SUMMARY
The prison institution is established all over the world with the vision and mission of reformation and rehabilitation of inmates. However, the relevance of Nigerian prisons has been challenged for its glaring inability to reform inmates and thus guards against relapsing into crime and criminality. The Nigerian prison system has over the years witnessed ever-increasing rate of recidivism. It is on this premise that the study examined the impact of prison conditions and social forces on criminal recidivism in Nigeria. The study made use of secondary data which were analytically reviewed and descriptively analysed. It is established in this study that criminal recidivism is caused by a plethora of social forces: situational, personal, familial, structural, psychological, economic, drug abuse, criminal association, and peer influence and pressure. The Nigerian prison system is characterised by debilitating conditions which subject inmates to inhumane treatment, thereby compelling them to import or form criminal subculture in order to cope with the hostile life that is commonplace in the Nigerian prison system. Prison inmates either import or form inmate code with its resultant ‘prisonisation’ within and outside the walls of prison institution and therefore internalised and institutionalised them over time through deviant learning and symbiotic relationships. Drawing corroboration from the United Nations’ Standard Minimum Rules (UNSMR) specifications, which Nigeria is a signatory to, the study recommended that living conditions in all Nigeria prisons should reflect human dignity in all aspects: accommodation, hygiene, sanitation, food, clothing, medical facilities, accoutrements of modern prisons, and the like.

INTRODUCTION
The prison system of any country plays the central role of rehabilitation and thus prevents and controls criminal recidivism. Prison is a regimented, transitional and total enclosure where people who are convicted after trial and are physically confined for rehabilitation with a view to making them law-abiding and acceptable
citizens in the mainstream society upon release. It is also a place where crime suspects awaiting trial are detained until the determination of their case. The prison serves as an institution where detainees or inmates undergo reformatory and rehabilitative training to be law-abiding after release, thereby making reintegration easy and possible and, more importantly, to deter would-be offenders and released inmates from relapsing into crime and criminality.

However, the rate at which released inmates repeatedly perpetrate crime and violence and consequently sent back to prison after release has cast aspersions on the function and relevance of social reintegration or social support programmes in Nigerian prisons. Although a global social problem that is caused by various social forces or factors and circumstances, recidivism seems to be on the increase in Nigeria as a result of dysfunctional prison system. Chukwumerije (2012), for instance, admitted that statistics from 19 prisons in Nigeria shows that over 60% of inmates are recidivists, and this is an indication that the prison as a ‘reformatory or rehabilitation home’ has failed in correcting antisocial behaviour of inmates. Obioha (1995), in Chukwudi (2012), lamented that prisons have become a training ground for criminals instead of rehabilitation home in Nigeria. The population that goes in and out of prisons shows that there are some problems in the system. The Nigerian prison has not been able to live up to expectations. The expectations are that the Nigerian prison has no positive impact on the lives and vocations of inmates which has raised questions that have not yet been completely addressed on the system’s functionality and existence.

The Nigerian prison system is characterised by debilitating conditions which subject inmates to inhuman treatment. People serving time or awaiting trial often suffer a number of deprivations and challenges: they are physically, socially, psychologically and economically abused and neglected; their inalienable rights are systematically infringed upon; denied conjugal visits unlike in the Western prisons; indiscriminately confined in overcrowded cells irrespective of age, nature of crime and medical conditions. Consequently, Adetula and Fatusin (2010) argued, the penal institutions: the justice, the police, the prisons yard and the operative ways of administering justice are believed more to bring about breeding and enhancing criminal behaviour and recidivism than serving deterrence, repentance, reformatory and reconciliatory attitudes between ex-convicts and people in free society.

In Nigeria, it is a common sight to see the remand, convicted, the young and older inmates, and petty thieves and hardened criminals indiscriminately confined together. This development is against the United Nations’ Standard Minimum Rules (UNSMR) specifications, which has it that “prisoners should be locked up according to their various categories. Reforms are needed in the areas of problem of overcrowding, poor staff morale, inadequate funding, need for new rights for prisoners, rights to good food, right to clean environment, right to human dignity,
need for other alternatives to imprisonment” (Chukwudi, 2012: 38). Fhooblall, Chittoo and Bholoa (2011: 53) went a step further to bring to the fore the UN Standard Minimum Rules: “the purpose and justification of a sentence of imprisonment is ultimately to protect society against crime, and that this end can only be achieved if the period of imprisonment is to ensure, so far as possible, that upon returning to society the offender is not only willing but also able to lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life”.

Interestingly, it makes sense at this juncture to explain social reintegration/social support programmes to enable us keep the central problem of this study in perspective. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2006), social reintegration in the prison setting refers to assisting with the moral, vocational and educational development of the imprisoned individual via working practices, educational, cultural, and recreational activities available in prison. It includes addressing the special needs of offenders, with programmes covering a range of problems, such as substance addiction, mental or psychological conditions, anger and aggression, among others, which may have led to offending and reoffending behaviour. Conversely, the Nigerian Prison Act is said to be obsolete and antithetical to the forward-looking and responsive growing trends in prison reformation/rehabilitation philosophy and or ethical standards. The Act still reflects and holds close to the then apparently institutionalised British idiosyncrasies which placed much emphasis on retributive and punitive aspect of incarceration in sharp contrast to the rehabilitative and reformative ideals of prison institution. As a result of this ugly development, the Nigerian prison system is now witnessing an alarming rate of both first-time criminals and recidivists.

Considering the UN Standard Minimum Rules which Nigeria is a signatory to, the central problem of this study is to find out what has gone wrong in the Nigerian prison system that it could not effectively reform inmates and, as a matter of fact, guard against criminal recidivism in the country. Could it be that there are social forces that have overwhelmed the reformation programmes? Or is it that the prison authorities only focus on keeping the prisoners away from the general public where the crimes are said to be committed? It is on this premise that the study sets out to critically assess the impacts of prison conditions and social forces on criminal recidivism in Nigeria.

**INFLUENCE OF PRISON SUBCULTURE ON CRIMINAL RECIDIVISM**

The criminal justice administrators, especially Correctional Technicians (Prison Warders) are not magicians; they can only succeed in stripping of offenders’ title, property, identity and power but not their covert behaviour which could be ‘criminogenic’ in nature. The number of persons incarcerated and those released but rearrested and re-incarcerated suggest that criminal subculture exists in the prison and by implication gives rise to criminal recidivism. As people in the free
society internalise the norms and values of their society, so do inmates strive to assimilate the ‘inmate codes’ within their subculture at all cost although try as much as possible to keep the conventional prison rules and regulations. But since the values of the inmates’ subcultural codes are always discordant with both the official prison and mainstream societal values, prisoners must adjust, readjust and strictly adhere to the self-imposed inmates’ rules and regulations or argots technically known as the ‘inmate code’ or ‘prisonisation’ in the crime literature. What is more, that which is considered unacceptable in the outside society may be encouraged and handsomely rewarded in the prison subculture that prevails in the walls of the total institution.

Living conditions in prisons, according to Giddens (2006), tend to drive a wedge between inmates and the outside society; they cannot adjust their behaviours to the norms of the society. Prisoners have to come to terms with an environment quite distinct from ‘the outside’ and the habits and attitudes they learn in prisons are quite often exactly the opposite of those they are supposed to acquire. The same source further argued that inmates under these debilitating conditions may develop a grudge against ordinary citizenry, learn to accept violence as normal, gain contacts with seasoned criminals who they maintain when freed, and acquire criminal skills about which they previously knew little. For this reason, prisons are sometimes referred to as ‘university of crime’. Based on this, Chukwumerije (2012) inferred that one of the yardsticks for judging the effectiveness of prisons system and its reformatory capabilities is the number of inmates who remain outside the prison wall after completing their terms of imprisonment.

Unfortunately, the preceding circumstances inhibit rehabilitation of inmates. With the inmate code and or ‘prisonisation’ so internalised by inmates while in prison, it will be difficult or impossible for them to pass through successful reformation and reintegration that could insulate them against committing further crimes and consequent re-conviction (recidivism). The prison subculture is always in antithesis to the official and ideal aims of incarceration. It prepares and fortifies inmates against the general acceptable culture of the prison and society at large, by not teaching them all the good aspects of both prison and societal norms and values. This process, according to Iwarimie-Jaja (2003), begins as new inmates learn to live by the tenets of their status as prisoners by adapting to conditions and influencing factors which breed and deepen the culture of criminality and antisociality in them and make them the object of criminalistics ideology in the prison community.

Obviously, the concept of subculture is perpetuated by primary groups in prisons. The new inmates learn criminal culture of the primary group they join and associate with in prison. As the new inmates continue to associate with their primary group in prison, they develop a serious criminal attitude during their
period of imprisonment. Some primary groups in prisons are committed to the subculture of violence. This group teaches their members to accept violence as a legitimated means to accomplish other criminal acts. In addition to the use of violence, primary groups teach their members to be aggressive in perpetuating crime. Prison subculture influences most inmates to become recidivists (Iwarimie-Jaja, 2003). Critically assessed, inmates form subculture in prison as a survival mechanism which enables them ease off the ‘pain of imprisonment’ and consequently become adaptive to the ennui prison environment. They engage in this aberrant behaviour to make themselves adjustable to the uninhabitable Nigerian prisons. Regrettably, this ugly development in our prisons has rather grounded both the ‘Stars’ (amateur or first-time offenders) and seasoned criminals in the tradition of crime and thus makes them ‘repeaters’ (recidivists) over time.

**IMPACTS OF PRISON CONDITIONS ON CRIMINAL RECIDIVISM**

In an increasing competitive world with high crime rate, prison is seen and perceived as an institution where individual offenders are reformed and rehabilitated to be law-abiding and acceptable human being in the society after lease. It is on this premise that the International Centre for Prison Studies (ICPS) in 2008 draws our attention to the ideal type and nature of modern standard prisons which stipulate that male and female prisoners should be kept in separate locations and that the modern prisons should be divided into wings. The modern prisons are expected to house, among other correctional facilities, a main entrance, a religious facility, educational facility, a gym, a health care centre or hospital, a segregation unit, safe cells for people under constant visual observation, a visiting section, a death row (for those awaiting execution), staff accommodation area, and services such as kitchens, industrial or agricultural plant and a recreational area (ICPS, 2008 cited in Otu, 2011). On the contrary, Nigeria is yet to implement both the United Nations’ Standard Minimum Rule and the International Centre for Prison Studies. This is because all these functional facilities, we observed, are grossly lacking in our prisons.

Certain characteristics of inmates’ institutional career affect their adaptation to prison and rehabilitation so as to insulate them against relapsing and easy reintegration into the outside world. These prison conditions include, among others, indiscriminate confinement of inmates irrespective of age, crime committed and state of health of inmates; age of onset; prison gang membership; overcrowding; and paucity of or non-availability of the state-of-the-art rehabilitation programmes. This belief draws our attention to the way in which prison structures and processes (regimentation, deprivations, application of harsh prison rules and regulations, and dehumanisation of inmates, etc) influence reaction to incarceration and reformation. In keeping with ICPS and UNSMR parlance, some scholars like Pollock (1986) and Mandaraka-Shephard (1986) are of the belief that
inmates in institutions with stricter disciplinary and operational regimes that emphasise custody rather than treatment, and with physically harsher environments tend to display more deviant attitudes towards the institution, whereas those in more treatment-oriented and less bureaucratic institutions tend to form stronger group association and easy adaptation and rehabilitation.

On that score, the relevance, functions and nature of contemporary Nigerian prisons have been a subject of discussion among some scholars. An increasing number of concerned observers have raised fear on the inability of the Nigerian prison system to reform inmates and thus guard against reoffending, recidivism. For instance, Atere (2000) and Oshodi (2010) stressed that the Nigerian prison system is characterised by a picture of hellish conditions: tortures, hunger, inhuman treatment, congestion, disease and premature death; and these conditions directly or indirectly encourage recidivism. Nigerian prisons generally seem to be one of the worst in the world. Our prisons are overcrowded with both convicted criminals and suspects awaiting trial. Otu (2011) substantiated this observation when she described the Abakaliki prisons as appearing to have the worst conditions of all prisons in Nigeria. The Abakaliki prison has the capacity to accommodate 387 inmates, both male and female, but now houses 871 inmates. Hence, the present study stands to argue that this ugly trend cuts across prisons in contemporary Nigeria, although with a slight deal of variation among them. Dambazau (2007) observed that inmates in Nigerian prisons are meted with punitive measure: they are poorly fed and clothed, and live in deplorable conditions that do not augur well for proper rehabilitation (with its consequent recidivism). Nigerian prisons are not designed for reform but rather prisoners are used mainly for public works. The system is poorly run, although the prison conditions may vary from one prison to another in the ‘disorganisation, callousness and exploitation.’ The Nigerian prisons look like ‘a relic of abandoned civilisation,’ Dambazau ululated!

The Nigerian prisons have a few things in common: congestion, dirt and inadequate medical and rehabilitation facilities. As a result, some inmates recidivate few months after their release while many of them fall sick and die before they are tried or during serving time (Alabi & Alabi, 2011 quoting Okunola, 2002; Amnesty International, 2008). The Nigeria Prisons Service Annual Report (NPSAR) records that the Nigerian prisons are filled with people whose human rights are systematically violated. The Report further revealed that 65 percent of the inmates in most of the Nigerian prisons are awaiting trial, a considerable number of them are too poor to be able to pay lawyers, and only one in seven of those awaiting trial has legal representation. Generally, Nigerian prisons do not fulfill the Minimum International Standard; inmates are locked up all day long, buckets are used as toilets in most cells, most of the inmates are denied visitors,
there is overcrowding, and lack of food rich in nutrient (NPSAR, 2008 cited in Otu, 2011; Otu, Otu & Eteng, 2013).

Supporting the above painted-condition, available literature reveals that the size of Nigerian prison cells is rather small for the number of prisoners they now hold. For instance, the result of Iwarimie-Jaja’s (2003) study reveals that 129 prisons in Nigeria play host to about 60,000 inmates. This gross inadequacy of space has aborted the policy regulation of keeping lesser criminals away from the hardened ones. As a result of the increase in inmate take-in, there is an indiscriminate mixing of prisoners. This means that the nation’s prisons are overstretched beyond their normal capacity. Nigeria has about 240 prisons spread across the 36 states, including Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, with the capacity of about 47,800 inmates. However, the total number of inmates in Nigerian prisons as at 2010 was put at about 85,000 with highest number of them on awaiting trial, followed by recidivism offenders (Alabi & Alabi, 2011 citing the Nigerian Prisons Service Annual Report, 2010).

The nature and conditions of Nigerian prisons encourage recidivism. The Nigerian prisons are overcrowded and both socially and physically disorganised—thereby posing threat to the social, psychological and medical well-being of inmates therein. Otu et al. (2013: 1-2) recapped that the “Nigerian prisons lack basic infrastructure and social amenities. The electrical power supply is very erratic. There are no recreational facilities and social support programmes are poorly and inadequately provided”. The overcrowding and other harsh conditions in Nigerian prisons with their concomitant effects are inimical to inmates’ rehabilitation, and this regrettably does not guard released inmates against reoffending upon release or guarantees effective reintegration into the mainstream society. The fact remains that the present prison system in Nigeria was designed and constructed during the colonial era for different purposes than what the criminal justice system requires today. These conditions undoubtedly do not augur well for proper rehabilitation of inmates so as to insulate them from recidivating after release.

Chukwumerije (2012) submitted that after imprisonment care, which is supposed to reduce the number of recidivists, is hampered by the inability of the prison service to provide tools and funds for the discharging inmates to start their own trade. This author reviewed the report of the Prison Service Annual Report from 2000 through to the present to justify his claims. The report indicates that only 119 inmates could be given trade tools out of 6,183 inmates discharged during this period. And such is the parlous state of welfare care to inmates that the nation may continue to expend scarce fund to recycle ill-reformed criminals, who interact with first convicts, thereby neutralising any positive impact on the inmates. Chukwumerije further commented that discharging a hapless and helpless ex-convict without vocational skills and tools into the bareness and void of an uncaring
and self-serving outside world is merely to create a stronger case for return to crime (recidivism). Little wonder therefore that Cunneen and Luke (2007) concluded that recidivism studies are a common way of measuring the effectiveness of various criminal justice programmes and interventions while reoffending is a major overall performance indicator for the criminal justice system. Others report that the prison with its correctional facilities is a school of crime and breeding ground for criminal socialisation and thus encourages recidivism (Giddens, 2006; Adetula & Fatusin, 2010; Alabi & Alabi, 2011; Obioha, 1995 in Chukwudi, 2012; Tenibiaje, 2013).

SOCIAL FORCES RESPONSIBLE FOR CRIMINAL RECIDIVISM

There is no mono-causal risk factor for criminal recidivism; a number of variables are responsible for its occurrence or perpetration. However, only the social forces and some socially related factors which contribute to offending and reoffending behaviour will be dissected in this study. Acknowledging the fact that crime is caused by numerous societal variables within and outside individual offenders, Tenibiaje (2013) noted that situational, personal interpersonal, familial, structural, cultural, and economic factors which relate to environment in criminal conduct allow certain individuals to get into prison. Although the authors underscored the relevance of Tenibiaje’s postulation in this study, they somewhat differ from this popular belief by taken a step further to added or be explicit that these social forces do not only cause some people to commit crime and be remanded but also, to a large extent, can predict released inmates’ eventual re-entry and re-admission into the prison custody. The same Tenibiaje, citing Alberta (2000), suggested that getting out of prison and going back to prison (recidivism), which he termed ‘risk factors’, ‘predictors’ or ‘correlates’ are present in an individual who has not yet committed a crime, may be considered predictive of criminal involvement, and may include aspects of a person’s character and life experience which have been identified as being strongly associated with criminal behaviour.

Through the use of meta-analysis technique, Gendreau, Little and Goggin (1996) identified dynamic risk factors and static risk factors as social predictors of recidivism. The dynamic risk factors fluctuate more rapidly over time and reflect internal states or temporary circumstance of the individual such as attitudes and cognition. Static risk factor represents the demographic or criminal history variables which are determined beforehand such as gender, age when first convicted of an offence, having a parent with a criminal record, present age, types of offence committed, among others. Gendreau and his associates argued that the strongest predictors of recidivism were dynamic risk factors and ‘criminogenic needs’ which are referred to as a cluster of factors, and they include: criminal peers, criminal history or history of antisocial behaviour, social achievement, and family factors. The weaker predictors are intellectual functioning, personal stress, and social class of origin. Indeed, the present researchers are of the conception
that both the strongest and the weaker factors that give rise to crime may in one way or another have a strong influence on some released inmates relapsing into crime and criminal lifestyles, despite passing through rehabilitative processes.

Peer group influence or pressure is another powerful social force responsible for criminal recidivism. Certain individuals may mount pressure on their peers in a manner that can lure them into crime and criminality. Direct or indirect behavioural learning through modeling, imitation and emulation is one of the characteristics of peer group subculture, and some offences are common among youngsters and they are committed in a group setting. According to McGuire (2009) in Tenibiaje (2013), effect of the peer group and the pressure this may exert towards experimentation and other manifestations of growing independent of youths are cases in point on criminality and recidivism. The peer generation effects have to do with the link that resides in pattern of social interaction inside such groupings. It has been established in various scholarly works that one risk factor for criminal behaviour (including recidivism) is an absence of strong social bonds with people who engage in prosocial behaviour (Agnew & Bresing 1997; Carr & Vandiver, 2001; Kosterman, Hawkings, Abbot, Hill, Herrenkhol & Catalano, 2005; Beaver, Shutt, Boutwell, Ratchford, Roberts & Barness, 2008; Goldner, Peters, Richards & Pearce, 2010; Murray & Farrington, 2010). Besides absence of prosocial networks and bonds associated with crime, the study deduced that spending great deal of time with older relatives and friends who commit crime can be a stronger predictor of crime and criminal recidivism, especially when such act is wittingly or unwitting rewarded by these ‘role models’ instead of the contrary, frowning at it.

Another strong social factor responsible for recidivism is substance abuse. The prevalence of substance abuse problems among inmates has prompted some observers like McKean and Ransford (2004) to theorise that drug or substance abuse is a primary cause of recidivism. Drugs and alcohol are clearly major problems relating to both crime and recidivism. Although the drug crime connection is powerful, the true relationship between them is still uncertain because many users have had a history of criminal activity before the onset of their substance abuse (Speakart & Anglin, 1986). It is possible that chronic criminal offenders begin to abuse drugs and alcohol after they had engaged in crime (crime causes drug abuse) or substance abusers turn to a life of crime to support their habits (drug abuse causes crime) (Siegel, 2008); drug use and crime co-occur in individuals (both crime and drug abuse are caused by some other common factors) (Weil, Loeber & White, 2004).

CONCLUSION
In the light of the foregoing, we see that there is interplay of numerous social forces within and outside the prison that contribute in one way or another to the ever-increasing rate of criminal recidivism in Nigeria. Specifically, the study looked into
the influence of prison subculture on recidivism, impacts of prison conditions on criminal recidivism, and social forces responsible for criminal recidivism. The nature and conditions of Nigerian prisons encourage recidivism. The Nigerian prisons are overcrowded and grossly lack functional facilities for proper reformation and rehabilitation of inmates. By implication, the overcrowding, unkempt nature and other harsh conditions in Nigerian prisons are inimical to inmates’ rehabilitation. These harmful conditions undoubtedly encourage the formation of criminal subculture within and even outside the prison environment, and this state of affairs does not guard released inmates against reoffending upon release or guarantee their effective reintegration into the mainstream society.

The study revealed that criminal recidivism is caused by a multiplicity of factors: situational, personal, familial, structural, psychological and economic, among others. The Nigerian prison system lacks the accoutrements for inmates’ reformation and rehabilitation. Even the few available correctional facilities are in moribund or so obsolete that they are incapable of rehabilitating and empowering inmates upon release. All these predictors of criminal recidivism are strongly linked to the structural strain associated with criminal subculture that is commonplace in the Nigerian prison system. Peer group influence or pressure is a common characteristic of subcultural gangs and strong risk-factor for criminal recidivism. The peer group subculture is characterised by criminogenic modelling, imitation and consequent emulation and experimentation of criminal behaviour, paves way for learning opportunities for criminal enterprise. It is believed that these two-way means (give-and-take) of learning criminal behaviour within a subculture could either take place while a person is in the prison (before release), or in the mainstream society prior to incarceration.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations, which are by no means exhaustive, are made:

1. As recommended by the United Nations’ (UN) Standard Minimum Rules (SMR) specifications, which Nigeria is a signatory to, the study recommends that living conditions in Nigerian prisons should reflect human dignity in all aspects: accommodation, hygiene, sanitation, food, clothing, medical facilities, accoutrements of modern prisons, and the like.
2. Prisons are closed system, and it is high time they are opened to some kind of positive and constructive public input. In other words, carefully selected individual(s) should be authorised to visit prisons and give independent and reliable reports on them to appropriate authorities for implementation.
3. The Federal Government of Nigeria should realise that the process of reformation and rehabilitation of offenders is an integral aspect of the total process of social engineering and political reconstruction. Therefore, the
development of prisons should be considered in the national development plans.

4. Finally, the development of prisons should be planned in a systematic manner, taking into consideration the goals they are poised to achieve and the progress of implementation of such plans should constantly be monitored and appraised at regular intervals.
REFERENCES


