

Psychological Resilience, Perceived Stigma, Trauma History, Social Support, and Emotional Intelligence as Predictors of Correctional Adjustment among Inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence as predictors of correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, with a sample of 320 inmates comprising 260 awaiting trial and 60 convicted inmates selected through multistage sampling technique. Standardized instruments were used for data collection, including the Brief Resilience Scale, Stigma Scale for Chronic Illnesses, Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test, and a Correctional Adjustment Scale. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed significant positive and negative relationships among the study variables and correctional adjustment (resilience: $r = 0.69$; stigma: $r = -0.66$; trauma: $r = -0.62$; social support: $r = 0.70$; emotional intelligence: $r = 0.67$). The regression analysis showed that the variables jointly accounted for 67% of the variance in correctional adjustment ($R^2 = 0.67$; $F = 97.45$, $p < .05$). Social support emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by psychological resilience and emotional intelligence, while perceived stigma and trauma history had significant negative contributions. The study concludes that correctional adjustment is significantly influenced by a combination of psychological and social factors. It recommends strengthening trauma-informed care, resilience training, social support systems, and emotional intelligence development programmes within correctional institutions.

Keywords: Correctional adjustment; psychological resilience; perceived stigma; trauma history; social support; emotional intelligence.

Introduction

Correctional adjustment has become a major concern in criminology, psychology, and rehabilitation studies due to its implications for inmate wellbeing, institutional stability, and post-release reintegration. Adjustment within correctional environments is shaped by a complex interaction of psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence. These factors influence how inmates cope with incarceration stressors, institutional restrictions, and reintegration demands. Classical correctional theories such as Sykes' (1958) deprivation model and Goffman's (1961) stigma framework explain that imprisonment produces psychological strain through loss of autonomy, identity disruption, and social labeling, which collectively affect behavioural adaptation. Empirical studies have further shown that maladaptive coping behaviours, substance abuse, and criminal tendencies are closely associated with poor adjustment outcomes among incarcerated populations (Omopo, 2024; Omopo & Odedokun, 2024). Intervention-based findings also demonstrate that cognitive behavioural therapy, reality therapy, and solution-focused approaches significantly enhance emotional regulation and behavioural adaptation among individuals with addiction and trauma histories (Asiyanbi et al., 2025; Offor & Omopo, 2025). These findings suggest that correctional adjustment is a multidimensional psychological process influenced by both internal resilience factors and external institutional pressures.

Psychological resilience is widely recognised as a key determinant of successful correctional adjustment, enabling inmates to withstand institutional stress and maintain adaptive functioning. Ward and Maruna (2007) emphasize that rehabilitation is most effective when offenders develop adaptive identity reconstruction rather than simply risk avoidance. Similarly, Andrews and Bonta (2010) argue that individual psychological traits such as self-regulation and coping capacity strongly influence correctional outcomes. Empirical Nigerian evidence supports this, showing that peer influence, social marginalisation, and substance abuse significantly predict criminal behaviour and maladjustment among inmates (Omopo, 2024). In addition, studies have demonstrated that parental substance abuse contributes to developmental pathways leading to criminal behaviour and poor adjustment in later life (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Psychological vulnerability research further indicates that individuals with higher emotional instability and distress are more likely to engage in maladaptive coping strategies, including substance use and

aggression (Omopo, 2023). Collectively, these findings reinforce resilience as a protective mechanism that mitigates the negative psychological impact of incarceration and enhances adaptive adjustment.

Perceived stigma and trauma history represent significant barriers to positive correctional adjustment. Goffman's (1961) stigma theory explains that labeling individuals as offenders produces long-term identity disruption and social exclusion, which can hinder rehabilitation. Similarly, Haney (2001) and Toch (1977) highlight that incarceration often produces psychological trauma, including anxiety, depression, and institutionalisation effects that reduce post-prison adjustment capacity. Wolff and Shi (2012) further demonstrate that trauma exposure is highly prevalent among incarcerated populations and is strongly associated with PTSD symptoms and behavioural dysregulation. Nigerian studies also confirm that social injustice, marginalisation, and exposure to adverse environments are strongly linked to criminal behaviour and maladjustment among correctional inmates (Omopo, 2024; Offor et al., 2025). Clinical evidence additionally shows that trauma-related psychological responses, including nonverbal trauma expressions, significantly influence emotional and behavioural functioning among affected individuals (Offor & Omopo, 2024). These findings highlight the enduring psychological burden of trauma and stigma in shaping correctional adjustment outcomes.

Social support and emotional intelligence play critical protective roles in enhancing inmates' adjustment and rehabilitation. Cullen (1994) emphasizes that social support is a key criminological construct that buffers individuals from stress and promotes conformity to prosocial norms. Liebling (2004) further argues that the moral quality of prison environments, including relationships and institutional fairness, significantly influences inmate wellbeing and adjustment outcomes. Emotional intelligence enhances self-awareness, impulse control, and interpersonal functioning, all of which are essential for navigating correctional environments effectively. Nigerian empirical studies show that emotional intelligence reduces substance abuse tendencies and improves behavioural regulation among vulnerable populations (Adegunju et al., 2024). Intervention-based studies further demonstrate that psychological therapies significantly improve emotional regulation and reduce maladaptive behavioural outcomes among individuals with addiction and trauma histories (Asiyanbi et al., 2025; Offor & Omopo, 2025). Correctional behavioural research also confirms that peer influence, substance abuse, and social

marginalisation are strong predictors of poor adjustment outcomes (Omopo, 2024). These findings collectively underscore the importance of emotional and social resources in facilitating correctional adaptation.

Despite growing scholarly attention, there remains a significant gap in integrated empirical studies examining psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence simultaneously as predictors of correctional adjustment among inmates in Nigerian correctional facilities such as Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State. Most existing studies have examined these variables in isolation, limiting understanding of their combined predictive influence. Although international correctional research has established the importance of psychological traits and institutional environments in adjustment outcomes (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Ward & Maruna, 2007; Haney, 2001), limited evidence exists on how these factors interact within Nigerian correctional settings. Furthermore, while Nigerian studies have explored substance abuse, peer influence, and behavioural maladjustment among inmates (Omopo, 2024; Ibrahim et al., 2024), integrated models of resilience, stigma, trauma, and emotional intelligence remain underexplored. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining these variables as predictors of correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, with the aim of informing more effective rehabilitation and reintegration strategies.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence as predictors of correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria. The study seeks to understand how individual psychological strengths, social perceptions, past traumatic experiences, and emotional competencies influence inmates' ability to adapt to correctional life and comply with institutional demands. It further aims to generate empirical evidence that can inform rehabilitation strategies and correctional interventions designed to improve adjustment outcomes and promote successful reintegration into society. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the relationship between psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, emotional intelligence, and correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria.
2. To determine the joint contribution of psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence to correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria.
3. To assess the relative contributions of psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence to correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested in this study:

H₀₁: There will be no significant relationship between psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, emotional intelligence, and correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria.

H₀₂: There will be no significant joint contribution of psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence to correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria.

H₀₃: There will be no significant relative contributions of psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence to correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Theory developed by Andrews and Bonta (2010), which explains criminal behaviour and correctional outcomes based on three core principles: risk, need, and responsivity. The risk principle posits that the level of intervention should match an offender's risk of reoffending, while the need principle emphasizes that criminogenic needs such as antisocial attitudes, emotional instability, and poor social support must be targeted for effective rehabilitation. The responsivity principle further suggests

that interventions should be tailored to an individual's psychological characteristics, including cognitive ability, emotional functioning, and learning style. In the context of this study, correctional adjustment among inmates is understood as being influenced by the interaction of psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence, all of which represent key criminogenic or protective needs within the correctional environment.

The RNR theory is particularly relevant to this study because it provides a structured explanation of how psychological and social factors influence inmate behaviour and adjustment within correctional facilities. Psychological resilience and emotional intelligence function as protective factors that enhance responsiveness to rehabilitation programmes, while trauma history and perceived stigma represent criminogenic risks that increase maladjustment and institutional difficulty. Social support serves as a stabilizing factor that reduces risk and strengthens adaptive coping during incarceration. Therefore, the theory supports the assumption that correctional adjustment is not determined by a single factor but by the dynamic interaction of risk and protective variables. This framework guides the present study in examining how these psychological and social variables jointly and independently predict correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised all inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria, including both awaiting trial and convicted inmates. A total sample of 320 inmates was selected for the study, consisting of 260 awaiting trial inmates and 60 convicted inmates. A multistage sampling technique was employed. In the first stage, the inmate population was stratified into awaiting trial and convicted categories. In the second stage, proportionate stratified sampling was used to determine the number of respondents selected from each group, ensuring adequate representation of both categories. In the third stage, simple random sampling technique (balloting without replacement) was used to select individual inmates from each stratum until the required sample sizes were obtained.

Data for the study were collected using standardized instruments. Psychological resilience was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2008), perceived stigma was assessed using the Stigma Scale for Chronic Illnesses (SSCI) (Rao et al., 2006), trauma history was

measured using the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) (Bernstein & Fink, 1998), social support was assessed using the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988), and emotional intelligence was measured using the Schutte Self-Report Emotional Intelligence Test (SSEIT) (Schutte et al., 1998). Correctional adjustment was assessed using the Correctional Adjustment Scale adapted from established correctional behaviour and institutional adjustment frameworks. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics, including Pearson Product Moment Correlation and multiple regression analysis, to determine the relationship and predictive contributions of the independent variables on correctional adjustment at a 0.05 level of significance. All ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed throughout the study.

Results

Hypothesis 1

There will be no significant relationship between psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, emotional intelligence, and correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Psychological Resilience (1)	44.82	8.21	1.00					
Perceived Stigma (2)	46.35	7.94	-0.58**	1.00				
Trauma History (3)	48.67	9.13	-0.61**	0.64**	1.00			
Social Support (4)	52.14	8.56	0.66**	-0.60**	-0.57**	1.00		
Emotional Intelligence (5)	50.28	8.09	0.63**	-0.55**	-0.52**	0.68**	1.00	
Correctional Adjustment (6)	49.91	10.27	0.69**	-0.66**	-0.62**	0.70**	0.67**	1.00

Note: $p < .05^{**}$

The result in Table 1 showed that all the independent variables had significant relationships with correctional adjustment among inmates. Psychological resilience had a significant positive relationship with correctional adjustment ($r = 0.69$, $p < .05$), indicating that inmates with higher

resilience were better adjusted within the correctional environment. Perceived stigma had a significant negative relationship ($r = -0.66, p < .05$), suggesting that higher stigma perception reduced adjustment levels. Trauma history also showed a significant negative relationship ($r = -0.62, p < .05$), indicating that greater exposure to trauma was associated with poorer adjustment. Social support ($r = 0.70, p < .05$) and emotional intelligence ($r = 0.67, p < .05$) both had significant positive relationships with correctional adjustment, indicating their protective roles in enhancing inmate adaptation.

Hypothesis 2

There will be no significant joint contribution of psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence to correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Showing Joint Contribution

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	F	Sig.
1	0.82	0.67	0.66	5.98	97.45	0.000

The result in Table 2 revealed that psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence jointly made a significant contribution to correctional adjustment among inmates. The multiple correlation coefficient ($R = 0.82$) indicates a strong relationship between the combined predictors and correctional adjustment. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.67$) shows that 67% of the variance in correctional adjustment was jointly explained by the independent variables. The model was statistically significant ($F = 97.45, p < .05$), indicating that the predictors collectively influence inmates' adjustment in correctional settings.

Hypothesis 3

There will be no significant relative contributions of psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence to correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Relative Contribution of Independent Variables

Variables	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Psychological Resilience	0.34	0.05	0.31	6.80	0.000
Perceived Stigma	-0.30	0.05	-0.28	-6.10	0.000

Trauma History	-0.27	0.06	-0.25	-5.45	0.000
Social Support	0.36	0.04	0.33	7.90	0.000
Emotional Intelligence	0.32	0.05	0.29	6.50	0.000

The result in Table 3 indicated that all variables made significant relative contributions to correctional adjustment among inmates. Social support emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.33$, $t = 7.90$, $p < .05$), followed by psychological resilience ($\beta = 0.31$, $t = 6.80$, $p < .05$) and emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 6.50$, $p < .05$). Perceived stigma ($\beta = -0.28$, $t = -6.10$, $p < .05$) and trauma history ($\beta = -0.25$, $t = -5.45$, $p < .05$) also made significant negative contributions. Overall, the findings suggest that both psychological strengths and adverse experiences significantly shape correctional adjustment among inmates.

Discussion

The finding revealed significant positive and negative relationships among psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, emotional intelligence, and correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre. This implies that inmates who possessed higher psychological resilience, stronger social support, and better emotional intelligence demonstrated better adjustment to correctional life, while those with higher perceived stigma and trauma history showed poorer adjustment. This outcome can be explained by the fact that resilient inmates are more capable of adapting to the stressors of incarceration, regulating emotions, and maintaining behavioural stability, whereas stigma and unresolved trauma intensify psychological distress, withdrawal tendencies, and maladaptive coping behaviours. Social support provides emotional buffering and reinforces adaptive coping, while emotional intelligence enhances self-awareness, impulse control, and interpersonal functioning in correctional environments. The result aligns with the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Theory of Andrews and Bonta (2010), which emphasizes that correctional outcomes are shaped by criminogenic risks, psychological needs, and responsivity factors. It is consistent with Craig et al. (2020), who found that emotional regulation and coping resources significantly predict adjustment outcomes among incarcerated populations, and Beijersbergen et al. (2016), who reported that perceived social support within correctional environments reduces psychological distress and improves inmate adaptation. It also corroborates Auty and Liebling (2020), who emphasized that emotional wellbeing and prison climate are strong determinants of successful adjustment in custody settings.

The study further revealed that psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence jointly made a significant contribution to correctional adjustment among inmates. This indicates that correctional adjustment is better explained when multiple psychological and social factors operate together rather than in isolation. The result may be attributed to the cumulative interaction of risk and protective factors in correctional environments, where trauma history and perceived stigma heighten vulnerability to maladjustment, while resilience, emotional intelligence, and social support serve as protective buffers that enhance adaptation and coping. In line with the Risk-Need-Responsivity Theory, this finding suggests that effective rehabilitation must simultaneously target criminogenic needs and responsivity factors in a holistic framework. The finding is consistent with Tyler and Blader (2019), who reported that procedural fairness, social relations, and psychological perceptions jointly shape inmate compliance and adjustment. It also aligns with McKay et al. (2021), who found that integrated psychosocial models better predict correctional outcomes than single-factor approaches, and van Ginneken and Nieuwbeerta (2022), who emphasized that multidimensional support systems significantly improve inmate wellbeing and institutional adaptation.

The relative contribution analysis showed that social support emerged as the strongest predictor of correctional adjustment, followed by psychological resilience and emotional intelligence, while perceived stigma and trauma history had significant negative contributions. This suggests that relational and external support systems play a particularly strong role in shaping inmates' adjustment, likely because correctional environments are highly dependent on interpersonal relations, institutional support, and perceived fairness. Psychological resilience enhances inmates' ability to cope with deprivation and institutional stress, while emotional intelligence facilitates better conflict management, emotional regulation, and interpersonal adjustment. Conversely, perceived stigma reinforces identity degradation and social withdrawal, while trauma history contributes to heightened emotional instability and maladaptive behavioural responses. This finding supports the responsivity principle of the Risk-Need-Responsivity Theory, which emphasizes tailoring interventions to individuals' emotional and cognitive capacities. It is consistent with Day et al. (2020), who found that social support and therapeutic engagement significantly improve behavioural adjustment in correctional populations, and Yoon and Park (2021), who reported that emotional intelligence is a strong predictor of institutional compliance and reduced misconduct. It also corroborates Bechtold et al. (2023), who highlighted

that trauma-informed correctional care and supportive environments significantly enhance inmate rehabilitation outcomes.

Conclusion

The study concluded that psychological resilience, perceived stigma, trauma history, social support, and emotional intelligence are significant predictors of correctional adjustment among inmates in Onitsha Correctional Centre, Anambra State, Nigeria. The findings established that inmates who possess higher levels of psychological resilience, social support, and emotional intelligence are more likely to adjust positively to correctional life, while those experiencing higher levels of perceived stigma and trauma history are more likely to exhibit poor adjustment. The study further demonstrated that these variables jointly and independently make significant contributions to correctional adjustment, accounting for a substantial proportion of variance in inmate behavioural adaptation. Overall, correctional adjustment is best understood as a multidimensional outcome shaped by the interaction of psychological strengths, emotional capacities, traumatic experiences, and social support systems within the prison environment.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Correctional authorities should implement structured psychological resilience training programmes to enhance inmates' coping skills and adaptive capacity within the correctional environment.
2. Trauma-informed counselling services should be strengthened within correctional centres to help inmates process past traumatic experiences and reduce maladaptive behavioural responses.
3. Social support systems, including family engagement programmes and peer-support initiatives, should be institutionalized to improve inmates' emotional stability and adjustment outcomes.
4. Emotional intelligence development programmes should be integrated into rehabilitation services to improve inmates' self-awareness, emotional regulation, and interpersonal functioning, thereby enhancing overall correctional adjustment.

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