



Original

Assessment of Knowledge and Perception of Inmates regarding Custodial sentences in Jigawa state

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Article history: Received 10 July 2024, Reviewed 3 September 2024, Accepted for publication 10 September 2024

Abstract

Background: This research study delves into the analysis of custodial sentences in the context of the Nigerian correctional system, focusing on Jigawa State. The investigation aims to unravel offenders' demographic profiles and understand the population's beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions concerning these sentencing options. Through a comprehensive analysis of data collected from a diverse sample, this research contributes valuable insights into the effectiveness of custodial sentences and their potential impact on reformation, rehabilitation, and crime reduction.

Method: The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across various demographic groups, such as gender, age, educational background, and employment status. A structured questionnaire with interviews was used as the primary data collection tool.

Result: The analysis reveals a nuanced picture of beliefs at different levels, encompassing individual perspectives, group dynamics, thematic trends, consensual attitudes, and aggregate viewpoints. This research's conceptual framework is essential for establishing a structured understanding of how custodial sentences relate to the demographic profile of crimes in Jigawa State.

Conclusion: This framework is informed by existing theories and empirical evidence in the fields of criminology, sociology, and criminal justice. It guides the research by presenting the key variables, their interrelationships, and the expected outcomes.

Keywords: Custodial sentences, demographic profile of offenders, rehabilitation, reintegration, learning to commit crimes.



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How to cite this article:

Rasheed MW, Abdullahi MI, Ya'u NA, Adegboye OA, Olayiwola IO, Adekunle AA, Idowu NA, Richard SK. Assessment of Knowledge and Perception of Inmates regarding Custodial sentences in Jigawa state. The Nigerian Health Journal 2024; 24(3):1514-1522.
<https://doi.org/10.60787/tnhj.v24i3.864>





Introduction

Custodial sentences involve the confinement of offenders in correctional facilities, commonly referred to as prisons or jails. These sentences are primarily justified by the goals of punishment, deterrence, incapacitation, and the protection of society. Imprisonment removes offenders from the community, limiting their capacity to commit further crimes and sending a message that society will not tolerate certain behaviors.¹

While custodial sentences serve as a means of punishment and deterrence, their effectiveness in achieving these objectives has been subject to debate. Critics argue that imprisonment alone does not adequately address the root causes of criminal behavior or contribute to long-term rehabilitation and successful reintegration.² The prison environment itself can be detrimental to an individual's mental and physical well-being, and the lack of access to education, vocational training, and support systems can hinder rehabilitation efforts.³

Moreover, custodial sentences can result in challenges during the reintegration process. The stigma associated with incarceration, limited employment prospects, and social isolation upon release can increase the risk of recidivism.⁴ The effectiveness of custodial sentences may also vary depending on the duration of the sentence, the availability of rehabilitative programs, and the quality of prison conditions.^{5,6}

In addition, it's important to note that incorporating the voices of inmates is essential for developing rehabilitation programs that address the specific needs and challenges faced by incarcerated individuals.⁷ Furthermore, Fazel et al emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between public perceptions and criminal justice policies, suggesting that informed policy decisions should be guided by an understanding of inmate perspectives.⁸

Nigeria has a network of correctional facilities, formerly known as prisons, where individuals serving custodial sentences are held. These facilities are operated by the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCS) and are designed to provide secure and humane custody for offenders. However, the conditions in many Nigerian correctional facilities have long been a cause for concern. There are issues of concern such as inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, poor sanitation, and limited access to healthcare and other essential services have been widely reported.⁹

In some cases, custodial facilities are overcrowded, leading to increased tension among inmates, compromised safety, and difficulties in maintaining proper hygiene and security. These conditions can hinder the effective management and rehabilitation of offenders, potentially undermining the goals of the custodial sentence.¹⁰ Efforts have been made by the Nigerian government and stakeholders to improve correctional facilities and address the issues of infrastructure and conditions militating against adequate reformation of inmates. More importantly, initiatives such as the ongoing prison reforms and the construction of new correctional centers aim to enhance living conditions and ensure the human rights of individuals in custody.¹¹

Moreover, a notable challenge in Nigerian Correctional facilities is overcrowding, with the capacity of these facilities often exceeded. The issue of overcrowding has far-reaching implications for the well-being of inmates and the overall functioning of the custodial system.¹²

Overcrowding can exacerbate the already challenging conditions in correctional facilities, including limited access to basic amenities, increased risk of disease transmission, and heightened levels of violence and tension among inmates. It also strains the capacity of the correctional system to provide effective rehabilitation programs and services.^{12,13}

Furthermore, overcrowding hampers the ability of correctional staff to adequately supervise and manage the inmate population, potentially compromising security and safety within the facilities. It also contributes to delays in court processes and access to justice, as individuals awaiting trial may be held in overcrowded facilities for extended periods¹³

Finally, addressing the issue of overcrowding requires comprehensive measures, including reforms in the criminal justice system, promotion of alternative sentencing options, improvement of infrastructure, and expediting legal processes to reduce pre-trial detention periods. Thus, this study aims to establish the assessment of the knowledge and perception of inmates regarding custodial sentences in Jigawa State, Nigeria. The custodial sentences have been extensively studied, but there are still notable gaps in the literature. These gaps include:

a) **Long-term outcomes of incarceration:** There is a need for research that examines the long-term effects of custodial sentences on offenders, including their reintegration into society, employment prospects, and overall well-being. Understanding the post-release



experiences and challenges faced by individuals who have served custodial sentences can inform policies and programs aimed at reducing recidivism and supporting successful reentry.

b) **Correctional facility conditions and their impact:**

While the conditions in custodial facilities have been widely documented, more research is needed to understand the specific effects of these conditions on inmate well-being, mental health, and rehabilitation outcomes. Exploring the relationship between facility conditions and factors such as violence, overcrowding, and access to educational and vocational programs can inform efforts to improve the custodial environment.

c) **Comparative analysis of custodial systems:**

Comparative studies that examine different custodial systems, both domestically and internationally, can provide valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches. Comparative research can shed light on innovative practices, policies, and programs that contribute to positive outcomes within custodial settings.

The existing evidence on custodial sentences reveals the following key findings:

a) **Correctional facilities and conditions:** Many correctional facilities in Nigeria face challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, poor sanitation, and overcrowding. These conditions can impact the well-being of inmates, compromise security, and hinder effective rehabilitation efforts.

b) **Overcrowding and its implications:** Overcrowding in custodial facilities is a significant concern, leading to increased tension, compromised safety, and limited access to essential services. Addressing overcrowding requires comprehensive measures, including reforms in the criminal justice system, promotion of alternative sentencing options, and improvements in infrastructure and legal processes.

c) **Rehabilitation programs and services:** Custodial sentences should incorporate effective rehabilitation programs and services to facilitate offender reintegration and reduce recidivism. However, the availability and effectiveness of such programs vary, with limited resources and competing priorities affecting their implementation within correctional facilities.

Method

Study Site

The study was conducted at the Nigerian Correctional Service facilities Dutse in Jigawa State which houses both custodial and non-custodial sentences. The state is located in the North West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The study setting encompasses the Nigerian Correctional Service facilities which provides a detailed

overview of the correctional system and its characteristics. This section explores the types of custodial and non-custodial sentences implemented within these facilities, the capacity and characteristics of the correctional institutions, the demographic composition of the inmate population, and the relationship with criminal justice system stakeholders. The Nigerian Correctional Service facilities in Jigawa State house both custodial and non-custodial sentences. Custodial sentences involve the physical confinement of offenders within prisons and detention centers, while non-custodial sentences offer alternative forms of punishment that allow offenders to serve their sentences in the community under specific conditions. Understanding the range of sentencing options available is crucial for analyzing the effectiveness of different approaches to offender management and rehabilitation.

The capacity and characteristics of correctional facilities play a significant role in the administration of custodial and non-custodial sentences. Factors such as infrastructure, amenities, security measures, and available resources shape the environment within which these sentences are implemented. Additionally, an examination of the capacity of the facilities provides insights into the challenges posed by overcrowding and the implications for offender management and rehabilitation efforts. The demographic composition of the inmate population within the correctional facilities in Jigawa State is an important aspect of the study setting. Analyzing the age, gender, socioeconomic background, and other relevant demographic variables helps identify any disparities or patterns related to the types of offenses committed, sentencing practices, and the effectiveness of custodial and non-custodial sentences. This information provides valuable insights into the representation of different population groups within the correctional system and the potential impact of criminal justice policies and practices on specific demographics. The study also encompasses the relationship between correctional facilities and various stakeholders within the criminal justice system. This includes interactions with judicial officials, law enforcement agencies, legal practitioners, and other relevant actors involved in the sentencing and management of offenders. Understanding these relationships sheds light on the dynamics and collaboration among different stakeholders in implementing custodial and non-custodial sentences, as well as the broader context in which sentencing decisions are made

Study Design

This is cross-sectional study using a simple stratified random sampling and purposive selection of



respondents, with data collection through questionnaires. Understanding these relationships sheds light on the dynamics and collaboration among different stakeholders in implementing custodial and non-custodial sentences, as well as the broader context in which sentencing decisions are made.

Target Population

The study population for this research consists of individuals who have been convicted or alleged to have committed crimes and are currently serving either non-custodial or custodial sentences at Nigerian correctional centers, Dutse, Jigawa State. By analyzing the demographic profile of these offenders, the study seeks to gain insights into any differences in characteristics such as age, gender, educational background, and employment status between the two groups. The study encompassed inmates convicted of various types of offenses, including but not limited to violent crimes, property crimes, drug offenses, and other criminal offenses. It aims to include inmates from diverse demographic backgrounds, including different age groups, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Sample Size Determination

The Taro Yamane formula is commonly used to calculate the sample size for a finite population¹⁴ with adjustment for a finite population, error margin of 5%, gave $n \approx 384$

Inclusion Criteria

Offense Type: The study will encompass inmates convicted of various types of offenses, including but not limited to violent crimes, property crimes, drug offenses, and other criminal offenses.

Sentencing Type: The study will include inmates who have received either non-custodial sentences (such as probation, community service, parole, fines, or other community-based programs) or custodial sentences (such as imprisonment) as per the Nigerian criminal justice system.

Demographic Diversity: The study aims to include inmates from diverse demographic backgrounds, including different age groups, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This criterion ensures the representation of various population groups within the correctional facilities.

Availability of Data: The study will include inmates for whom relevant data on their demographic profile, type of sentence, and offense are available in the records of the Nigerian Correctional Service facilities in Jigawa State. This criterion ensures that the necessary information is accessible for analysis and comparison.

Exclusion Criteria

Incomplete or Missing Data: Inmates with incomplete or missing data regarding their demographic profile, type of sentence, or offense in the records of the Nigerian Correctional Service facilities will be excluded from the study. This criterion ensures that the necessary information for analysis and comparison is complete and reliable.

Inadequate Sentence Information: Inmates for whom detailed information on the type of sentence (non-custodial or custodial) received is unavailable or unclear will be excluded. This criterion ensures that only inmates with clearly documented sentencing information are included in the study.

Inadequate Offense Information: Inmates for whom sufficient information regarding the nature of the offense committed is lacking or insufficient will be excluded. This criterion ensures that the study focuses on inmates with well-defined offense types, allowing for accurate comparisons.

Ineligibility for Study Participation: Inmates who are deemed ineligible or unable to participate in the study due to factors such as mental health conditions, language barriers, or other circumstances that impede their ability to provide informed consent or participate in research activities will be excluded.

Duplicate Records: In cases where duplicate records of inmates exist within the correctional facility's database, only one record will be included to avoid redundancy and ensure data integrity.

Data Collection Tool

The data collection instrument was collected through a structured questionnaire consisting of demographic questions (age, gender, ethnicity, religion, level of education, (primary, secondary, and tertiary), type of sentence with regards to custodial patterns of crimes or offenses committed (murder, rape, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, motor car theft, etc), employment status (employed, unemployed, underemployed), if employed monthly income, source of learning how to commit crimes (peer group, community, correctional centers, family, pornography, social media). Pilot testing was conducted to enhance the instrument's effectiveness.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through surveys and official records was subjected to statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the inmate population, the distribution of non-custodial and custodial sentences, and other relevant variables. Inferential statistics, such as chi-square tests,



regression analysis, or other appropriate statistical tests, would be applied to examine relationships and associations between variables.

Ethical Consideration

The research was conducted under the Declaration of Helsinki and the confidentiality of the patient was maintained. The ethical approval was obtained with registration number CHJG.105/VOL.II/53.

Results

3.1 Demographic Data of Respondents

The demographic data of respondents revealed that; 494 respondents representing 97% are males, while 15 representing 3% are females. As for the educational qualifications of respondents, 238 (48%) held Primary education, 32 (6.5%) held secondary education, 188 (38.1%) tertiary education, 38 (7.7%) had no formal education, and others held 0.4%. On marital status; 253 (50.9%) are married, 192 (38.4%) are single, and 53 (10.7%) are divorced/ separated/ widows. In view of the occupation, 399 (80.4%) are self-employed, 59 (11.9%) are unemployed, 2 (0.4%) are students, 15 (3%) are

farmers, 20 (4%) are business owners, while 1 (0.2%) is into farming and business.

3.2 Data Analysis

Most respondents (68.2%) were familiar with incarceration as a form of custodial sentence. Respondents identified various sources from which they learned about crime, with peer groups (75.2%) and the community (65%) being the most frequently cited sources. Social media (27.6%) and pornography (30.9%) were also mentioned, highlighting the role of technology and the internet in crime-related knowledge. The data suggested a strong link between economic factors and crime, as 95.8% of respondents believed that poverty led people to commit crimes for socioeconomic reasons. It was also noted that a significant majority (97.8%) thought that unemployment contributed to the crime rate.

Questionnaire Distribution Responses

In this section, the researcher provided a tabular overview of the distribution of questionnaires to respondents. The following table outlines the number of respondents for each question and the percentage of responses for multiple-choice questions:

Table 1: Questionnaire Distribution Responses

Questions	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Responses
Gender		
- Male	494	97%
- Female	15	3%
Educational Qualification		
- Primary School	238	48%
- Secondary School	32	6.5%
- Tertiary Education	188	38.1%
- No Formal Education	38	7.7%
- Others	2	0.4%
Occupation		
- Self-employed	399	80.4%
- Unemployed	59	11.9%
- Student	2	0.4%
- Farming	15	3%
- Business	20	4%
- Farming and Business	1	0.2%
Marital Status		
- Married	253	50.9%
- Single	192	38.4%
- Divorced	53	10.7%
Familiarity with Non-Custodial Sentences		
- Yes	337	67.9%
- No	150	30.3%
Familiarity with Types of Non-Custodial Sentences		
- Parole	64	13.7%



- Probation	54	11.5%
- Restorative Justice	280	59.8%
- Community Service	434	92.7%
- Others	12	2.6%
Familiarity with Incarceration as a Form of Custodial Sentence		
- Yes	337	68.2%
- No	120	24.3%
- Maybe	36	7.3%
Preference for Non-Custodial Sentence for Offense Correction		
- Yes	347	70.4%
- No	113	22.9%
- Prefer Not to Answer	37	7.5%
Preference for Non-Custodial Sentence (on a Scale of 5)		
- Agree	248	49.9%
- Extremely Agree	106	21.3%
- Neutral	131	26.4%
- Disagree	12	2.4%
Preference for Non-Custodial Sentence's Cost-Effectiveness (on a Scale of 5)		
- Agree	287	57.9%
- Disagree	71	14.3%
- Extremely Agree	122	24.5%
- Neutral	122	24.5%
- Extremely Disagree	13	2.6%
Recommendation of Non-Custodial Sentence Over Custodial Sentence to the Federal Government		
- Yes	342	69%
- No	48	9.7%
- Maybe	102	20.6%
Recommendation for Non-Custodial Sentence (on a Scale of 5)		
- Extremely Agree	206	41.7%
- Agree	152	30.7%
- Neutral	123	25%
- Disagree	16	3.2%
Recommendation for Custodial Sentence to the Federal Government		
- Yes	234	47.3%
- No	202	40.8%
- Maybe	59	11.9%
Recommendation for Custodial Sentence (on a Scale of 5)		
- Extremely Agree	99	20%

Discussion

Most respondents demonstrated an understanding of custodial indicating that the concept is relatively well-known within the study population. They also had the belief that crime is a learned behavior, with peer groups and communities as major sources of learning which strengthen the role of social influences in criminal behavior. Respondents linked crime to socioeconomic factors, particularly poverty and unemployment. The study highlighted the widely held belief that these demographic factors play a significant role in criminal activities. The strong consensus among respondents that

current sentencing practices adequately consider the demographic profile of offenders suggests a level of trust in the criminal justice system's fairness and equity.^{15,16}

In addition, there is a clear emphasis on addressing the root causes of crime, including socioeconomic factors, and a recognition of the role of social influences in criminal behavior. The findings underscore the importance of aligning criminal justice policies and practices with these evolving perceptions. In her seminal work, "Are Prisons Obsolete?" Angela Davis et al explore the



psychological toll of incarceration on individuals.¹⁷

Davis argues that custodial sentences not only serve as punitive measures for criminal behavior but also inflict profound emotional distress on inmates. Feelings of isolation, loss of autonomy, and the dehumanizing nature of imprisonment contribute to a sense of hopelessness among inmates, which were also attributed to the inmates' perception during the interview at the correctional centre. This finding is concordant with other reviewers.^{18,19} Shadd et al review, particularly in "Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives", highlights the significance of maintaining social connections during imprisonment.²⁰ Inmates often perceive a loss of connection with the outside world, leading to strained relationships with family and friends. Shad et al emphasize the crucial role that social ties play in successful reintegration into society post-release. Robert Martinson's et al controversial article, "What Works? Questions and Answers About Prison Reform" (1974), challenges the efficacy of rehabilitation within prison walls. Martinson's assertion that "nothing works" raised questions about the effectiveness of existing rehabilitation programs.²¹ Inmates' perceptions of custodial sentences are shaped by the availability and quality of rehabilitation efforts, with inadequate programs hindering personal development and preparation for life beyond bars. John Irwin and Donald Cressey, in "Thieves, Convicts, and the Inmate Culture", delve into the subculture within prisons, emphasizing the harsh realities inmates face.²² The prevalence of violence, power struggles, and the survival mentality within correctional facilities significantly influence inmates' perceptions of custodial sentences. The prison environment can impede an individual's focus on self-improvement and rehabilitation. In "The Scale of Imprisonment" (1995), Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins discuss the impact of the length of sentences on inmates.²³ Prolonged periods of incarceration can exacerbate negative effects, leading to a loss of hope and increased frustration. Inmates facing lengthy custodial sentences often struggle to envision a meaningful future outside of prison walls, further influencing their overall perception of the criminal justice system.

Many individuals in custody are awaiting trial rather than serving a sentence. Research by Paul Heaton et al has shown that pretrial detention can have significant negative consequences on individuals' mental health, economic stability, and social connections. Inmates who are incarcerated while awaiting trial may perceive the custodial system differently from those who have been convicted, yet

their experiences still shape their attitudes toward incarceration and the justice system. The disproportionate representation of certain racial and ethnic groups within the prison population has been extensively studied by Petit et al. (2009)²⁶. Inmates of colour may perceive custodial sentences as not only punitive but also as symptomatic of broader systemic injustices.²⁴ Their perceptions are often influenced by experiences of racial discrimination, inequality, and marginalization, which can exacerbate feelings of alienation and distrust towards the criminal justice system.

Furthermore, Bright et al, highlight the unique experiences of female inmates within custodial settings.²⁵ Women may have different perceptions of custodial sentences compared to men, shaped by factors such as trauma, caretaking responsibilities, and experiences of gender-based violence. Understanding these gender dynamics is crucial for developing gender-responsive policies and interventions within correctional facilities. In addition to the direct experiences of inmates, custodial sentences also have ripple effects on their families and communities. Hagan & Dinovitzer et al have examined the collateral consequences of incarceration on families, including financial strain, disrupted relationships, and intergenerational trauma.²⁶ Inmates' perceptions of custodial sentences may be influenced by concerns for their loved ones and the broader impact of incarceration on their social networks. Chikadzi et al investigated the challenges faced by individuals upon reentry into society after serving a custodial sentence.²⁷ Inmates' perceptions of incarceration are shaped not only by their experiences behind bars but also by their expectations and experiences upon release. Concerns about finding employment, stable housing, and social support can significantly influence inmates' attitudes toward custodial sentences and their prospects for successful reintegration into society.

The findings from these prominent scholars provide valuable insights into the intricate tapestry of inmate perceptions regarding custodial sentences. From the emotional toll and loss of connection to the impact on rehabilitation, harsh prison realities, and the role of time served, understanding these perspectives is essential for policymakers, practitioners, and society at large. By incorporating these insights into the discourse surrounding criminal justice reform, we can strive towards a system that prioritizes rehabilitation, addresses the emotional needs of inmates, and works towards reducing recidivism.

Implications of the findings of this study

The study aimed to examine the perceptions of individuals regarding custodial sentences, their understanding of sentencing concepts, and the role of demographics in crime and sentencing. The following is a summary of the major findings.

1. A significant percentage of respondents were familiar with custodial sentences, over two-thirds indicating awareness of these concepts.
2. Crime was widely seen as a learned behaviour, with peer groups and communities being the primary sources of learning criminal activities.
3. The demographic profile of crimes revealed an association between poverty, unemployment, and crime.

Limitations of the Study

Every research study has inherent limitations that need to be acknowledged. This section highlights the limitations encountered during the study, such as sample size constraints, potential biases, or limitations in generalizing the findings. It also discusses the steps taken to minimize and address these limitations to the best extent possible.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the perceptions of inmates regarding custodial sentences, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of incarceration and its impact on individuals, families, and communities. As we reflect on these findings, it becomes evident that inmates' perceptions are shaped by a myriad of factors, including emotional distress, loss of connection, racial disparities, gender dynamics, and the challenges of reentry into society. These insights underscore the complexity of the criminal justice system and the need for a more holistic approach to addressing crime and punishment.

Declarations

Ethical Consideration: The research was conducted under the Declaration of Helsinki and the confidentiality of the patient was maintained. The ethical approval was obtained with registration number CHJG.105/VOL.II/53.

Authors' Contribution: The list of authors' contributions, credits, and other information are as follows: RMW: conception and design of the work; data acquisition; data analysis, and interpretation of data for the work), manuscript reviewing and editing; literature review, editing and critical appraisal for intellectual content ,drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual

content; manuscript preparation; final approval of the version to be published; and agreement to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved AMI (, manuscript reviewing and editing; literature review, editing and critical appraisal for intellectual content , YN, literature review and critical reviewing, editing for intellectual content, literature review and critical reviewing, editing for intellectual content AOA (design of the work; interpretation of data for the work; drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content; and final approval of the version to be published ,OIO, editing for intellectual content, literature review and critical reviewing, editing for intellectual content, AAA, editing and critical appraisal for intellectual content, drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content, NIA, editing and critical appraisal for intellectual content, drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content, RSK; manuscript reviewing and editing; literature review, editing and critical appraisal for intellectual content, drafting the work and revising it critically for important intellectual content.

Conflict of interest: There is no conflict of interest.

Funding: Self-funded

Acknowledgment: I thank Allah SWT who guided and preserved my life to this present moment. After that, I would like to appreciate the support rendered by Mr Mohammad Sanni Jahun, (Superintendent officer) Kafilu Abdullahi, (Chief Superintendent officer), and Hussaini Usman (ICT and Data Officer) owing to their immense contribution towards facilitating enabling the environment for data collection at Nigerian Correction Service, Dutse, Jigawa State. In addition, I express my deep pleasure to Muhammad Hannatu Tukur, Ibrahim Yahaya and Oladayo Ajibola for their significant contribution during data collection and collation. Finally, I thank my children (Aisha Rasheed

Mumini, Khadijah Rasheed Mumini, Abdulsalam Rasheed Mumini, and Umm Al-Khayr Rasheed Mumini) for their emotional and psychological support.

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