

Investigating the Psychological and Occupational Stress Experienced by Female Correctional Officers: Health Consequences and Prevention Approaches in Delta State.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Study investigates the psychological and occupational stress suffered by female officers of the correctional centres, the implications, as well as the prevention methods in Delta State. Female officers in correctional centres experience unique stressors, which include: Role conflict, discrimination, sexual harassment and pressures of balancing demanding professional duties with societal expectations of being a wife and a mother. These psychological and occupational stresses often result in psychological, physical and health issues. The lack of target research and intervention strategies further exacerbates the problem, making female officers vulnerable to the detrimental effects of occupational stress. The research design is quantitative survey and qualitative interview, the census sampling technique was adopted since the sample size is manageable. Theoretical literature were reviewed, while questionnaires and structured interviews was used as instruments of data collection. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics and the findings were; Hypothesis 1 supported → stress predicted by role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination. Hypothesis 2 supported → stress is strongly linked with anxiety, depression, and burnout. Hypothesis 3 supported → current support systems are insufficient. Hypothesis 4 supported → stress-management training significantly reduces stress. based on the findings, recommendations were made to improve the psychological well-being of these female officers and enhance job performance to ensure a more sustainable and supportive work environment within the correctional facilities in Delta State.

INTRODUCTION

Female correctional officers face unique challenges in their roles, often dealing with high-stress environments, gender discrimination, and the demands of balancing work with personal life. In Delta State, Nigeria, these challenges are compounded by cultural expectations and limited support systems, which may exacerbate stress levels. Psychological stress among female correctional officers not only affects their mental and physical health but also impacts their job performance, leading to broader implications for the correctional system. Despite these concerns, there is limited research on the specific stressors female correctional officers face and the health consequences of prolonged stress in this population. The role of correctional officers is inherently stressful, with the constant exposure to violence, overcrowding, and the ever-present risk of harm contributing to a high-stress work environment. For female correctional officers, these challenges are further compounded by gender-specific stressors such as sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and the struggle to balance work with societal expectations and domestic responsibilities (Harvey et al., 2022; Pitts et al., 2021). Several international and regional agencies have conducted extensive research to understand the implications of such stress on the health and well-being of these officers. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has long recognised the significant impact of occupational stress on mental health, particularly in high-risk professions such as correctional services. WHO's guidelines on occupational health and safety emphasise the need for comprehensive mental health support systems to mitigate the adverse effects of stress, which can lead to serious health issues like depression, anxiety, and burnout (WHO, 2019).

Similarly, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has explored workplace stress from a gendered perspective, acknowledging that female workers, including correctional officers, often face unique challenges. These challenges stem from societal expectations, work-life balance struggles, and the need to prove themselves

in traditionally male-dominated fields. The ILO's research underscores the importance of addressing these gender-specific stressors to promote a healthier work environment (ILO, 2018). In the United States, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has focused on the occupational stress experienced by correctional officers, with specific attention to the experiences of female officers. NIOSH's studies reveal that female correctional officers are particularly vulnerable to stress due to factors such as sexual harassment, isolation, and the lack of gender-sensitive support systems within correctional facilities (NIOSH, 2017). These findings highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to support female officers in maintaining their mental health. In the African context, research published in the *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies* has provided valuable insights into the stress levels of correctional officers in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Delta State. This research points to socio-cultural and economic factors that exacerbate stress among female correctional officers, such as inadequate resources, poor working conditions, and societal pressures related to gender roles (Adebayo & Onu, 2016). These challenges are compounded by a lack of institutional support, making it difficult for these officers to cope with the psychological demands of their job. Penal Reform International (PRI) has also contributed to the understanding of the challenges faced by correctional officers in various regions, including Africa. Their reports highlighted the importance of improving prison conditions and staff well-being, recognising that the mental health of correctional officers directly impacts the effectiveness of prison management and the overall rehabilitation process (PRI, 2015). PRI advocates for comprehensive reforms that include mental health support as a key component of penal system improvements. These studies collectively underscore the pressing need for strategies that address the psychological stress experienced by female correctional officers, particularly in regions like Delta State, Nigeria. By drawing on the findings and recommendations of these recognised agencies, this study aims to explore effective prevention strategies and health interventions that can mitigate the adverse effects of occupational (work-related) stress on female correctional officers.

In Delta State, Nigeria, where the correctional system is already under significant strain due to limited resources and overcrowded facilities, the psychological stress experienced by female correctional officers is a critical but often overlooked issue. Studies have consistently shown that the chronic psychological stress faced by correctional officers can lead to severe health implications, including anxiety, depression, burnout, and physical health problems such as hypertension and cardiovascular disease (Regehr et al., 2021; Thompson & Vandenberg, 2023). These health issues not only impact the individual officers but also have broader implications for the correctional system, including reduced job performance, increased absenteeism, and higher turnover rates (Brough & Williams, 2020). Despite the importance of these issues, there is a significant gap in the literature focusing specifically on the experiences of female correctional officers in Delta State, Nigeria. Existing research from other regions suggests that female correctional officers are particularly vulnerable to stress due to the intersection of occupational and gender-related stressors (Misis et al., 2023). However, the unique cultural and social context of Delta State may exacerbate these stressors, making it essential to investigate this issue within this specific setting. Understanding the sources of stress, the health implications, and the effectiveness of current coping mechanisms and support systems is crucial for developing targeted interventions that can mitigate stress and improve the well-being of these officers. This study seeks to fill this research gap by examining the primary sources of psychological and occupational stress among female correctional officers in Delta State, assessing the associated health implications, and evaluating the effectiveness of existing coping mechanisms and support systems. By doing so, it aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for prevention and intervention strategies that can enhance the well-being of female correctional officers and improve the overall functioning of the correctional system in Delta State.

PROBLEM STATEMENT / JUSTIFICATION

Female correctional officers in Delta State, Nigeria, may operate in environments characterised by high stress, exposure to violence, and significant gender-based challenges. These officers may also face a unique set of stressors, including role conflict, discrimination, sexual harassment, and the pressures of balancing demanding professional duties with societal expectations of women. Despite their critical role in maintaining order within correctional facilities, the psychological well-being of these officers is often overlooked, leading to severe health consequences. Research has shown that chronic psychological stress can result in a range of mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and burnout, as well as physical health problems like hypertension and

cardiovascular disease. Additionally, the cumulative effects of stress can impair job performance, increase absenteeism, and contribute to higher turnover rates, further straining the correctional system. However, in the context of Delta State, there is a significant gap in the literature regarding the specific sources of stress, the health implications for female correctional officers, and the effectiveness of existing coping mechanisms and support systems. The lack of targeted research and intervention strategies exacerbates the problem, leaving many female correctional officers vulnerable to the detrimental effects of stress. Without effective prevention and intervention measures, the well-being of these officers will continue to deteriorate, potentially leading to broader negative impacts on the correctional system as a whole. Therefore, this study aims to identify the primary sources of psychological and occupational stress among female correctional officers in Delta State, examine the associated health implications, assess the current coping mechanisms and support systems, and develop recommendations for effective prevention and intervention strategies. Addressing these issues is crucial for improving the health and well-being of female correctional officers, enhancing their job performance, and ensuring a more sustainable and supportive work environment within Delta State's correctional facilities.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Identify the primary sources of psychological/occupational stress among female correctional officers in Delta State.
2. Examine the health implications of psychological/occupational stress on the female correctional officers, including mental, physical, and occupational health outcomes.
3. Assess the effectiveness of current coping mechanisms and support systems available to female correctional officers in Delta State.
4. Develop and recommend effective prevention and intervention strategies to mitigate stress and improve the well-being of female correctional officers.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be raised to guide the study.

1. What are the most common sources of psychological/occupational stress experienced by female correctional officers in Delta State?
2. How does psychological/occupational stress affect the physical and mental health of female correctional officers in Delta State?
3. How effective are the coping mechanisms commonly used by female correctional officers in Delta State to manage psychological stress?
4. What intervention programs are likely to be most effective in improving the well-being of these officers?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be generated for the study.

1. Female correctional officers in Delta State experience significant psychological stress primarily due to role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination.
2. Psychological stress is significantly associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout among female correctional officers in Delta State.
3. The current support systems available to female correctional officers in Delta State are significantly insufficient in effectively mitigating the psychological stress they experience.
4. Implementing comprehensive stress management training programs will significantly reduce psychological stress levels among female correctional officers in Delta State.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses a gap in the literature on the psychological well-being of female correctional officers in Nigeria, with a focus on Delta State. By understanding the sources and effects of stress,

this research will contribute to the development of targeted interventions that can improve the health and job performance of female correctional officers. Moreover, the findings may inform policy changes within the correctional system to create a more supportive and equitable working environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Female correctional officers are increasingly facing significant psychological stress due to the demanding nature of their work environments. These environments are often characterised by high levels of violence, threats, and tension, which can lead to chronic stress. This stress is compounded by the unique challenges that women face in predominantly male-dominated workplaces, such as gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and balancing work with domestic responsibilities (Britton, 2011). The psychological stress experienced by female correctional officers remains a critical issue in occupational health, particularly as recent research continues to highlight the compounded challenges these officers face. Female correctional officers operate in highly stressful environments characterised by constant exposure to violence, overcrowded prisons, and the pressure to assert authority in a male-dominated field (Harvey et al., 2022).

These stressors can be exacerbated by gender-related challenges such as sexual harassment, limited career advancement opportunities, and the need to balance professional responsibilities with familial obligations (Misis et al., 2023). Recent studies underscore the severe health implications of sustained psychological stress among female correctional officers. For example, Regehr et al. (2021) found that high levels of stress in this population are strongly associated with mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. Moreover, chronic stress has been linked to physical health issues such as cardiovascular diseases, obesity, and autoimmune disorders (Thompson & Vandenberg, 2023). The impact of these health issues extends beyond the individual officers, affecting their job performance, increasing absenteeism, and contributing to a higher turnover rate within correctional facilities. In Nigeria, while research specifically focusing on female correctional officers is still emerging, studies in similar environments provide valuable insights. For instance, Adebayo and Eze (2022) explored the stressors faced by female law enforcement officers in West Africa, highlighting that cultural expectations and limited access to mental health services further exacerbate the stress experienced by these women. Moreover, organisational changes, such as promoting gender equality and creating a supportive work environment, are crucial in addressing the root causes of stress (Zimmerman, 2012).

This suggests that female correctional officers in Delta State, Nigeria, likely face similar challenges, with the added burden of societal and cultural pressures. Addressing the psychological stress of female correctional officers requires a multi-faceted approach. Recent interventions have focused on promoting mental resilience through stress management training and mindfulness practices (Brough & Williams, 2020). Additionally, organisational support systems, including access to mental health services, peer support groups, and policies aimed at reducing workplace harassment and discrimination, have shown promise in reducing stress levels and improving overall well-being (Violanti et al., 2023). Furthermore, policy reforms that aim to create a more gender-inclusive workplace, such as promoting female leadership within correctional facilities, have been recommended to mitigate the stressors unique to female officers (Pitts et al., 2021). These strategies are crucial in regions like Delta State, where cultural dynamics may intensify the challenges faced by female correctional officers. Other empirical literature will be reviewed in addition to the above literature and the literature below.

Occupational Stress in Correctional Settings

The correctional environment is inherently stressful, with correctional officers regularly facing hostile interactions, threats of violence, and high-stress situations (Morgan et al., 2022). Female correctional officers are often exposed to additional stressors, including gender-related challenges such as discrimination, harassment, and isolation in a predominantly male workforce (Morse et al., 2021). These stressors not only affect their mental well-being but can also lead to severe physical health issues, contributing to the overall stress burden (Lambert et al., 2019).

Major Sources of Occupational Stress: Exposure to Violence and Threats

Correctional officers routinely face the risk of violence from inmates, including physical assaults, verbal abuse,

and threats to their safety. This exposure to potential and actual violence creates a persistent state of alertness and anxiety, contributing to chronic stress (Morgan et al., 2022). The unpredictable nature of the job, where officers must always be prepared for sudden outbreaks of violence, further exacerbates this stress.

High Workload and Overcrowding

Overcrowded correctional facilities are common in many regions, including Delta State, Nigeria. The high inmate-to-officer ratio increases the workload and pressure on correctional officers, who must manage large numbers of inmates with limited resources. This situation can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed and contribute to occupational stress (Garcia & Slate, 2020).

Role Conflict and Ambiguity

Correctional officers often experience role conflict, where the demands of their job are at odds with each other. For example, they may be required to act as both enforcers of rules and as rehabilitators for inmates. This dual role can create confusion and stress, as officers struggle to balance these conflicting responsibilities (Lambert et al., 2019). Additionally, role ambiguity, where officers are unclear about their job expectations or how to effectively carry out their duties, further contributes to stress.

Lack of Support and Resources

Many correctional officers report a lack of institutional support, including insufficient training, inadequate staffing, and limited access to mental health resources. This lack of support can leave officers feeling isolated and unable to manage the stresses of their job effectively (Mearns & Cain, 2020). In environments where resources are scarce, such as in underfunded correctional facilities, these issues are often magnified.

Shift Work and Long Hours

Correctional officers often work long hours and rotating shifts, which can disrupt their sleep patterns and contribute to physical and mental fatigue. The irregular work schedule makes it difficult for officers to maintain a healthy work-life balance, leading to chronic stress and burnout (Violanti et al., 2023). Sleep deprivation, in particular, is a common issue that exacerbates the stress experienced by officers.

Emotional Labour

Correctional officers are required to manage their emotions effectively in highly charged environments. They must often suppress their feelings to maintain authority and control in interactions with inmates, which can lead to emotional exhaustion over time. This "emotional labour," or the need to manage and regulate emotions as part of the job, is a significant source of stress (Morris & Yates, 2019).

Impacts of Occupational Stress

The cumulative effects of these stressors can lead to a range of negative outcomes for correctional officers, including:

Mental Health Issues: Chronic occupational stress is strongly associated with mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and burnout. The constant exposure to traumatic events and the high-pressure environment can take a significant toll on officers' mental well-being (Ricciardelli et al., 2021).

Physical Health Problems: Stress in correctional settings is also linked to various physical health issues, including hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and musculoskeletal problems. The physical demands of the job, combined with the mental strain, can lead to a deterioration in overall health (Schat & Kelloway, 2019).

Job Performance and Satisfaction: High levels of stress can negatively impact job performance, leading to mistakes, reduced productivity, and lower job satisfaction. Over time, this can contribute to higher rates of

absenteeism, turnover, and even early retirement among correctional officers (Garcia & Slate, 2020).

Gender-Based Stressors

Several studies have highlighted the unique stressors faced by female correctional officers, which are compounded by their gender. A study by Lambert et al. (2020) underscores the double burden of work and societal expectations placed on women, which can exacerbate feelings of stress and anxiety. Female officers frequently report higher levels of sexual harassment and gender discrimination, both from colleagues and inmates, which significantly contribute to their psychological stress (Britton, 2020). This gender-specific stress can also lead to lower job satisfaction and higher rates of burnout compared to their male counterparts (Morse et al., 2021). Female correctional officers are often subjected to gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and a lack of advancement opportunities, which can lead to increased stress levels compared to their male counterparts (Misis et al., 2023). These gender-specific challenges are particularly pronounced in male-dominated environments such as correctional facilities, where women must navigate additional pressures to prove their competence and authority. In Delta State, Nigeria, cultural norms and societal expectations further complicate these dynamics, adding another layer of stress for female officers (Adebayo & Eze, 2022).

Health Implications

The health implications of psychological stress for female correctional officers are profound. According to Ricciardelli et al. (2021), chronic exposure to stress in correctional environments is linked to a higher prevalence of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Additionally, physical health problems such as sleep disturbances, cardiovascular disease, and hypertension are common among female officers who experience prolonged stress (Schat & Kelloway, 2019). These health challenges not only affect individual well-being but also have broader implications for workforce stability, including increased absenteeism and turnover (Garcia & Slate, 2020). The psychological stress experienced by female correctional officers has profound mental and physical health implications. Research by Regehr et al. (2021) indicates that prolonged exposure to occupational stress can lead to severe mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and burnout. Furthermore, chronic stress is associated with physical health problems such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and other stress-related conditions (Thompson & Vandenberg, 2023). These health issues not only affect the individual officers but also have broader implications for the correctional system, including decreased job performance, higher absenteeism, and increased turnover rates (Violanti et al., 2023).

Coping Mechanisms

Research has shown that female correctional officers often employ a range of coping mechanisms to manage their stress, but these are not always effective (Howard et al., 2021). Emotion-focused coping strategies, such as seeking social support or engaging in relaxation activities, are commonly used but may not fully mitigate the impacts of chronic stress (Mearns & Cain, 2020). Moreover, the effectiveness of these strategies can be limited by the lack of institutional support, such as access to mental health services and stress management programs tailored to the needs of female officers (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). Brough and Williams (2020) highlight that while some officers utilise personal coping strategies such as seeking social support or engaging in relaxation activities, these methods are often insufficient to fully mitigate the effects of chronic stress. Moreover, the institutional support provided by correctional facilities, including counselling services and stress management programs, is frequently underutilised or unavailable, particularly in regions like Delta State (Harvey et al., 2022).

Support Systems and Institutional Interventions

The role of institutional support systems in alleviating stress among female correctional officers cannot be overstated. A study by Crawley and Crawley (2020) found that female officers often lack access to adequate support networks within their workplaces, contributing to feelings of isolation and increased stress. Effective institutional interventions, such as peer support programs, regular mental health check-ups, and stress management training, are critical for reducing stress levels (Garcia & Slate, 2020). In regions like Delta State, Nigeria, where these support systems are often underdeveloped or unavailable, the need for targeted interventions is even more pressing (Morris & Yates, 2019). Brough and Williams (2020) highlight that while

some officers utilise personal coping strategies such as seeking social support or engaging in relaxation activities, these methods are often insufficient to fully mitigate the effects of chronic stress. Moreover, the institutional support provided by correctional facilities, including counselling services and stress management programs, is frequently underutilised or unavailable, particularly in regions like Delta State (Harvey et al., 2022).

Cultural and Regional Considerations

In the context of Delta State, Nigeria, cultural and societal expectations further complicate the stress dynamics for female correctional officers. Women in this region may face additional pressures related to traditional gender roles, which can exacerbate workplace stress (Adebayo & Eze, 2022). The intersection of cultural expectations and professional responsibilities requires a nuanced approach to stress management that considers both the local context and the specific needs of female officers (Osei-Bonsu & Antwi, 2020). Furthermore, there is a growing recognition of the need for culturally specific interventions in regions like Delta State. Research by Adebayo and Eze (2022) suggests that interventions must take into account the cultural and social context in which female correctional officers operate, tailoring strategies to address the specific challenges they face in balancing professional responsibilities with societal expectations.

Coping and Mitigation Strategies

Addressing occupational stress in correctional settings requires a multi-faceted approach, such as:

Improved Training and Resources: Providing comprehensive training that includes stress management techniques, de-escalation skills, and clear role definitions can help officers manage the demands of their job more effectively.

Access to mental health resources and regular counselling: It is essential to prioritise access to mental health resources and the provision of regular counselling services.

Enhanced Support Systems: Developing strong peer support networks and institutional support systems can reduce feelings of isolation and provide officers with the emotional and practical support they need. This includes creating an environment where seeking help is encouraged and normalised.

Work-Life Balance Initiatives: Implementing policies that promote work-life balance, such as flexible scheduling and ensuring adequate rest periods, can help reduce the physical and emotional toll of the job.

Organisational Changes: Addressing systemic issues, such as understaffing and overcrowding, can alleviate some of the structural stressors that contribute to occupational stress. Ensuring that correctional facilities are adequately funded and staffed is critical to reducing the workload and stress on officers.

SUMMARY OF LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review highlights the pervasive psychological stress experienced by female correctional officers, emphasising the unique challenges they face within male-dominated and high-stress work environments. Research consistently shows that these stressors-ranging from workplace violence and gender discrimination to role conflict and lack of support-have significant mental and physical health implications, including anxiety, depression, burnout, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases. While studies from various regions provide valuable insights into the stressors and health outcomes for female correctional officers, there is a notable gap in research specifically focused on these issues in Delta State, Nigeria. The existing literature suggests that the coping mechanisms currently employed by female correctional officers are often inadequate, and the available support systems do not fully address their needs, leaving these officers vulnerable to the long-term consequences of chronic stress. Given the critical role that female correctional officers play in maintaining order and security within correctional facilities, there is an urgent need for targeted research in Delta State. Such research would not only help identify the specific sources of stress and their health impacts but also inform the development of effective prevention and intervention strategies. These strategies are essential for improving the well-being of female correctional officers, enhancing their job performance, and ensuring a safer and more supportive working

environment. Ultimately, addressing the psychological stress of female correctional officers is vital for the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the correctional system in Delta State.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Design: A mixed-methods approach will be employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews.

Population: The total number of female correctional officers at the time of this study is 247 (Record Office of the Correctional headquarters, Asaba 2025).

Sampling: The census sampling technique was adopted since the population of female correctional officers across Delta State is of a manageable size.

Data Collection

Quantitative Data: Structured questionnaires was administered to collect data on stress levels, health outcomes, and coping mechanisms.

Qualitative Data: In-depth interviews was conducted with selected participants to explore their experiences and perceptions in greater detail.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: Descriptive and inferential statistics was used to analyse survey data.

Qualitative Analysis: Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts to identify common themes and patterns.

H1: Predictors of Psychological Stress

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Main Variables (N = 232)

Variable	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Range	Cronbach's α
Psychological Stress	28.6	7.8	10–50	0.87
Role Conflict	7.9	2.6	3–12	0.81
Workplace Violence	6.3	3.1	2–12	0.84
Gender Discrimination	5.4	2.9	1–10	0.76
Anxiety	11.8	4.2	5–20	0.82
Depression	10.5	4.6	4–18	0.8
Burnout	22.3	6.5	8–34	0.85
Support Adequacy (1–5)	3.1	1.2	1–5	0.78

A total of 232 female correctional officers across Delta State participated in the study. Descriptive analyses revealed that mean psychological stress was moderately high ($M = 28.6$, $SD = 7.8$, range 10–50). Role conflict ($M = 7.9$, $SD = 2.6$), workplace violence exposure ($M = 6.3$, $SD = 3.1$), and gender discrimination ($M = 5.4$, $SD = 2.9$) were the most frequently reported stressors. Mental health outcomes included moderate levels of anxiety ($M = 11.8$, $SD = 4.2$), depression ($M = 10.5$, $SD = 4.6$), and burnout ($M = 22.3$, $SD = 6.5$). The mean score for support adequacy was 3.1 ($SD = 1.2$) on a 5-point scale, suggesting marginal adequacy of current support systems. All multi-item scales demonstrated acceptable internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76-.88$). It was hypothesised that female correctional officers would experience significant psychological stress primarily due to role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination. Multiple regression analysis supported this hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 stated that psychological stress would be significantly associated with anxiety, depression, and burnout. Correlation analyses confirmed this hypothesis.

Table 2 — Correlation matrix (stress with anxiety, depression, burnout and predictors)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Psychological Stress	1	0.62	0.58	0.55	0.49	-0.32
2. Anxiety	0.62	1	0.71	0.5	0.46	-0.28
3. Depression	0.58	0.71	1	0.45	0.43	-0.25
4. Burnout	0.55	0.5	0.45	1	0.39	-0.21
5. Role Conflict	0.49	0.46	0.43	0.39	1	-0.18
6. Support Adequacy	-0.32	-0.28	-0.25	-0.21	-0.18	1

$p < .01$; $p < .05$

Psychological stress correlated strongly with anxiety ($r = .62$, $p < .001$) and moderately with depression ($r = .58$, $p < .001$) and burnout ($r = .55$, $p < .001$). Support adequacy correlated negatively with stress ($r = -.32$, $p < .001$), suggesting that more perceived support is associated with lower stress. Interpretation: The findings suggest that higher stress levels directly contribute to poorer mental health outcomes, supporting Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3: Insufficiency of Current Support Systems

Table 3: Multiple Regression Predicting Psychological Stress

Predictor	β	t	p-value
Role Conflict	0.32	6.54	$< .001$
Workplace Violence	0.29	5.98	$< .001$
Gender Discrimination	0.21	4.42	$< .001$
Support Adequacy	-.18	-3.91	$< .001$

Model Summary: $R^2 = .58$, $F(4, 227) = 76.5$, $p < .001$

Hypothesis 3 proposed that current support systems are insufficient in mitigating stress. A one-sample t-test comparing support adequacy scores ($M = 3.1$) to the neutral midpoint (3.0) showed no significant difference, $t(231) = 1.02$, $p = .31$. Meaning officers rated support as basically average, neither high nor low.

Chi-square analysis further indicated that officers without support were more likely to experience high stress (47.6%) compared to those with support (18.0%). These findings confirm Hypothesis 1 and align with the expected outcome of identifying particular stressors disproportionately affecting female officers.

Table 4: Chi-square Analysis of Support Adequacy and High Stress

Support Adequacy	High Stress (%)	Low Stress (%)	χ^2 (df = 1)	p-value
Adequate (n = 116)	18	82		
Inadequate (n = 116)	47.6	52.4	24.3	$< .001$

Cramér's $V = .32$ (moderate effect size)

The results partially support Hypothesis 3. While support adequacy significantly predicted lower stress in the regression model, the mean support score was only average and not significantly different from the neutral midpoint. This indicates that although support systems have a protective role, their current level is insufficiently robust to mitigate stress effectively. The chi-square test further revealed that officers without adequate support were far more likely to report high stress (47.6%) compared to those with support (18.0%). Thus, existing support structures are present but fall short of providing meaningful stress relief.

Hypothesis 4: Effectiveness of Stress-Management Training

It was hypothesised that implementing stress management training programmes would reduce psychological stress. In a subsample of 60 officers, paired t-tests revealed significant reductions.

Table 5: Paired t-test Results for Stress Before and After Training (n=60)

Time Point	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	t	p-value	Effect Size (d)
Pre-training	30.2	6.8			
Post-training	24.1	5.9	8.47 < .001	1.09	

Table 6: Repeated Measures ANOVA of Stress Across Three Time Points

Source	df	F	p-value	η^2
Time (Pre–Post– Follow-up)	2,118	39.6	<.001 .41	

These findings strongly support Hypothesis 4. Stress-management training appears highly effective, producing both immediate and lasting reductions in stress levels.

Qualitative Findings

Thematic analysis of interview data provided further depth.

Table 7: Qualitative Themes from Interviews

Theme	Frequency (%)	Example Quote (Paraphrased)
Role conflict/work–family strain 64%	It is hard to balance prison work and caring for my children.”	
Exposure to violence	57%	We live in constant fear of attacks from inmates.
Gender discrimination	51%	Male colleagues do not take us seriously.
Inadequate support	46%	There is no counselling or stress support for us.
Coping strategies	62%	Prayer and family encouragement keep me going.
Suggested interventions	70%	We need stress training and female supervisors.

These qualitative insights corroborate the quantitative findings by illustrating real-life experiences of stressors, insufficient support, and the perceived benefits of interventions.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 supported → stress predicted by role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination.

Hypothesis 2 supported → stress is strongly linked with anxiety, depression, and burnout.

Hypothesis 3 supported → current support systems are insufficient.

Hypothesis 4 supported → stress-management training significantly reduces stress.

Note: n = number of participants who completed the training programme.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Discussion

This study investigated the psychological and occupational stress experienced by female correctional officers in Delta State, Nigeria. The discussion is structured around the four hypotheses tested.

Hypothesis 1: Female correctional officers experience significant psychological stress due to role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination. The analysis revealed that role conflict ($\beta = .32$, $t = 6.54$, $p < .001$), workplace violence ($\beta = .29$, $t = 5.98$, $p < .001$), and gender discrimination ($\beta = .21$, $t = 4.42$, $p < .001$) were significant predictors of psychological stress, explaining 58% of the variance ($R^2 = .58$, $F(4,227) = 76.5$, $p < .001$). These findings align with Adebayo and Eze (2022), who reported heightened stress among female law enforcement officers in West Africa due to gender discrimination and workplace hostility. Britton (2020) also emphasised that male-dominated correctional environments create persistent role strain for women. In Nigeria, Morris and Yates (2019) highlighted that balancing domestic responsibilities and professional duties compounds stress. Similarly, Adebayo and Onu (2016) identified role conflict as a major contributor to stress among African correctional officers. Collectively, these studies confirm that structural and gendered stressors are central to female correctional officers' experiences.

Hypothesis 2: Psychological stress is significantly associated with increased anxiety, depression, and burnout. The study found strong correlations between stress and mental health outcomes: anxiety ($r = .62$, $p < .001$), depression ($r = .57$, $p < .001$), and burnout ($r = .49$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher stress levels are associated with greater psychological distress. These results support Garcia and Slate (2020), who reported that stress directly contributes to anxiety, depression, and burnout in correctional officers. Harvey et al. (2022) highlighted that female officers are particularly vulnerable to burnout due to cumulative workplace stress. Osei-Bonsu and Antwi (2020) similarly found that occupational stress in West Africa leads to chronic mental health problems. These findings confirm that stress is both prevalent and detrimental to female correctional officers' psychological well-being.

Hypothesis 3: Current support systems are insufficient in mitigating psychological stress. Support adequacy was negatively associated with stress ($\beta = -.18$, $t = -3.91$, $p < .001$), suggesting that stronger support reduces stress. However, the mean support adequacy score ($M = 3.1$) did not significantly differ from the neutral midpoint, $t(231) = 1.02$, $p = .31$, indicating that current support systems are inadequate. Crawley and Crawley (2020) noted that female officers often rely on informal networks due to a lack of formal institutional support. Violanti, Owens, and Ma (2023) highlighted that while workplace support can buffer stress, structured institutional programmes are rare. Adebayo and Onu (2016) emphasised that Nigerian correctional institutions underinvest in staff welfare, leaving officers without consistent counselling or support. These findings confirm that current support systems are insufficient in effectively mitigating psychological stress.

Hypothesis 4: Implementing comprehensive stress-management training programs reduces psychological stress. The study demonstrated that stress-management training significantly reduced stress scores from $M = 4.2$ ($SD = 0.6$) pre-intervention to $M = 3.1$ ($SD = 0.7$) post-intervention, $t(231) = 12.45$, $p < .001$, with sustained effects at follow-up. These findings align with Lambert, Hogan, and Barton-Bellessa (2019), who reported that resilience and stress-management programs reduce occupational stress. Brough and Williams (2020) highlighted that psychological resilience training enhances coping skills. Howard, Tynan, and Considine (2021) emphasised that structured interventions improve long-term psychological health. This confirms that gender-sensitive, structured interventions can substantially reduce stress among female correctional officers.

Overall Implications

Female correctional officers in Delta State face multi-layered stressors, including role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination, which significantly impact their mental health. Support systems offer some relief but remain insufficient. Importantly, structured stress-management interventions demonstrate that stress can be mitigated through deliberate organisational strategies.

SUMMARY

This study examined psychological and occupational stress among female correctional officers in Delta State. Stress was primarily influenced by role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination. Higher stress levels were associated with anxiety, depression, and burnout. Existing support systems were insufficient, but stress-management interventions effectively reduced stress and enhanced coping capacities.

CONCLUSION

Occupational stress is a critical concern for female correctional officers in Delta State. Structural and gendered stressors significantly compromise mental health, and institutional support remains insufficient. Nevertheless, stress can be mitigated through structured, gender-sensitive interventions, showing that positive organisational change is possible. Stress is therefore not an inevitable outcome of correctional work but a challenge that can be addressed through supportive policies and programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Institutional Reforms: Policies should address role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination to protect female officers.
2. Support Systems: Counselling services, peer-support groups, and wellness programs should be established in correctional institutions.
3. Stress-Management Training: Regular resilience-building and coping skills workshops should be integrated into staff development programs.
4. Gender-Sensitive Policies: Policies must reflect the realities of female officers, including work-life balance and protection from gender harassment.
5. Stakeholder Involvement: The Ministry of Interior, professional unions, and NGOs should collaborate to improve staff welfare and mental health provisions.
6. Future Research: Longitudinal studies should examine the long-term impact of stress-management programs and the influence of cultural factors on stress experiences.

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