

Comparison of Mental Health Issues between Male and Female Prison Officers

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ABSTRACT

Background: Prison officers play a crucial role in supervising and caring for the inmates in the correctional system. Chinese correctional officers were observed having depression and anxiety. Due to the dearth of studies in the literature related to mental health issues among correctional officers and to have a comprehensive understanding of gender differences among prison officers. The present study aims to investigate mental health issues between male and female prison officers. *Methods:* The present study is a cross-sectional study design conducted at Central Prison, Shivamogga, Karnataka. 42 prison officers (21 male and 21 female) were administered the depression, anxiety and stress scale to understand the difference in mental health status between male and female prison officers. *Results:* The present study observed a significant difference in stress between male and female prison officers. *Conclusion:* The current research concludes that male prison officers working at prisons undergo a lot of stress dealing with prisoners who mostly possess antisocial personalities. Additionally, counselling and providing awareness about mental health are some of the ways to reduce the stress of the prison officers.

Keywords: depression; anxiety; stress; prison officer; DASS-21

INTRODUCTION

Prison officers play a crucial role in supervising and caring for the inmates in the correctional system. Convicted prisoners mostly suffer from substance use disorders, antisocial personality disorders, mood disorders, and psychosis (Ayirolimeethal, 2014). No doubt prison inmates' numbers are increasing steadily, and the mental health issues related to prisoners are also expanding. However, one study attempted to provide training to correctional officers to deal with prisoners' mental health issues (Darani et al., 2021). Nevertheless, there is limited psychological research on prison officers' mental health issues. In a cross-sectional study conducted in China, 981 frontline prison officers reported that they are suffering from depression and anxiety (Li, 2022). Similarly, in another cross-sectional study conducted on 472 Chinese correctional officers, it was observed that depression and anxiety were present (Huang, 2024). Due to the dearth of studies in the literature related to mental health issues among correctional officers and to have a comprehensive understanding of gender differences among prison officers. The present study aims to investigate mental health issues between male and female prison officers.

METHODOLOGY

There will be no significant difference in depression, anxiety, and stress between male and female prison officers. Venue: Shivamogga Central Prison, Shivamogga Study design: cross sectional design.

Sample and sampling: A total of 42 prison officers were taken for the study using purposive sampling method.

Tools used

Socio Demographic Data Sheet

The current study used a socio-demographic data sheet to collect the demographic details, which include age, gender, education, and marital status.

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS 21)

Lovibond & Lovibond (1995) developed this 21-item self-report questionnaire. Each of the 7 items of this scale represents the constructs of depression, anxiety, and stress. The scores range between 0 and 3, with 0 representing never, 1 indicating sometimes, 2 indicating often, and 3 indicating almost always (Lovibond & Lovibond 1995).

Procedure

Once obtaining the permission from the Chief Superintendent of Prison at Shivamogga Central Prison, 42 prison officers were selected for the study, in which 21 were male and 21 were female. After explaining the objective of the research, consent was taken from each officer. Subsequently, a socio-demographic data sheet and DASS (Lovibond & Lovibond 1995) were administered to all 42 prison officers.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0 version was used for descriptive statistics and sociodemographic data. Independent sample t-test was used to compare the difference in depression, anxiety, and stress between male and female prison (SPSS Inc. 2007).

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic variables of male and female prison officers

Variables		Male Prison officer Mean± SD/n (%)	Female Prison officer Mean± SD/n (%)
Age		33.28± 9.52	38.90± 10.06
Education		14.38± 1.59	14.19± 2.08
Marital status	Married	9 (42.9%)	17 (81%)
	Unmarried	12 (57.1%)	4 (19%)

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic details of the prison officers, in which, among male prison officers, 12 (57.1%) were unmarried and 9 (42.9%) were married. Among female prison officers, 4 (19%) were unmarried and 17 (81%) were married. The mean age of male prison officers was 33.28 ± 9.52 , and female prison officers were 38.90 ± 10.06 . The mean education of male prison officers was 14.38 ± 1.59 , and for female prison officers, it was 14.19 ± 2.08 .

Table 2 shows the comparison of depression, anxiety, and stress between male and female prison officers n=42

Variables	Male prison officer Mean± SD n=21	Female prison officer Mean± SD n=21	t	df	p
Depression	8.28± 4.20	8.66± 3.91	.304	40	.763
Anxiety	8.95± 4.22	8.28± 3.75	.540	40	.592
Stress	14.47± 5.31	5.31± 2.06	6.506	40	.001*

Table 2 shows the comparison of depression, anxiety, and stress between male and female prison officers using an independent sample t-test. There was a significant difference in the mean of the stress domain ($p < .001$) between male and female prison officers.

DISCUSSION

The present study observed a significant difference in stress between male and female prison officers. The male prison officer showed higher stress than the female prison officer. This finding is in accord with the previous study that reported that male frontline prison officers have been prone to mental health problems (Li, 2022). The present study didn't show any significant difference in depression and anxiety between male and female prison officers. Conversely, in a cross-sectional study conducted on 472 Chinese correctional officers, it was observed that depression and anxiety were present (Huang, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The current research concludes that male prison officers working at prisons undergo a lot of stress dealing with prisoners who are difficult to handle. Prison officers require support and care. Additionally, counselling and providing awareness about mental health are some of the strategies to annihilate the stress.

Limitations

The present study was conducted on a sample of 42 prison officers, which is considered too small to generalise. Further, the future studies should focus on psychological treatment of prison officers.

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The author reports no competing interests.

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