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Research Article

Trafficking in Nigerian Custodial Centres: Implications for Staff Integrity, Security, and Institutional Effectiveness

Nura Umar Manya Manya

Department of Social Studies Education, National Teachers' Institute, Kaduna, Northwest Zone, (ZACAST) Study Centre Gusau Zamfara State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author, E-mail; umarmanyamanyanura@gmail.com

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Abstract. Trafficking within Nigerian custodial centres has become an emerging security concern that undermines the integrity of correctional institutions and threatens national security. The phenomenon includes the illegal movement of contraband items such as drugs, mobile phones, weapons, money, and other prohibited materials into custodial facilities, often facilitated through collusion involving inmates, visitors, or corrupt officials. This paper examines the implications of trafficking for correctional staff integrity, institutional security, and the effectiveness of the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCOs). Using a qualitative documentary research design, the study relies on secondary data obtained from scholarly journals, books, government publications, policy documents, and reports of international organizations. The findings reveal that trafficking erodes staff professionalism, promotes

corruption, strengthens criminal networks within custodial centres, compromises rehabilitation programmes, and weakens public confidence in correctional institutions. The study recommends strengthening staff integrity systems, deploying modern surveillance technologies, improving staff welfare, enforcing anti-corruption measures, and enhancing inter-agency collaboration to curb trafficking and improve institutional effectiveness.

Keywords: Trafficking, Nigerian Custodial Centres, Correctional Staff, Institutional Security, Integrity, Nigerian Correctional Service.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Correctional Service plays a vital role in the criminal justice system by ensuring the safe custody, rehabilitation, and reintegration of offenders. Despite reforms introduced under the Nigerian Correctional Service Act, 2019, trafficking of prohibited items into custodial centres continues to pose significant operational and security challenges. Contraband trafficking facilitates criminal activities, weakens discipline, compromises correctional officers, and undermines institutional credibility. The involvement of correctional staff in trafficking—whether through corruption, negligence, or coercion—raises serious concerns regarding ethics, accountability, and institutional effectiveness. The persistence of these practices threatens rehabilitation efforts and public confidence in the correctional system.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. Examine the nature of trafficking in Nigerian custodial centres.
2. Assess the implications of trafficking for correctional staff integrity.
3. Evaluate the effects of trafficking on institutional security.
4. Examine the impact of trafficking on institutional effectiveness.
5. Recommend strategies for preventing trafficking within custodial centres.

Research Questions

1. What forms of trafficking occur within Nigerian custodial centres?
2. How does trafficking affect staff integrity?
3. What are the security implications of trafficking?
4. How does trafficking affect institutional effectiveness?
5. What measures can reduce trafficking in custodial centres?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Trafficking in Custodial Centres

Trafficking in custodial centres refers to the illegal introduction, possession, movement, exchange, or distribution of prohibited items and services within correctional facilities. Contraband commonly includes illicit drugs, mobile phones, weapons, alcohol, money, tobacco, and other unauthorized materials capable of undermining institutional security. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs

and Crime (UNODC, 2023), the trafficking of contraband is a major challenge confronting correctional institutions worldwide because it facilitates organized crime, corruption, violence, and continued criminal activities by inmates.

In the Nigerian context, trafficking within custodial centres often occurs through collaboration among inmates, visitors, contractors, legal representatives, and, in some instances, corrupt correctional personnel. The Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019) prohibits the introduction of unauthorized items into custodial facilities and prescribes sanctions for offenders. Nevertheless, reports indicate that contraband trafficking persists due to weak surveillance systems, inadequate staff welfare, overcrowding, corruption, and insufficient institutional oversight.

Types of Trafficking in Nigerian Custodial Centres

Trafficking within Nigerian custodial centres takes several forms, each posing distinct threats to institutional security, staff integrity, inmate rehabilitation, and correctional effectiveness. The most common forms include the following:

1. Trafficking of Illicit Drugs

The trafficking of illicit drugs such as cannabis, tramadol, cocaine, heroin, and other psychoactive substances is among the most prevalent forms of contraband trafficking in custodial centres. These drugs are often smuggled into correctional facilities through visitors, corrupt officials, contractors, or concealed deliveries. Drug trafficking contributes to addiction, violence, indiscipline, intimidation, and the emergence of criminal gangs within custodial institutions. It also undermines rehabilitation programmes by encouraging substance abuse among inmates.

3. Trafficking of Mobile Phones and Communication Devices

The illegal introduction of mobile phones, SIM cards, chargers, memory cards, and other communication gadgets has become a major security concern. Mobile phones enable inmates to maintain contact with criminal associates outside custodial facilities, coordinate kidnappings, fraud, cybercrime, extortion, and other criminal operations despite being incarcerated. This significantly compromises institutional security and public safety.

4. Trafficking of Weapons and Dangerous Objects

Weapons trafficked into custodial centres include knives, blades, sharp metal objects, improvised weapons, firearms, ammunition, and explosive materials. Such items increase the likelihood of inmate violence, assaults on correctional officers, hostage-taking, riots, and escape attempts. The presence of weapons seriously undermines the ability of correctional authorities to maintain order and discipline.

5. Trafficking of Money and Financial Resources

Although inmates are subject to financial regulations within custodial centres, unauthorized cash and electronic financial transactions continue to occur through corrupt networks. Money trafficking facilitates bribery, gambling, drug purchases, preferential treatment, and the financing of criminal activities. Financial trafficking strengthens corruption and weakens accountability among correctional personnel.

6. Trafficking of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Prohibited Consumables

Alcoholic beverages, cigarettes, tobacco products, and other prohibited consumables are frequently smuggled into custodial centres. Their circulation contributes to indiscipline, health problems, conflicts among inmates, and violations of institutional regulations. These items are often exchanged through informal inmate markets that undermine prison discipline.

7. Trafficking of Food, Medicines, and Unauthorized Supplies

Certain food items, prescription medicines, medical drugs, clothing, electronic devices, and other supplies are illegally introduced into custodial centres without authorization. While some items may appear harmless, they are frequently exchanged for favours or used to establish criminal influence and unequal treatment among inmates, thereby encouraging corruption and institutional inequality.

8. Human-Facilitated Trafficking Through Corrupt Networks

Another significant form of trafficking involves the unlawful collaboration among correctional staff, visitors, contractors, legal practitioners, transport personnel, and inmates to facilitate the movement of prohibited items into custodial centres. Such organized networks often exploit weaknesses in institutional oversight, inadequate searches, corruption, poor remuneration, and limited surveillance technologies. This form of trafficking is particularly dangerous because it erodes staff integrity and institutional legitimacy.

9. Methods of trafficking in custodial centres

Since the inmates of custodial and reformatory institutions are usually confined to a single space within the premises of the custodial centre, it is impossible for them to acquire drugs except with the help of someone coming from the outside.

Some warders; i.e., correctional officers who indulge in the illicit act of drug trafficking into the custodial centre do so willingly, despite knowing fully well the effects of those drugs on humanity.

Trafficking is prohibited by the laws of the land and there are penalties and sanctions specified by law as enshrined in the relevant provisions of the Nigerian constitution.

To that effect, there are some means through which illicit drugs and substances are brought to the correctional centre. The following are some but not all of the techniques used in trafficking drugs:

- Some male officers hide Marijuana (Cannabis) and other drugs ranging from 2 – 10kg under their pants just as the female officers hide drugs in their brassieres and underwear.
- Trafficking are often thrown across the perimeter wall fence into the Prison yard from the outside. This is followed by onward collaboration of picking up and delivery to the inmates. This process mostly occurs at night.
- Some inmates who are repeated offenders also having noticed the method of searching at the gates upon admission come up with other means of coming in with illicit items. At times through their footwear and also through their underwear and other unsuspecting places.
- There is also a type of trafficking that occurs primarily through the use of food stuffs. Drugs are packaged into sacks of food

10. Implications of the Different Types of Trafficking

Each type of trafficking presents unique but interconnected consequences for correctional administration. Drug trafficking promotes addiction and violence; mobile phone trafficking facilitates external criminal coordination; weapon trafficking increases the risk of riots and escapes; money trafficking fuels corruption; while trafficking through organized networks weakens institutional accountability and public confidence. Collectively, these forms of trafficking undermine the statutory objectives of the Nigerian Correctional Service by compromising safe custody, rehabilitation, correctional discipline, and offender reintegration.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2023) emphasizes that comprehensive contraband control requires intelligence-led security, integrity management, technological surveillance, routine searches, staff training, and effective inter-agency collaboration. Similarly, the Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019) prohibits the introduction or possession of unauthorized items within custodial centres and prescribes sanctions for offenders. Therefore, addressing the diverse forms of trafficking requires a holistic strategy that combines ethical leadership, strict enforcement of regulations, improved staff welfare, modern security technologies, and continuous institutional oversight.

11. Disadvantages of Trafficking

According to Lecture 14 of the Prison Lecture Manual, the following are the disadvantages of trafficking in the custodial centres:

- a. Trafficking with a prisoner will give him the impetus or aid to plan for his escape.
- b. Trafficking removes the Prisoners' feelings to realize that he is serving a sentence, thereby defeating the warders' responsibility towards his objective of reforming and rehabilitating the Prisoner.
- c. Through trafficking, warders' lives are not secured because a prisoner may arrange with his friends or relatives outside to bring a detrimental instrument or any other dangerous article by which on its application may cause death of the warder on duty.
- d. Trafficking deters the department's integrity; hence, it is inconsistent with the Federal Government's objective in performing and rehabilitating the citizens as well as reforming and rehabilitating the prisoners.

12. Implications of Trafficking on the Custodial Centres

1. Riot or disorderly conduct by inmates
2. Deaths of both staff and inmates
3. Breakdown of law and order
4. Retardation of reformation of inmates
5. Violation of prison regulations
6. Assault by one prisoner on another or on an officer
7. Indecent or disorderly behaviour
8. Escape
9. Usage of insulting or threatening language on an officer or fellow inmate
10. Receiving or having in possession any article not allowed by prison regulations

11. Willful destruction of tools and clothing belonging to the Federal Government
12. Idleness or negligence to work
13. Willfully disabling oneself from work
14. Willful mismanagement at work
15. Conspiracy
16. Secreting of articles
17. Making frivolous and groundless complaints
18. Leaving without permission of an officer the gang to which he/she has been attached or leaving a part of the prison to which he/she has been confined
19. Loitering or lingering in the yard when they are opened
20. Encourages petty theft within the custodial centres and reformatory institutions
21. Removing, defacing, or altering any distinct number or mark on the clothing or person
22. Some inmates are lured into being homosexuals by virtue of their involvement with the drugs.
23. Tampering with prison locks, lamps or light or other property with which he has no concern
24. Omitting or refusing to help any officer of the prison in the case of any attempted escape or an attack upon such an officer or upon another inmate
25. Disobeying lawful orders of the officers of the prison, or refusing to perform duties in the manner prescribed.
26. Mutiny or incitement to mutiny
27. Personal violence against any officer or servant of the prison.

Measures to Control Trafficking by the Nigerian Custodial Administration

The effective control of trafficking in Nigerian custodial centres requires a comprehensive approach that combines institutional reforms, technological innovation, intelligence-led security, and ethical leadership. The following measures are recommended:

1. **Strengthen Access Control and Screening Procedures:** All persons entering custodial centres—including staff, visitors, contractors, legal practitioners, and service providers—should be subjected to thorough security screening using body scanners, metal detectors, X-ray machines, and biometric verification systems. Routine and surprise inspections should be conducted to prevent the smuggling of contraband.
2. **Deploy Modern Surveillance Technologies:** The Nigerian Correctional Service should invest in advanced security technologies such as closed-circuit television (CCTV), electronic surveillance systems, drone-assisted perimeter monitoring, biometric access control, and contraband detection equipment. These technologies improve monitoring, deter misconduct, and enhance institutional security.
3. **Strengthen Staff Integrity and Accountability:** Regular integrity screening, ethics training, lifestyle audits, and periodic staff rotation should be institutionalized to reduce opportunities for corruption and collusion. Officers found to be involved

- in trafficking should face prompt disciplinary measures and prosecution in accordance with the Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019).
4. **Improve Staff Welfare and Professional Development:** Competitive remuneration, adequate housing, healthcare, insurance, and career development opportunities can reduce financial pressures that may encourage corrupt practices. Continuous professional training on correctional ethics, intelligence gathering, and contraband detection should also be provided.
 5. **Enhance Intelligence-Led Security Operations:** Correctional authorities should establish dedicated intelligence units responsible for collecting, analyzing, and sharing information on trafficking networks within custodial centres. Intelligence should be integrated with regular risk assessments, confidential reporting systems, and proactive security operations.
 6. **Strengthen Inter-Agency Collaboration:** Effective cooperation among the Nigerian Correctional Service, the Nigeria Police Force, the Department of State Services (DSS), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Nigerian Customs Service, and other security agencies is essential for dismantling organized trafficking networks and prosecuting offenders.
 7. **Conduct Regular Searches and Security Audits:** Unannounced searches of inmate accommodation, workshops, kitchens, and administrative offices, vehicles, and staff quarters should be conducted regularly. Periodic institutional security audits should identify vulnerabilities and recommend corrective measures.
 8. **Introduce Whistle-Blower and Reporting Mechanisms:** Confidential reporting channels should be established to encourage staff, inmates, and visitors to report trafficking activities without fear of retaliation. Whistle-blower protection policies can improve accountability and facilitate early detection of contraband networks.
 9. **Strengthen Legal Enforcement and Sanctions:** Existing laws prohibiting the introduction of unauthorized items into custodial centres should be strictly enforced. Individuals involved in trafficking, regardless of status or position, should be investigated, prosecuted, and sanctioned to serve as a deterrent to others.
 10. **Reduce Overcrowding and Improve Institutional Management:** Overcrowded custodial facilities make surveillance and contraband control more difficult. Accelerating criminal justice processes, expanding non-custodial sentencing, improving inmate classification, and upgrading correctional infrastructure will reduce opportunities for trafficking.
 11. **Promote Rehabilitation and Behavioral Change Programmes:** Effective educational, vocational, psychological, and counselling programmes reduce inmates' dependence on illicit markets within custodial centres. Rehabilitation initiatives should be strengthened to discourage involvement in contraband trafficking.
 12. **Continuous Monitoring and Policy Evaluation:** The Nigerian Correctional Service should establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to periodically

assess the effectiveness of anti-trafficking policies, identify emerging threats, and review operational procedures in line with international best practices.

1. Efforts made Towards Curbing Trafficking by Correctional Centres

The Nigerian Correctional Service has taken several measures to prevent the entrance of illegal substances into their centres. These methods have been successful and many more are being introduced through continual review of legislation. Some of these measures are discussed below:

SEARCHING

This is a procedure carried out by the custodial centres and reformatory institutions to ensure that no illegal substance or materials are brought into their institutions.

Prisoners on admission are searched by a person of their own sex apart from other prisoners. All money effects, and articles whatsoever except necessary clothing shall be taken from the criminal prisoners, but nothing shall be taken from debtors and other non-criminal prisoners except; knives, weapons, and articles calculated could facilitate escape. (Prison Lecture Manual, P.37)

Standing Orders 288 – 304 amplified the need for searching in Prisons. Searching is one of the greatest security precautions in the Prisons and its importance can never be overstressed especially to check the passing of dangerous materials such as weapons, implements, ropes, clothes, drugs, etc., as forbidden by Section 18 of the Prison Regulations CAP 159 which says “*No spirituous liquor shall be admitted for use of any Prisoner and no smoking shall be allowed, or tobacco in any form introduced except under the written order of the medical officer*”. These forbidden articles may be used to injure or kill other inmates or the staff or even to effect escape. (Prison Lecture Manual, P.37). Hence, searching in Custodial centres and reformatory institutions is of utmost importance.

These searches are carried out on inmates, staff and visitors to the custodial centres. In the instance of the staff, the search is conducted on a daily basis as they resume for work. In the case of visitors, searches are conducted upon their entry into the custodial centre. However, in the instance of the inmates within the custodial centre, there are various types of searches performed. These include:

1. **Periodical Search/Searching of Cells:** This is done in such a way that all parts of the cells of the prison are searched at least once a week. (Prison Lecture Manual, P.37)
2. **Workshop Search:** This is done on the orders of the Superintendent and should be done in such a manner to ensure that all parts of the workshops and buildings are searched at least once in two weeks. Prisoners in the workshops must be searched out of the workshops and this searching should be ordered by the superintendent without notice and should normally be done with warders not employed in the workshops, but the instructor in-charge of the workshops must be present. (Prison Lecture Manual, P.38)
3. **Rub-down Search:** This is the commonest search done. This is done by removing the cap off the prisoners' head, while standing akimbo with hands raised and

- mouth opened to enable inspection of under the tongue. The parts of the body, hems of clothes, laps and girdles are fully searched. This search usually done. When any prisoner enters or leaves the prison gate, including on admission.
- b. Enters or leaves the adjudication room before the superintendents
 - c. Before entering the Dock in Court
 - d. Before surrendering to bill
 - e. Entering or leaving workshops or visiting rooms
 - f. At any other period as when the gang is leaving a premises where work had been carried out. (Prison Lecture Manual, P.38)
4. **Ordinary Search:** During this search, a prisoner is stripped naked and his clothes properly searched. While standing naked, all parts of his body will be searched with legs apart. The arms are also searched. This type of searching is normally done on admission in the Record Office and will be done in the presence of at least two (2) warders and out of sight of another prisoner. It will be done with decency and no unnecessary waste of time with regards to this type of searching. (Prison Lecture Manual, P.38)
 5. **Special Search:** This is done when a warder suspects a prisoner to be secreting a prohibited article with him. The authority of the Superintendent or Chief Warder is necessary before carrying out this search. The prisoner is stripped naked and his body and clothing are carefully examined. Entry will be made in the search book and signed by authorized officer. (Prison Lecture Manual, P.38)

Separation of Categories

According to the “*Standard Minimum Rules for Treatment of Prisoners*”, the different categories of inmates shall be kept in separate institutions taking account of their sex, age, criminal record, the legal reason for their detention and the necessities of their treatment. The purpose of the classification shall be:

- a. To separate from others those prisoners who, by reason of their criminal records or bad characters, are likely to exercise a bad influence.
- b. To divide the prisoners into classes in order to facilitate their treatment with a view to their social rehabilitation.

Direct Legislation

The Nigerian correctional service uses direct regulations such as acts, decrees and standing orders to further limit the influx of illegal drugs into their system. Some of these legislations are:

- The standing order 26 of the Prison which states that “*Tobacco or cigarettes received with a convicted prisoner shall not be accepted as property but destroyed in the presence of the prisoner and at least one other officer. A note shall be made in the appropriate prisons’ form and the property book stating the approximate quantity*”.
- The standing order 234 of the Prison which states that “*Cigarettes may be allowed to condemned prisoners who wish to smoke in designated places, as may be recommended by the Medical Officer. No condemned prisoner shall be allowed to handle matches, or a cigarette lighter; one of the officers on*

condemned cell duty shall provide the means to light the cigarette as required”.

- The standing order 598 of the Prison which states that *“The health worker shall be responsible for the correct dispensing of all prescriptions under the supervision or direction of the Medical officer, for the proper dressing of all surgical cases which they may be directed to dress and for the care of all medicines, medical stores, surgical instruments and appliances in the clinic”* and order 599 which states that *“Pharmacists or pharmacy technicians shall not dispense any medicament or issue any drug of any kind, except on the prescription of the Medical Officer”.*
- Section 18 of the Prisons Regulation CAP 159 states that *“No spirituous liquor shall be admitted for use of any Prisoner and no smoking shall be allowed, or tobacco in any form introduced except under the written order of the medical officer”.* Section 14 of the Prison Decree 1972 also speaks in this vein.

Imposition of Punishments

Punishments are usually imposed by the Correctional Service to both inmate and staff caught in the act of illicit drug trafficking:

1. Punishment Imposed on Officers of the Correctional Service

According to Section 14, subsection 1(a) of the Prison Act CAP 366 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990; *“any person who brings, throws or otherwise introduces into or removes from a prison, or gives to or takes from a prisoner, any alcoholic liquor, tobacco, intoxicating or poisonous drug or article prohibited by regulations made under this Act”* is liable to punishments incurable for drug trafficking by a staff of the custodial centre if found guilty after following the laid down procedures for trial found in the Prison standing orders 613 – 630.

In the event of a guilty verdict, such a staff is liable to one or more of the following; as found in Section 83 of the Prisons Act CAP 366 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990 which says *“A superintendent may examine into the truth of any such charge as aforesaid, and, if his decision is against the accused, may impose on him one or more of the following punishments;”*

- a. Extra duty
- b. A fine, the maximum of which is to be set according to the level of the erring officer
- c. Stoppage of pay, or attachment of monetary deposit, where there has been loss by neglect of, or injury to, government property, or absence without leave, provided that any fine and stoppages together shall not exceed a half of the pay due in any month, and that the total stoppages which may be awarded by a superintendent shall not exceed three months’ pay of the offender’s rank
- d. Reduction in rank, subject to the approval of the Controller-General of Prisons, and, when the offender is the holder of a pensionable office, to the covering authority of the minister.
- e. Dismissal or termination of appointment, but subject to the approval of the Controller-General of Prisons, should the offender be above the rank of Prison

Assistant III (PAIII), and to the covering authority of the Minister, when the offender is the holder of a pensionable office.

- f. Section 14 of the Prisons Act CAP 366 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990 also states that *“such an officer shall be guilty of an offence and on conviction receive imprisonment not exceeding 12 months or be required to pay a fine. He could also be required to serve both the imprisonment and also pay a fine”*.

According to N.U. Manya Manya (2021), he observed while on the job that the management of the Custodial centres on the orders of the superintendent also apply the following principles to any staff alleged to have committed drug trafficking. They are as follows;

1. **Warning letter:** When an officer is found to be usually of good behaviour and is also a first offender, such an officer may be given a warning letter to serve as a deterrent to him not to repeat such acts.
2. **Suspension until the end of the trial:** The accused officer will be placed on immediate suspension once the allegation is made and a trial panel is constituted. Such a person will remain in suspension until the resolution of the case.
3. **Interdiction:** It is the prerogative of the management to determine whether or not a staff on suspension for alleged trafficking will receive pay. However, when the decision is that he should be paid during suspension, such an officer will receive only half pay.
4. **Suspension without pay:** The management also reserves the right to give such a suspension without pay. Whenever this is done, such officer receives no pay until the end of the trial. If found innocent, he is to be paid his outstanding in lump sum; however, he forfeits all pay if found guilty.
5. **Demotion of rank:** If found guilty, an officer of the custodial centre can be demoted from his current rank to a previous rank and could also be withdrawn from promotion privileges.
6. **Dismissal without further prosecution:** The trial panel can give a guilty officer a verdict of summary dismissal for his actions and also bar him from applying for any other post in the Nigerian Military or Para-Military organizations. After this, the erring officer is set free.
7. **Dismissal with further prosecution:** The panel can also decide to hand over the officer to the relevant authorities for further prosecution after he has been dismissed and stripped of the privileges of his/her uniform.

Punishment imposed on inmates of the custodial

1. **Reduced ration on the recommendation of the medical officer:** as a deterrent, the chief medical officer may recommend that an inmate found with any illegal substance for the first time or who tests positive to any banned substance for the first time be given a reduced ration to serve as an example for others who might be interested in following his footsteps.
2. **Isolation on the recommendation of the medical officer:** On the recommendation of the Chief Medical officer of the correctional centre, an inmate

who has been found with illicit substances in his possession more than once or who tests positive to any banned substance consistently within the compound shall be put in an isolation cell to prevent him from corrupting other inmates and also to assist him receive proper medical attention while staying off the drugs.

3. **Forced manual labour:** An inmate may be made to do a form of forced manual labor to serve as punishment for being in possession of a banned substance or for testing positive to such drugs. Examples of such labour could include; clearing of grass within a specified space, fetching of a designated amount of water, sweeping a particular portion, etc. All these punishments could be given to serve as a warning to others.
4. **Withdrawn privileges:** An inmate who has some special privilege given unto him by the management of the custodial centre may have such privileges withdrawn if and when such an inmate is found to be in possession of an illicit substance.
5. **Loss of remission on time to be served:** By practice, a custodial centre reserves the right to give an inmate a one-third ($\frac{1}{3}$) remission of the time he has been sentenced to serve. For example, an inmate sentenced to three (3) years imprisonment may receive a one-third ($\frac{1}{3}$) remission of his sentence and thus will have to serve only two (2) years of his sentence. However, a case of substance abuse may lead to the removal of such remission and thus meaning that the inmate will serve his full jail term.

Staff Integrity and Correctional Administration

Staff integrity refers to the commitment of correctional personnel to professionalism, honesty, transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct in the discharge of their official responsibilities. Integrity is fundamental to maintaining discipline, institutional legitimacy, and public confidence in correctional administration. According to Alemika (2013), corruption within correctional institutions weakens organizational effectiveness by encouraging abuse of authority, bribery, favoritism, and collaboration with criminal elements.

International studies also demonstrate that poor remuneration, inadequate supervision, occupational stress, and limited opportunities for career development increase the likelihood of unethical behaviour among correctional officers (UNODC, 2023). When staff members become involved in trafficking activities, institutional discipline deteriorates, professional standards decline, and inmates become more capable of sustaining criminal networks within correctional facilities.

For your research paper, you can expand Section 10: Recommendations by adding a new subsection titled "Measures to Control Trafficking in Nigerian Custodial Centres." The following academic content can be incorporated before the conclusion.

Institutional Security in Custodial Centres

Institutional security encompasses all policies, procedures, personnel, and technologies designed to maintain order, prevent escapes, detect contraband, protect correctional staff and inmates, and ensure the effective operation of custodial institutions. Effective security requires intelligence gathering, surveillance systems, regular searches, risk assessment, access control, and staff professionalism.

The National Institute of Justice (2020) argues that contraband trafficking significantly undermines correctional security because prohibited items facilitate violence, gang activities, escape attempts, intimidation of staff, and external criminal coordination. Mobile phones, in particular, enable inmates to communicate with criminal associates outside correctional facilities, organize kidnappings, financial crimes, and other illegal activities despite being in custody. These developments create serious operational challenges for correctional administrators and law enforcement agencies.

Institutional Effectiveness

Institutional effectiveness refers to the ability of correctional institutions to achieve their statutory objectives of safe custody, offender rehabilitation, behavioural reformation, and successful reintegration into society. The Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019) emphasizes rehabilitation through education, vocational training, counselling, psychological services, and skills acquisition.

However, the effectiveness of these programmes depends largely on a secure institutional environment. Persistent trafficking of contraband weakens rehabilitation efforts by promoting drug abuse, violence, indiscipline, corruption, and the continued influence of criminal organizations within custodial centres. According to the World Prison Brief (2024), overcrowding and inadequate correctional resources further complicate institutional management, thereby increasing opportunities for illicit trafficking and reducing correctional effectiveness.

Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined prison administration, correctional security, and institutional reforms in Nigeria and other jurisdictions. Alemika (2013) observed that corruption remains one of the greatest challenges confronting prison administration in Nigeria, undermining accountability, discipline, and public confidence. Although the study identified institutional weaknesses, it did not specifically investigate the implications of trafficking for staff integrity and organizational effectiveness.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2023) reported that contraband trafficking threatens correctional security globally by enabling inmates to maintain criminal enterprises, organize violence, and compromise prison management systems. The report recommends stronger intelligence gathering, integrity testing, technological surveillance, and improved staff welfare to reduce institutional corruption.

The National Institute of Justice (2020) similarly found that correctional institutions with advanced surveillance technologies, regular security audits, and comprehensive staff training recorded lower levels of contraband trafficking than institutions relying primarily on manual security procedures.

Studies on prison reforms in Nigeria have largely concentrated on prison congestion, inmate welfare, rehabilitation programmes, and human rights issues. Comparatively few studies have examined how trafficking directly affects correctional

staff integrity, institutional security, and organizational effectiveness under the Nigerian Correctional Service. This gap justifies the present study.

Literature Gap

Although considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to prison administration, correctional reforms, inmate welfare, rehabilitation, and institutional security, limited empirical research has specifically examined trafficking within Nigerian custodial centres from the perspective of its implications for staff integrity, institutional security, and institutional effectiveness. Existing studies have focused predominantly on prison congestion, human rights, correctional reforms, and inmate rehabilitation, while giving comparatively little attention to the organizational consequences of contraband trafficking and staff involvement.

Furthermore, most international studies are based on correctional systems with more advanced security infrastructure and institutional capacity, making their findings less applicable to the Nigerian correctional environment. Consequently, there remains a significant knowledge gap regarding the relationship between trafficking, staff corruption, institutional security, and correctional effectiveness in Nigeria.

This study therefore fills this gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of how trafficking within Nigerian custodial centres affects correctional staff integrity, institutional security, and the overall effectiveness of the Nigerian Correctional Service, while proposing practical policy measures for strengthening institutional accountability and improving correctional administration.

Staff Integrity

Staff integrity refers to the adherence of correctional personnel to ethical standards, professional conduct, transparency, and accountability. High integrity promotes institutional trust, while compromised integrity encourages corruption and misconduct.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Institutional Theory and Routine Activities Theory. The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive explanation of the organizational, behavioural, and security factors that facilitate trafficking in Nigerian custodial centres and its implications for staff integrity, institutional security, and correctional effectiveness.

Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory was developed by John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan (1977) and later expanded by Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1983). The theory argues that organizations function effectively when they establish strong institutional rules, ethical standards, accountability mechanisms, and effective systems of supervision. Conversely, organizations with weak governance structures, poor oversight, inadequate enforcement of regulations, and institutional corruption become vulnerable to misconduct and organizational failure.

Within the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCOs), Institutional Theory explains that trafficking of contraband is not merely the result of individual misconduct but also a consequence of institutional deficiencies. Weak internal controls, inadequate staff supervision, poor remuneration, overcrowding, insufficient surveillance technologies, ineffective disciplinary procedures, and weak anti-corruption mechanisms create an environment in which correctional officers, inmates, visitors, contractors, and other actors may engage in the trafficking of prohibited items.

The theory further suggests that institutional effectiveness depends on the existence of transparent leadership, accountability, professional ethics, staff integrity, and compliance with established rules and regulations. Where these institutional mechanisms are weak, trafficking becomes widespread, leading to corruption, declining staff morale, compromised security, and reduced public confidence in correctional institutions.

The relevance of Institutional Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how strengthening organizational governance, improving staff welfare, enhancing accountability, and enforcing institutional regulations can significantly reduce trafficking and improve the overall effectiveness of Nigerian custodial centres.

Routine Activities Theory

Routine Activities Theory was developed by Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979). The theory explains that crime occurs when three essential elements converge at the same place and time: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian.

In Nigerian custodial centres, motivated offenders include inmates, corrupt correctional personnel, visitors, contractors, and other individuals seeking to introduce prohibited items into correctional facilities. Suitable targets consist of custodial centres where contraband can be exchanged or concealed, while the absence of capable guardians results from weak security screening, inadequate surveillance systems, ineffective intelligence gathering, poor supervision, and institutional corruption.

Routine Activities Theory demonstrates that trafficking can be reduced by strengthening capable guardianship through improved access control, electronic surveillance systems, biometric verification, intelligence-led operations, routine searches, staff integrity programmes, and strict enforcement of correctional regulations. The theory therefore emphasizes crime prevention by reducing opportunities for trafficking rather than relying solely on punishment after offences have occurred.

The theory is particularly relevant because it highlights the importance of modern security technologies, continuous monitoring, professional correctional personnel, and institutional vigilance in preventing the illegal movement of contraband into custodial centres.

Application of the Theories to the Study

Institutional Theory and Routine Activities Theory complement each other in explaining trafficking within Nigerian custodial centres. Institutional Theory focuses on organizational weaknesses such as corruption, inadequate accountability, poor governance, and weak ethical standards that encourage trafficking. Routine Activities Theory explains how everyday security lapses and insufficient guardianship create opportunities for the introduction and circulation of contraband.

Together, these theories provide a robust framework for understanding how trafficking undermines staff integrity, weakens institutional security, promotes corruption, compromises rehabilitation programmes, facilitates criminal activities within custodial centres, and reduces the overall effectiveness of the Nigerian Correctional Service. They also support the study's recommendations for strengthening institutional governance, enhancing staff professionalism, deploying advanced security technologies, improving intelligence gathering, and enforcing strict anti-trafficking measures to achieve secure and effective correctional administration.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative documentary research design. The qualitative approach is appropriate because it enables an in-depth exploration and interpretation of trafficking within Nigerian custodial centres and its implications for staff integrity, institutional security, and institutional effectiveness. Documentary research is suitable since the study relies on existing scholarly and official documents rather than primary data collected through surveys or interviews. This design allows the researcher to synthesize evidence from diverse sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Sources of Data

The study is based entirely on secondary data obtained from credible and authoritative sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, textbooks, government publications, policy documents, conference papers, official reports, and publications from national and international organizations. Key sources include the Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019), publications of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the World Prison Brief, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the CLEEN Foundation, and other relevant materials on correctional administration, institutional security, corruption, and contraband trafficking.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through a systematic review of published and unpublished documentary materials relevant to the study. The researcher searched academic databases, university repositories, government websites, institutional reports, and library resources using keywords such as trafficking in custodial centres, contraband in prisons, correctional staff integrity, institutional security, Nigerian Correctional

Service, and prison administration. Only documents directly related to the objectives of the study and considered credible and relevant were selected for analysis.

Method of Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using thematic content analysis. This method involved carefully reading the selected documents, identifying recurring concepts and patterns, coding relevant information, and grouping similar ideas into themes aligned with the study objectives. The major themes included the nature and forms of trafficking, staff integrity, institutional security, institutional effectiveness, and measures for preventing trafficking in Nigerian custodial centres. The findings were interpreted in relation to the Institutional Theory and Routine Activities Theory, which provide the theoretical foundation for explaining the causes and implications of trafficking within correctional institutions.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, information was obtained from multiple authoritative sources and cross-checked for consistency. Preference was given to peer-reviewed publications, official government documents, and reports from reputable international organizations. The use of multiple sources facilitated triangulation, thereby improving the validity and reliability of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

Since the study relied exclusively on secondary sources, no human participants were involved, and ethical risks associated with primary data collection were minimal. Nevertheless, the researcher adhered to accepted academic standards by ensuring accurate citation of all sources, avoiding plagiarism, and presenting findings objectively without distortion or bias. The study also complied with established principles of academic integrity and responsible research conduct.

Discussion and Analysis

The findings of this study demonstrate that trafficking in Nigerian custodial centres is a multidimensional institutional challenge that extends beyond the illegal movement of contraband. It represents a significant threat to correctional governance, staff professionalism, institutional security, offender rehabilitation, and the overall effectiveness of the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCOs). The analysis reveals that trafficking is sustained by a combination of organizational weaknesses, corruption, inadequate supervision, overcrowding, poor staff welfare, weak intelligence systems, and insufficient technological surveillance.

One major finding is that trafficking significantly undermines staff integrity. The involvement of some correctional personnel in facilitating the movement of prohibited items into custodial centres reflects serious ethical and professional failures. Staff who engage in bribery, collusion, or abuse of official authority compromise the credibility of the institution and weaken public confidence in correctional administration. This finding supports Alemika (2013), who argued that corruption remains one of the greatest obstacles to effective prison administration in

Nigeria. It also validates Institutional Theory, which explains that organizations characterized by weak governance structures, ineffective accountability mechanisms, and poor institutional oversight become more vulnerable to unethical conduct and organizational failure.

The study further establishes that trafficking seriously threatens institutional security. The circulation of illicit drugs, mobile phones, weapons, unauthorized financial resources, and other contraband strengthens inmate criminal networks and creates opportunities for violence, intimidation, riots, hostage-taking, escape attempts, and organized criminal activities within custodial centres. Mobile phones, in particular, enable inmates to communicate with criminal associates outside correctional facilities, facilitating kidnappings, cybercrime, armed robbery, fraud, and other offences despite incarceration. These findings are consistent with the National Institute of Justice (2020), which emphasizes that contraband trafficking significantly weakens correctional security by enabling inmates to continue criminal operations while in custody.

The analysis also indicates that trafficking undermines institutional effectiveness by disrupting the core statutory objectives of the Nigerian Correctional Service. The NCOs is mandated to provide safe custody, rehabilitation, reformation, and successful reintegration of offenders into society. However, the widespread availability of contraband promotes drug abuse, violence, indiscipline, gang formation, and corruption, thereby reducing inmates' participation in educational, vocational, counselling, and behavioural change programmes. Consequently, institutional resources are diverted from rehabilitation to crisis management, security operations, investigations, and disciplinary procedures, thereby reducing operational efficiency.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that overcrowding within many Nigerian custodial centres increases opportunities for trafficking. Overcrowded facilities create significant difficulties in inmate supervision, intelligence gathering, surveillance, and routine searches. These operational constraints make it easier for traffickers to exploit institutional weaknesses and conceal prohibited items. This observation aligns with reports by the World Prison Brief (2024), which identify overcrowding as a major challenge affecting correctional administration and institutional security in Nigeria.

The study also demonstrates that organized trafficking networks often involve collaboration among inmates, visitors, contractors, legal practitioners, transport personnel, and, in some cases, corrupt correctional staff. Such coordinated criminal networks exploit weaknesses in access control, staff supervision, visitor management, and technological surveillance. The existence of these networks suggests that trafficking is not merely an isolated disciplinary problem but a form of organized criminal activity requiring intelligence-led security responses and coordinated inter-agency collaboration.

The findings equally support the assumptions of Routine Activities Theory. The theory argues that crime occurs when motivated offenders encounter suitable targets in the absence of capable guardians. Within Nigerian custodial centres, motivated offenders include inmates, corrupt officials, visitors, and contractors seeking financial or criminal advantage. Suitable targets include poorly secured custodial facilities

where institutional weaknesses can be exploited, while the absence of capable guardians is reflected in inadequate searches, limited surveillance technology, poor intelligence gathering, weak supervision, and ineffective enforcement of correctional regulations. The persistence of trafficking therefore demonstrates the need to strengthen capable guardianship through improved security screening, biometric access control, CCTV surveillance, routine inspections, intelligence gathering, staff integrity programmes, and strict disciplinary enforcement.

The analysis further reveals that inadequate staff welfare contributes indirectly to trafficking. Poor remuneration, occupational stress, insufficient training, and limited opportunities for professional advancement increase the vulnerability of some correctional personnel to bribery and corruption. Although poor welfare does not justify unethical behaviour, improving working conditions can reduce incentives for misconduct while enhancing staff commitment, professionalism, and institutional loyalty.

Another important finding is that trafficking weakens public trust in the Nigerian Correctional Service. Public confidence in correctional institutions depends on transparency, accountability, professionalism, and the ability of correctional authorities to maintain secure custodial environments. Frequent reports of contraband trafficking, corruption, and continued criminal activities coordinated from custodial centres undermine the legitimacy of the correctional system and reduce public confidence in government efforts to combat crime.

Overall, the study demonstrates that trafficking within Nigerian custodial centres is both a governance challenge and a national security concern. Addressing it requires comprehensive institutional reforms that combine ethical leadership, strengthened accountability mechanisms, improved staff welfare, intelligence-led operations, advanced surveillance technologies, regular security audits, and effective prosecution of offenders, inter-agency collaboration, and continuous monitoring of correctional operations. Such reforms will enhance staff integrity, improve institutional security, strengthen rehabilitation programmes, and enable the Nigerian Correctional Service to fulfil its statutory mandate of safe custody, offender reformation, and successful reintegration.

CONCLUSION

Trafficking within Nigerian custodial centres remains a persistent and complex challenge that undermines the core objectives of the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCOs). The study has shown that the illegal movement of contraband—including illicit drugs, mobile phones, weapons, money, and other prohibited items—not only compromises the security of custodial facilities but also erodes staff integrity, weakens institutional accountability, and diminishes the effectiveness of offender rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. The persistence of trafficking is driven by multiple factors, including corruption, inadequate staff welfare, overcrowding, weak institutional oversight, insufficient technological surveillance, and the activities of organized criminal networks involving inmates, visitors, contractors, and, in some cases, corrupt correctional personnel.

Anchored on Institutional Theory and Routine Activities Theory, the study demonstrates that trafficking thrives where institutional governance is weak and where opportunities exist due to inadequate security measures and ineffective supervision. The findings further reveal that trafficking facilitates prison violence, gang activities, escape attempts, drug abuse, and the continuation of criminal operations from within custodial centres, thereby posing significant threats to national security and public safety. These challenges divert institutional resources away from rehabilitation and correctional development toward crisis management and security operations, ultimately reducing the operational efficiency and credibility of the Nigerian Correctional Service.

The study therefore concludes that combating trafficking in Nigerian custodial centres requires a holistic and sustainable approach that integrates strong institutional governance, ethical leadership, intelligence-led security operations, advanced surveillance technologies, improved staff welfare, rigorous anti-corruption measures, and effective inter-agency collaboration. Regular security audits, continuous staff training, integrity management systems, and strict enforcement of the Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019) are also essential for preventing the introduction and circulation of contraband. Furthermore, addressing overcrowding through criminal justice reforms and expanding rehabilitation programmes will reduce opportunities for illicit activities within custodial facilities.

Ultimately, strengthening staff integrity and institutional accountability will enhance public confidence in the Nigerian Correctional Service, improve correctional security, and enable custodial centres to fulfil their statutory mandate of safe custody, offender reformation, rehabilitation, and successful reintegration. By implementing these measures, the Nigerian Correctional Service will be better positioned to promote institutional effectiveness, support national security objectives, and contribute to a more efficient and humane correctional system in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen staff integrity, enhance institutional security, and improve the effectiveness of the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCOs) in combating trafficking within custodial centres:

- 1) **Strengthen Access Control and Screening Procedures:** The Nigerian Correctional Service should reinforce access control measures by ensuring that all persons entering custodial centres—including correctional personnel, visitors, contractors, legal practitioners, and service providers—undergo comprehensive security screening. The deployment of body scanners, metal detectors, X-ray machines, biometric verification systems, and electronic access control devices should become standard practice. Routine, random, and intelligence-led searches should also be conducted to prevent the smuggling of contraband into custodial facilities.
- 2) **Deploy Modern Surveillance Technologies:** Investment in modern security technologies should be prioritized to improve institutional surveillance and contraband detection. Closed-circuit television (CCTV), biometric access systems, electronic perimeter fencing, drone-assisted surveillance, body-worn cameras,

contraband detection equipment, and integrated digital monitoring systems should be deployed across custodial centres. These technologies will enhance real-time monitoring, improve incident response, and reduce opportunities for trafficking.

- 3) **Strengthen Staff Integrity and Accountability:** The Nigerian Correctional Service should institutionalize integrity management programmes through regular ethics training, lifestyle audits, integrity testing, periodic staff rotation, and strict enforcement of disciplinary measures. Officers found to be involved in trafficking should be investigated promptly and prosecuted in accordance with the Nigerian Correctional Service Act (2019). A culture of professionalism, transparency, and accountability should be promoted at all levels of correctional administration.
- 4) **Improve Staff Welfare and Professional Development:** Improving the welfare of correctional personnel is essential for reducing vulnerability to corruption. Government should provide competitive salaries, adequate housing, healthcare services, insurance coverage, and opportunities for career advancement. Continuous professional development programmes should focus on correctional ethics, intelligence gathering, contraband detection, risk assessment, and modern correctional management practices.
- 5) **Enhance Intelligence-Led Security Operations:** Dedicated correctional intelligence units should be strengthened to collect, analyse, and disseminate intelligence relating to trafficking networks within custodial centres. Intelligence-led operations, confidential informant systems, risk profiling, and regular security assessments should be integrated into daily correctional operations to identify emerging threats and prevent organized criminal activities.
- 6) **Strengthen Inter-Agency Collaboration:** Effective collaboration among the Nigerian Correctional Service, the Nigeria Police Force, the Department of State Services (DSS), the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Nigerian Customs Service, and other relevant security agencies should be enhanced. Joint intelligence sharing, coordinated investigations, and joint operations will improve the detection, disruption, and prosecution of trafficking networks.
- 7) **Conduct Regular Searches and Institutional Security Audits:** and unannounced searches should be conducted in inmate accommodation, workshops, kitchens, administrative offices, staff quarters, and vehicles. Periodic institutional security audits should be undertaken to identify operational weaknesses, assess compliance with security procedures, and recommend corrective measures for improving custodial security.
- 8) **Introduce Whistle-Blower and Confidential Reporting Mechanism:** The Nigerian Correctional Service should establish confidential reporting channels that enable staff, inmates, and members of the public to report trafficking activities without fear of intimidation or retaliation. Strong whistle-blower protection mechanisms will encourage early reporting of corruption and improve institutional accountability.
- 9) **Strengthen Legal Enforcement and Anti-Corruption Measures:** Existing legal provisions prohibiting the introduction and possession of unauthorized items

within custodial centres should be strictly enforced. Individuals involved in trafficking—including correctional personnel, visitors, contractors, and inmates—should be investigated, prosecuted, and sanctioned without bias. Consistent enforcement of the law will serve as an effective deterrent against future offences.

- 10) **Reduce Overcrowding and Improve Institutional Management:** Government should address custodial overcrowding through accelerated criminal justice processes, wider use of non-custodial measures, improved inmate classification, and expansion of correctional infrastructure. Reducing overcrowding will enhance supervision, facilitate effective rehabilitation programmes, and reduce opportunities for contraband trafficking.
- 11) **Strengthen Rehabilitation and Behavioral Change Programmes:** Educational, vocational, psychological, religious, and counselling programmes should be expanded to reduce inmates' dependence on illicit prison economies. Effective rehabilitation initiatives promote positive behavioural change, reduce recidivism, and discourage participation in trafficking and other criminal activities within custodial centres.
- 12) **Promote Continuous Monitoring, Evaluation, and Policy Review:** The Nigerian Correctional Service should establish a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework to periodically assess the effectiveness of anti-trafficking policies, security procedures, and institutional reforms. Findings from regular evaluations should inform policy reviews, operational improvements, and the adoption of international best practices in correctional administration.
- 13) **Promote Community and Stakeholder Engagement:** Civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, community leaders, and the media should collaborate with the Nigerian Correctional Service in promoting transparency, accountability, and public awareness on the dangers of trafficking within custodial centres. Such partnerships can support oversight, public confidence, and sustainable correctional reforms.
- 14) **Strengthen Institutional Leadership and Ethical Governance:** Correctional leadership should demonstrate zero tolerance for corruption by fostering ethical leadership, enforcing merit-based promotion, ensuring transparent decision-making, and promoting a culture of accountability. Strong leadership commitment is essential for sustaining anti-trafficking initiatives and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the Nigerian Correctional Service.

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