

Somatisation Symptoms in a Sample of Nigerian Prisoners

**Sunday Erhabor Idemudia¹, Ntomchukwu Sylvester Madu², Jegede,
Ayodele Samuel¹ and Ibe Blessing¹**

*¹Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Social Sciences University of Ibadan, Ibadan,
Nigeria*

*²Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts, University of the North, Sovenga, 0727,
South Africa*

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ABSTRACT The study examined the previous rate of somatisation and influence of time spent in prison, prisoners' status and type of crime committed on somatic symptoms report in a sample of inmates in Nigerian medium prisons. Data was collected from a sample of 300 prison inmates, randomly drawn from three medium prisons - A godi prison, Ibadan; Ijebu-Ode prisons and Abeokuta prisons in Ogun State. All three prisons are located in Southwestern Nigeria. Somatisation was measured with the Enugu Somatisation Scale (ESS) developed by Ebigbo (1982). Generally, results indicate a high prevalence of somatisation (77.3% of the total) among prison inmates. Results also revealed a higher prevalence of STs in males than females. Two hundred (200) male inmates (86.2% of the cases or 66.7% of the total) were classified as STs and only 32 (13.8% of the cases or 10.7% of the total) were classified as STs. Therefore the ratio of males: females is 8:1. Somatisation was more prevalent among Awaiting Trial Persons (ATPs) than the convicts: prevalent rate for the ATPs was 83.7 percent of the cases and 16.2 percent of the total for the convicts. Results also showed that, somatisation was higher in inmates with longer prison sentences, that is, those who have spent over two years in prisons. There was no significant difference in somatisation and type of crime. The predominant symptoms were dizziness (61%), compulsive head shaving (59.3%), headache (52.7%), unbelievable physical symptoms (55%), and pains in the limbs (53.7%) and excessive sweating (52%). It is suggested that the legal framework on which the Nigerian penal system is anchored be generally modified and overhauled as the system is working against its' objective of rehabilitation and reformation. The prison system should also be more realistic and be sensitized to the present realities of penology if the relevance of prisons to national development is to be realized.