDs and IDIs. This required classifying the responses according to recurring themes, analysing trends and making deductions regarding the goals of the study. To ensure that important viewpoints and experiences were appropriately represented and in line with the main research questions, manual coding techniques were used to arrange the qualitative data.

### **Ethical Issues**

Throughout the research process, ethical standards were rigorously adhered to. Permission was sought and obtained from the Nigeria Correctional Service, Akwa Ibom State Command. Before participation, informed consent was obtained from each participant after they were briefed on the

study's objectives. Respondents were guaranteed to participate voluntarily and to be free to leave at any time without facing any consequences. By avoiding personal identifiers and safely storing the data gathered, the study guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Inmates, who constitute a vulnerable population, were given special ethical consideration by guaranteeing non-coercive participation, respectful engagement and the presence of correctional officials during data collection only when necessary for security reasons, without impairing participants' freedom of expression.

## Results

The socio-demographic distribution of the 384 respondents revealed that males constituted the majority (80.7%), reflecting the general trend of higher incarceration rates among men. Most respondents were between the ages of 24 and 35, indicating that a significant portion of inmates were young adults in their prime working years. The largest age group was 30 to 35 years (26.6%), followed by those aged 24 to 29 (22.4%). In terms of religion, the majority identified as Christians (81.3%), with smaller proportions identifying as Muslims (11.7%) and adherents of African Traditional Religion (7.0%). This religious distribution likely influences the nature and emphasis of religious services available in correctional centres and reflects the dominant faith practices within the region.

In terms of marital status, 37.0% of respondents were married, while 48.4% of respondents were single. The proportions of widowed and divorced people were 8.1% and 6.5%, respectively, indicating a wide variety of personal histories as well as potentially different social and emotional support networks. In terms of education, a sizable percentage had completed secondary school (40.9%), followed by primary school (25.0%) and university (19.5%). Just 14.6% of respondents said they had no formal education. This suggests that both officers and prisoners have a moderate level of literacy, which affects how they interact with written religious texts and rehabilitation initiatives. Of the 72 correctional officers who responded, 56.9% were junior officers and 43.1% were senior officers. This reasonably even distribution points to a range of viewpoints from various operational and administrative levels within the facilities. All things considered, the demographic distribution offers a solid basis for analysing the impact and perception of religious services in the healing process.

**Table 5: Distribution of Inmates and Recidivists across Medium Security Custodial Centres in Akwa Ibom State**

Location	No. of Inmate	No. of Recidivist
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Uyo	1820	310
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Eket	251	85
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Ikot Ekpene	916	144
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Ikot Abasi	420	161
Total	3407	555

**Source: Field data (2025)**

Table 5 shows the number of inmates and the prevalence of recidivism across the correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State. There are 555 identified recidivists out of 3,407 total inmates, which

makes up about 16.3% of the total inmate population. A major obstacle to rehabilitation efforts within the correctional system is reflected in this figure.

Out of all the correctional centres, Uyo had the most inmates (1,820) and the most recidivists (310), who made up about 17% of the inmate population. Even though there were fewer inmates (420), Ikot Abasi had a disproportionately high number of recidivists (161), meaning that its recidivism rate is the highest of all the centres at about 38.3%. This raises the possibility of inadequacies in the effectiveness of rehabilitation or post-release support there. Recidivism rates in Eket and Ikot Ekpene are approximately 33.9% and 15.7%, respectively, based on the reports of 85 and 144 recidivists. The comparatively lower rate in Ikot Ekpene might indicate that post-release monitoring systems or inmate reform initiatives there are more successful than in Eket.

**Table 6: Inmate Participation in Faith-Based Religious Activities across Medium Security Custodial Centres in Akwa Ibom State**

Location	Faith-Based Organisations				Total
	Catholic	Pentecostal	Islam	Others	
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Uyo	150	990	80	600	1820 (59.73%)
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Eket	86	133	12	20	251 (8.24%)
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Ikot Ekpene	85	531	40	260	916 (30.06%)
Medium Security Custodial Centre, Ikot Abasi	25	260	10	125	420 (13.78%)
Total	346 (11.95%)	1914 (62.82%)	142 (4.66%)	1005 (32.98%)	3407 (100%)

**Source: Field data (2025)**

Table 6 shows how many inmates participate in different faith-based religious activities in four medium security prisons in Akwa Ibom State. It shows how common certain religious affiliations are, as well as how many inmates participate in spiritual programs as part of their rehabilitation. The majority of the 3,407 inmates (1,914 or 62.82%) engage in Pentecostal religious activities, making it the most prevalent religious affiliation across all centres. Because of their focus on prison ministry and outreach, Pentecostal groups are probably the most active or well-organised within correctional facilities, based on this high level of engagement.

With 1,820 inmates, Uyo Custodial Centre has the most faith-based participants of any inmate facility. Of these, 990 are Pentecostal, 600 are classified as “Others” (which may include nondenominational or nonmainstream Christian sects), 150 are Catholic and 80 are Islamic. This strengthens Uyo's standing as a major centre for reformative and religious engagement. With 916 inmates and high levels of religious participation, notably 531 Pentecostal and 260 Others, Ikot Ekpene comes in second, indicating a high degree of diversity and faith-based intervention. With 133 and 260 participants, respectively, Eket and Ikot Abasi demonstrate noteworthy involvement, especially in Pentecostal practices, despite having smaller prison populations. This highlights the pervasive impact of Pentecostal ministries even in smaller facilities. With 142 participants (4.66%), there is some Islamic representation, but it is relatively low. This could be due to the region's religious makeup or possibly the facilities' restricted availability of Islamic clerical

services. A considerable proportion of prisoners are drawn to alternative or interdenominational religious groups, as evidenced by the 346 inmates (11.95%) who are Catholic and the 1,005 inmates (32.98%) who fall under the "Others" category.

**Research Question I: How effective are the religious services within correctional centres of Akwa Ibom State?**

**Table 7: Perception of Inmates and Correctional Officers on the effectiveness of Religious Services in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State**

Religious services	Effective (%)	Not Effective (%)	Total (%)	Remark
Prayer and Worship	45 (23.3%)	5 (2.6%)	50 (25.9%)	Effective
Religious Counselling	38 (19.7%)	4 (2.1%)	42 (21.8%)	Effective
Scripture Study	33 (17.1%)	3 (1.6%)	36 (18.7%)	Effective
Faith-Based Group Activities	30 (15.5%)	3 (1.6%)	33 (17.1%)	Effective
Mentorship by Religious Facilitators	27 (14.0%)	5 (2.6%)	32 (16.6%)	Effective
Total	173 (89.6%)	20 (10.4%)	193 (100%)	

**Source: Field data (2025)**

The information in Table 7 sheds light on the opinions of both inmates and correctional officers regarding the effectiveness of religious services offered in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State. It shows that 89.6% (173 respondents) strongly agreed that these services had a positive impact, while only 10.4% (20 respondents) disagreed. With 45 respondents (23.3%) evaluating prayer and worship as effective, it was the most widely recognised religious service among those evaluated. This implies that group worship has a big impact on prisoners' spiritual and mental health and may even act as a unifying factor in the prison setting.

Also highly ranked is religious counselling, which 38 respondents (19.7%) believed it to be effective. Its high level of approval might be explained by its focus on rehabilitation, personal development and post-release preparedness. Likewise, faith-based group activities (15.5%) and scripture study (17.1%) were reported to have an impact. In addition to promoting moral reflection, shared values and group support, these structured interactions probably help people change their behaviour and become less aggressive. Even though it occurs less frequently (14.0%), mentoring by religious facilitators is viewed favourably. Although it may not reach as many participants as group-based services, mentoring offers a more individualised and ongoing form of guidance that is still thought to help promote moral development and reorientation towards one's life's purpose. Religious interventions are generally viewed favourably, as evidenced by the consistently high percentages across all service types. The comparatively low number of respondents (between 1.6% and 2.6% per category) who thought the services were ineffective might be due to programme irregularities, accessibility issues, or a minority of staff members or inmates' lack of interest in religion.

**Table 8: Selected Responses on the Effectiveness of Available Religious Services in Akwa Ibom State Correctional Centres (FGD & IDI)**

S/n	Responses (FGD & IDI)
	<i>Prayer and Worship – FGD (Inmate): "Taking part in prayer meetings has kept me composed and optimistic. Every week I have something to look forward to because of it. To be honest, I would be lost here without those moments".</i>
	<i>Religious Counselling – IDI (Inmate): "My perspective was altered by religious counselling. I feel like I have a second chance now, whereas before I thought no one cared about us. This pastor truly listens without passing judgement".</i>
	<i>Scripture Study – FGD (Inmate): "We study the Bible together and I take away lessons that improve my understanding of who I am. I learn forgiveness and patience from it. That has kept me out of trouble".</i>
	<i>Faith-Based Group Activities – IDI (Inmate): "I like it when we get together in groups to talk about life and faith. It strengthens our relationship and maintains harmony. It resembles group therapy with a spiritual twist".</i>
	<i>Mentorship by Religious Facilitators – FGD (Inmate): "The religious mentors do more than just give sermons. Like brothers, they give us advice. After hearing that I might still have a future, I began studying tailoring here. That has actual impact".</i>
	<i>Prayer and Worship – IDI (Officer): "I've noticed that prisoners who consistently attend worship sessions are generally more disciplined. They follow directions better and stay out of arguments".</i>
	<i>Religious Counselling – FGD (Officer): "Real behavioural change has been observed, particularly among repeat offenders who have enrolled in religious counselling. After release, some returned merely to express gratitude".</i>
	<i>Scripture Study – IDI (Officer): "Studying the Bible provides them with a worthwhile activity. It eases tension in the garden. Through scripture sessions, some prisoners have even begun teaching others to read".</i>
	<i>Faith-Based Group Activities – FGD (Officer): "Cliques and violence are lessened by these group activities. They put their gang allegiances aside when they get together for religious talks. It fosters unity".</i>
	<i>Mentorship by Religious Facilitators – IDI (Officer): "The inmates get along well with the mentors, particularly the outside ones. They discuss life after prison with them, something that many officers are not trained or have the time to do".</i>

**Source: Field data (2025)**

The qualitative responses obtained from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) offer valuable insights into the lived experiences of inmates and correctional officers with regard to religious services in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State (see Table 8). The majority of the testimonies support the quantitative findings regarding the efficacy of religious programs by confirming their rehabilitative impact. Inmates frequently reported that prayer and worship sessions are an essential source of emotional stability and hope. Attending weekly services is characterised as an anchor that offers direction and mental peace, rather than merely as a routine. According to officers, these sessions are linked to improved inmate behaviour and adherence to institutional regulations, indicating that religious activities support order in the prison environment.

It was found that religious counselling was especially transformative. Inmates emphasised the psychological and emotional relief it offers, stating that it has changed their perspective on life to be truly heard without passing judgment. Correctional Officers who have seen long-term behavioural change, even among recidivists, who sometimes return after being released to show gratitude, agree with this sentiment, which is a potent testament to the service's enduring impact. Scripture study promotes peer support, emotional control and personal growth from the viewpoints of both officers and inmates. Inmates attribute it to teaching them patience and forgiveness, which are qualities that are said to lower infractions and interpersonal conflict. Officers attribute it to a rise in literacy initiatives and a decrease in idleness, which enhances the social climate in general.

Religious group activities were commended for fostering a sense of belonging and lowering tensions among the inmates. The group-based approach reduces gang behaviour and tensions while also promoting mutual introspection. Correctional Officers noted that these kinds of activities foster harmony and lessen violence, indicating that their worth goes beyond spirituality to include social cohesion and conflict resolution. Religious facilitators' mentoring, particularly that provided by those outside the facility, seems to have a profound and intimate effect. Inmates view these mentors as sources of inspiration and life coaching in addition to spiritual guidance. For some, mentorship served as the impetus for future planning and vocational training. Correctional officers recognised that outside mentors interact with inmates in ways that staff members frequently cannot, especially when it comes to post-release reintegration.

#### **Research Question II: In what ways do religious services contribute to the rehabilitation of inmates in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State?**

**Table 9: Inmates' Perceived Rehabilitation Outcomes from Religious Services in Akwa Ibom State (n = 193)**

<b>Religious services</b>	<b>Helps in Moral Transformation</b>	<b>Reduces Recidivism</b>	<b>Improves Mental Well-being</b>	<b>Promotes Forgiveness and Social Values</b>	<b>Total Responses (%)</b>
Prayer and Worship	20	8	12	10	50 (25.9%)
Religious Counselling	18	10	8	6	42 (21.8%)
Scripture Study	15	6	8	7	36 (18.7%)
Faith-Based Group Activities	14	8	6	5	33 (17.1%)
Mentorship by Religious Facilitators	13	7	5	7	32 (16.6%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>193 (100%)</b>

**Source: Field data (2025)**

The information in Table 9 indicates how inmates view the contribution of religious services to their rehabilitation in correctional centres in Akwa Ibom State. The answers are dispersed among the four main facets of rehabilitation: fostering forgiveness and social values, reducing recidivism,



improving mental health and moral transformation. The most common rehabilitative result of religious services, according to a sizable percentage of prisoners (41.5%), was moral transformation. This implies that religious activities, especially those involving prayer, counselling, scripture study and mentoring, are effective means of changing inmates' perspectives and encouraging moral behaviour. Notably, the highest number of responses (20) in this category came from prayer and worship alone, indicating its perceived spiritual and behavioural impact.

Even though there were fewer responses overall (20.2%), the decrease in recidivism was significant. The most commonly mentioned practices in this area were faith-based group activities and religious counselling, suggesting that peer involvement and organised religious discussion may be crucial in preventing recurrent offences. These programs probably give inmates a new sense of responsibility and useful moral guidance that could help them in their post-incarceration lives. All five religious services had a positive correlation with mental well-being, which received 20.2% of all responses. This suggests that engaging in religious activities offers coping strategies, inner peace and emotional relief from the stresses of incarceration. In this regard, prayer and scripture study stand out for their therapeutic benefits.

Meanwhile, 18.1% of all responses related to the promotion of social values and forgiveness. The findings indicated that religious teachings aided the inmates in developing empathy, patience and reconciliation skills—qualities necessary for reintegration into society and interpersonal stability in correctional settings. Mentorship and scripture study were particularly influential in this regard. Overall, the responses showed that prisoners viewed religious services as multifaceted rehabilitation tools. These services address the psychological, behavioural and social facets of inmate development rather than just the spiritual.

**Table 10: Selected Responses on Inmates' Perceived Rehabilitation Outcomes from Religious Services in Akwa Ibom State**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Responses (FGD &amp; IDI)</b>
<b>Inmates</b>	<p><i>"Worship and prayer altered my perspective. I used to not give a damn about right or wrong, but these days I feel bad when I make mistakes. I'm improving as a person". (Moral transformation). IDI</i></p> <p><i>"I decided not to return here after going to religious counselling. After my release, it gave me the confidence to start over and live a different life". (Reducing recidivism). FGD</i></p> <p><i>"Whenever I participate in Bible study or worship, I feel at ease. It eases my anxiety. I've changed a lot since I was an aggressive person". (Mental well-being). FGD</i></p> <p><i>"My faith has taught me about forgiveness. I no longer harbour resentment towards those who have harmed me. I wasn't that person before". (Forgiveness and social values). IDI</i></p> <p><i>"I feel hopeful because of the guidance I receive from religious leaders. They claim that our past does not define who we are. I'm getting ready for freedom thanks to that belief". (Moral transformation and social reintegration). FGD</i></p>
<b>Correctional Officers</b>	<p><i>"The majority of prisoners who participate in prayer and worship are more composed and courteous. They are less likely than others to run afoul of the law". (Moral transformation and mental stability) FGD</i></p> <p><i>"I've witnessed ex-offenders who were once troublesome reintegrate into society and succeed, particularly those who received religious counselling as mentors." (Reduced Recidivism) FGD</i></p>

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*"I hear from some prisoners about how studying the Bible helps them deal with their depression. Their violent outbursts are less frequent". (Mental wellbeing) IDI*

*"Group activities based on faith foster respect and unity among prisoners. It is there that they discover how to live in harmony and respect others". (Forgiveness and social values) IDI*

*"The religious mentors are assisting these men in finding their purpose, something that even some professionals are unable to do. That has great potential for long-term recovery". (Mentorship and moral development). IDI*

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**Source: Field data (2025)**

The qualitative responses from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) in Table 10 provide powerful first-hand accounts that support the therapeutic value of religious services in correctional settings. These testimonies show four main outcomes that were consistently observed in both participant groups: mental health, moral transformation, recidivism reduction and the encouragement of forgiveness and social values.

According to the inmates, religious participation seems to have a profoundly transformative effect. A number of prisoners reported that their worldview and moral compass were changed by their involvement in prayer, worship and spiritual mentoring. As evidence of true moral reorientation, one prisoner acknowledged that prayer made them more aware of right and wrong. Following religious counselling, another person reported feeling hopeful and motivated to start over, demonstrating a noticeable shift away from criminal recidivism and towards social reintegration. Religious pursuits also had therapeutic benefits; worship and Bible study were linked to calming effects that lessened emotional instability and anxiety. The ability to forgive, which is essential for lowering interpersonal conflict and promoting social harmony, was another skill that inmates reported having improved. Crucially, some inmate responses combine more than one outcome, like readiness for reintegration and moral transformation. These overlapping effects imply that religious interventions provide a comprehensive approach to rehabilitation, addressing behavioural modification, emotional healing and readiness for life after incarceration.

Correctional officers' viewpoints offer additional confirmation. In line with the idea of moral and behavioural transformation, officers noticed that prisoners who regularly took part in religious programs typically displayed better behaviour, emotional stability and respect for authority. Additionally, they noted that prisoners who participated in scripture study exhibited lower levels of aggression and depressive symptoms, indicating that these programs have a significant positive impact on mental health. To support the long-term benefits of spiritual interventions in lowering recidivism, officers also cited the successful reintegration stories of former offenders, particularly those who received religious counselling. They also recognised the special contribution that faith-based group activities make to the development of inmate community, peace and respect—all of which are essential for preserving order in correctional facilities.

The acknowledgement of religious mentors, often outside facilitators, as crucial in offering direction that correctional staff might not be able to provide, is especially significant. These mentors are recognised for assisting inmates in regaining a feeling of direction and optimism, which is a necessary starting point for long-term behavioural change and mental healing. All things considered, the qualitative data in Table 11 confirmed that both officers and inmates viewed religious services in correctional facilities as stimulants for true rehabilitation. They supported the

larger objectives of the Nigeria Correctional Service's philosophy by promoting social readiness, emotional stability, personal growth and internal transformation.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Religious services in correctional facilities throughout Akwa Ibom State were found to be very successful in promoting inmate rehabilitation, according to the first objective and related findings. According to inmates and correctional staff, religious programs supported moral transformation, behavioural change, and emotional stability - all of which are important aspects of rehabilitation. This is consistent with the findings of Jang & Johnson (2022), who discovered that religious engagement enhanced inmate behaviour in Texas prisons and decreased psychological distress. Similarly, Said & Butler (2023), in a United States-based study, observed that participation in faith-based programmes fostered personal transformation and reduced institutional misconduct. These parallels across diverse contexts highlight the broad relevance of religious services in correctional environments, reinforcing the present study's finding that structured spiritual engagement plays a significant role in promoting internal change and emotional healing.

&the second objective and corresponding findings strongly affirmed that religious services contributed to the moral, psychological and social rehabilitation of inmates. According to the respondents, inmates were able to experience forgiveness, empathy, and social bonding through important components like scripture study, group worship, and mentoring. These findings are in line with Robinson-Edwards & Kewley's (2018) research, which showed how religious interventions can promote harmony and lessen gang-related conflicts in UK jails. Akunesiobike (2016) also noted that religious participation encourages behavioural realignment in Nigeria. In keeping with Andrews & Bonta's Theory of Effective Correctional Intervention, the current study reinforces this while also adding to the conversation by providing in-depth insights into how particular religious activities address the moral and psychological needs of prisoners.

### **Conclusion**

According to the results, 89.6% of participants agreed that religious services have a positive impact on mentoring, scripture study, counselling, worship, and group activities. These services were also seen by correctional officers and inmates in Akwa Ibom State as being highly successful in fostering social cohesion, behavioural change, emotional stability, and spiritual development. Furthermore, inmates and correctional officers reported that religious services in correctional facilities across Akwa Ibom State significantly contribute to inmates' rehabilitation by promoting moral change, reducing recidivism, improving mental health, and fostering social values and forgiveness.

These findings imply that, with careful planning and execution, faith-based interventions can serve as powerful tools for correctional reform. They offer transformative, culturally relevant, and reasonably priced pathways to reduced crime and offender reintegration. By highlighting the rehabilitative effects of religious programs in Nigerian prison environments, specifically in Akwa Ibom State, the study contributes to the growing body of research that sees spirituality and moral education as crucial components of best practices in corrections. It encourages scholarly discussion by modifying global correctional theories, such as the Theory of Effective Correctional Intervention, to fit Nigeria's unique institutional and sociocultural context.

With psychological and practical benefits that extend beyond incarceration and into post-release reintegration, this study reinforces the notion that religious services are crucial to inmate rehabilitation and custodial stability. Future research could examine these findings by comparing

the sustainability and effects of different states and denominations, or by examining the long-term reintegration outcomes of formerly incarcerated individuals who participated in religious programs.

### **Recommendations**

- i. The Nigerian Correctional Service should go beyond the current practices and formally incorporate religious services into correctional policy frameworks. This should include regular training for facilitators, a standardised multi-faith delivery model, structured partnerships with recognised religious organisations and a strong evaluation system to measure impact. This would guarantee that religious rehabilitation becomes an inclusive and evidence-based part of inmate reform, increase accountability and improve quality across facilities.
- ii. The Nigerian Correctional Service should encourage post-release reintegration. This entails offering social integration initiatives, job training, mental health services, and extensive support networks. Religious services, vocational training, counselling and mentorship programmes can be facilitated by working together with businesses, government agencies, religious and community organisations. This all-encompassing strategy lowers recidivism rates and encourages civic engagement, which eventually makes society more inclusive.

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