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**EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL CASEWORK
METHODS IN THE CORRECTION OF JUVENILE
DELINQUENTS IN SELECTED CORRECTIONAL CENTRES
IN LAGOS STATE**

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ABSTRACT

The correction of juvenile delinquents while they are in correctional institutions is crucial to their effective reintegration into the community and their contribution to the development of society. This study examined the effectiveness of social casework methods in correcting juvenile delinquents in selected correctional centres in Lagos State. Using psychosocial theory, problem-solving theory, and social systems theory, this study employed a qualitative research approach, and content analysis was used for data analysis. Data were gathered from 35 juveniles and 12 social workers from Lagos State. Findings highlight the role of interviews in the gathering of information from the juveniles, which leads to the diagnosis of their problems and eventual individualised treatment. It also revealed that past trauma affects the juveniles' ability to open up and engage positively in interviews, accurate social diagnosis is often hindered by the lack of training and the expertise of the correctional staff and effective treatment is often compromised due to inadequate funding, leaving juveniles without access to the support and resources needed for their total correction and successful reintegration into the community. The study recommends continuous training and professional development for social workers to enhance their effectiveness in juvenile corrections, adequate funding of the correctional centres by the State government and the engagement of trauma-informed specialists in the interview processes at the correctional centres.

Keywords: Juvenile Delinquency, Social Casework, Correctional Centres, Social Work.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency remains a major social issue in Nigeria, with increasing concerns about the effectiveness of correctional methods in addressing the behaviour of young offenders. As urbanisation, industrialization, and economic instability persist, cases of juvenile offences such as theft, substance abuse, gang involvement, and violent crimes continue to rise, this has necessitated the implementation of structured correctional interventions aimed at reforming juvenile delinquents and facilitating their reintegration into society (Gray et al, 2024).

Social casework has emerged as a fundamental approach in juvenile correction, employing individualised interventions to address the behavioural and psychological needs of juvenile delinquents. Several studies have highlighted the significance of social casework in correctional centres, particularly through methods such as interviews, social diagnosis, and treatment planning. However, there is a growing concern regarding the inconsistency in applying these methods, the limited training of social workers, and the absence of standardised correctional frameworks.

The effectiveness of correctional methods largely depends on the approach used in addressing juvenile delinquency. Some scholars argue that punitive measures such as incarceration and harsh discipline do not yield positive behavioural changes and, in some cases, may exacerbate delinquent tendencies (Feld, 2019). Conversely, correctional approaches that incorporate counselling, education, and vocational training have been found to produce better outcomes in reducing recidivism among juveniles (Makinde, 2023).

Nigeria's correctional system has faced criticism for its inadequate infrastructure and lack of correctional-focused programs (Egwuagu & Udenta, 2023). Many correctional centres struggle with overcrowding, poor living conditions, and insufficient access to trained social workers, which significantly hinders

the effectiveness of social casework interventions. These limitations often result in juvenile offenders re-entering society without the necessary behavioural modifications to prevent future offences. Social casework methods rely heavily on effective collaboration between social workers, law enforcement agencies, families, and community organisations. Studies have shown that holistic interventions, which involve family counselling and community support, yield better long-term outcomes for juvenile offenders (Day & Malvaso, 2024). However, in Nigeria, a weak inter-agency coordination framework has made it difficult to implement a multidisciplinary approach to juvenile correction. Furthermore, cultural perceptions and societal stigmatisation of juvenile offenders continue to impede correctional efforts. In some cases, juvenile delinquents face rejection from their families and communities, making reintegration even more challenging (Balcha et al., 2021). Addressing these social barriers is essential to ensuring the success of correctional programs and reducing repeat offences.

According to Naessens and Raeymaeckers (2020), a generalist approach to effective social work has proven so effective in addressing juvenile delinquency. They argue that comprehensive social interventions must integrate various case management strategies to support juveniles through their correctional journey. However, in Nigeria, a lack of case-based interventions limits the impact of social work in correctional centres.

Research by Gibson et al. (2025) asserts that incarcerated juveniles benefit significantly from structured caseworker programmes that offer mentorship and guidance. They emphasise that caseworkers must be adequately trained to understand the complex psychological and social issues affecting juveniles, thereby tailoring correctional interventions to each individual's needs. Islam (2021) posits that social inclusion and structured aftercare programs are critical in preventing recidivism among juvenile offenders.

The absence of these structured interventions within the Lagos correctional centres has led to a cycle of reoffending among juveniles, highlighting the need for policy reforms to establish more effective reintegration strategies.

In addition to infrastructural challenges, a lack of policy enforcement has also contributed to the inefficiencies in juvenile correctional programs in Lagos State. While Nigeria has adopted international frameworks for juvenile justice, the practical implementation of these policies remains inconsistent (Coalition for Juvenile Justice et al., 2022). This has led to disparities in how correctional methods are applied across different regions and institutions.

1.1 Background of Juvenile Delinquency and Correctional Methods

Juvenile delinquency is a critical challenge faced by correctional institutions worldwide. The increasing number of juvenile offenders calls for evidence-based correctional approaches that prioritise behavioural transformation and reintegration. Traditionally, punitive measures were employed to discipline juvenile offenders, but modern correctional approaches emphasise correctional through social casework techniques, counselling, vocational training, and educational support. According to Walker (2024), punitive measures such as incarceration often fail to address the root causes of delinquency, leading to high recidivism rates. Instead, correctional-focused interventions that provide skill development and psychological counselling have shown more promising results in helping juveniles reintegrate into society successfully. Gabriel et al. (2021) assert that a child-centred correctional approach is necessary to address the specific needs of juvenile delinquents. They emphasise that correctional centres should focus on fostering emotional stability and personal development rather than merely detaining offenders. In Nigeria, however, many correctional facilities still operate under puni-

tive models that lack the necessary rehabilitative programs.

One major limitation in Lagos's juvenile correctional system is the insufficient number of trained professionals capable of implementing social casework methods effectively (Odinka et al., 2023). Without well-equipped social workers, many juvenile offenders do not receive adequate psychological and social support, leading to ineffective correctional outcomes.

Furthermore, research by Ogbanga (2024) highlights the importance of holistic correctional programs that integrate both formal education and vocational training. They argue that offering structured educational and skill-based programs within correctional facilities significantly enhances the chances of successful reintegration and reduces the risk of reoffending.

Juvenile correction also requires active family involvement and community support. According to Dawson (2022), juveniles who receive post-correctional support from family members and local organisations are less likely to engage in criminal activities again. However, in many Nigerian communities, juvenile offenders face rejection and stigmatisation, making reintegration efforts more challenging. Given these challenges, effective policy implementation and inter-agency collaboration are essential to improving correctional methods for juveniles. As emphasised by the Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board (2022), countries with structured, well-funded juvenile correctional systems tend to have lower recidivism rates and better correctional outcomes. Lagos State must adopt similar approaches to ensure that correctional programmes are not only punitive but also transformative.

1.2 Significance of Social Casework in Juvenile Correction

Social casework plays a pivotal role in juvenile correction by facilitating personalised intervention strategies. Through the use of structured interviews, so-

cial diagnosis, and tailored treatment, social workers help juvenile offenders address the underlying causes of delinquency. Despite its relevance, there is a gap in the effective implementation of social casework methods, particularly in resource-limited correctional centres.

1.3 Problem Statement and Research Gap

While social casework has been widely recognised as an essential correctional method, its effectiveness in Lagos juvenile correctional centres remains under-explored. Existing studies have focused on punitive measures and general correctional techniques, but have not adequately examined the role of social casework in addressing juvenile delinquency.

This study seeks to bridge this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of social casework methods in selected correctional centres in Lagos State. It also examined the usefulness of interviews in the correction of juvenile delinquents. It investigated the efficacy of social diagnosis and treatment in the correction of juvenile delinquents. It determined the challenges in implementing social casework methods and strategies for its improvement. The study answered the questions of the roles social casework methods, such as interview, social diagnosis and treatment, play in the correction of juvenile delinquents, with the challenges and strategies in implementing them.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on three major theories that provide insight into juvenile correctional methods: 1. Psycho Social Theory: This theory emphasises the interplay between an individual's psychological state and their social environment. It posits that juvenile delinquency often stems from adverse social conditions, requiring correctional methods that address both psychological and social aspects of behavioural change. 2. Problem-Solving Theory: This theory sug-

gests that social casework should focus on identifying and addressing the root causes of delinquency through systematic intervention strategies. It asserts that by equipping juveniles with problem-solving skills, their likelihood of recidivism is reduced. 3. Social Systems Theory: This theory views juvenile delinquents as part of a broader social system that influences their behaviour. Effective correctional interventions should, therefore, involve multiple stakeholders, including family, community, and institutional frameworks.

2.1 Review of Previous Studies

Several studies have examined the role of social casework in juvenile correction. Feld (2019) posits that juvenile justice systems have evolved from punitive approaches to rehabilitative models, however, emphasising structured correctional methods. Similarly, Coalition for Juvenile Justice et al. (2022) assert that evidence-based correctional programs significantly improve outcomes for juvenile offenders. Chu and Daffern (2024) believe that social casework interventions, such as individualised treatment plans and vocational training, contribute positively to behavioural change. However, Anderson et al. (2021) argue that the effectiveness of these interventions is often hindered by systemic challenges, including inadequate resources and limited professional training.

Furthermore, Balcha et al. (2021) posit that social diagnosis plays a critical role in identifying the underlying causes of delinquency. They assert that comprehensive assessments enable tailored interventions that address both psychological and social needs. On the other hand, Egwuagu and Udentia (2023) highlight the challenges faced by social workers in implementing effective casework strategies, including bureaucratic delays and inconsistent policy frameworks.

2.2 Identified Gaps in Existing Literature

While previous research has extensively examined correctional interventions, there remain gaps in un-

Understanding the specific role of social casework in juvenile correctional centres in Nigeria. Key gaps include:

1. Limited studies focusing on the effectiveness of interviews, social diagnosis, and individualised treatment plans in Nigerian correctional facilities.
2. Inadequate exploration of systemic barriers that hinder the successful implementation of social casework methods.
3. Insufficient empirical research on how standardised correctional frameworks can enhance casework effectiveness.

2.3 History of Social Casework

Social casework has evolved significantly since its inception in the 19th century. The Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (A.I.C.P.), established in America in 1843, was among the earliest structured efforts to support disadvantaged individuals through home visits, employment assistance, and economic guidance. The foundation of the New York School of Social Work in 1898 marked a crucial step in professionalising the field. Similarly, the American Charity Organisation Society emerged in 1877, promoting individualised casework services through volunteers known as “Friendly Visitors.” These early approaches primarily adhered to the medical model, where assistance was primarily extended to sick individuals (Gabriel, Brown, León, & Outley, 2021; Bri-erley, Bruell, & McDermott, 2024).

By the early 20th century, social casework gained further recognition with structured training programs and professional accreditation. The term “work with case” was first introduced in the 1914–1917 National Conference on Social Work in the United States, leading to the first summer training programs for caseworkers. As a result, social work institutions affiliated with agencies began offering specialised training, ultimately strengthening casework as a profession.

Notably, Mary Richmond and Francis McLean made significant contributions during this period, with Richmond publishing *Social Diagnosis* in 1917 and the first systematic guide to casework practice (Walker, 2024; Gibson, Remond, MacGillivray, Baldry, & Sullivan, 2025). This period also witnessed the impact of World War I, as social casework shifted its focus from economic factors to broader societal pressures influencing human behaviour. The subsequent World War II further expanded the role of social caseworkers, particularly in medical and psychiatric services, where demand increased dramatically (Kovacs & Miklosi, 2025; Naessens & Raeymaeckers, 2020).

Following the wars, social casework embraced new theoretical frameworks, particularly psychoanalytical approaches in the 1920s. Inspired by Freudian psychology, caseworkers began analysing clients’ internal conflicts and unconscious motivations. This led to the psychiatric expansion of social work, with caseworkers extending their roles into prisons, schools, and mental health institutions. The 1930s saw a shift toward economic casework due to the Great Depression, as financial instability became a major concern. Governments introduced relief programs such as the Federal Emergency Relief Act and the Works Progress Administration, reducing the economic burden on private charities. The 1950s and 1960s marked a period of professional diversification, with caseworkers engaging in community-based interventions, private practice, and policy reform initiatives. Additionally, the growing recognition of the interdependence between personality and environment fostered a more holistic approach to casework, emphasising social research and advocacy (Egwuagu & Udentia, 2023; Odinka et al., 2023).

In modern times, social casework continues to evolve, integrating evidence-based practices and digital innovations. Caseworkers now operate across diverse fields, including juvenile justice, correctional centres, healthcare, and family services, with an emphasis on

preventive interventions and policy-driven reforms. In Nigeria, social casework developed as a response to challenges brought about by industrialisation, modernisation, and urbanisation. Early practitioners lacked formal training and operated as generalist social workers, serving as probation officers, counselors, and child welfare advocates. The establishment of the School of Social Work in Emene played a critical role in the formal education of social workers, while universities have increasingly incorporated specialized social work programs. However, financial constraints, inadequate resources, and cultural influences continue to pose challenges to effective casework in Nigeria. Despite these obstacles, the field is progressively gaining recognition, with growing emphasis on research, professionalization, and interdisciplinary collaboration (Brierley et al., 2024; Gabriel et al., 2021).

2.4 Methods of Social Casework Process

Social Casework is a systematic and individualised process that social workers utilise to assess and address the needs of individuals, families, and groups. In addressing the needs of the aforementioned, social caseworkers go through the following processes using social casework methods:

Interview: Interviewing is a face-to-face conversation between the caseworker and the client, used to gather information and analyse the client's problems. It helps obtain details about the client's background, including family, school, and social relationships. Caseworkers may also visit the client's environment to gain further insight. During interviews, skills such as listening, observation, and questioning are employed to ensure accurate data collection. (Lloyd, & Woolham, 2024).

Social Diagnosis: This stage follows the interview, where collected data is analysed to identify the nature of the client's problems and contributing factors. Social diagnosis enables caseworkers to determine areas where behavioural change is needed. (Ferguson,

I. 2024).

Treatment: Treatment, also called intervention, involves strategies to modify a client's situation. Unlike in medicine, where the patient is treated directly, caseworkers collaborate with clients to create a change plan. Intervention may include financial assistance, vocational training, psychological support, or counselling. Treatment begins with setting goals between the client and the caseworker and involves direct engagement to provide the necessary help.

Referral or Termination: Termination occurs when the client and caseworker agree that the set goals have been met, or the issue has been resolved. Referral happens when the client's needs cannot be met by the agency, requiring a transfer to another service provider (Yao & Waggoner, 2022).

3.0 METHODS

This section describes how the study was conducted, including research design, population, sampling technique, and data collection methods.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design and follows a qualitative research method to explore social casework in juvenile correctional centres.

3.2 Study Location

The study was conducted in four correctional centres in Lagos State:

Special Correctional Centre for Boys, Oregun, which was established in 1942, relocated to Ikeja in 1976. Capacity: 150, (ages 9–18).

Special Correctional Centre for Girls, Idi-Araba, which was established in 1964. Capacity: 50.

Senior Boys Approved School, Isheri, which was established in 1948, capacity of 200 juveniles.

Junior Boys Approved School, Birrel Yaba, which was established in 1958.

3.3 Population of Study

The study population included juveniles and staff at the correctional centres. Juveniles were those who had committed delinquent acts, required emergency shelter, or were beyond parental control. Staff included social workers, caregivers, principals, vocational teachers, and security personnel. Only social workers with over three years of experience and juveniles who had been at the centres for over three years were selected.

3.4 Sample and Sampling Technique

A total of 47 respondents participated, comprising 35 juvenile delinquents and 12 social workers. A multi-phase sampling technique was used, and correctional centres were purposefully chosen based on available institutions. Only juveniles with over three years of stay were considered. Among 108 eligible juveniles, 38 met the criteria, and 35 agreed to participate. Three social workers were selected from each centre. Approval was obtained from the Ministry of Youth and Social Development, granting access to conduct the study at these centres.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on research objectives and questions. The analysis integrates responses from social workers and juvenile delinquents to highlight the effectiveness, challenges, and policy implications of social casework methods in correctional centres.

4.1 The Role of Social Casework Methods in Juvenile Corrections

The study underscored the usefulness of interviews, social diagnosis, and treatment strategies in correctional centres, however, it revealed that systemic

challenges often hindered the effectiveness of these methods.

Participants emphasised that social casework plays a crucial role in the correctional process, particularly through structured interviews, social diagnosis, and treatment strategies. One social worker stated: “We use interviews to understand the juveniles’ backgrounds and identify the root causes of their delinquency. Without this step, intervention efforts would be ineffective. “This aligns with findings by Anderson et al. (2021), who argue that social casework is essential in diagnosing behavioural triggers and designing individualised correctional plans.

Juvenile delinquents also acknowledged the importance of social casework, with one informant noting: “Talking to the caseworkers helped me realise the mistakes I made and how to change my behaviour. They listened to me, which made a big difference.” This statement underscores the significance of structured casework in fostering trust and encouraging behavioural transformation among juveniles.

4.2 Effectiveness of Interviews, Social Diagnosis, and Treatment in the Correctional Process

Findings in this study discovered that these approaches are useful, but their effectiveness was often hindered by systemic challenges. According to a caseworker, “The interview process helps us gather necessary information, but sometimes the juveniles are reluctant to open up due to past traumas.” This highlights the need for specialised training in trauma-informed care to improve caseworker interactions.

Regarding social diagnosis, most participants agreed that a proper understanding of juveniles’ past experiences was crucial for effective correction. However, one juvenile noted: “Some social workers just assume they know my story without really listening.” This suggests that while social diagnosis is a vital tool, its effectiveness depends on the skill level and engagement of the social workers.

Treatment interventions, including counselling and vocational training, were found to be moderately effective. While many juveniles reported improvements in their behaviour, others felt the programmes were inconsistent. One participant stated: “We start learning skills, but sometimes the training is stopped halfway due to lack of funds.” This finding supports prior research by Gibson et al. (2025), which suggests that incomplete rehabilitation programmes contribute to higher recidivism rates.

4.3 Challenges Hindering the Implementation of Social Casework in Correctional Centres

Social workers face several challenges in implementing casework strategies. These include high caseloads, inadequate training, and a lack of resources. As captured by a social worker, “One caseworker is expected to handle over 30 juveniles, which makes it difficult to provide individualised attention.” This corroborates the study by Egwuagu and Udentia (2023), who argue that high caseloads negatively impact caseworker efficiency.

Additionally, funding shortages were frequently mentioned as a major obstacle. One administrator noted: “Most of the time, we don’t have enough resources to run vocational training or provide proper counselling.” This systemic limitation affects the consistency and sustainability of intervention programs.

4.4 Strategies for Improving Correctional Methods for Juvenile Offenders

The study also discovered the need for better inter-agency collaboration, policy reforms, and increased training for social workers. This reflects in one of the social workers’ responses: “If the government invests more in training and hires additional caseworkers, we can provide more effective interventions.”

Juveniles also highlighted the need for post-release support, with one stating: “When we leave the centre,

we struggle to find jobs or support. More follow-up programs would help us stay on track.” This finding aligns with Islam (2021), who posits that structured aftercare programmes are crucial in preventing recidivism among juvenile offenders.

In summary, while social casework methods play a critical role in juvenile correction, systemic barriers limit their full effectiveness. Addressing these challenges through policy improvements, increased funding, and enhanced social worker training would lead to more successful correctional outcomes.

4.5 Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings underscore the need for policy reforms to strengthen social casework methods in juvenile corrections. Standardised training programmes, increased funding, and the integration of evidence-based correctional strategies are recommended to enhance the effectiveness of juvenile correctional interventions. Islam (2021) posits that systemic improvements in correctional methods lead to better outcomes for juvenile offenders. Additionally, fostering better collaboration between correctional centres, social workers, and families can improve the sustainability of correctional interventions. Establishing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for correctional programs would also help identify gaps and facilitate continuous improvement in juvenile correctional practices.

The discussion highlights the importance of structured social casework in juvenile correctional methods, reinforcing the need for continuous improvements in practice and policy to ensure effective interventions. Strengthening inter-agency cooperation and increasing public awareness about the role of social casework in juvenile correction can further contribute to positive outcomes for juvenile delinquents.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This study has examined the effectiveness of social casework methods in juvenile correctional centres in Lagos State. The findings highlight that structured interviews, social diagnosis, and individualised treatment strategies significantly contribute to the correctional process. However, systemic challenges such as inadequate training, high caseloads, resource constraints, and inconsistent program implementation hinder the full realisation of the benefits of social casework.

The study underscores the importance of evidence-based correctional methods, emphasising the need for professional training, resource allocation, and policy enforcement to enhance juvenile correction. Addressing these gaps will improve correctional outcomes and contribute to broader juvenile justice reforms. Future research should explore the long-term effects of correctional interventions on juveniles' post-reintegration.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Regular training and professional development programs should be provided for social workers to improve their skills in case assessment, interviewing, and treatment strategies.
- Correctional centres should be equipped with adequate counselling rooms, educational facilities, and vocational training centres to enhance correctional interventions.
- A uniform framework for social casework should be developed to ensure consistency in intervention strategies across different juvenile correctional centres.
- Government agencies should enforce existing policies on juvenile correction, ensuring that so-

cial caseworkers adhere to ethical and professional standards.

- Greater cooperation between correctional centres, social workers, families, and community organisations can facilitate a holistic correctional process and improve reintegration outcomes.
- Establishing monitoring frameworks will help assess the effectiveness of correctional methods and provide data-driven insights for continuous improvement.

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