

EFFECTIVENESS OF NON-CUSTODIAL SENTENCES IN DECONGESTING CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian Correctional System currently grapples with severe overcrowding, which has remained unhealthy for our Criminal Justice System. The study, as part of efforts to provide a sustainable solution to this precarious issue, aimed at examining the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences towards decongesting correctional institutions in Nigeria, with lessons from the Awka Custodial Centre. The Differential Association theory propounded by Edwin Sutherland served as the theoretical framework for the study. Mixed-methods design with a multi-stage sampling technique was used. A total of 400 respondents aged 18 years and above were randomly selected from the study population of 1,920, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The data were presented, analysed and evaluated using descriptive statistics, including percentages, frequency distribution tables, and charts. The interviews were transcribed and evaluated using thematic data analysis. The study findings show that many respondents see non-custodial sentences as being effective in decongesting Awka Custodial Centre. The study equally identified barriers to the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in decongesting Awka Custodial Centre. These barriers were found to include lack of funding, inadequate legal and policy frameworks, stigmatisation of convicts by the locals, corruption and overreliance on pre-trial detention. Amidst the barriers, it was recommended, amongst others, that there be an urgent need for the promotion of non-custodial sentencing over minor offences. The study concluded that correctional facilities' congestion in Awka and across Nigeria is driven more by slow trials, excessive use of remand, and systemic delays than by the absence of non-custodial sentences alone. Without addressing these root causes, non-custodial sentences alone cannot solve the overcrowding crisis in the Awka Custodial Centre.

Keywords: Correctional Institution, Criminal Justice System, Decongestion, Non-Custodial Sentences.

INTRODUCTION

Crime no doubt permeates every known society and has existed since the dawn of time (Onyekuru, 2019; Obah, 2025). It is evident in literature that the act of violating societal rules of behavior as interpreted and expressed by the criminal legal code of a society is not a recent

phenomenon (Olutola, 2017). From antiquity until recent times, discourse on crime has always been on the front burner of public debate throughout the world. Crime, with its varying consequences on individual crime victims, family and friends, and even society at large, has become a social phenomenon that attracts the attention and energy of all and sundry (Prenzler, 2009; cited in Olutola, 2017). According to Olutola (2017), getting to grips with criminal activities has been the priority of individuals, groups, governments, and many other stakeholders for centuries. Indeed, the age-long realization that criminal activities do not only cause misery to the victims but also put enormous pressure on the community and the government has generated a broad spectrum of societal reactions to crime (Lewis, 2003; Olutola, 2017). Despite this, however, leaving victims of crime to the option of avenging or revenging crime has never been the preferred and rational option, particularly since the dawn of modernity. Conversely, the act of tackling and adjudicating on crime globally has been contractually and legally placed within the preserve of appropriate governments in all societies of the world.

According to Roth (2015), from the post-social contract era till now, many societies have reacted to crime in the way of criminal justice. However, in ancient times, the common response was revenge. As a matter of fact, during this period, sanctions for criminal behavior were made public and were designed to shame the offenders and deter others, as prisons were not a popular choice (Roth, 2015). The earliest forms of prison (Correctional Centers) can be traced back to ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece. In these societies, detention was often used to hold individuals awaiting trial or punishment, rather than serving as a means of long-term confinement (Kabir, 2020). In the medieval period, prisons but these were used as places where erring individuals were kept before the commencement of their trial or while awaiting punishment. However, the dawn of the 19th century brought a great change to imprisonment and correctional systems in many parts of the world, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom.

In many African societies, before colonialism, detention did exist but was often community-based, serving restorative rather than retributive functions (Nwankwo, 2019). The advent of colonialism led to the introduction of Western-style prisons, often modelled after European systems, as prisons were used for political dissenters and local populations who resisted colonial rule (Nwankwo, 2019). These colonies established prisons as a means of control, laying a foundation for the current prison system that often lacks rehabilitative elements (Mutua, 2001).

In Nigeria, the origin of western prisons (correctional centres) is traceable to the colonial regime in 1861 during the time their administration was preoccupied with the bane of safeguarding their businesses and protecting the missionaries (Onyi and Daramola, 2021). By 1861, the then acting governor of the Lagos colony, who was also a British merchant in Lagos, put a police force of about 25 constables in place, followed in 1863 by the establishment of four (4) courts which included a police court meant to resolve minor disputes; a criminal court meant to try more serious cases; a slave court meant to try cases arising from efforts to abolish the trade in slaves; as well as a commercial court meant to resolve disputes arising among the colonial merchants and traders (Nigeria Correctional Service, 2018). This marked the beginning of the formal Correctional Institution in the country, and subsequently, Custodial Centres (prisons) were established in other regions, including Calabar, Kaduna, and Enugu (Nuelson, 2024). Hence, it is no longer new knowledge that Correctional Centres are built to take custody of legally detained people towards identifying causes of their ill behaviours as well as restraining them to become more functional in society (Orakwe, 2018).

Statistically, according to Latessa and Allen (2019), the Nigerian Correctional Centres as of 2019 were housing 49,000 in two hundred and thirty-four custodial centres out of which 20% are convicts, while the rest are inmates awaiting trial. In 2024, October 21st to be precise,

the total population of inmates across Nigerian Correctional Centres reached 84,165. Out of this population, 27,178 (32%) are convicted, while a substantial 56,987 individuals (68%) are awaiting trial, reflecting severe inefficiencies within the judicial process. In the view of Onyeji and Udegbumam (2020), at least three quarters of Nigeria's total population are inmates serving without being sentenced. To Onyeji and Udegbumam (2020), according to the Controller of Correctional Service, 51,983 inmates are awaiting trial out of the custodial total population of 73,726 inmates. In the same vein, in Awka Custodial Centre, while the facility is built for 233 inmates, a recent investigation shows that the facility currently holds 1052 inmates as of May 2024, which is beyond its capacity and, hence, making it the most crowded Custodial Centre in Nigeria (Awka Custodial Centre Registry Unit reports, 2024).

Following the unsafe and congested state of the Nigerian Correctional Centres nationwide, with Awka Custodial Centre not an exception, recently, human rights activists and scholars not only condemn imprisonment but also clamour for the utilization of non-custodial sentences in the country's Criminal Justice System. This is because non-custodial sentences such as community service, parole, probation, and restorative justice, amongst others, are perceived to serve as a panacea to the overcrowding and congestion crises that have continued to pose a significant challenge to the correctional system. Regrettably, despite the existence of these non-custodial sentence in Nigeria, their usage remains minimal relative to the scale of the inmate's population, as only 521 individuals (less than 1% of the total inmate's population) are currently serving non-custodial sentences, according to reports of the Nigerian Correctional System 2024.

With Awka Custodial Centre serving as one of the most congested custodial centres in Nigeria, recent studies by scholars have been limited in their discourse on the significant underutilization of non-custodial sentence options such as community service, parole, and payment of fines, amongst others, in decongesting the custodial centre, hence casting doubt on its effectiveness. In a bid to fill this knowledge gap, this study will deviate from the standard literature, which approaches the problem of custodial congestion from a perspective that is orientated to a holistic one. It is considering the foregoing that this study is carefully designed to empirically examine the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in decongesting correctional institutions in Nigeria, a study of the Awka Custodial Centre, Anambra State.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Concept of Non- Custodial Sentence

The term "non-custodial sentence" has gained significant attention in Criminal Justice Systems worldwide to address the challenges of overcrowded custodial centres, recidivism, and the social reintegration of offenders. In the context of Nigerian Correctional Service, non-custodial sentences refer to non-custodial measures aimed at reducing the burden on Nigeria Correctional System, promoting rehabilitation, and ensuring justice while maintaining public safety (Ajibade, 2022). A non-custodial sentence encompasses a range of sanctions that allow offenders to serve their sentences outside of custodial facilities while still being held accountable for their actions (Akinyele, 2021). Unlike traditional incarceration, which isolates offenders in correctional facilities, non-custodial sentences focus on rehabilitation, restorative justice, and community-based solutions. Examples of non-custodial sentences include community service, probation, parole, fines, house arrest, restorative justice programs, and electronic monitoring. These measures aim to address the root causes of criminal behavior, such as poverty, lack of education, or social disconnection, while reducing the negative impacts of imprisonment on both the offender and the society. In Nigeria, the correctional system faces significant challenges, including overcrowding, poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, and limited rehabilitation programs. Nigerian Custodial Centres are often filled beyond capacity, with many inmates awaiting trial for extended periods due to delays in the judicial process. This situation underscores the need for non-custodial sentences to alleviate the strain on custodial facilities and provide more humane and effective approaches to justice (Akinyele, 2021).

Conceptualizing the Nigerian Correctional Centre

According to Joseph et al. (2021), a prison is a physical structure in a geographical location where a few people live under highly specialized conditions, utilize the resources, and adjust to the alternatives presented to them by a unique kind of social environment that is different from the larger society in so many ways. Obviously, there are basic social and cultural characteristics that are present in the custodial community and other total institutions alike, which do not exist in the larger society. The custodial community with its distinct culture and way of life epitomizes a complete design capable of changing the attitudes of individual members for good or bad depending on the personal experience and the social environment.

Correctional Centers are most used within a Criminal Justice System: people charged with crimes may be imprisoned until they are brought to trial, and those pleading or being found guilty of crimes at trial may be sentenced to a specified period of imprisonment. Besides their use for punishing civil crimes, prisons are frequently used by authoritarian regimes (Adekoya, 2021). The term "prison" or "penitentiary" is often used to describe institutions that incarcerate people for longer periods of time, such as years, while "jail" is often used to describe institutions focused on confining people for shorter periods of time (e.g., for shorter sentences or while waiting for trial/sentencing). Prisons often have facilities that are more designed with long-term confinement in mind in comparison to jails (Adekoya, 2021).

The Nigerian prison system, officially known as the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) since the passage of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act 2019, plays a critical role in the country's Criminal Justice framework. Designed to serve as a mechanism for reformation, rehabilitation, and reintegration of offenders, Nigerian Correctional Service have instead become characterized by systemic challenges that undermine their purpose. Overcrowding, poor living conditions, prolonged pre-trial detention, and limited rehabilitation programs have bedeviled the Nigerian Correctional Service, thereby raising serious concerns about human rights issues and the effectiveness of the correctional system (Ohazulike and Chikwendu, 2023).

Effectiveness of Non-Custodial Sentences in Decongesting Nigerian Correctional Centres

The Nigerian Correctional System has long grappled with severe overcrowding, with facilities often holding two or three times their intended capacity. Data shows that non-custodial sentences have shown some success in reducing custodial congestion in specific contexts. The Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA 2015), adopted by the federal government and several states, provides a legal framework for non-custodial measures, enabling courts to impose probation, community service, and fines for minor and non-violent offenses. For instance, in Lagos State, one of the earliest adopters of the ACJA, pilot programs for community service have diverted hundreds of minor offenders from custody. Offenders convicted of offenses like petty theft or public nuisance have been sentenced to tasks such as cleaning public spaces, thereby reducing the number of inmates entering already crowded facilities (Bukie and Ogbanga, 2024).

Similarly, the introduction of restorative justice practices, such as victim-offender mediation, has shown promise in resolving disputes without incarceration (Ajibade, 2022). In some jurisdictions, mediation programs have successfully resolved cases involving property crimes, allowing offenders to make restitution rather than serve custody terms. Adekoya (2021) stated that parole and early release mechanisms to a moderate extent have also been effective in decongesting Nigerian Custodial Centres. The NCoS, in collaboration with state governments, has occasionally implemented amnesty programs, particularly during national holidays, aimed at releasing low-risk inmates to ease custodial congestion. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, over 3,000 inmates were released across Nigeria under executive pardons to reduce health risks in congested facilities. Probation services, though limited, have also enabled some offenders to serve their sentences under supervision in the community, thus freeing up custodial space. These efforts demonstrate that non-custodial sentences, when

applied carefully, can help to reduce the pressure on correctional facilities and align with global best practices in criminal justice (Adekoya, 2021; Ajibade, 2022).

Barriers to the Effectiveness of Non-custodial Sentences in Decongesting Nigerian Correctional Centres

The Nigerian Correctional System is notoriously overcrowded, with facilities holding far more inmates than their intended capacity. Studies show that many Nigerian Custodial Centres operate at over 200% capacity, leading to inhumane conditions, strained resources, and increased recidivism rates (Okiwe et al., 2020). Non-custodial sentences, including non-custodial measures such as probation, community service, fines, parole, and restorative justice, have been proposed as a viable strategy to decongest custodial centres while promoting rehabilitation and reducing reoffending. However, the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in Nigeria is hindered by several systemic, societal, and institutional barriers. This section examines these barriers, including inadequate legal frameworks, lack of infrastructure, societal attitudes, corruption, and limited awareness and their impact on the successful implementation of non-custodial sentences in decongesting custodial centres (Okiwe et al., 2020; Adebayo, 2021).

Inadequate Legal and Policy Frameworks

One of the primary barriers to the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in Nigeria is the lack of a robust legal and policy framework to support non-custodial measures. While the Nigerian Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015 introduced provisions for non-custodial sanctions such as community service and probation, the implementation of these measures remains inconsistent. Many states are yet to domesticate the ACJA, leading to variations in the application of non-custodial sentence across the country. Furthermore, the legal framework lacks clarity on the eligibility criteria for non-custodial sentences, leaving judges and magistrates with discretionary powers that are often underutilized due to lack of guidelines or training. Without comprehensive and uniform legislation, non-custodial sentence struggles to gain traction as a viable tool for decongesting custodial centres.

Lack of Institutional Infrastructure and Resources

The successful implementation of non-custodial sentence requires robust institutional infrastructure, including probation services, community service programs, and rehabilitation centers (Adebayo, 2021). In Nigeria, however, these systems are either underdeveloped or non-existent in many regions. For instance, probation services are underfunded and understaffed, with many probation officers lacking the training or resources to monitor offenders effectively.

Social Attitudes and Stigma

Societal attitudes toward non-custodial sentences pose another significant barrier. In Nigeria, there is a strong cultural preference for punitive measures over rehabilitative ones. Many citizens view imprisonment as the only legitimate form of sanction, associating non-custodial sentence with leniency or a lack of accountability (Adekoya, 2021). Offenders placed on probation or community service may face stigma from their communities, which can hinder their reintegration and increase the likelihood of recidivism. Additionally, victims of crimes may feel that non-custodial measures fail to deliver justice, leading to resistance against their adoption. This societal bias toward incarceration limits the acceptance and effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in decongesting custodial centres (Adekoya, 2021).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Differential association theory stands out as the most suitable theory to guide this research. The proponent of differential association theory is Edwin Sutherland. The theory was propounded in the year 1939. The theory was adopted as the theoretical framework because it provides good insights on the specific factors promoting crime, which in return leads to custodial sentences in

Awka. The theory posits that crime rates, congestion in correctional centres and the search for effective non-custodial sentence strategies are critical issues in criminology, particularly in places like Awka, where correctional facilities face significant overcrowding. Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory provides a robust framework for understanding these phenomena by emphasizing the role of learned behaviour in criminality. The theory posits that criminal behaviour is learned through social interactions with others who hold values, attitudes and techniques favourable to law-breaking. According to the theory, individuals become criminals when they are exposed to excessive definitions that favour crime. These associations may vary in frequency, duration, priority and intensity, thereby shaping an individual's likelihood of engaging in crimes that could land the person in the congested Awka Correctional facility.

In addition, the theory asserts that a high rate of crime increases the number of arrests and convictions, thereby contributing to congestion in Awka, Custodial Centre, Anambra State. Other causes of congestion according to the theory include lack of rehabilitation centres in Awka, pre-trial detention, judicial delays and overreliance on incarceration by the courts. The theory argues that non-custodial sentence such as community service offer viable strategies for decongesting custodial centres while addressing the root cause of crime. The theory supports the use of these measures by emphasizing the importance of altering negative social influences to deter criminal behaviour. On the strength of the foregoing, it is obvious that differential association theory provides a compelling lens for understanding the rise in crime rate and custodial congestion in Awka. These insights are necessary and provide good indices for measuring the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in decongesting Awka Custodial Centre.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a mixed-methods research design. This research took place in Awka Custodial Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria. Historically, Awka has been an administrative and cultural centre, dating back to its prominence in the Nri civilization around 800 AD and known for its advanced bronze works and blacksmithing. The Custodial Centre itself is situated in Amawbia, a town within Awka South, and houses the State Governor's Lodge and other key government institutions. Awka Custodial Centre has long served as a key facility under the Nigerian Prison Service, which was renamed the Nigerian Correctional Service following the Nigerian Correctional Service Act of 2019. According to the public record available at the Awka Custodial Centre, the population of custody inmates at the time of conducting this study was 1,920. The population was made up of 1,344 males and 576 females. Additionally, the study sample included 400 persons aged 18 years and above who are incarcerated in the Awka correctional centre. The sample size was calculated using Yamane's (1967) statistical method. The study used both nonprobability and probability sampling techniques. To maximise the study's results, the researchers used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Structured questionnaires and the In-Depth Interview (IDI) were tools utilized to gather quantitative and qualitative data for this study. The Test-Retest Reliability Technique was used in the investigation. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 25 was employed to manage and analyze the data collected for this study. Descriptive statistics, encompassing fundamental percentages, charts, and frequency distributions, were employed to organize, display, analyze and interpret the data.

RESULTS

Table 1: Respondents' Views on whether they See Non- Custodial Sentences as Being Effective in Decongesting Awka Custodial Centre

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Yes	217	54.9
No	178	45.1
Total	395	100.0

Field Survey, 2026

Table 1 shows that 54.9% of the respondents saw non-custodial sentences as being effective in decongesting Awka Custodial Centre. Conversely, 45.1% of the respondents disagreed. This indicates that majority of the respondents are conversant with the topic under investigation. This aligns with the IDI data. One of the interviewees stated:

First, non-custodial sentence simply means a different kind of sentence used instead of the usual one such as prison sentence or fine. It occurs when someone who has done something wrong is given another option to make up for it, rather than being locked up or punished harshly (Male, Married, 34 years, Prisoner, Awka Custodial Centre).

Table 2: Respondents' Views on the Effectiveness of Non-Custodial Sentence in Decongesting Awka Custodial Centre

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Very effective	108	49.8
Effective	109	50.2
Total	217	100.0

Field Survey, 2026

Table 2 reveals that the respondents were asked to describe the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in decongesting Awka Custodial Centre and 49.8% of the respondents described it as very effective whereas 50.2% of the respondents indicated that it is effective. This implies that majority of the respondents believe that non-custodial sentence is probably effective in decongesting Awka Custodial Centre.

Table 3: Respondents' Views on Measures to Enhance the Effectiveness of Non-Custodial sentences in Decongesting Awka Custodial Centre

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Promotion of alternative sentencing over minor offenses	188	47.6
Build new prisons to promote alternative punishments	64	16.2
Establish prison monitoring team to protect the interest of inmates	21	5.3
Quick judicial process	41	10.4
Funding	32	8.10
Police should stop indiscriminate arrest of innocent youths	29	7.3
All of the above	20	5.1
Total	395	100.0

Field Survey, 2026

With regards to measures that can help to enhance the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in decongesting Awka Custodial Centre, 47.6% representing majority of the respondents recommended the promotion of non-custodial sentencing over minor offenses while 5.1% of the respondents indicated all the above. This indicates that something can be done to address the concerns raised in the study. This aligns with the IDI data. One of the interviewees stated:

To enhance the effectiveness of non-custodial sentencing in Awka Correctional facility, the government should expand prison infrastructure where necessary while treating imprisonment as a last resort, especially for minor offences. If these steps are taken seriously, non-custodial sentences can become powerful tool for creating a more effective, less congested and truly correctional system in Anambra State (Male, Married, 34 years, Prisoner, Awka Custodial Centre).

Another participant stated:

Ultimately, a balanced justice system that combines fair punishment with rehabilitation will benefit not only the prisons but also the wider society by reducing re-offending and promoting safer communities in Awka, Anambra State (Female, Single, 29 years, Prisoner, Awka Custodial Centre).

One of the participants said:

One major barrier to the success of non-custodial sentences is the weak system for supervising offenders serving community service, probation or parole in the community. Many offenders violate the conditions because there are not enough probation officers, monitoring tools to track them etc. Therefore, to improve this, the government should establish and equip more probation offices and community service centres at state and local government levels (Male, Married, 45 years, Prisoner, Awka Custodial Centre).

Similarly, another interviewee had this to say:

Many Judges and Magistrates still prefer imprisonment because they lack confidence in non-custodial sentence or do not fully understand how and when to apply them. Some are also unaware of the full provisions in the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA), 2015 and the Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019. As a result, a strong solution is to organize regular and mandatory training workshops for judges (Female, Single, 30 years, Prisoner, Awka Custodial Centre).

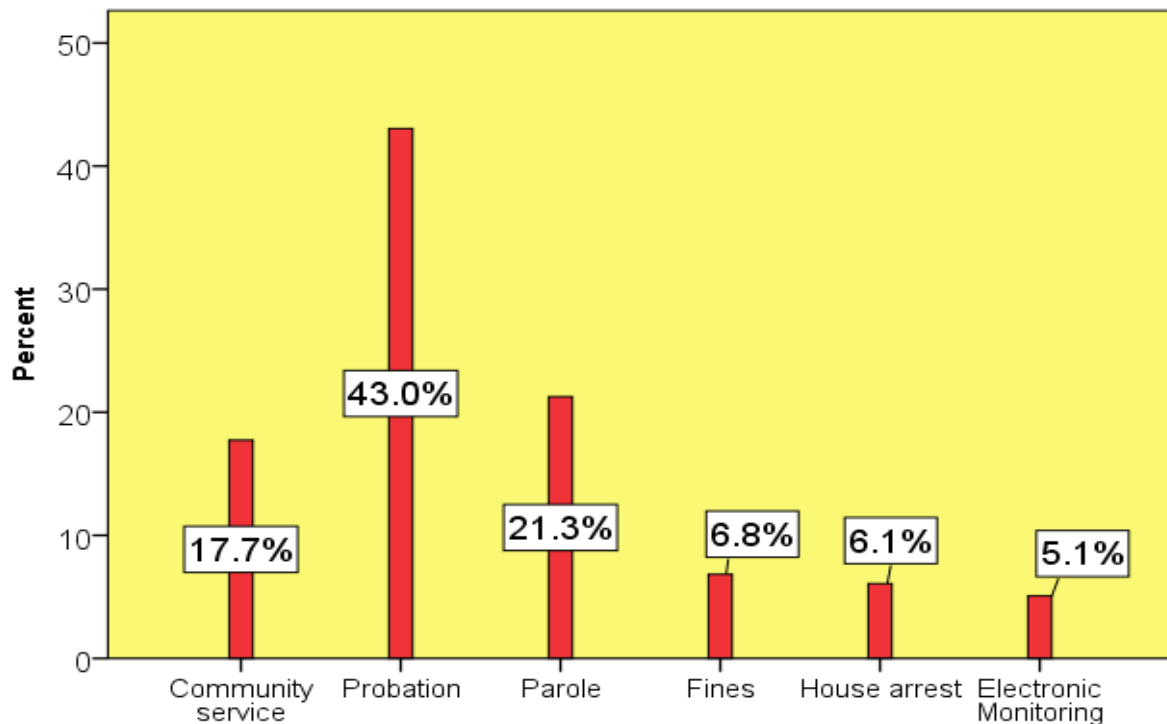


Fig 1: Respondents' Views on the Major Types of Non-Custodial Sentences Currently Being Implemented in Awka custodial centre.

Fig. 1 indicates that many (43.0%) of the respondents identified probation as one of the major types of non-custodial sentences currently being implemented in Awka custodial centre. Similarly, 5.1% of the respondents identified electronic monitoring as another type of non-custodial sentences that exist in Awka custodial centre

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study examined the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in decongesting correctional institutions in Nigeria, with Awka Custodial Centre serving as a case study. Results show that many define custodial centres as a temporary confinement for lawbreakers. Many respondents see non-custodial sentences as being effective in decongesting Awka Custodial Centre. This aligns with a previous study by Bukie and Ogbanga (2024), carried out across Correctional Centre in Ogun State, namely, Abeokuta Correctional Centre; Sagamu Correctional Centre; and Ijebu Ode Correctional Centre. The study confirmed that non-custodial sentences are moderately effective in decongesting correctional centres in Ogun State. Another study by Adekoya (2021) examined the effectiveness of alternative punishment (non-custodial sentences) in decongesting Correctional Centre in Mandala Medium Security Custodial Centre in Kwara State, and results found that non-custodial sentences have shown good signs in decongesting Mandala Medium Security Custodial Centre, but effectiveness is hindered by several challenges, such as limited implementation and slow justice dispensation.

The majority of the respondents recommended the promotion of non-custodial sentences over minor offences. Probation was identified by the majority of the respondents as the major type of non-custodial sentence currently being implemented in the Awka Custodial Centre. Other types of non-custodial sentences in the Awka Custodial Centre include community service, parole fines, house arrest and electronic monitoring. This agrees with the previous study by Ohazulike and Chikwendu (2023), which investigated the impact of alternative sentencing and prison overcrowding in Port Harcourt Prison. Findings showed that types of alternative sentencing (non-custodial sentencing) in Port Harcourt Custodial Centre include compensation,

community service, probation and the fine option. Other respondents added that to enhance the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in decongesting Awka Custodial Centre, there is a need to build a new correctional facility to promote non-custodial sentences; establish a monitoring team to protect the interest of inmates; provide a quick judicial process and funding; and stop the police from indiscriminately arresting of innocent youths. This falls in consonance with the study by Omoyeni et al. (2025), which found that non-custodial sentencing options in Nigeria's Criminal Justice System have not been able to ease jail overcrowding, particularly in Ikoyi Custodial Centre. Majority of the inmates awaiting trial points to the fact that the criminal justice system in Nigeria is inadequate. The negligence of the authority and the lack of appropriate non-custodial sentences for those who committed minor offences are the main causes of custodial overcrowding. All signs point to the fact that Ikoyi Custodial Centre will be less crowded if all these issues are addressed properly.

CONCLUSION

Non-custodial sentences represent a smart and humane approach to decongesting custodial centres like the Awka Custodial Centre. They can save government money; support offender rehabilitation; reduce overcrowding-related problems (such as poor health conditions and mixing of first-time offenders with hardened criminals); and promote restorative justice where offenders give back to society. The study clearly shows that these measures have not been very effective yet due to deep-rooted problems in the criminal justice system. Correctional facilities' congestion in Awka and across Nigeria is driven more by slow trials, excessive use of remand, and systemic delays than by the absence of non-custodial sentences alone. Without addressing these root causes, non-custodial sentences alone cannot solve the overcrowding crisis in Awka Custodial Centre. For real progress, there is an urgent need for stronger implementation; this includes better training for justice sector workers, improved funding and faster court processes. The time to act is now

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made for possible implementation to enhance the effectiveness of non-custodial sentences in decongesting Awka Custodial Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria.

1. There is an urgent need for the promotion of non-custodial sentencing over minor offences.
2. Government should build new correctional facilities to promote non-custodial sentences.
3. Correctional Officials should establish monitoring team to protect the interest of inmates in Awka Custodial Centre.
4. There is a need for a quick judicial process in Anambra State.
5. Proper funding should be put in place and the police should stop the indiscriminate arrest of innocent youths.

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