

Evaluating the Impact of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act on the Well-being of Female Inmates: A Case Study of Pa Demba Road Maximum Security Prison

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Abstract

This study evaluates the impact of Sierra Leone's Correctional Service Act of 2014 on the well-being of female inmates, with a focus on the Pa Demba Road Maximum Security Prison in Freetown. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the influence of gender-specific policies on the physical and mental health, access to justice, and rehabilitation outcomes for incarcerated women. Primary data were collected from 50 female inmates through structured surveys, supplemented by interviews with prison officials, legal experts, and human rights advocates. The study reveals significant gaps in policy implementation, leading to substandard living conditions marked by overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, and poor sanitation. Mental health issues are prevalent, with 73% of respondents reporting symptoms of depression and anxiety. Legal access remains limited, with many women detained without proper representation. The study concludes with seven key hypotheses examining the relationship between gender-specific policies, prison environment, and the well-being of female inmates. Recommendations include enhancing gender-sensitive policies, improving legal aid, expanding vocational rehabilitation programs, and strengthening oversight to prevent human rights violations. This research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on improving correctional conditions for female prisoners in Sierra Leone.

Keywords: *Correctional Service Act, Well-Being, Gender-Specific Policies, Female Inmates, Freetown, Sierra Leone.*

1. Introduction

The incarceration of women presents unique challenges that necessitate gender-specific policies to ensure their well-being within correctional facilities. In Sierra Leone, the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014 serves as the primary legislative framework governing the treatment of inmates, including female prisoners. However, the effectiveness of these policies in addressing the distinct needs of female inmates remains a subject of critical evaluation. Studies indicate that gender-responsive correctional policies are essential in mitigating the adverse effects of incarceration on women, particularly in areas such as healthcare, rehabilitation, and protection against gender-based violence (YAPHOR, 2023).

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Female inmates often face disproportionate hardships compared to their male counterparts, including inadequate access to reproductive healthcare, heightened vulnerability to abuse, and limited rehabilitation opportunities. Research highlights that gender-sensitive approaches in correctional settings can significantly improve the mental and physical well-being of incarcerated women (One Billion Rising Sierra Leone). The Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014, outlines provisions aimed at safeguarding the rights of female inmates, yet its implementation and impact require further scrutiny to determine whether it aligns with international standards such as the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners (Bangkok Rules). The Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act (2014) aims to provide secure and humane conditions for inmates while supporting rehabilitation and reintegration. However, the Freetown Correctional Centre faces significant challenges, including poor resource management, human rights violations, unsanitary conditions, inadequate detention facilities, and arbitrary remand for minor offenses, raising concerns about prison reform. This paper critically evaluates the gender-specific policies embedded within the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014, and their impact on the well-being of female inmates. By analyzing existing literature, policy frameworks, and comparative international standards, this study aims to highlight gaps in implementation and propose recommendations for enhancing gender-responsive correctional strategies in Sierra Leone.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical framework

The incarceration of women presents unique challenges that necessitate gender-specific policies to ensure their well-being within correctional facilities. This study applies three key theories—Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, Feminist Theory, and the Human Rights-Based Approach—to critically evaluate the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014 and its impact on female inmates.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is a foundational psychological theory developed by Abraham Maslow in 1943. The theory emphasizes that individuals must fulfill basic physiological and safety needs before achieving higher levels of psychological well-being and self-actualization. In the context of female inmates, this framework highlights the importance of adequate healthcare, nutrition, safety, and rehabilitation programs within correctional facilities (Werby, 2013). Many incarcerated women struggle with unmet basic needs, which can hinder their ability to reintegrate into society successfully. The Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014 aims to provide secure and humane conditions for inmates, yet reports indicate that poor resource management and inadequate detention facilities continue to undermine these fundamental needs (Stalker-Firth, 2020).

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory critiques traditional correctional policies that often fail to address the unique experiences of female inmates, such as histories of abuse, reproductive health concerns, and social reintegration challenges. This perspective advocates for gender-responsive policies that recognize the structural inequalities affecting women in the criminal justice system (Stalker-Firth, 2020). Applying feminist theory to the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014, allows for a critical evaluation of whether the legislation adequately protects and empowers female inmates. Studies suggest that gender-sensitive correctional strategies improve rehabilitation outcomes and reduce recidivism rates among female prisoners (Werby, 2013). Feminist theorists argue that achieving gender justice within the correctional system requires a radical rethinking of how society views crime and punishment (Naples, 2018). This involves shifting from a punitive model to a rehabilitative and restorative approach that takes into account the social and economic contexts that lead women to commit crimes. It also requires greater representation of women in legal and policy-making spaces, ensuring that prison reforms are informed by the lived

experiences of those who are most affected. Expanding access to reproductive healthcare in prisons, and offering alternative sentencing for non-violent female offenders can contribute to a more just and equitable system (Baldrige, 2018).

Human Rights-Based Approach

This approach emphasizes that incarcerated individuals retain fundamental human rights, including access to healthcare, protection from abuse, and fair legal treatment. The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners (Bangkok Rules) align with this framework, advocating for gender-sensitive correctional policies that uphold the dignity and rights of female inmates (Werby, 2013). Evaluating the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014, through a human rights lens helps identify gaps in policy implementation and areas for reform. Reports indicate that arbitrary remand for minor offenses, poor sanitary conditions, and overcrowding continue to violate the basic rights of female inmates in Sierra Leone (Stalker-Firth, 2020). HRBA also calls for gender-sensitive rehabilitation programs that prepare incarcerated women for reintegration into society. Many prison rehabilitation programs are designed with male prisoners in mind, focusing on skills training that does not necessarily align with the needs of female inmates (Ravagnani & Policek, 2017). In Sierra Leone, vocational training for incarcerated women is limited, leaving them with few opportunities for economic independence upon release. The HRBA framework promotes rehabilitation programs that are tailored to women's needs, such as financial literacy training, small business development, and trauma-informed counseling (Baldrige, 2018). Without such interventions, female inmates are at greater risk of reoffending or falling into cycles of poverty and exploitation.

By integrating these theories, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of gender-specific policies and their impact on female inmates in Sierra Leone. The findings will contribute to ongoing discussions on prison reform and gender-responsive correctional strategies

Empirical Literature

Empirical research on gender-specific correctional policies highlights the unique challenges faced by female inmates and the effectiveness of gender-responsive strategies in improving their well-being. Studies indicate that traditional correctional policies, often designed for male offenders, fail to address the distinct needs of incarcerated women, including trauma histories, reproductive health concerns, and social reintegration barriers (Salisbury & Crawford, 2025).

Gender-Responsive Correctional Strategies

Over the last two decades, research has demonstrated that gender-responsive correctional strategies significantly reduce recidivism among female inmates. These strategies acknowledge the different criminogenic needs of women, such as histories of abuse, substance dependence, and relational identity (Blanchette & Brown, 2006). Empirical studies show that correctional programs tailored to women's experiences lead to better rehabilitation outcomes and lower rates of reoffending (Van Voorhis et al., 2010).

Challenges in Sierra Leone's Correctional System

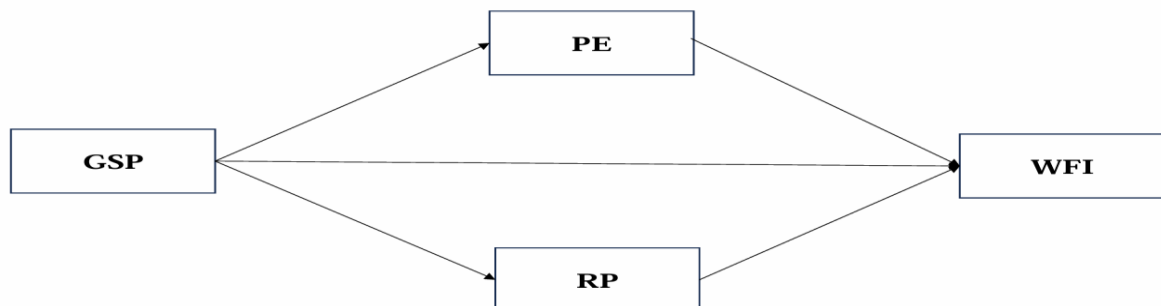
Despite the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014, reports indicate that female inmates continue to face severe hardships, including poor sanitary conditions, inadequate healthcare, and arbitrary detention for minor offenses (Barlow, 2014). Research suggests that gender-neutral risk assessments used in correctional facilities often fail to account for women's specific needs, leading to ineffective rehabilitation programs (Barlow, 2014). Studies emphasize the need for gender-sensitive policies that align with international standards, such as the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners (Bangkok Rules) (Salisbury & Crawford, 2025).

Policy and Research Implications

Empirical findings underscore the importance of integrating gender-responsive principles into correctional policies to improve the well-being of female inmates. Comparative studies indicate that countries implementing gender-sensitive correctional strategies report better reintegration outcomes and lower recidivism rates among female prisoners (Van Voorhis, 2014). In Sierra Leone, addressing resource management issues and enhancing rehabilitation programs for female inmates could lead to more effective correctional policies (Barlow, 2014).

This empirical literature review highlights the critical need for gender-responsive correctional policies in Sierra Leone and provides a foundation for evaluating the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014 in relation to international best practices.

Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis



Where:-

Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)

This includes the policies aimed at addressing the unique needs of female inmates, such as healthcare, legal support, vocational training, and protection from abuse. The effectiveness of these policies is critical in determining the quality of life within the correctional facility.

Prison Environment (PE)

The physical conditions of the correctional facilities, including overcrowding, hygiene, safety, and access to health care, directly influence inmates' well-being. This also encompasses the social environment, such as interactions with other inmates and correctional officers, which can either support or harm the rehabilitation process.

Well-Being of Female Inmates (WFI)

The focus is on both the physical and mental health of female inmates, their access to justice, and their rehabilitation outcomes. This includes psychological health (such as the prevalence of anxiety, depression, or PTSD), physical health (including access to reproductive health services), and the opportunities for rehabilitation and social reintegration after incarceration.

Hypothesis Development

The hypotheses outlined in the study provide a framework for understanding the relationships between gender-specific policies and various factors affecting female inmates (Kim & Pedersen, 2011; Lesche, 2021). Here's a breakdown of each hypothesis:

In recent years, growing attention has been directed toward the unique needs of female inmates within correctional systems, revealing the inadequacy of traditional, male-centered policies. Women in prison often present distinct profiles characterized by higher rates of trauma, mental health issues, substance dependency, and responsibilities as primary caregivers (Covington, 2002). These characteristics underscore the necessity for gender-specific correctional approaches that acknowledge and respond to women's life experiences and rehabilitative needs. Covington (2002) emphasized that many incarcerated women follow pathways shaped by abuse, poverty, and marginalization—factors that are not adequately addressed by conventional

correctional models. Similarly, Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003) proposed a framework for gender-responsive correctional strategies, advocating for policies that are trauma-informed, relational, and tailored to women's psychosocial development. Their research indicates that such approaches foster psychological stability and reduce recidivism. Salisbury and Van Voorhis (2009) provide quantitative evidence that gender-responsive factors, such as victimization and mental illness, are significant predictors of institutional adjustment and post-release success among women offenders. Their findings support the claim that gender-specific programming improves correctional outcomes. Furthermore, van den Bergh, Moller, and Hayton (2010) argue from a public health perspective that women prisoners experience higher rates of reproductive health issues, mental illness, and prior abuse, necessitating targeted policy interventions to achieve equitable health outcomes. Carlen and Worrall (2004) critically examine the implications of ignoring gender in penal policy, contending that the one-size-fits-all approach fails to account for the lived realities of women in custody. Their work reveals that neglecting gender-specific needs can lead to harmful institutional practices that further marginalize female inmates. Taken together, these studies suggest that gender-specific policies—designed to meet the psychological, physical, and social needs of women—are essential in promoting their overall wellbeing. These policies include trauma-informed care, mental health services, parenting support, gender-aware risk assessments, and educational or vocational training adapted to women's contexts. Thus

H1: *Gender-Specific Policy positively enhances the Wellbeing of Female Inmates.*

Additionally, the structure and quality of the prison environment are critical determinants of institutional outcomes, including inmate behavior, safety, and rehabilitation potential. Traditional correctional systems, predominantly designed around male experiences and behaviors, often fail to create environments conducive to the needs of female inmates. As research in correctional policy evolves, gender-specific approaches have gained recognition for their transformative effect—not only on individual inmate wellbeing but also on the broader institutional climate. Covington (2002) argued that women's pathways into crime are often marked by trauma, abuse, and marginalization, which shape their needs and behaviors within prison. When correctional policies ignore these gendered realities, they inadvertently create environments of neglect, retraumatization, and tension. Conversely, gender-specific policies—such as trauma-informed care, gender-aware security practices, and mental health services—contribute to a safer, more rehabilitative atmosphere by aligning the institution's structure with the inmates' lived experiences. Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003) further assert that gender-responsive strategies are not simply therapeutic interventions but systemic reforms that influence staff training, facility design, programming, and disciplinary procedures. These changes foster a more humane and constructive prison culture, reduce institutional misconduct, and improve staff-inmate interactions. Their research supports the notion that the environment becomes more stable and conducive to rehabilitation when it reflects a gender-conscious framework. Salisbury and Van Voorhis (2009) demonstrated empirically that gender-responsive practices reduce disciplinary infractions and improve inmates' engagement with institutional programs. These outcomes directly relate to improvements in the prison environment, suggesting that policy changes geared toward women's needs can influence order, safety, and inmate-staff dynamics.

Moreover, van den Bergh, Moller, and Hayton (2010) emphasize the role of public health-based gender-specific strategies in creating healthier institutional settings. Providing appropriate medical care, mental health services, and reproductive health access not only supports individual wellbeing but also contributes to a more stable, equitable environment within prisons. When correctional institutions adopt such practices, the result is often a shift in institutional norms, routines, and relational patterns among inmates and staff. Carlen and Worrall (2004) warn that environments rooted in patriarchal and punitive models tend to be counterproductive for female inmates. By neglecting gender-specific needs, institutions can create hostile or neglectful environments that undermine rehabilitation. Their critique supports the view that structural

reform through gender-specific policies is essential for cultivating a positive correctional climate. These findings collectively suggest that gender-specific policy implementation has the power to reshape the prison environment—improving safety, reducing conflict, fostering rehabilitative engagement, and promoting dignity for both inmates and staff. Rather than functioning merely as add-ons, such policies alter the operational culture of prisons in significant ways. Therefore, **H2: Gender-Specific Policy directly influences Prison Environment.**

The effectiveness of rehabilitation within correctional institutions depends not only on program availability but also on the relevance of those programs to inmates' experiences and needs. Traditional prison rehabilitation models, built largely around male criminogenic patterns, often neglect the gendered realities of women's incarceration. This gap has prompted a shift toward gender-specific policies, which acknowledge the distinct psychological, social, and economic challenges faced by women in custody. These policies have been shown to significantly shape the structure, delivery, and success of rehabilitation programs for female inmates. Numerous studies have documented the unique needs of incarcerated women. Daly (1992) introduced the concept of "pathways to crime," demonstrating that women often become involved in criminal behavior due to abuse, poverty, addiction, and caretaking burdens—factors rarely accounted for in mainstream rehabilitation models. When policies are reoriented to address these issues, rehabilitation becomes more effective. For example, trauma-informed care—now a cornerstone of gender-responsive policy—is rooted in evidence that untreated trauma impedes participation in education, therapy, and vocational training (Messina & Grella, 2006).

Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003) offered a pioneering gender-responsive framework, advocating for correctional strategies that are relational, trauma-informed, and tailored to women's developmental needs. Their work shows that such policies reshape program curricula, prioritize trust-building and emotional safety, and reframe success metrics to include emotional regulation, relationship repair, and caregiving competencies—elements traditionally overlooked in male-centered models. Recent empirical work further supports this claim. Wright, Van Voorhis, Salisbury, and Bauman (2014) evaluated gender-responsive interventions across several U.S. jurisdictions and found improved outcomes in program completion, institutional behavior, and post-release stability. These outcomes were largely attributed to policy-level shifts that enabled correctional staff to implement more adaptive, woman-focused rehabilitation strategies. In addition, Richie (2001) emphasized that without policy-level recognition of women's victimization histories, rehabilitation efforts may inadvertently retraumatize inmates or be perceived as punitive rather than supportive. Policies that embed safety, trust, and choice into program design enable women to engage more meaningfully with rehabilitative services. Also, worth noting, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2009) underscores that the rehabilitation of female inmates must include integrated services across healthcare, education, and psychosocial support. This international perspective reinforces the importance of institutional policies that formally mandate such integration—making rehabilitation not just a programmatic component, but a systemic, gender-aware approach. Together, these studies highlight the direct role that gender-specific policy plays in transforming rehabilitation from a generic institutional requirement to a purposeful, tailored, and effective process for female inmates.

H3: Gender-Specific Policy directly influences Rehabilitation Program.

The prison environment plays a crucial role in shaping the overall wellbeing of female inmates, influencing their mental health, safety, and rehabilitation outcomes. Research indicates that when prisons foster supportive, respectful, and gender-responsive environments, female inmates experience improvements in psychological wellbeing, reduced stress, and greater engagement in rehabilitative programs. Covington (2002) highlights that women offenders often enter prison with histories of trauma and abuse, making a safe and nurturing environment essential for their healing and adjustment. Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003) argue that environments incorporating gender-specific considerations—such as trauma-informed practices, opportunities

for meaningful relationships, and access to health and social services—can enhance inmates' sense of dignity and security. Such positive environments help mitigate the negative effects of incarceration and contribute to emotional stability and self-efficacy.

Salisbury and Van Voorhis (2009) found that when prison settings address women's mental health needs and create spaces for supportive social interactions, there is a noticeable decline in behavioral problems and an increase in participation in educational and therapeutic programs. This suggests that a positive prison environment is not only a physical space but also a psychosocial milieu that fosters wellbeing. Furthermore, van den Bergh, Moller, and Hayton (2010) emphasize that a prison environment attentive to women's specific health needs—including reproductive health and mental healthcare—significantly improves their overall health outcomes and quality of life during incarceration. Taken together, these studies provide strong evidence that a positive, gender-responsive prison environment plays a vital role in supporting the wellbeing of female inmates.

H4: *Prison Environment positively contributes to the Wellbeing of Female Inmates.*

Rehabilitation programs within correctional facilities are fundamental to supporting the wellbeing of female inmates by addressing their unique psychological, social, and educational needs. Research shows that well-designed rehabilitation programs can improve mental health outcomes, reduce recidivism, and enhance inmates' self-esteem and social functioning. Covington (2002) emphasizes that female offenders often face complex trauma histories and relational challenges, which necessitate tailored rehabilitative interventions focusing on trauma-informed care and empowerment. Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003) argue that gender-responsive rehabilitation programs that include counseling, vocational training, parenting support, and substance abuse treatment promote a sense of purpose and hope among incarcerated women. These programs help inmates develop skills essential for successful reintegration into society, which in turn contributes positively to their overall wellbeing. Empirical evidence supports this view: Salisbury and Van Voorhis (2009) found that female inmates engaged in gender-specific rehabilitation programs exhibit lower rates of institutional misconduct and improved psychological health compared to those in generic programs. Furthermore, studies like those by Messina, Grella, and Burdon (2007) show that participation in comprehensive rehabilitation is associated with decreased depression, anxiety, and substance use relapse, all critical components of wellbeing. Overall, the literature indicates that effective rehabilitation programs are not just beneficial but essential for promoting the holistic wellbeing of female inmates, supporting their mental health, social reintegration, and personal growth.

H5: *Rehabilitation Program positively contributes to the Wellbeing of Female Inmates.*

3. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of gender-specific policies and their impact on female inmates under the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014. The combination of these methods ensures a balanced evaluation, capturing both statistical trends and personal experiences within correctional facilities.

Study Area

The study focuses on Freetown, Sierra Leone, specifically the Pa Demba Road Maximum Security Prison, which houses female inmates under the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014 (Bangura, 2022). Rapid urbanization, post-war displacement, and inadequate correctional facilities contribute to overcrowding, poor sanitation, and limited healthcare, disproportionately affecting female prisoners (Fehrmann, 2019). The Bangkok Rules advocate for gender-responsive policies to uphold inmates' rights, yet resource constraints and systemic weaknesses hinder effective implementation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). To assess these challenges, the study adopts positivist and interpretivist research philosophies, combining quantitative data on prison conditions with qualitative insights into female inmates' experiences

(Saunders, 2016). A human rights-based approach, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and feminist theory frame the analysis, exploring incarceration's impact on healthcare access, rehabilitation, and protection from abuse (Jena, 2022; Barry et al., 2020). Findings aim to inform policy reforms, ensuring improved correctional practices for women in Sierra Leone (Ravagnani & Policek, 2017).

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter. Public policy and its impact on the well-being of female inmates in Sierra Leone's correctional centres is a complex issue that requires multiple data sources for accurate assessment. The mixed-methods approach combines objective and subjective realities. Quantitative research involves the administration of structured questionnaires to collect numerical data that can be statistically analyzed. This ensures that the findings are evidence-based, allowing for measurable comparisons regarding factors such as access to justice, prison conditions, and rehabilitation outcomes. By using surveys, the study will capture the prevalence of mental health issues, healthcare access, and recidivism rates among female inmates. Conversely, qualitative research methods, including observations, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions, will provide insights into the personal experiences of incarcerated women. These methods will help uncover narratives related to systemic discrimination, barriers to legal representation, and psychological distress. The integration of qualitative data will enhance the interpretation of statistical findings, providing a nuanced understanding of the issues at hand.

Research Variables

In this study, a multinomous variable approach is employed to classify female inmates into distinct groups based on their unique vulnerabilities and shared experiences within Sierra Leone's correctional system. This classification is essential for understanding the specific challenges faced by different categories of incarcerated women and tailoring interventions to address their needs effectively. The research focuses on four primary groups: rural women, urban women, women with disabilities, and girls under the age of 18. Each of these categories represents a subset of the female prison population that faces unique adversities, contributing to their vulnerability within the correctional system.

The first category examined in this study is rural women, who primarily reside in remote communities across Sierra Leone. Freetown, the focus area of this research, is divided into Western Rural and Western Urban districts. Rural women, by definition, are those who live in the interior of the country and are predominantly engaged in agricultural activities for survival. Due to limited access to education, healthcare, and legal representation, they are among the most marginalized members of society. When these women come into conflict with the law, their lack of awareness regarding legal processes, coupled with financial constraints, makes it extremely difficult for them to navigate the justice system. Consequently, they often remain in detention for prolonged periods without access to proper legal defense. The conditions they endure in correctional facilities mirror the hardships they face in their everyday lives, with inadequate healthcare, food scarcity, and overcrowded living spaces exacerbating their suffering. The second group of interest comprises urban women, particularly those residing in Freetown. Unlike their rural counterparts, urban women have more exposure to legal and social services. However, they constitute a significant portion of the female prison population due to the high crime rates and socio-economic challenges prevalent in urban settings. Many of these women find themselves incarcerated for minor offenses, such as petty theft or drug-related crimes, often stemming from financial desperation or coercion. The conditions they face in prison are deplorable, characterized by severe overcrowding, poor sanitation, insufficient access to healthcare, and limited nutritional provisions. These factors contribute to the deterioration of their physical and mental well-being, making rehabilitation efforts more difficult. The study aims to shed light on the struggles of urban

female inmates and assess how existing correctional policies address their needs. Another critical variable in this study is women with disabilities, who experience compounded vulnerabilities within the correctional system. This category includes females with physical, psychosocial, intellectual, and sensory impairments. These women face systemic barriers to accessing adequate healthcare, rehabilitation programs, and legal representation. The lack of disability-friendly infrastructure within correctional facilities further marginalizes them, making it difficult for them to perform daily activities or seek medical attention when needed. Moreover, they are often at a heightened risk of abuse and neglect, as correctional staff may not be adequately trained to cater to their specific needs. Understanding the challenges faced by women with disabilities in prison is crucial for advocating for policy reforms that ensure their dignity and rights are upheld.

The final category focuses on girls under the age of 18, who are among the most vulnerable members of the prison population. These young females, due to their inexperience and lack of life skills, are often susceptible to exploitation, coercion, and peer influence. Many of them have been detained for offenses related to substance abuse, including the consumption of drugs such as Kush, Pampas, and Tramadol. Others are incarcerated due to circumstances beyond their control, such as being homeless, victims of abuse, or involved in criminal activities under duress. The juvenile justice system in Sierra Leone is often ill-equipped to handle their rehabilitation effectively, leading to their placement in police stations, prisons, approved schools, and juvenile homes. These institutions, however, do not always provide the necessary support structures to address the psychological and emotional trauma experienced by these young inmates. Without proper intervention, these girls face a high likelihood of recidivism, further entrenching them in the criminal justice system. By categorizing female inmates into these four groups, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their unique struggles and advocate for policy recommendations that address their specific needs. The proposed research questionnaire will be structured to capture the experiences of these women, enabling a data-driven approach to improving the conditions within Sierra Leone's correctional facilities. Through this study, the broader goal is to influence systemic change and promote the well-being of incarcerated women across the country.

Sample Size

The sample size for this study is 273 respondents, carefully selected to provide a balanced and comprehensive assessment of public policy and its impact on female inmates in Sierra Leone's correctional centers. This figure was determined using calculator.net, based on a known population of 1,073,000 from the study area, with a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 5%. The calculated sample size ensures statistical reliability and enhances the validity of the study findings by minimizing sampling bias and ensuring representativeness. To achieve a diverse and representative sample, the study employs a multi-group selection process, ensuring that respondents reflect different perspectives on the issue. The Likert scale questionnaire will be distributed across eleven (11) target groups, including incarcerated women, prison officials, legal professionals, human rights advocates, policymakers, healthcare workers, social welfare officers, and community representatives. This diverse approach is designed to capture the complexities and multidimensional realities faced by female inmates, as well as the broader systemic challenges within Sierra Leone's correctional system. The inclusion of female inmates ensures that the study directly reflects the lived experiences of those most affected by correctional policies. Their input is crucial in evaluating conditions such as access to healthcare, prison safety, rehabilitation programs, and human rights protections. Meanwhile, prison officials will provide insights into institutional challenges, resource limitations, and policy enforcement. The perspectives of legal professionals and human rights advocates will help assess the legal framework governing the treatment of female inmates, while policymakers will offer viewpoints on legislative intent, reform efforts, and policy implementation gaps. Additionally, healthcare workers and social welfare officers will provide critical perspectives on the adequacy of medical and psychological support services for female prisoners. Each respondent will have the autonomy

to express their views by selecting from five options in the structured Likert scale questionnaire. This approach ensures that responses are measurable and quantifiable, allowing for the identification of key trends and patterns. The study's methodology is structured to balance quantitative rigor with qualitative depth, ensuring that findings are both statistically sound and socially relevant. By incorporating diverse viewpoints, this research aims to highlight the broader impact of correctional policies and contribute to meaningful, evidence-based recommendations for reform in Sierra Leone's prison system.

Data Collection Methods

The data collection methods used in this study include surveys, interviews, focus group and document analysis. Structured questionnaires have been distributed to prison officials and policymakers to assess policy effectiveness. Semi-structured interviews with female inmates will provide insights into their experiences. Discussions with correctional officers and legal professionals will explore challenges in policy implementation. Also, Official reports, legal documents, and international guidelines (e.g., Bangkok Rules) will be reviewed to compare Sierra Leone's correctional policies with global standards

Sample Selection

Out of the 273 target respondents stated in the sample size, a random sample selection is proposed to distribute a well-structured questionnaire in areas stated.

Data Analysis Method

The data collected in this study use basic statistical methods to ensure a clear understanding of the key findings. The analysis will include measures such as mean, median, standard deviation, and variance, which will help in identifying trends and patterns in the responses. These statistical methods will be applied to examine the impact of public policy on female inmates in Sierra Leone's correctional centers, particularly in areas such as healthcare access, prison conditions, rehabilitation programs, and legal protections. For this study, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is the selected software for computing both numerical and textual data. SPSS is widely used in social research due to its ability to handle large datasets, perform complex statistical tests, and generate clear visual representations of findings. The software will be used to conduct descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, allowing for a structured and reliable interpretation of the collected data. A Likert scale method will be employed to measure respondents' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences regarding the treatment of female inmates. The Likert scale is a widely accepted tool in social science research, as it provides a standardized way to measure subjective opinions and attitudes (Saunders, 2016). To facilitate statistical and graphical analysis, numerical codes will be assigned to each response, ensuring that data can be easily interpreted and compared. This coding system will allow for the effective categorization of responses, which will then be represented in academic tables and graphs to enhance readability and comprehension.

In addition to quantitative data, the study will incorporate qualitative data analysis to provide deeper insights into the experiences of female inmates and other stakeholders. This qualitative data will consist of textual, visual, and infographic materials, including secondary sources such as reports, case studies, and policy documents. These sources will help contextualize the numerical findings by providing real-life narratives, historical trends, and policy evaluations. Both quantitative and qualitative data will be analyzed simultaneously using the concurrent mixed-method approach. This approach enables the study to triangulate findings, ensuring that numerical trends are supported by qualitative insights. By integrating both data types, the study aims to answer research questions comprehensively, offering a holistic view of the role of public policy and its impact on female inmates in Sierra Leone's correctional centers.

4. Findings and discussion

Table 4.1: Respondents' Demographic data

Variable	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	116	42%
	Female	157	58%
	Total	273	100%
Age (in years)	18-25	21	8%
	26-35	88	32%
	36-45	117	43%
	46-55	37	14%
	56+	10	4%
	Total	273	100%
Education	Certificate	17	6%
	Diploma	23	8%
	Bachelor's Degree	160	59%
	Master's Degree	71	26%
	Doctorate Degree	2	1%
	Total	273	100%
Work Experience (in years)	1-5	78	29%
	6-10	149	55%
	11-15	31	11%
	20+	15	5%
	Total	273	100%

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2024

Table 4.1 shows the demographic data of the 273 respondents and provides an overview of their gender, age, education level, and work experience, offering valuable insights into the study population. The gender composition of the respondents indicates that 157 (58%) are female, while 116 (42%) are male. The higher proportion of female respondents aligns with the study's focus on female inmates, ensuring their perspectives are well represented. The age distribution of respondents shows a diverse range across different age groups: This distribution suggests that most respondents are in their prime working and decision-making years, which could impact their perspectives on gender-specific policies and rehabilitation programs. This data suggests that the study participants are generally well-educated, potentially contributing to informed responses and insights. The distribution of work experience suggests that the respondents possess a balanced mix of early, mid, and experienced career professionals, enriching the study with diverse viewpoints. The demographic profile indicates a well-educated and experienced participant pool, with a predominant representation of females and individuals in the 36-45 age group. These characteristics suggest that the respondents can provide valuable insights into gender-specific policies and their impact on female inmates' well-being.

Table 4.2: Survey Institutions

Variable	Item	Frequency	Percentage
Survey Institution	Sierra Correctional Centre	40	15%
	National Legal Aid Board	26	10%
	Pademba Road Magistrate Court	24	9%
	Sierra Leone Bar Association	22	8%
	Sierra Leone Law School	20	7%
	Sierra Leone Police Complaint Board	29	11%
	Ministry of Gender and Children Affairs	30	11%
	Legal Link Advocacy	27	10%
	Legal Advocaids SL	25	9%
	Human Rights Sierra Leone	30	11%
	Total	273	100%

Source: Researcher's field survey, 2024

Table 4.2 shows the diversity of survey institutions ensures a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities surrounding gender-specific policies and rehabilitation efforts

for female inmates in Sierra Leone. The perspectives gathered from correctional, legal, governmental, and human rights organizations provide a holistic view of the current state of female inmates' well-being and the effectiveness of existing policies.

Table 4.3: Construct Validity and Reliability

Construct	Item	FL	VIF	Ca	Cr	AVE
Gender-Specific Policies	GSP1	0.835	1.905	0.804	0.812	0.630
	GSP2	0.823	1.726			
	GSP3	0.800	1.751			
	GSP4	0.712	1.381			
Prison Environment	PE1	0.814	2.384	0.829	0.829	0.596
	PE2	0.805	2.075			
	PE3	0.735	1.711			
	PE4	0.786	2.271			
	PE5	0.713	1.644			
Rehabilitation Program	RP1	0.840	3.139	0.857	0.873	0.629
	RP2	0.795	2.350			
	RP3	0.803	1.693			
	RP4	0.764	2.544			
	RP5	0.760	1.642			
Wellbeing of Female Inmates	WFI1	0.783	1.665	0.760	0.760	0.582
	WFI2	0.780	1.578			
	WFI3	0.747	1.418			
	WFI4	0.740	1.369			

Source: Author's computation, 2024

Table 4.3 provides an extensive analysis of the construct validity and reliability of four key constructs central to the study: Gender-Specific Policies (GSP), Prison Environment (PE), Rehabilitation Program (RP), and Wellbeing of Female Inmates (WFI). These constructs are fundamental in assessing the impact of correctional policies on incarcerated women and ensuring the effectiveness of rehabilitation efforts. Each construct is evaluated using a combination of Factor Loadings (FL), Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), Cronbach's Alpha (Ca), Composite Reliability (Cr), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). These statistical metrics play a crucial role in determining whether the constructs and their associated items adequately capture the intended variables while maintaining internal consistency and minimizing redundancy among items.

i. Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)

The Gender-Specific Policies (GSP) construct is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of policies aimed at addressing the unique needs of female inmates within correctional facilities. This construct consists of four items, each representing a critical element of gender-responsive policy implementation. The Factor Loadings (FL) for these items range from 0.712 to 0.835, all exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7. These values indicate that the items strongly contribute to the overall construct and accurately measure the degree of gender-specific policy implementation, ensuring that policies are tailored to meet the specific needs of incarcerated women. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values for the GSP construct range from 1.381 to 1.905, all well below the critical threshold of 5.0. This suggests that there is no issue of multicollinearity, meaning that the items are independent and measure distinct aspects of gender-specific policies without excessive overlap. This ensures that the measurement of the GSP construct remains clear and precise. Regarding reliability, both Cronbach's Alpha (Ca) and Composite Reliability (Cr) values are 0.804 and 0.812, respectively, which exceed the recommended minimum threshold of 0.7. These values confirm the internal consistency of the construct, signifying that the items collectively measure the same underlying concept. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the GSP construct is 0.630, indicating that it captures a substantial proportion of variance from its items. This assures that the construct is

both valid and reliable, effectively reflecting the gender-specific policies implemented in correctional facilities and their impact on female inmates.

ii. Prison Environment (PE)

The Prison Environment (PE) construct is composed of five items, each exhibiting strong correlations with the overall construct. The Factor Loadings (FL) for these items range from 0.713 to 0.814, demonstrating a robust alignment between individual indicators and the concept of the prison environment. VIF values range from 1.644 to 2.384, indicating minimal multicollinearity and confirming that the items are not excessively overlapping in what they measure. This suggests that the PE construct is well-defined and accurately captures the aspects of the prison environment that influence inmate experiences. Regarding reliability, both Cronbach's Alpha (Ca) and Composite Reliability (Cr) are 0.829, surpassing the acceptable threshold of 0.7, thereby confirming the internal consistency of the construct. These values indicate that the PE items are reliably measuring the same underlying concept. Furthermore, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for PE is 0.596, indicating that the construct explains a significant proportion of variance in the associated items, ensuring its validity. Overall, the PE construct is a reliable and valid measure of the conditions within correctional facilities, specifically focusing on factors affecting the well-being of female inmates.

iii. Rehabilitation Program (RP)

The Rehabilitation Program (RP) construct, designed to evaluate the effectiveness of rehabilitation efforts in Sierra Leone's correctional centers, comprises five items with Factor Loadings (FL) ranging from 0.760 to 0.840. This indicates that each item contributes significantly to the overall construct. The VIF values for RP range from 1.642 to 3.139, all within acceptable limits, confirming that the indicators do not suffer from problematic multicollinearity and are measuring distinct aspects of rehabilitation. In terms of reliability, Cronbach's Alpha (Ca) is 0.857, and Composite Reliability (Cr) is 0.873, both exceeding the recommended minimum threshold of 0.7. These figures highlight strong internal consistency, ensuring that the items within the RP construct effectively measure rehabilitation efforts. Additionally, the AVE for RP is 0.629, indicating that the construct captures a substantial amount of variance from its associated items. This further confirms the construct's validity, making it an effective tool for evaluating the quality and impact of rehabilitation programs on female inmates.

vi. Wellbeing of Female Inmates (WFI)

The purpose of the Wellbeing of Female Inmates (WFI) construct is to evaluate the general mental and physical health of women who are incarcerated. Factor Loadings (FL) for the four elements that make up this construct range from 0.740 to 0.783, all of which are above the conventional cutoff of 0.7. This suggests that the indicators used for this construct are robust and successfully represent the different facets of the well-being of female prisoners. WFI's VIF values, which show little multicollinearity between the components, range from 1.369 to 1.665. This guarantees that there is no unnecessary overlap and that each component adds something special to our understanding of inmate well-being. Cronbach's Alpha (Ca) and Composite dependability (Cr) are both 0.760 in terms of dependability, which supports the construct's internal consistency. These values suggest that the items are measuring the same underlying concept, ensuring that the assessment of female inmates' well-being is both accurate and dependable. Additionally, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for WFI is 0.582, which indicates that the construct explains a satisfactory proportion of variance in its associated items. This further affirms that the WFI construct is both valid and reliable for evaluating the physical, psychological, and emotional conditions of incarcerated women, providing a comprehensive understanding of their well-being.

Overall Construct Validity and Reliability

Across all four constructs (GSP, PE, RP, and WFI), the study confirms that Factor Loadings, VIF values, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and AVE exceed the recommended thresholds. This provides strong evidence that the measurement model is both robust and valid, making it well-suited for assessing the intended constructs in the study. The findings from this validation process support the conclusion that gender-specific policies, prison environments, rehabilitation programs, and the well-being of female inmates can be reliably measured using the selected items. By ensuring that these constructs meet high standards of validity and reliability, this study provides a strong foundation for evaluating correctional policies and their impacts on incarcerated women in Sierra Leone.

The consistency and reliability of the constructs underscore the importance of implementing policies that improve prison environments, enhance rehabilitation programs, and prioritize the well-being of female inmates. These validated constructs will guide the study's subsequent analysis and contribute to evidence-based recommendations for prison reform.

Table 4.4: HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait) ratio

Construct	FIP	PE	RP	WFI
GSP				
PE	0.699			
RP	0.404	0.656		
WFI	0.690	0.842	0.563	

Source: Author's computation, 2024

Table 4.4 presents the **Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio**, a metric used to assess the discriminant validity of constructs in a measurement model. Discriminant validity ensures that each construct is distinct from other constructs, confirming that the constructs measure different concepts. A common criterion for HTMT is that the values should be below 0.90. For stricter evaluations, a threshold of 0.85 is sometimes applied, particularly when constructs are conceptually similar. Values exceeding these thresholds may indicate issues with discriminant validity. The HTMT values between GSP and other constructs (Prison Environment, Rehabilitation Program, and Wellbeing of Female Inmates) are not provided, which may imply that these relationships were either not calculated or not relevant in this context. The HTMT value between PE and Rehabilitation Program (RP) is **0.656**, indicating acceptable discriminant validity. The HTMT value between PE and Wellbeing of Female Inmates (WFI) is **0.842**, which is within the upper acceptable limit of 0.85 but close enough to warrant attention, depending on the strictness of the threshold used. The HTMT value between RP and Wellbeing of Female Inmates (WFI) is **0.563**, demonstrating strong discriminant validity, as it is well below both the 0.85 and 0.90 thresholds. The HTMT value between WFI and PE is **0.842**, close to the stricter threshold but still acceptable. The HTMT value between WFI and RP is **0.563**, further reinforcing discriminant validity. The HTMT values suggest that the constructs generally demonstrate good discriminant validity. Most values are comfortably below the threshold of 0.85, except for the PE-WFI relationship, which is on the higher side. However, it is still within acceptable limits. This indicates that the constructs are distinct but may share some conceptual overlap, particularly between Prison Environment and Wellbeing of Female Inmates. This overlap might be contextually appropriate, depending on the study's focus.

Table 4.5: Fornell-Larcker criterion

Construct	FIP	PE	RP	WFI
GSP	0.794			
PE	0.575	0.772		
RP	0.361	0.576	0.793	
WFI	0.543	0.675	0.482	0.763

Source: Author's computation, 2024

Table 4.5 provides results for the **Fornell-Larcker criterion**, a method used to assess **discriminant validity** in a structural equation model. This criterion compares the square root of

the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct with its correlations with other constructs. A construct demonstrates discriminant validity if the square root of its AVE (diagonal values) is greater than its correlations with any other construct (off-diagonal values). The square root of AVE for GSP (0.794) is greater than its correlations with PE (0.575), RP (0.361), and WFI (0.543). This indicates good discriminant validity for GSP. The square root of AVE for PE (0.772) is greater than its correlations with RP (0.576) and WFI (0.675), as well as GSP (0.575). Discriminant validity is established for PE. The square root of AVE for RP (0.793) is greater than its correlations with GSP (0.361), PE (0.576), and WFI (0.482). RP demonstrates good discriminant validity. The square root of AVE for WFI (0.763) is greater than its correlations with GSP (0.543), PE (0.675), and RP (0.482). WFI also meets the criterion for discriminant validity. The results confirm that all constructs meet the Fornell-Larcker criterion for discriminant validity. The diagonal values (square root of AVE) are consistently higher than the correlations with other constructs, indicating that each construct is distinct and well-measured in the context of this study. This supports the robustness of the measurement model and enhances the reliability of subsequent structural model analyses.

Table 4.6: Cross Loadings

Construct	FIP	PE	RP	WFI
GSP1	0.835	0.444	0.271	0.438
GSP2	0.823	0.515	0.385	0.472
GSP3	0.800	0.426	0.234	0.393
GSP4	0.712	0.430	0.233	0.411
PE1	0.433	0.814	0.405	0.474
PE2	0.545	0.805	0.386	0.482
PE3	0.362	0.735	0.542	0.613
PE4	0.467	0.786	0.367	0.440
PE5	0.406	0.713	0.511	0.577
RP1	0.239	0.435	0.840	0.315
RP2	0.247	0.423	0.795	0.319
RP3	0.389	0.495	0.803	0.441
RP4	0.201	0.340	0.764	0.258
RP5	0.289	0.523	0.760	0.484
WFI1	0.404	0.465	0.325	0.783
WFI2	0.428	0.533	0.372	0.780
WFI3	0.361	0.537	0.426	0.747
WFI4	0.461	0.516	0.342	0.740

Source: Author's computation, 2024

Table 4.6 presents the **cross-loadings** of items on their respective constructs as well as on other constructs. Cross-loadings are used to assess the **discriminant validity** of a measurement model. For discriminant validity to be established, each item should load higher on its assigned construct than on any other construct. Items GSP1 (0.835), GSP2 (0.823), GSP3 (0.800), and GSP4 (0.712) load highest on the GSP construct, with all cross-loadings on other constructs being significantly lower. Example: GSP1 has a loading of 0.835 on GSP, but its cross-loadings are 0.444 (PE), 0.271 (RP), and 0.438 (WFI). This confirms that GSP1 is more strongly associated with GSP than with any other construct. Items PE1 (0.814), PE2 (0.805), PE3 (0.735), PE4 (0.786), and PE5 (0.713) load highest on the PE construct. Example: PE1 has a loading of 0.814 on PE, while its cross-loadings are 0.433 (GSP), 0.405 (RP), and 0.474 (WFI). This demonstrates a strong relationship with PE relative to other constructs. Items RP1 (0.840), RP2 (0.795), RP3 (0.803), RP4 (0.764), and RP5 (0.760) show their highest loadings on RP. Example: RP1 has a loading of 0.840 on RP, with cross-loadings of 0.239 (GSP), 0.435 (PE), and 0.315 (WFI). This indicates strong discriminant validity for RP items. Items WFI1 (0.783), WFI2 (0.780), WFI3 (0.747), and WFI4 (0.740) load highest on WFI. Example: WFI1 has a loading of 0.783 on WFI, while its cross-loadings are 0.404 (GSP), 0.465 (PE), and 0.325 (RP), confirming that WFI1 is most strongly associated with its intended construct. The cross-loadings clearly show that all items load more strongly on their respective constructs than on any other construct. This supports the

discriminant validity of the measurement model, indicating that each item is appropriately aligned with its intended construct and does not overlap significantly with other constructs. This strengthens the reliability of the model for assessing relationships in the study.

Table 4.7: Explanatory Power of Constructs

Construct	R-square	Q ² predict	RMSE	MAE
PE	0.331	0.321	0.833	0.672
RP	0.13	0.122	0.944	0.79
WFI	0.502	0.288	0.852	0.672

Source: Author's computation, 2024

Table 4.7 presents the **explanatory power** of the constructs in the model using several key metrics: **R-squared (R²)**, **Q² (predictive relevance)**, **RMSE (Root Mean Square Error)**, and **MAE (Mean Absolute Error)**. These indicators help evaluate how well the model explains the constructs and the accuracy of the model's predictions. R² indicates the proportion of variance in a dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables in the model. Higher R² values signify better explanatory power. Q² assesses the model's ability to predict new data. It is derived using a cross-validation procedure, and values greater than 0 indicate predictive relevance. A higher Q² value suggests better out-of-sample predictive power. RMSE measures the average magnitude of error between predicted and observed values. Lower RMSE values indicate better predictive accuracy. MAE provides a measure of the average absolute differences between predicted and observed values. Like RMSE, lower MAE values indicate better prediction accuracy.

Prison Environment (PE) and **Wellbeing of Female Inmates (WFI)** demonstrate moderate to substantial explanatory power, with good predictive relevance, but PE shows more room for improvement in terms of prediction accuracy, as indicated by the RMSE and MAE values. **Rehabilitation Program (RP)**, on the other hand, has weak explanatory power and limited predictive relevance, as reflected in its low R² and Q² values, along with relatively high RMSE and MAE values. This suggests that the model might need refinement to better explain and predict RP outcomes. Overall, the constructs for PE and WFI are relatively well explained and predicted by the model, while RP could benefit from further investigation and model improvement.

Results

Table 4.8: Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	B	T statistics	P values	Decision
H1	GSP -> WFI	0.226	3.96	0.000	Accepted
H2	GSP -> PE	0.575	12.993	0.000	Accepted
H3	GSP -> RP	0.361	8.22	0.000	Accepted
H4	PE -> WFI	0.470	7.856	0.000	Accepted
H5	RP -> WFI	0.130	2.631	0.009	Accepted

Source: Author's computation, 2024

Table 4.8 presents the **direct effects** of the hypotheses in the model, assessing the relationships between different constructs. These relationships are evaluated using the **standardized path coefficients (β)**, **T-statistics**, and **P-values** to determine the strength and significance of the paths. **β (Standardized Path Coefficient)** represents the strength and direction of the relationship between two constructs. Higher values indicate stronger relationships. **T-statistics** is used to assess the significance of the path. A T-statistic above 1.96 (for a 5% significance level) generally shows statistical significance. **P-values** are used to determine the statistical significance of the path. A P-value less than 0.05 indicates that the relationship is significant.

Analysis of Direct Effects

This section analyzes the direct effects of **Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)** on the **Well-being of Female Inmates (WFI)**, **Prison Environment (PE)**, and **Rehabilitation Programs (RP)**, as well as the effects of **Prison Environment (PE)** and **Rehabilitation Programs (RP)** on the **Well-being of Female Inmates (WFI)**. The hypotheses tested in this section assess the strength and significance of these relationships.

Hypothesis H1: GSP → WFI

The first hypothesis posits that **Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)** positively influence the **Well-being of Female Inmates (WFI)**. The analysis shows a moderate positive relationship between GSP and WFI, with a standardized path coefficient (β) of 0.226. This indicates that gender-responsive policies contribute positively to the well-being of female inmates. The statistical significance of this relationship is confirmed by a T-statistic of 3.96, which is well above the threshold of 1.96. Furthermore, the P-value is 0.000, much lower than the 0.05 significance level, confirming that the relationship is highly significant. Therefore, we accept Hypothesis H1, indicating that GSP has a positive and significant effect on the well-being of female inmates.

Hypothesis H2: GSP → PE

The second hypothesis examines the relationship between **Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)** and the **Prison Environment (PE)**. The analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between these two constructs, with a path coefficient (β) of 0.575. This suggests that GSP explains a substantial portion of the variance in the prison environment, which is critical to improving conditions for female inmates. The T-statistic of 12.993 is significantly above 1.96, indicating a highly significant relationship, and the P-value of 0.000 reinforces the statistical significance of this effect. Thus, Hypothesis H2 is accepted, confirming that GSP has a significant and strong effect on the prison environment.

Hypothesis H3: GSP → RP

Hypothesis H3 explores the effect of **Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)** on **Rehabilitation Programs (RP)**. The results show a moderate positive relationship between GSP and RP, with a path coefficient (β) of 0.361. This indicates that gender-responsive policies help to shape rehabilitation programs, though to a lesser extent compared to the effect on the prison environment. The T-statistic of 8.22 is well above the critical threshold of 1.96, and the P-value of 0.000 is extremely low, confirming the statistical significance of the relationship. Therefore, Hypothesis H3 is accepted, suggesting that GSP has a positive and significant effect on the development of rehabilitation programs for female inmates.

Hypothesis H4: PE → WFI

The fourth hypothesis posits that a better **Prison Environment (PE)** enhances the **Well-being of Female Inmates (WFI)**. The results indicate a moderate positive effect of PE on WFI, with a path coefficient (β) of 0.470. This suggests that improving the physical and psychological conditions of the prison environment contributes to the well-being of female inmates. The T-statistic of 7.856 exceeds the threshold of 1.96, signaling that this relationship is statistically significant. Additionally, the P-value of 0.000 further supports the significance of this effect. Therefore, we accept Hypothesis H4, affirming that a better prison environment positively affects the well-being of female inmates.

Hypothesis H5: RP → WFI

Finally, Hypothesis H5 examines the effect of **Rehabilitation Programs (RP)** on the **Well-being of Female Inmates (WFI)**. The analysis shows a relatively weaker, but still positive, relationship between RP and WFI, with a path coefficient (β) of 0.130. While this effect is more modest compared to those of GSP and PE, it is statistically significant, as indicated by the T-statistic of 2.631, which is above the threshold of 1.96. The P-value of 0.009 is also below 0.05, confirming the significance of this relationship. As a result, Hypothesis H5 is accepted, suggesting that

rehabilitation programs positively impact the well-being of female inmates, although the effect is weaker than that of the prison environment and gender-specific policies.

All five hypotheses (H1 to H5) are accepted, indicating that **Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)** positively impact both **Well-being of Female Inmates (WFI)** and **Prison Environment (PE)**, with a particularly strong relationship to PE. Additionally, **Prison Environment (PE)** significantly influences **WFI**, further enhancing the well-being of female inmates. While **Rehabilitation Programs (RP)** also have a positive effect on WFI, their impact is relatively weaker compared to that of PE and GSP. These direct effects highlight the important relationships between the constructs and emphasize the need for gender-specific policies that enhance the environment and rehabilitation opportunities for female inmates.

Table 4.9: Mediation effects

Hypothesis	Relationship	B	T statistics	P values	Decision
H6	GSP -> PE -> WFI	0.270	6.655	0.000	Accepted
H7	GSP -> RP -> WFI	0.047	2.554	0.011	Accepted

Source: Author's computation, 2024

Table 4.9 presents the **mediation effects** within the model, examining how **Prison Environment (PE)** and **Rehabilitation Program (RP)** mediate the relationship between **Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)** and the **Wellbeing of Female Inmates (WFI)**. Mediation effects are assessed using the standardized path coefficient (β), T-statistics, and P-values.

Hypothesis Testing and Analysis

The hypotheses examined in this study aim to explore the relationships between gender-specific policies, prison environment, rehabilitation programs, and the well-being of female inmates in Sierra Leone's correctional system. The following presents the findings from the analysis of these hypotheses:

Hypothesis H1: Gender-Specific Policies and Well-being of Female Inmates

The first hypothesis posits that the implementation of gender-specific policies (GSP) enhances the well-being of female inmates (WFI). The data analysis shows a moderate but statistically significant positive relationship between GSP and WFI ($\beta = 0.226$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that the presence of gender-responsive policies contributes to improvements in various dimensions of inmates' well-being, including mental and physical health, access to healthcare, and overall quality of life during incarceration. This finding supports the importance of gender-specific frameworks in prison systems and underscores the need for their expanded implementation.

Hypothesis H2: Gender-Specific Policies and Prison Environment

The second hypothesis investigates whether GSP positively influences the prison environment (PE). The results indicate a strong positive relationship between gender-specific policies and the prison environment ($\beta = 0.575$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that gender-sensitive policies play a pivotal role in improving the physical and psychological environment within correctional facilities, making them more conducive to the well-being of female inmates. The significant impact of GSP on PE highlights the necessity of incorporating gender-specific needs into prison design and management, ensuring safer, more supportive living conditions for female prisoners.

Hypothesis H3: Gender-Specific Policies and Rehabilitation Programs

The third hypothesis explores whether gender-specific policies contribute to more effective rehabilitation programs (RP) for female inmates. The analysis reveals a moderate positive relationship between GSP and RP ($\beta = 0.361$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that gender-responsive policies influence the development and implementation of rehabilitation initiatives. However, the effect size is not as large as the one observed for PE, suggesting that while GSP positively impacts

rehabilitation efforts, there remains a significant need for targeted interventions and programs designed specifically for the needs of incarcerated women.

Hypothesis H4: Prison Environment and Well-being of Female Inmates

The fourth hypothesis examines the effect of the prison environment on the well-being of female inmates. The results indicate a moderate, statistically significant relationship between PE and WFI ($\beta = 0.470$, $p < 0.001$). This finding underscores the importance of a supportive and safe prison environment in promoting the physical and psychological health of female inmates. The prison environment plays a crucial role in alleviating stress and anxiety, fostering mental well-being, and contributing to overall rehabilitation success.

Hypothesis H5: Rehabilitation Programs and Well-being of Female Inmates

The fifth hypothesis investigates whether participation in rehabilitation programs positively affects the well-being of female inmates. The analysis shows a moderate positive relationship ($\beta = 0.130$, $p = 0.009$), indicating that while rehabilitation programs do contribute to improvements in well-being, the effect is less pronounced compared to the impact of the prison environment and gender-specific policies. This finding suggests that enhancing the quality and availability of rehabilitation programs could further improve the outcomes for female inmates, particularly in terms of mental health, self-esteem, and reintegration into society.

Analysis of Mediation Effects

This section explores the mediation effects of **Prison Environment (PE)** and **Rehabilitation Programs (RP)** in the relationship between **Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)** and **Well-being of Female Inmates (WFI)**. Specifically, we examine two hypotheses to assess how PE and RP mediate the impact of GSP on WFI.

Hypothesis H6: GSP → PE → WFI

Hypothesis H6 suggests that **Prison Environment (PE)** mediates the relationship between **Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)** and the **Well-being of Female Inmates (WFI)**. The findings show that the indirect effect of GSP on WFI through PE is moderately strong, with a standardized path coefficient (β) of 0.270. This indicates that PE plays a significant role in mediating the effect of GSP on WFI. Specifically, the data suggest that improvements in gender-specific policies lead to better prison environments, which in turn enhance the physical and mental well-being of female inmates. The statistical analysis confirms the significance of this mediation effect, with a T-statistic of 6.655, well above the critical value of 1.96, indicating that the effect is statistically significant. Additionally, the P-value of 0.000 further corroborates the strength of this mediation, as it is much lower than the threshold of 0.05.

Therefore, we accept Hypothesis H6, affirming that the prison environment significantly mediates the relationship between gender-specific policies and the well-being of female inmates. This suggests that improving the conditions within correctional facilities is a crucial mechanism through which gender-sensitive policies positively impact the well-being of incarcerated women.

Hypothesis H7: GSP → RP → WFI

Hypothesis H7 posits that **Rehabilitation Programs (RP)** mediate the relationship between **Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)** and **Well-being of Female Inmates (WFI)**. The results indicate that the indirect effect of GSP on WFI through RP is relatively weaker compared to the mediation effect of PE. The standardized path coefficient for this relationship is 0.047, suggesting that although RP does mediate the relationship between GSP and WFI, its effect is not as strong as that of PE. However, the statistical significance of this mediation effect is confirmed, with a T-statistic of 2.554, which is above the threshold of 1.96, and a P-value of 0.011, which is below the 0.05 significance level.

We accept Hypothesis H7, confirming that RP plays a significant, though relatively weaker, mediating role in the relationship between GSP and WFI. This suggests that while gender-specific

policies have a positive influence on rehabilitation programs, their overall impact on the well-being of female inmates is less pronounced compared to the influence of the prison environment.

Conclusion

Both mediation hypotheses (H6 and H7) have been accepted. The analysis demonstrates that **Prison Environment (PE)** plays a strong mediating role in the relationship between **Gender-Specific Policies (GSP)** and **Well-being of Female Inmates (WFI)**. This suggests that improving the physical and psychological conditions within correctional facilities is a key pathway through which gender-responsive policies enhance the well-being of female inmates. On the other hand, **Rehabilitation Programs (RP)** act as a weaker mediator, with their effect on well-being being less significant compared to the prison environment. While gender-specific policies contribute to the enhancement of rehabilitation programs, their overall impact on female inmates' well-being remains more limited.

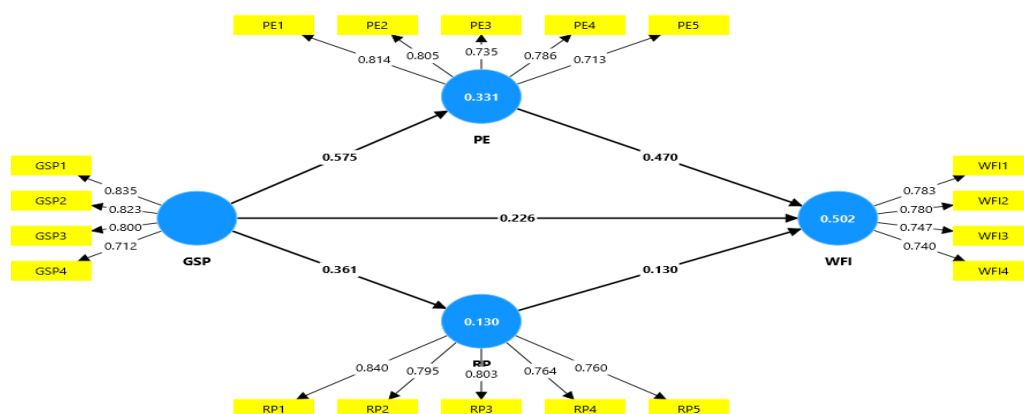


Figure 1: Structural Model

Conclusions and Suggestions

Based on the findings and data analysis presented in this study, significant reforms are necessary to address the challenges affecting female inmates. This section outlines key recommendations and countermeasures, focusing on strengthening institutional policies, expanding rehabilitation programs, improving mental health support, enhancing prison conditions, and fostering community engagement. A major gap identified is the lack of gender-responsive policies tailored to the specific needs of female inmates. Studies show that when prison policies incorporate gender-sensitive interventions such as trauma-informed care and reproductive health services, rehabilitation outcomes improve significantly (Covington & Bloom, 2003). The Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act of 2014 was introduced to reform the prison system and shift its focus from punishment to rehabilitation. However, inadequate implementation has led to persistent human rights violations in detention facilities. Strengthening institutional policies should involve implementing gender-sensitive correctional frameworks that prioritize healthcare access, mental health support, and vocational training. These policies should align with international human rights standards, including the United Nations Bangkok Rules, which emphasize humane treatment for female inmates.

Rehabilitation programs play a crucial role in reducing recidivism and ensuring successful reintegration into society (Lo et al., 2020; Sorbello et al., 2002). However, only 27% of female inmates in Sierra Leone participate in skill-based rehabilitation programs, significantly limiting their post-incarceration employment prospects. To address this, correctional institutions should expand vocational training programs in fields such as cosmetology, agriculture, tailoring, and entrepreneurship to provide women with marketable skills (Tripodi et al., 2011). Enhancing access to formal education, including literacy classes, high school equivalency programs, and

computer literacy training, would improve self-esteem and critical thinking skills among inmates (Engstrom & van Ginneken, 2022). Furthermore, integrating trauma-informed counseling and peer support groups can help address the psychological distress that many female inmates experience, as studies show that participation in such programs improves emotional resilience and reduces post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (Blakeslee, 2014). Mental health remains one of the most neglected aspects of prison healthcare, with high rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD among female inmates (Kupers, 2005). The prison system in Sierra Leone lacks adequate mental health professionals, and many incarcerated women do not receive psychological care (Bangura, 2022). Addressing this issue requires training correctional staff in trauma-informed approaches to ensure they can identify and respond to signs of mental distress among inmates. Increasing the number of mental health professionals in detention centers would enable the provision of regular therapy and psychiatric care (Harrison & Rainey, 2009). Additionally, gender-sensitive substance abuse treatment programs should be introduced, as many incarcerated women struggle with addiction linked to prior trauma and socio-economic hardships. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of access to clean water, and inadequate healthcare services remain pressing concerns in Sierra Leone's correctional centers. Reports indicate that pregnant women often give birth in unhygienic conditions and that inmates have limited access to basic medical supplies (Olugbenga-Bello et al., 2013). Improving prison healthcare facilities is critical to ensuring access to prenatal and postnatal care, menstrual hygiene products, and essential medications (Blanchette & Gobeil, 2022). Enhancing infrastructure to provide clean drinking water and adequate sanitation facilities is equally important. Establishing gender-specific prison wings would improve safety, dignity, and overall living conditions for female inmates. Reintegration remains one of the most significant challenges for formerly incarcerated women, as many lack employment opportunities and social support systems upon release (Ilić et al., 2024). Research indicates that post-release support programs reduce recidivism rates and improve overall quality of life (Plugge et al., 2006). Strengthening partnerships between correctional facilities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can help provide essential post-incarceration support, such as housing, employment training, and mental health services (Beer et al., 2007). Implementing structured mentorship programs would enable formerly incarcerated women to receive guidance and employment assistance upon release. Moreover, developing alternative sentencing options, such as community service or rehabilitation-focused probation, could provide a more effective approach for non-violent female offenders while reducing prison overcrowding. The implementation of these countermeasures strengthening institutional policies, expanding rehabilitation programs, improving mental health services, enhancing prison conditions, and promoting post-release support is essential for fostering a more humane and effective correctional system. By adopting these reforms, correctional facilities can shift from punitive approaches to rehabilitation-focused strategies, improving the overall well-being of female inmates and ensuring better reintegration into society.

Recommendations

In conclusion, this study has critically examined the impact of the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act of 2014 on the well-being of female inmates, highlighting the systemic challenges they face in detention. Despite legislative reforms aimed at transforming prisons into rehabilitative institutions, significant gaps remain in policy implementation, access to healthcare, mental health support, legal representation, and rehabilitation programs. The findings reveal that female inmates in Sierra Leone endure harsh living conditions, inadequate healthcare services, and limited opportunities for reintegration, which collectively undermine their physical, psychological, and social well-being. The correctional system in Sierra Leone, like many others in developing countries, suffers from severe overcrowding, which exacerbates existing challenges. The Freetown Correctional Centre, originally designed to hold 300 inmates, now accommodates over 1,300 prisoners, leading to deteriorating living standards. Overcrowding contributes to poor sanitation, limited access to clean water, and insufficient food supplies, all of which negatively impact inmates' health. The situation is particularly dire for female inmates, many of whom

require specialized healthcare services, including maternal and reproductive health support. However, due to resource constraints and poor policy enforcement, these essential services are either absent or grossly inadequate. Pregnant women in detention often give birth under unsafe and unhygienic conditions, highlighting the urgent need for gender-responsive healthcare policies within correctional facilities.

Another critical issue identified in this study is the lack of adequate mental health services for incarcerated women. Research indicates that a significant percentage of female inmates suffer from depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), often as a result of pre-incarceration trauma, prolonged incarceration, and social isolation. However, mental health services remain severely limited, with few correctional facilities employing trained mental health professionals. The absence of psychological support systems not only affects inmates' well-being but also increases the likelihood of recidivism upon release. Addressing these mental health concerns requires urgent reforms, including the recruitment of trained professionals, the integration of trauma-informed care, and the establishment of peer support networks within correctional institutions.

Rehabilitation and reintegration programs are also insufficient, leaving female inmates unprepared for life after incarceration. The study found that only 27% of female inmates participate in vocational training programs, limiting their employment prospects upon release. Effective rehabilitation requires expanding access to education, vocational skills training, and entrepreneurship programs tailored to women's needs. Providing opportunities for inmates to develop marketable skills can empower them to reintegrate into society successfully and reduce their likelihood of reoffending. Furthermore, community-based rehabilitation programs should be strengthened to ensure that female inmates receive continued support post-incarceration, including housing assistance, employment opportunities, and mental health care. The role of institutional policies in addressing these challenges cannot be overstated. While the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act of 2014 laid the foundation for prison reforms, its effectiveness has been undermined by weak implementation and a lack of accountability. A more structured approach is necessary to enforce gender-sensitive policies, improve prison conditions, and ensure compliance with international human rights standards such as the United Nations Bangkok Rules. Strengthening oversight mechanisms, increasing funding for correctional services, and training prison staff in gender-responsive practices are essential steps toward creating a more humane and rehabilitative prison environment.

Applications and limitations

This study provides critical insights into gender-specific correctional policies and their impact on female inmates under the Sierra Leone Correctional Service Act, 2014. Its findings can support policy reform by highlighting gaps in healthcare, rehabilitation, and protection against gender-based violence within Sierra Leone's correctional system. Additionally, the study contributes to human rights advocacy by assessing prison conditions against international standards such as the Bangkok Rules, ensuring that female inmates receive adequate legal protections. Furthermore, the research informs judicial and correctional training, guiding prison officials and policymakers toward gender-sensitive approaches that better address the unique challenges faced by incarcerated women. By allowing comparative analysis with gender-responsive correctional strategies in other countries, the study enriches discussions on global prison reforms and strategies for improving female inmate well-being.

Despite its contributions, the study faces several limitations, particularly regarding data accessibility, as restricted access to correctional facilities may limit comprehensive reporting on female inmates' experiences. Additionally, generalizability remains a challenge, as focusing on Freetown's Pa Demba Road Maximum Security Prison may not fully reflect conditions in other correctional institutions across Sierra Leone. Resource constraints also pose hurdles in the

practical implementation of recommended reforms, with financial limitations, political dynamics, and systemic weaknesses affecting policy execution. Lastly, ethical considerations must be carefully addressed, ensuring confidentiality and informed consent for female inmates participating in interviews. Acknowledging these limitations ensures a balanced evaluation, reinforcing the importance of gender-responsive correctional reforms while accounting for practical challenges in execution.

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