

Correlates of Mental Health Status of Prisoners – An Empirical Study

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Abstract

Good mental health status enhances a person to make right decisions, to have control over his emotions, increases his resilience and coping challenges in his day to day life. On the contrary the low level of mental health status leads unwise decision making, uncontrolled emotions failure to cope up with the crisis situations results in impulsive behaviours sometimes result in violation of law. People who commit heinous crimes are incarcerated for their correction and rehabilitation. Incarceration alone may not help in bringing behavioural changes, the mental health status of the prisoners needs to be enhanced in order to prevent recidivism. The mental health of a person may be determined by the socio-economic factors, resilience, emotional intelligence and coping ability of that person. The mental health status of the prisoners could be assessed by assessing certain variables like depression, anxiety and stress.

Keywords: Prisoners, mental health, depression, anxiety, stress, resilience, emotional intelligence and coping.

Introduction

Mental health has been defined as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community (WHO, 2001). Good mental health status enhances a person to make the right decisions, to have control over his emotions, increases his resilience and coping challenges in his day to day life. On the contrary, the low level of mental health status leads unwise decision making, uncontrolled emotions failure to cope up with the crisis situations results in impulsive behaviors sometimes result in a violation of a law. People who commit heinous crimes are incarcerated for their correction and rehabilitation. Incarceration alone may not help in bringing behavioral changes, the mental health status of the prisoners needs to be enhanced to prevent recidivism.

The mental health of a person may be determined by the socio-economic factors, resilience, emotional intelligence and coping ability of that person. The mental health status of the prisoners could be assessed by assessing certain variables like depression, anxiety and stress.

Review of Literature

Woojae Han, Allison Redlich (2018) compared Mental Health Court and Traditional Court Defendants in using Community Health Service. Within the traditional court sample, African Americans were less likely than Whites to receive mental health and substance abuse services. However, significant racial/ethnic disparities were not found for the MHC sample. In an interaction model, African Americans were still less likely to use substance abuse services (but not mental health services) compared with the Whites. However, the African American MHC participants utilized more substance abuse services than their counterparts; Prisoners were unable to get timely legal services due to late appointment by District Legal Services Authorities and their lack of interest and expertise in the subject matter. Most of the prisoners didn't get parole due to the prison staff's lethargic attitude to help them and the fear that the prisoners on parole may not return to prison SDTT (Sir Dorabji Tata Trust), (2011).

The older offenders who entered prisons for heinous crimes found it difficult to adapt the prison environment. They had difficulties coping with the shame and stigmatization. Further they feared victimization by other inmates. (Aday, 2003; Allen, Latessa & Ponder, 2010). It was reported by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB 2008: ii) many of the prisoners are in prison not because they are proved guilty, but because they cannot afford the legal service in order to be out on bail. Life prisoners served sentence without parole (Nellis & King, (2009), Mauer, King, & Young (2004) in USA., more than one third of them were blacks (West & Sabol, 2008). Various research studies on prisoners show the aging of the prison population and the need for geriatric services that will result in costly medical care (Appleton & Grover, 2007; Harvard Law Review, 2006; King & Mauer, 2001). Life without parole and environmental stressors played a primary or secondary role in the development of depression (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Kerbs and Jolley (2007) examined victimization that older male inmates experienced from other inmates. The highest rates of mental health problems were found in those aged 24 years or younger with the lowest rates among

those 55 or older (James & Glaze, 2006). P.C. Mishra and Minum Shyam (2005) made an attempt to find out the relationship of social support and job involvement in prison officers. The result showed that social support (overall) and its dimensions, namely, appraisal support, tangible support and belonging support had significant positive relationship with job involvement. Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis suggested that overall social support was a significant predictor of job involvement in prison officers. The other predictors were belonging, support, appraisal support and tangible support.

The Scope of the Research Study

As there is erosion and increasing trend in crime in India, it is imperative to explore strategies to combat violence and minimize crime in our country. The factors contributing to violence and crime need to be explored and preventive measures to be plotted out. Further, a significant task could be accomplished by reforming and rehabilitating the violators of the law who could be found in prisons. Through reforming the prisoners, the likelihood of recidivism could be prevented. By analyzing the available literature about prisoners, a research gap was found. Only a few research studies are available on the mental health of prisoners in India. Further, there is no study conducted in linking the above-mentioned variables. Hence it needs the attention of the social scientists to focus on assessing the mental health status of the prisoners and explore the influencing factors of mental health and evolve intervention strategies to enhance the mental health status of the prisoners. Hence an empirical study was carried out on "Correlates of the mental health status of prisoners."

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the socio-economic profile of the respondents
2. To find out a level of mental health status of the respondents.
3. To assess the level of resilience of the respondents.
4. To measure the level of emotional intelligence of the respondents.

5. To gauge the level of coping of the respondents.
 6. To link the key variables and learn the extent of influence the variables have upon each other.
 7. To suggest suitable measures to enhance the mental health status of the respondents.
- Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS 21) Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) were administered to the respondents.
 - The Connor–Davidson Resilience scale (2003) (CD-RISC) was used to measure resilience.
 - Coping was assessed with the Brief Cope Scale (Carver, 1997).
 - Emotional intelligence scale (EIS) by Schutte et al. (1998) was used to measure the emotional intelligence of the respondents.

Inclusion Criteria

The prisoners were convicted and serving their sentence in the male prison are included in the present study.

Exclusion Criteria

The prisoners who were not willing and were not in a position to participate in the research process were excluded in the present study.

Methodology

Research Design

As the study described socio-economic factors, depression, anxiety, resilience, emotional intelligence and coping ability of the respondents hence, it is descriptive.

Pilot Study

The researcher paid several visits to the prison and had meetings with the prison authority to understand the profile of the prisoners. Further, he interacted with the male prisoners and built a rapport with them. It made the researcher to confirm the feasibility of conducting the research study.

Tools of Data Collection

- A structured Self-prepared questionnaire was used to elicit socio-demographic data.

Pre-Test

The Structured Self-prepared questionnaire was pre-tested with ten respondents and was modified.

Universe and Sampling

The universe of the study constituted 700. By using systematic sampling, a sample of 175 respondents was drawn.

Data Collection and Ethical Issues

The researcher got permission from the office of the Additional Director General of police/Inspector General of Police, Chennai, dated 19.2.2018, to carry out his research study in the central prison, Tamilnadu. (The identity of the prison is not revealed as per the ethical responsibility of the researcher). The prisoners have oriented the purpose and the outcome of the research study and got their consent to participate in the research process. The data were collected by contacting the respondents personally in the central prison, Tamilnadu.

Analysis and Interpretation

The collected data were processed and analyzed manually. Simple statistics like percentage and average were used to analyze the data.

The Major Findings of the Study
Table Socio-Demographic Profile the Respondents

S.No	Variables	Number of Respondents N=175	%
1	Age (In Years)		
	Below 30	21	12.00
	30 – 40	48	27.43
	40 – 50	59	33.71
	50 – 60	20	11.43
	60 – 70	19	10.85
	70 & above	08	4.57
2	Educational Status		
	Primary	57	32.57
	Middle School	51	29.14
	High School	49	28.00
	Higher Secondary	11	06.28
3	Marital Status		
	Married	125	71.42
	Unmarried	50	28.58
4	Domicile		
	Rural	123	70.28
	Urban	52	29.72
5	Type of Family (N=171)		
	Joint	89	52.05
	Nuclear	82	47.95

Average Age = 43.75 years

Over one-third of the respondents (33.71 percent) belong to the age group of 40 – 50 years. Less than one-third of the respondents (32.57 percent, 29.14 percent and 28 percent) have acquired primary, middle and high school education respectively.

Majority of them (71.42 percent) are married. Majority of the respondents (70.28 percent) were from rural areas. More than half of the respondents (52.05 percent) were from joint families.

Table Respondents' Family Size And Family Monthly Income

S.No	Variables	Number of Respondents	%
1	Size of the Family (N=171)		
	Small (2-4)	110	64.33
	Medium (4-6)	45	26.31
	Large (6-8)	16	9.36
2	Family Income		
	Have Family Income	93	53.14
	No Family Income	82	46.86

3	Family Monthly Income (In Rs) (N=93)		
	Below 5000	29	31.18
	5000-10,000	32	34.41
	10,000-20,000	20	21.51
	20,000 & above	12	12.90

The above reveals the respondents' family size and monthly income. Majority of the respondents' (64.33 percent) family size was small. Less than half of the respondents' (46.86 percent) families have no income at all. The family monthly income of the respondents ranges from Rs.2000 to Rs.1,10,000. When looking into the monthly income of the respondents' families, more than one third of them

(34.41 percent) have their family income from Rs.5,000 to Rs.10,000 while less than one third of the families (31.18 percent) have their family income below Rs,5,000 and over one fifth of the respondents' families have Rs.10,000 – Rs.20,000 as their family monthly income. Few of the respondents' families (12.90 percent) have their family income Rs.20,000 and above.

Table Incarceration Variables of the Respondents

S.No	Variables	Number of Respondents N=175	%
1	Years of Imprisonment		
	Below 5	49	28.00
	5-10	55	31.42
	10-15	46	26.28
	15-20	18	10.28
	20-25	5	02.86
	25 & above	2	01.14
2	Duration of Conviction		
	Life Imprisonment	151	86.28
	Below seven years	16	9.14
	7-10 years	8	4.57
3	Nature of Offenders		
	Non-habitual offenders	160	91.42
	Habitual Offenders	15	8.57
4	Nature of Crime		
	Murder	147	84.00
	Other Crimes	28	16.00

Nearly one-third of the respondents (31.42 percent) years of imprisonment at the time of data collection was 5-10 years. A vast majority of the respondents' (86.28 percent) nature of conviction was life imprisonment. . A vast majority of the respondents were non – habitual offenders (91.42 percent). A vast majority of the respondents' (84 percent) nature of crime committed was murder while

the remaining less than one fifth of the respondents (16 percent) have committed other crimes such as Hooliganism (6.85 percent), Theft (3.42 percent), Rape (1.71 percent), Attempt to murder (1.71 percent), Robbery (1.14 percent), Abduction (0.57 percent) and Suicide inducement (0.57 percent). Nearly one-third of the respondents (30.29 percent) had committed crime due to a property dispute.

Table Key Variables Involved in Mental Health Status of the Respondents

Levels	Stress		Anxiety		Depression	
	N=175	%	N=175	%	N=175	%
Normal	127	72.57	99	56.57	96	54.86
Mild	13	07.42	9	5.14	21	12.00
Moderate	26	14.85	17	09.71	36	20.57
Severe	6	03.42	9	05.14	11	6.29
Extremely Severe	3	1.71	41	23.42	11	6.29
	Resilience		Emotional Intelligence		Coping	
Low	68	38.86	85	48.57	85	48.57
High	107	61.14	90	51.23	90	51.23

Over half of the respondents (54.86 percent and 56.57 percent) were normal about depression and anxiety respectively. Nearly one-fourth of the respondents (23.42 percent) had extremely severe anxiety. Over one-fifth of the respondents (20.17 percent) had a moderate level of depression. Majority of the respondents (72.57 percent) were normal about stress. Majority of the respondents (61.14 percent) had a high level of resilience and over one-third of the respondents (38.16 percent) had a low level of resilience. More than half of respondents (51.23 percent & 51.23 percent) had a high level of emotional intelligence and coping respectively and nearly half of the respondents (48.57 percent & 48.57 percent) had a low level of emotional intelligence and coping respectively.

Suggestions and Recommendations

In the present study, the majority of the respondents were from rural areas. It may be due to ignorance about the consequences of committing a crime. Hence the prison authorities may arrange programmes for the prisoners to realize the consequences of committing a crime. Further, the government can create awareness especially among rural areas on law and order through various agencies like field publicity offices, Non-governmental organizations, Central and State Legal Services Authorities, etc. Media could be encouraged to screen films which propagate non-violence. In the present study, it was found that less than half of the respondents' families had no earning members at all. It was observed by the researcher that their means of subsistence was their 100 percent dependence on the free ration grocery provided by the government; further, it was found

that they were residing in their own houses. Hence it could be inferred that financial constraint was one of the reasons for the respondents involving in criminal activities. Hence the government can create more employment opportunities and identify pre-delinquents and provide them vocational training to prevent them involving in criminal activities.

Further, it is suggested that the present authorities can arrange vocational training for the prisoners and make to learn a trade/skill which may help them to start their enterprise on their release. A vast majority of the respondents were non – habitual offenders. Nearly one-fourth of the respondents had extremely severe anxiety. Over one-fifth of the respondents had a moderate level of depression. A significant proportion of the respondents had a moderate level of stress and it was learned by the researcher that majority of the crimes were committed emotionally and were proved guilty easily in the court where as in case of habitual offenders everything was pre-planned and witnesses feared to give evidence as against the accused and the crime as well. The respondents need counselling since they leave their family abruptly stranded and were very much worried about their families. The visiting mental health personnel like Social Workers, counselors and psychiatrists can play an important role to improve the mental health status of the respondents. Over one-third of the respondents had a low level of resilience. Nearly half of respondents had a low level of emotional intelligence. Nearly half of the respondents had a low level of coping. Programmes like yoga, meditation, recreation could be arranged in the prisons; and the services by the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) could be enhanced based

on the felt needs and problems of the prisoners, the policies, programmes and strategies of DSLA and prison administration could be modified to extend timely help to the prisoners.

Conclusion

The present study portrays the existing condition especially it focusses on the factors contributing to the mental health status of the male prisoners in Tamilnadu. The study was confined to only one district male prisons in south India. It is recommended that more studies need to be conducted in both male and women prisons focusing on different dimensions like adjustment problems, health issues, basic amenities like maintenance of minimum standards in prisons, a relationship between prison administrators and prisoners, services like parole and probation, good time, bail, library, etc

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