

Information behaviour of prison inmates in Ghana

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Abstract

Information provision and services in prisons have been demonstrated to be a critical component of successful rehabilitation and reintegration. The study therefore examined the information behaviour of inmates in Ghana prisons with the aim of understanding their information needs, sources and challenges towards improving the information provision and services available in Ghana prisons. In all, qualitative data were collected from 27 participants comprising 19 inmates and eight Correctional Officers from four prisons in Ghana: Ankaful Maximum Security, Nsawam Medium Security, Kumasi Central and Nsawam Female prisons. The study found that inmates had information needs related to welfare, legal, support among others and it was evident that a number of their information needs were not met. The study further revealed poor library systems in Ghana prisons and inmates' inability to access modern ICT tools as some of the challenges in accessing information in Ghana prisons. The study recommends the need for stakeholders and policy makers to invest in information provisions and services in Ghana prisons.

Keywords

information behaviour, information needs, information services, information sources, prison inmates

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Introduction

Over the ages, prison systems have developed into their current shape, with rising awareness of the importance of rehabilitation programmes around the world (United Nations, 2017). Although serving a term of imprisonment is one of the means used by societies to punish offenders, the prison also serves as a reformatory institution, pursuing programs that will help inmates reintegrate meaningfully into society after their release (Baffour, 2021). As defined by Lehman and Locke (2005: 17) prisons are “institutions or facilities where people are held in custody, incarceration, or detention for crimes committed against society and for their rehabilitation and reformation”.

In prisons, several services are provided in order to effectively address, recover, and assimilate offenders back into society. Provision of information is undoubtedly one of these services, and information

resource centres such as libraries are expected to be accessible in prisons to aid in the attainment of these goals (Obiano et al., 2020). For optimal growth and development and the realization of socio-economic well-being, information is essential in everyone's life (Rubin, 2017). As a result, excellent information services in prisons are critical instruments in instilling hope in inmates' collective psyche that they would be able to thrive outside the correctional facilities.

Prison information services have been demonstrated to be a critical component of successful reintegration, providing prisoners with the skills they need to reach their full potential, find work, and contribute

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to their communities (Coates, 2016). A prison library, for example, performs the same function as a regular library in a citizen's life. Through the delivery of library services and information resources to inmates, prison libraries play a supportive role in prison reformation and rehabilitative services, which is one of the goals of prison services (Mfum, 2012).

Prisoners require basic information to survive in prison and to prepare for a successful post-release life. The importance of information emphasizes the need of inmates having unfettered access to appropriate, contemporary, and timely information for their use, which will empower them with capabilities and enable them to be valuable and productive people upon re-entry into society. However, it has been noticed that inmates' use of information resources is minimal, particularly in impoverished nations like Ghana (Omolola, 2015; Eze, 2013; Mfum, 2012). In Ghana, despite the favourable effects that providing information to convicts has on the rehabilitation purpose of prisons, there is a dearth of well-resourced and completely effective library services for inmates and due to a lack of critical resources such as budget and money, library collections rely heavily on donations (Mfum, 2012).

Problem statement

Prisons have evolved from a place of punishment to a place of reformation, regeneration, education, and productive use of time. It is believed that inmates' knowledge demands for personal development, personal growth, and understanding how the mind works would be met.

If inmates' information behaviour is unknown, recreational and attitude development programs aimed at reforming and rehabilitating them and facilitating their social integration into society will be impossible to implement. Because of the confined nature of their environment, inmates seek specific knowledge that must fulfil their information demands; otherwise, they would go without this crucial resource because their options are limited.

Despite the fact that convicts have information needs, research in Africa have revealed that these needs are not satisfied in the majority of jails. There are fewer developing countries that are providing inmates' information needs, and the amount of inmates' satisfaction with information-related behaviour is substantially lower in many lower-income countries (United Nations, 2017). It has also been

shown that determining convicts' information needs is challenging due to the wide range of people found in prisons. Information behaviour has been thoroughly studied and characterized, according to the literature, but while many of these studies are available in the Global North and West, there are few on the phenomena in developing countries particularly relating to prison inmates. Therefore, this study was undertaken to look into the information behaviour of inmates in Ghana due to the paucity of information on the phenomenon in Ghana. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following research objectives were addressed:

- RO1: Ascertaining the information needs of prison inmates
- RO2: Exploring the information sources available to inmates
- RO3: Understanding inmates' information seeking challenges.

Literature review

Information behaviour of inmates

The importance of satisfying convicts' information behaviour stands out as the most important factor in attaining rehabilitation goals (Coates, 2016). Inmates have used information resources in many formats to improve their literacy over the years; many learn to read while incarcerated, manage legal difficulties for themselves and their family, especially for further appeal, and obtain essential life skills (Usman et al., 2019). Information is essential for the survival of guilty persons while incarcerated, just as it is for the optimal development and realization of socio-political and economic activities in the lives of all individuals.

For inmates in imprisonment, information is a valuable resource since it aids in the implementation of training and retraining for rehabilitation and re-entry into society (Emasealu, 2018). As a result, supplying inmates with information resources will aid them in continuing their education, training, and skill acquisition, allowing them to become more self-reliant and better prepared for social reintegration. Studies on the information needs and accessibility of prison inmates have been conducted, and these studies have opened up a window into the need to investigate what exactly constitutes the information needs that are unique to prison inmates in their confined setting (Sharda and Tiwari, 2022; Gama et al., 2020;

Odutola and Alegebeleye, 2019; Gbashima et al., 2016).

Several research in Africa have looked into the notion of information needs among inmates (Adegboye, 2017; Sambo et al., 2017; Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Tarzaan et al., 2015). Legal, family, religious, health, and financial information were found to be the most important information demands of convicts in Africa, according to the study. Prisoners' information requirements include vocational and recreational information once again (Eze, 2016).

Inmates are provided with educational and recreational materials in the form of books, newspapers, magazines, movies, and library programmes in the hopes of assisting in their rehabilitation (Coates, 2016). As a result, access to and use of library information resources are important predictors of inmates' psychological well-being. By allowing inmates to seek knowledge and address their information behaviour, the prison library becomes an integral aspect of the overall prison environment (Sharda and Tiwari, 2022). However, as with most other professional groups in society, prison inmates' information demands and library information resources have been neglected, and resources available seem to remain woefully inadequate.

Access to information is linked to development and the easier it is to access information, the more likely it is to be used (Attuh and Kankam, 2022; Kari, 2022). Inmates value information, and they are known to seek it out in order to find respite from harsh prison conditions, if not from captivity itself (Campbell, 2005). The prison library serves as a window to the outside world in this way, and it can give a wealth of information for people preparing for release. Apart from prison libraries, studies have revealed that offenders seek information from a variety of sources, including radio, television, family relations, healthcare professionals, social workers, fellow inmates, and chaplains, among others (Canning and Buchanan, 2019; Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2016). In developed countries, the internet and social media have also been identified as important sources of information for inmates (Kerr and Willis, 2018; Lim et al., 2013).

Inmates' access to and use of information is not without its challenges. Prisoners in jail face a number of obstacles to information access, including a lack of Internet access and well-stocked libraries, as well as misinformation (Canning and Buchanan, 2019; Bajic, 2015). Due to a lack of appropriate

staff, some convicts do not have access to the resources of prison libraries. For example, at the Nsawam prison in Ghana, oversight responsibility of the prison's "library is vested in the Education Coordinator of the Prison, but the daily management of the library is by an inmate with no basic training in librarianship" (Mfum, 2012: 5). Typically, an inadequate infrastructure and the failure to offer suitable facilities has thwarted the efforts of prisons in poor nations to implement rehabilitation and reconciliation concepts. As a result, existing library information resources are more difficult to obtain and use.

Truly awful funding of prison libraries, regulations and legislation restricting the kind of information materials to be offered to inmates, and a poor and filthy prison environment were also identified by Eze (2013) as some of the hurdles to inmate access to information. This situation recurs in such specific terms as inadequate facilities and infrastructural development, restriction and censoring of the constrained library information resources, behavioural and non-cognitive barriers that prevent inmates from accessing and using library information materials appropriately, and so on (Omolola, 2015).

Theoretical framework

The entirety of human behaviour in respect to information sources and networks, including both active and passive information seeking and information usage, is referred to as information behaviour (Wilson, 1999; Owusu and Kankam, 2020). Wilson's (1981) information behaviour model was adopted as the theory underpinning this study (See Figure 1). As maintained by Wilson (1999), information behaviour stalks from the information user's interaction with information sources to retrieve relevant information towards the satisfaction of their information needs. This proves that information behaviour starts from an information user whose need for information triggers information seeking from a variety of sources in order to satisfy their information needs (Chipeta et al., 2018).

Six elements of Wilson's (1981) model guided the study and discussion of the findings. How these elements were employed in relation to the study objectives are outlined below:

- The element "information user" relates to the prison inmates

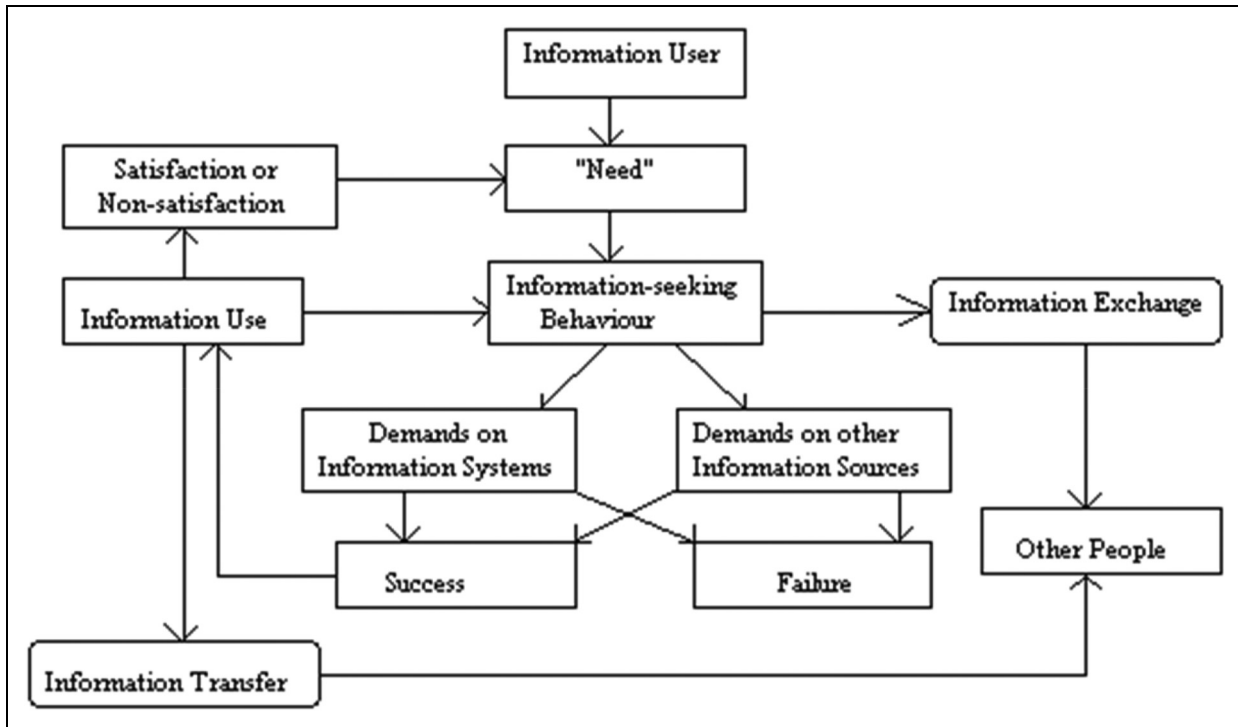


Figure 1. Wilson's 1981 Information Behaviour Model (Source: Wilson, 1999:251).

- The element “need” relates to the information needs of the prison inmates
- The elements “demands on information systems” and “demands on other information sources” relate to the activities and sources that were employed by the prison inmates to acquire information
- The element “failure” relates to the challenges that impeded prison inmates’ acquisition of relevant information to satisfy their information needs.

Methodology

Data for the study were collected from 19 individuals in custody and eight correctional officers in four different prisons in Ghana (Ankaful Maximum Security, Kumasi Central, Nsawam Medium Security and Nsawam Female prisons) to understand their information behaviour through qualitative research approach based on the interpretivist paradigm (Kankam, 2020). As noted by Baffour et al. (2022), conducting research in prisons comes with challenges that need to be managed to enhance the success of the research. In fact, this study was no exception as the researchers, after securing approval from the Ghana Prisons Service (GPS) Board needed to conform to security

protocols during recruitment and data collection. Recruitment of the individuals in custody was supervised by prison officers in the individual prisons. Nevertheless, we ensured that participation was voluntary, as we agreed with the prison officers that they were not allowed to handpick people for the study but allow the researchers to explain the eligibility criteria and recruitment processes. To this end, we placed a notebook in front of the General Office and/or Computer Room for interested individuals to put down their details. Recruitment of the correctional officers followed similar format as the individuals in custody, but a notebook was placed in the General Office for interested Officers to put down their details. The recruitment process lasted five business days in each of the prisons, and at 4:00 pm each day the papers that had the individuals in custody details were removed from the notebook. To be eligible, the individuals in custody must have spent two months or more in their current sentences and Correctional Officers were to be in charge of prison welfare or education and corrections.

Generally, 31 individuals in custody and 11 correctional officers expressed interest in the study. After applying the eligibility criteria, all individuals who expressed interest qualified. To this end, the participant groups were arranged based on the time and

date they expressed interest in the respective prisons. After interviewing 13 individuals in custody, the next six interviews produced similar information (saturation), and based on the theory of saturation we informed the remaining 12 individuals that we will call on them in the future if the need be. Saturation is a stage in the qualitative research when no new information is found from data and recurrence of the same discoveries occurs and continues in the data analysis process, signalling to researchers that data collecting may be discontinued (Islam and Aldaihani, 2022). To this end, interviews with the Correctional Officers also ended after conducting eight interviews when the study had reached saturation.

The individuals in custody were asked to discuss, among other topics, “their information needs and/or some of the issues or information they want to be aware of during their time in custody,” “sources and tools to access such information,” and “challenges in accessing information”. The Correctional Officers were engaged in discussions on the information needs and challenges of inmates. They were also asked to discuss the current state of modern communication technologies in the prisons and the chief concerns raised by the individuals in custody and prison staff alike on access to information.

Notes were taken for the interviews with the individuals in custody. This was due to security protocols that did not allow the use of electronic and recording equipment in the prisons. As a result, the interviews lasted between 1 h 7 min to 1 h 52 min. Notes taking prolonged the interviews because we had to confirm the consistency of the participants’ responses to the notes, concurrent with the interviews. This helped the study to minimize data loss and took notes that reflected participants’ responses. The interviews with the individuals in custody were conducted in Asante Twi and translated to the English language during the notes taking. All the Correctional Officers agreed to conduct their interviews outside the prison in order for the researchers to audiotape the interviews and the interviews lasted between 51 min to 1 h 27 min. The Correctional Officers’ interviews were conducted in the English language.

The data were transcribed through the use of Microsoft Word version 2016 and the transcribed data were shared for independent coding before agreeing on the final themes for the study. The researchers ensured credibility through member checking, participant triangulation, and reflexivity. Given our passion for the topic under study, we remained conscious of our inherent biases throughout the study.

Results

Demographic information of participants

Data were collected from two participant groups (individuals in custody and Correctional Officers) in four prisons in Ghana. Eleven of the participants were females, including seven individuals in custody and four Correctional Officers. The remaining 16 participants were males, including 12 individuals in custody and four Correctional Officers. The age range of participants was between 19 to 73 years (Table 1). Nine out of the 19 individuals in custody were 55 years or above, with four of the aging individuals serving life sentences. Four of the individuals in custody were serving a term for murder, three were serving a term for domestic violence, seven were imprisoned for armed robbery and burglary and the remaining 5 were serving a term for petty offenses such as mobile phone snatching and stealing related offenses. Five of the individuals in custody were enrolled in the prison-based high school, and 16 out of the 19 individuals in custody had at least one child. The correctional officers had been at the post for three years or more.

The 27 participants were given the following pseudonyms: Amma, Akosua, Esi, Akua, Yaa, Affi, Hajia, Kofi, Kwame, Kwaku, Kwadwo, Yaw, Akwasi, Kwabena, Kusi, Dan, Nti, Papa, Asa, Officer Owusu, Officer Osei, Officer Sunsum, Officer Koo, Officer Lizy, Officer Philo, Officer Blaba, and Officer Rita.

The desire to know what is going on in their communities

In this study, all the individuals in custody expressed the desire to be updated on the current state of affairs in their respective communities. Issues happening in their families and communities were of special interest

Table 1. Characteristics of inmates

Information about inmates	Number of participants
Female	7
Male	12
Age 19–35	3
Age 36–54	7
Age 55–73	9
Enrolled in prison-based school	5
Parents	16
Knowledge in computing	10 (All of them below age 55)

Table 2. Themes generated through thematic analysis from the responses of the participants.

Inmates' information needs	Information on family and friends Information on legal and other supports Information on general knowledge (including academic & sports) and happenings
Inmates' information sources	Family, friends & prison staff (interpersonal interaction) Traditional media
Inmates' information seeking challenges	Limited access to modern communication technology Restrictions on the use of personal communication gadgets

to the participants from all age groups, particularly those whose ages were from 55 years or above. The incarcerated individual participants stated that “they have their families and friends in the communities they came from and care about the happenings in those communities” (Akua, Affi, Esi, Hajia, Kwadwo, Yaa, Yaw). Officer Rita revealed that “on many occasions, the inmates come for my phone to call their families and friends.”

The individuals in custody became aware of the happenings in their respective communities and families through phone calls with their families and friends. Kwadwo said: “I call home to know what is happening – to check up on the family and how my children are doing.” Another participant, Nti, stated that he “calls his friends to know the current issues and ask them for help.” Further, all the participant groups highlighted some challenges in accessing information from the prisons, which they attributed to limited access to modern communication technologies such as phones, computers, and the internet. The themes that emerged from the data analyses are presented in Table 2:

ROI: ascertaining the information needs of prison inmates

Primarily, the individuals in custody's information needs were centred around the well-being of family and friends they had left in their respective communities. This could be as a result of the fact that 16 out of the 19 individuals in custody were parents and had left a dependant behind. It is not surprising that most of the participants made statements such as “I always want to know what is happening to my children” (Esi), “when I have not heard from him for a week, I cannot function”

(Hajia), “as a mother, I always want to hear about my children” (Akosua), “I left my children home, so I always think about them and want to know how they are doing” (Kwabena). Yaa added this: “I have children back home, so I call them and other loved ones who meant during my difficult times to check up on them. I always want to know what is going on, how they are doing, and what is happening in the community.”

Akua said: “I always want to hear from my child because I am the only parent she has – I have not set my eyes on her father three months into the pregnancy.” Esi's experience was similar to Akua, and she passionately shared:

I am a single mother of four children, and I left them in the care of my mother ... I am worried about their well-being, especially my youngest who was two when I came here – because I am no more with them, I try as much as I can to call home, speak to my mother and the children, and that makes me feel better.

Talking about how their ability to get information from family and friends made the individuals in custody feel better, Officer Lizy shared her observations:

Most of the inmates we have in the female prisons had an important responsibility in their homes before they came here ... when you speak to them, you come to appreciate how they miss their children and other family members ... to help them, I try my best to have call time on my phone when I am on duty, so that when they need to call home, they can use my phone – this is what I can do to help them because their mood changes when they hear from loved ones.

Additionally, other participants were the breadwinners in their households and were worried about the survival of their dependents in their absence. For example, Papa said:

In addition to my sisters, I was the sole provider for the family and the healthcare of our mother ... now that I am here, I think about how they are going to survive, and I am always trying to know how they are doing.

Affi, one of the female individuals in custody was in support of Papa, when she said:

I am in my later age, but my mother is still alive ... before my imprisonment, I was her caregiver, but now my elder daughter has taken that responsibility ... I

call my daughter every week to encourage her so that she does not get tired of supporting her grandmother.

The youngest participant among the individuals in custody wanted information on when his parents will send him money. He said:

I call home; I call my parents for them to send me money ... the way the prison life is, you need money to survive – life can be difficult without money. It is because of this I contact them for them to know how I am doing and what I need to survive (Kwaku).

Three of the inmates who were a few months into their prison terms wanted information on where they could get legal support to appeal their sentences. The responses of these participants suggest discontent with the court ruling that ended them in the prisons. One of them, in particular was looking for information on how to reduce the term of sentences. Asa lamented:

To some extent, I agree I was at fault for the offence that brought me here, but I also believe the term of sentence is too high given that I had no idea that what the guy sold to me was a stolen material ... if I think that the guy is serving ten years and I am serving the same term, it strikes me to file for an appeal to get the sentence reduced – I am always looking for information and my family are also working on this, so I call to know how it is going.

Unlike Asa, Dan and Kofi believed they were not guilty of the offenses they were serving terms for and have been working with their lawyers to change the verdict. Dan said: “I am still in disbelief that I am here – I have done nothing to be in this condition. Since I have been here, my focus has largely been on the appeal ... I am always waiting for information from my lawyers on how it is going.” Kofi shared a similar response to Dan. He said: “I was added to a case I knew nothing about even till today, I ask myself why I should be punished for something I know nothing about? This is why I am always looking for information on how to get out of this place.”

Additionally, Other participants who were enrolled in education were after information to improve their learning and pass their exams. Nti said: “I was a student before my sentence, so when I came in and was introduced to the school in the prison, I decided to take advantage – I contact my mates outside for material I need to prepare for the exams.” Kwabena

and other individuals in custody were teaching other colleagues in the prison due to their teaching profession before incarceration and the shortage of qualified teachers in the prisons who wanted information on current teaching materials and current affairs. Kwabena said: “Because of teacher shortage in the prison, the officers asked some of us who were teachers before our imprisonment to teach the inmate students ... we try to find current materials and current issues to teach them.”

Specifically, the set data suggests that in addition to welfare information needs, young adult male individuals in custody wanted information on current affairs and sporting events (individuals whose age were under 40 years), and older individuals in custody were particular to know issues in their specific communities, and female inmates were keen to hear about their children and immediate family members. Additionally, individuals in custody who were a few months (one to six months) into their sentences wanted information about how to apply for an appeal in custody. Those who were studying wanted to understand concepts and theories and past questions to improve their chances in external exams.

RO2: exploring the information sources available to inmates

The data set suggests two sources of information for the individuals in custody (family and friends and traditional media [television and radio]). It is important to highlight that most of the inmates regarded some of the prison staff as their friends and thus, sought information from them. The individuals in custody participants relied largely on their families for information. All the inmate participants had accessed information from a friend (including fellow inmates and prison staff) or family member since their incarceration. For example, Hajia said: “I get to know what is going on from my children and loved ones – these are people who feed me with what is happening in the community.” Esi indicated that she had one trusted source of information: “I call my parents because they are the only trusted sources of information apart from the radio programs.” Papa added: “I get information from my family and especially, my children and best friends. When I hear of any news from the community or about my family, my children and friends are the people I call – they have been helpful.”

Additionally, radio and television were sources of information and entertainment for the individuals in custody. The incarcerated individuals had their favourite programs which they find informative, educative, and refreshing. Amma said:

I listen to the radio and watch TV [television] ... I have specific programs that I watch and listen – these programs are of special importance because they are about inmates – it brings me hope because the host invites ex-convicts to share their stories and how they are doing in the community.

When it comes to the radio programs instilling hope in the individuals in custody, Affi, who was serving life sentence shared her experience:

In the condemned cells we do not have access to television, but radio. I listen to the radio all the time ... there are programs on inmates, and it is very interesting and instill hope in me – I listen to find out how I can also be free from here because they invite people who have been here before to talk about what happened and how they were able to file for an appeal or got favour from the government [government amnesty], which eventually helped them to leave here sooner than expected.

Papa, who was also serving life sentence indicated listening to the radio sometimes made him forget his troubles. He said: “I listen to the radio as much as I can – it is not only my source of information but comfort because the programs are very interesting and funny; you sometimes laugh and forget your troubles.”

Another participant, Dan, who was looking to file for an appeal in the court indicated he listens to a radio program that discusses his information needs. He shared:

There is a radio program that discusses how people spend prison sentences on offenses they have not committed ... they invite lawyers to discuss what victims can do to redeem themselves – it was through this program that I came to understand what I need to do to change my current situation – as we speak one of the lawyers are working with my brothers on my case.

Another important finding from the data set was revealed by Hajia, Esi, and Kwabena, who verified the accuracy of the information they received from family and friends from their children’s teachers and perceived highly respectful individuals. Esi said: “I confirm information with my parents about my

children from my uncle ... my uncle is highly respected, and I know he will not lie to me, so when I am in doubt, I wait till I get him on the phone to confirm some information about my children.”

Hajia provided a detailed explanation about how she confirmed information about her child’s involvement in a motor accident:

One of my friends called me to disclose one of my children was involved in an accident ... when I called my mother to confirm, she denied it and asked me to calm down ... I was disheartened and did not know who was speaking the truth. When I am unconvinced about the information from my mother or friends, I call my children’s teacher and the teacher I trust what she says – it came out that my friend was speaking the truth, but I also understood my mother, she did not want me to think about something I cannot do anything about because I find myself here.

Some of the individuals in custody who were teachers, as well as students were getting information from the prison library. Kwame said: “We have a library in the prison and some philanthropists have donated some useful books, so I go there to read and make notes.” Nti, a student in one of the prisons shared his challenges in accessing the right books at the library. He said: “the library is there, but the books are very old, and most do not focus on what was taught by the teachers – once a while you get a useful book, but such books are in high demand and you cannot keep them as you want to.”

RO3: understanding inmates’ information seeking challenges

The participants’ access to information were marred by challenges ranging from inadequate modern communication tools and restrictions. Modern communication tools such as computers, telephones, and emails were limited in supply in all the prisons. Additionally, the prison is a security zone, and the use of mobile phones, the internet, and video calls were restricted or prohibited. Officer Sunsum said:

The prison is a security zone, so the use of electronic devices such as phones are controlled ... if we are to go by the rules, officers are not supposed to enter the prison with their cell phones and laptops – what I am trying to say is we do not use phone in the prison, not even the prisons officers.

In addition to personal phones and computers that were restricted, the prisons' computer laboratories were restricted to individuals in custody who were not enrolled in the prisons' high school. This was due to the inadequate computers in the prisons. Officer Rita lamented: "We have a computer laboratory, but most of the computers are not working and the available ones cannot serve the needs of the students we have." Officer Koo explained: "the computers are very old, and they turn on and off at their own pace – there is no working internet, so we cannot do a lot with them." Another prison officer lamented about the limited computers in the prisons and what it means to the individuals in custody's studies. Officer Blaba explained:

The computers in the lab are few, and most of them are not working – at the end of their training, they sit the same exams as those in the mainstream schools ... we have internet in the lab, but it is almost like it does not exist – these restrict the students learning and access to information.

In one of the prisons, the incarcerated individuals did not have access to computers due to a lack of space. Officer Owuse lamented:

This prison was opened in 2011, and we are still waiting for phase two to be completed ... the inmates will benefit from computers, but even if we have them, there is no place to keep them for the students to learn with – there are benevolent organizations who donate training equipment, and I believe if we have the space, they will support us to set up a computer lab.

Another participant, Officer Osei, revealed that the prison receives useful books from benevolent organizations and individuals, but the students cannot access these books due to limited space. He said:

As you can see, there are a lot of books in this office – they are here because there is no space to shelve them ... we do not have a library because the original plan for the prison was that the first phase will be used for offices and inmates' cells and the second phase for inmates' workshops. Now, the second phase is not complete, so we keep these books here with the hope that when the construction is completed, we can have a library and shelve them for the inmates and officers to use.

The individuals in custody's responses were in support of the Officers, as they expressed

dissatisfaction in accessing information from the prisons. For example, Kusi shared his frustrations in using the computers in the prison computer laboratory: "sometimes we are supposed to learn with the computers, but they are too slow to turn on, and they freeze short after they are on...and can go off unexpectedly."

Apart from the malfunctioning of the computers in some of the prisons and the non-existence of it in one of the prisons, the individuals in custody were sharing limited telephones. It has been revealed in this study that most of the incarcerated individuals' information needs were to hear about their family and their well-being. It is therefore not surprising that the discussion on the limited telephones in the prisons generated lengthy discussions during the interviews. The individuals in custody believed that if they were not allowed to use mobile phones in the prisons then the authorities should provide them the means to reach out to their families and loved ones. Dan, in particular, criticised:

We are not allowed to use phones here, and at the same time the phone boots provided by the prison are not enough. Another problem is that when you are in the queue, and it is time for a rollcall, you will have to leave ... I think this is not fair, and something needs to be done.

Dan's dissatisfaction was shared by all the individuals in custody and some of the prison officers added their voices to it. For example, Officer Lizy stated that, "most of the inmates when they speak to their families, you could see a mood change, but they have to wait for more than an hour before it gets to their turn." This suggests that even though the prisons provide telephones for the individuals in custody to call and address their information needs, most of the inmates did not get access to these phones because they were limited. This is supported by Esi who explained: "It is difficult sometimes to get access to the phone, the phones are three, and everyone wants to call home...this creates a long queue, and it becomes more inconvenient when you cannot wait to call home." Yaa shared a similar experience: "sometimes, because of the long queue you cannot make the call and will have to wait and come early the next day."

In addition, before one can use the telephones provided by the prisons, they need to buy airtime. The individuals in custody discussed financial constraints as a major challenge in getting airtime. Hajia shared

her challenges, when she said, “the phone call is the only means I get in contact with my family – I end up spending all my money on calls; the airtime is too expensive.” Kwadwo added: “money to buy the phone card is expensive, and if you cannot afford the card, you cannot make calls”. Amma’s concern was similar to Hajia and Kwadwo when she said, “it is difficult to get money to buy credit [airtime] to make calls.” Some participants sadly revealed that, even if they get money to buy the airtime, the network in the prison is unreliable, and they end up wasting their hard-earned airtime. Nti said: “the network here is very bad, and sometimes we can go three days without a network to call home – when it comes to it is very annoying; you will be calling, and it will not go through, you will have to try countless times.” Akosua, who has had a similar experience as Nti in the female prison shared her experience:

The network of the phone provided by the prison is not reliable – sometimes, all your card’s credit will finish, but you have not delivered the message you want to send because of the poor network; it is sometimes difficult to hear what the person is trying to say because the voice is either not clear or you do not hear all the sentences ... it is on and off.

Regarding the money constraints, the individuals in custody who had favourite radio programs for information shared their challenges. Papa shared:

I have a device I use to listen to the radio, which is powered by batteries. This means I need to buy batteries when there is a need ... here, my only source of finance is my family, but it is not enough – sometimes I miss my favourite programs because I do not have money to buy batteries.

Discussion

The study looked into the information behaviour of prison inmates in Ghana by specifically examining their information needs, sources and challenges. A number of studies have examined the information behaviour of inmates with the attempt to improve the information provision to inmates globally (Gama et al., 2020; Adegboye, 2017; Drabinski and Rabina, 2015; Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2016). Wilson’s (1999) model’s ‘information need’ of the ‘information user’ elements guided the discussion of the research findings relating to the information needs of the prison inmates. Thus, the prison inmates constitute the

information users and their information requirements constituting ‘information needs’. It was clear from previous studies that inmates have information needs and every effort to meet the information needs of inmates would improve their well-being. The findings of this study also reveal that, inmates in Ghana prisons do have information needs. Particularly, the study found that the information needs of inmates in Ghana were related to the welfare of their families, legal information, support and finance. These findings support earlier studies in Africa (Emasealu and Popoola, 2016; Sambo et al., 2017; Tarzaan et al., 2015), Asia (Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2016), America (Perkins et al., 2018) and Europe (Drabinski and Rabina 2015) that found legal information, finance, support and welfare as information needs of inmates.

The study further establishes recreation (Adegboye, 2017; Rafedzi and Abrizah 2016) as information needs of inmates in Ghana prisons especially the young male prisoners who needed information on sporting events and current affairs. Moreover, the findings of the study show that, student and teacher inmates in Ghana prisons have information needs related to their education or literacy as found in earlier studies (Canning and Buchanan, 2019; Sambo et al., 2017). For example, In Slovak prisons, most inmates see books as a source of information and a method of self-education (Hladký, 2022). On the other hand, a number of studies have found information needs of inmates to be related to sex, religion, psychological survival, employment and life after prison (Canning and Buchanan, 2019; Sambo et al., 2017; Drabinski and Rabina, 2015; Rafedzi and Abrizah 2016; Eze, 2016; Mfum, 2012) but the findings of this study did not establish these as information needs of inmates in Ghana (Table 3).

Prison libraries serve as a major source of information for inmates (Folorunso, 2019; Finlay and Bates, 2018; Emasealu, 2018; Bajic, 2015; Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2016). In most advanced countries, prison libraries are “situated in a separate building as a part of an education centre at the facility” to serve inmates information needs (Hladký, 2022: 5). Wilson’s (1999) model of information behaviour elements of ‘demands on information system’ and “demands on other information sources” by the information user guided the discussion of the research findings relating to the information sources employed by the prison inmates. In Ghana, the findings of this study show that not all the prisons had a library. Inmates in prisons with libraries therefore accessed

Table 3. Comparison of findings with some related studies

	This study	Africa (Eze, 2016; Gama et al., 2020)	Western world: (Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2016; Canning and Buchanan, 2019)
Information needs	Age 19–35 (sports, current affairs, academic, legal supports, family & friends) Age 36–54 (Welfare of family members, legal and financial supports, current affairs) Age 55–73 (Welfare of family members, financial supports, current affairs)	Academic, health, business, family & friends, legal, spiritual & emotional stability	Family & friends, health, academic, sex, legal, psychological, career, religion, security and mutual supports, housing, recreation and leisure
Information sources	Age 19–35 (family & friends, traditional media, computer & library) Age 36–54 (family & friends, traditional media) Age 55–73 (family & friends, traditional media)	Traditional media, prison staff, family & friends, religious authorities	Library, internet, chaplains, healthcare professionals, prison staff, social workers, family, social media
Information seeking challenges	Library facilities, internet, inadequate communication facilities (telephone), prison policies, finance	Prison policies, lack of internet facilities, inadequate library resources, lack of experts	Stigma, misinformation, self-esteem, trust

the library to satisfy their information needs. It was evident from the results of this study that inmates who were students and teachers particularly had the library as their preferred source of information. Importantly, the findings of this study established two major sources of information for inmates in Ghana prisons: family & friends and traditional media especially radio). These are in support of the findings of earlier studies that maintained that information sources of prison inmates include the traditional media and family relations (Gama et al., 2020; Tarzaan et al., 2015; Bajic, 2015). Surprisingly, this study did not find chaplains and healthcare professionals as information sources of inmates as found in other studies (Canning and Buchanan, 2019; Rafedzi and Abrizah, 2016). Moreover, the participants in this study did not have Internet and social media as sources of information as depicted in other studies (Perkins et al., 2018; Finlay and Bates, 2018; Kerr and Willis, 2018). Clearly, the inmates in Ghana prisons as found in this study heavily depended on interpersonal sources of information and thus, sought information through family, friends and prison staff interactions.

Inadequate finance and subpar services are identified to be characteristics of prison library systems in Africa (Gama et al., 2020; Folorunso, 2019). The

'failure' attribute of Wilson's (1999) model of information behaviour guided the discussion of the findings relating to the information behaviour challenges of prison inmates. As highlighted by Wilson (1999), information users are faced with various barriers when accessing information to satisfy their information need. As revealed in this study, prisons in Ghana not having library systems due to lack of space and funding served as a barrier to inmates' quest to access information. The results also show that prisons that had libraries were also inadequately resourced to function properly coupled with lack of professional librarians to manage the prison libraries in Ghana. This confirms findings of similar study conducted in Ghana by Mfum (2012). Again, it was evident from the interviews with the prison staff and inmates who participated in this study that the library systems in Ghana prisons were not functioning as expected. For example, student inmates lamented that the libraries in the prisons had inadequate information resources and were stocked with old literature that did not support their academic works. Moreover, this study reveals that prison policies that place restrictions on inmates' access to modern ICT tools such as Internet and smartphones posed challenges for inmates to source information. It was evident that telephones served as a major channel for inmates to access

information from family relations and friends. Nevertheless, the telephones available in the prisons were found to be inadequate and costly. Clearly, inadequate information resources and prison restrictions negatively affected inmates' quest to seek information. (Sambo et al., 2017; Drabinski and Rabina, 2015).

Implication for policy and practice

The study has examined information behaviour of inmates in Ghana prisons and has therefore provided a unique theoretical perspective on the phenomenon. The study has established that inmates in Ghana have unmet information needs due to a number of challenges they face in their quest to access information. The study brings to light the urgent need for stakeholders and policy makers to look into measures to provide and invest in information provisions in Ghana prisons.

As a practical implication, the study has established an opportunity for the Government and the Prison Service to consider investing and incorporating effective library services in prison constructions. The need to employ professional librarians into the prison service to manage information resources in the prisons is crucial towards the provision of services to meet inmates' information needs. The study has also revealed the need for policy makers to make available mental health and chaplaincy services to inmates towards their emotional, psychological and religious information needs. It is evident from literature and findings of the study that policies that restrict ICT and other internet technological usage in prisons are outdated due to advancement in technology and the technological era we find ourselves. The study therefore presents an opportunity for the Prison Service and stakeholders to look into these restrictions in Ghana prisons.

Conclusion

Looking into the information behaviour of inmates is crucial towards the provision of services to satisfy the information needs of prisoners. The study has established that inmates in Ghana prisons have information needs and that a number of these needs are unmet. Particularly, the inmates failed to explicitly mention information needs related to psychological and emotional challenges, but these needs were evident during the interviews. Possibly, lack of information resources in Ghana prisons to deal with these situations and inmates' ability to cope with them without

information make them perceive them as not information needs. Inmates' efforts to find information from family, friends, and the traditional media demonstrate their willingness to satiate their information needs. The fact that perhaps the consequence of not having the information seems severe on them drove the inmates to access numerous information sources.

Clearly, inmates sourced information from sources that were available to them in the prisons such as radio, television, library, prison staff, family & friends through. Implicitly, inmates would have sourced information from the Internet, social media platforms and other modern technologies as well as chaplains and health professionals if they were available to them in the prisons. Thus, restrictions and censorship of information resources inhibit inmates' access to information in Ghana prisons. While literature establishes that prisons in advanced countries provide inmates with multiple information sources equipped with modern technology and Internet facilities, these were absent in Ghana prisons. This study therefore contributes to filling a knowledge gap in a developing country among inmates where access to information is limited.

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