

# Social-Emotional Skills of Correctional Officers

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**Abstract:-** Psychological well-being and mental health of inmates are investigated by international organization, committees and researchers. One of the main factors that influence their quality of life, daily mood and well-being is interpersonal relationship. Numerous empirical data confirm the importance of interpersonal relationship and attitudes toward the prisoners. An attitude can be defined as an evaluation of a stimulus as reflected in our cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses to the problem [1]. Prison officers are responsible for the safety and security of the prison facility, for supporting offender rehabilitation efforts and for managing organizational demands [2]. Despite their importance to the running of the prison system, the health and wellbeing of prison officers remains poor.

The systematic review of research and policy papers, articles that published on interpersonal relationship between inmates and officers in correctional facilities, also effective programs outcomes were conducted. The main symptoms of the problem were measured with special checklist and questionnaires. 35 officers participated social-emotional support program, and early diagnostic procedure.

A systematic approach in psychological work with prisoners, also officers allows for the transition from a symptomatic to a personality-oriented level of psychological impact. Psychological emotional support can renew their hope on life, influence positive outcomes of the support program. According to the results of repeated psychological research, the patient's condition was characterized by positive dynamics: the level of psychological distress and the intensity of psychological distress significantly decreased, the general internality of the personality increased, as well as the subjective assessment of personal well-being.

It is necessary to focus the attention of specialists on the advisability of using psycho-educational programs in a prison environment, providing information about aging dynamic. Such programs, used at the initial stages of work with patients, contribute to the creation of motivation for personal psychotherapy and significantly increase its effectiveness.

**Keywords:-** *Interpersonal relationship, elderly inmates, prison environment, correctional officers psychological emotional support program.*

## I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Giving and receiving social support is one of the important issues of the individual and community lives. Such support is often exchanged within families, learning and working environment, communities, between colleagues and other relationships. Researchers and policy-makers think that offenders need help and support from family, relatives, friends, also formal institutions- criminal justice agencies, correctional facilities, prison officers, social welfare services. Especially elderly inmates are the vulnerable group members who need more care and attention. This is because they experience multiple chronic physical and mental health conditions and physical disabilities at relatively young prisoners [3]. They also have suffered stress, or trauma over their lifetimes, have a previous experience of drug using and addiction, homelessness, and limited access to social welfare programs and education [4].

Mental health can be influenced by feelings of isolation in the prisons. Compared to younger prisoners, older inmates have fewer regular visitors and fewer connections and interpersonal relationships [5]. Correctional officers meet this population every day, and they are part of this interpersonal relationship, too. Health and well-being of prison officers remains poor. Armstrong, Griffin and other authors mentioned that between 30 to 50 percent of prison officers report moderate to high levels of workplace stress [6]. Boudouka, Gould, Jaegers and other researchers mentioned rates of burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, alcohol use are more common in prison officers than the general population. Furthermore, they experience poor physical health, decreased life and work satisfaction.

The concept of social support proposed by Cullen (1994) was used in this research. Cullen identified three main dimensions in the social support definition: the community, the social network and intimate and confiding associations [4]. The author differentiated instrumental and expressive support. Instrumental support refers food, money, housing, and services; while expressive support means sharing sentiments, discussing concerns and problems, or giving attention [4].

Different researches on inmates lend insight to the importance of social support in prisons. Inmates report the need for safety, structure, support, emotional feedback, social stimulation, activity and other issues [7]. They often desire “support and structure” (instrumental support), “emotional feedback” (expressive support) within the correctional facilities, too [7].

Since Cullen (1994) mentioned an importance of social support for criminal justice, some researchers have begun to investigate interpersonal relationships in the prisons.

Meanwhile relationship between family ties and inmate behavior has long been overlooked by researchers. Visits, furloughs, receiving calls, and letters by family members and relatives can be differed as an expressive support tool. Bales and colleagues (2008) mentioned that more frequent visitation while incarcerated is related to the reduction of recidivism upon release.

Cognitive component of attitudes means beliefs, stereotypes, and perceptions about older adults and the aging process. Some beliefs regarding aging and cognition are negative, when some of them are positive. For example, while old age might be associated with growth or maintenance some aspects of functioning, such as those associated with expressive behavior or wisdom [8]. Attitudes are also reflected in behaviors toward older adults. Finding from literature analyzing mentioned stereotypes, also younger adults' patronizing talk with older individuals. Such patronizing talk is characterized by demeaning emotional tone, clarification strategies, controlling or disapproving messages [8]. Aging related attitudes also influence in other important social contexts. Behavioral components can be different due to cultural moments. Aging attitudes shape dependence-related behaviors in older adults; such behaviors may not always be reactions to the external environment. They may reflect selective processes designed to foster control and conserve resources [9].

The concept of stereotype threat was invoked by Steele and colleagues (2002) that explain the effects of negative stereotypes on performance. Authors mentioned that situational cues activate these thoughts, which may negatively impact performance due to some issues, including anxiety, arousal, and decreased effort.

By exploring the subjective experiences of prison officers when interacting with prisoners, I aim to better understand how these interactions may interact with the health and wellbeing of prison officers. As such the current study will examine interactions between prison officers and prisoners as reported in the existing literature. Owen (1983) in the USA explored prison culture and relationship with 35 prison officers, Liebling and colleagues (1999) in England studied this problem with 17 prison officers using semi structured interviews, Cianchi in Australia explored investigated the same problem in 2009, Lemmergard and Muhr (2012) focused on emotional labour and professional identity problem of correctional officers in Denmark, Ibsen (2013) chose an ethnography to get information about informal favours as social control by prison officers in Norway, Worley (2016) used auto- ethnography in the two prisons of the USA, Ricciardelli and Perry (2016) used semi-structured interviews with 42 officers in Canada, Halsey and Deegan (2017) explored this problem in Australia.

An exploratory research that realized in Italy, differentiated factors that negatively affect the psychological well-being of correctional officers [6]. The author stressed that managing relationships with prisoners was the most stressful part of a prison officer's job. That research brought to light an interesting aspects little considered until 2016: for the interviewees, the closeness with the inmates means, most

of all, being in contact with their suffering and their desperation caused by their state as detainees and worsened by the inability of the Italian penitentiary system to guarantee conditions of dignity in the detention experience [6]. Moreover, feelings of guilt and powerlessness, due to the impossibility of helping the inmates are also highlighted as part of the COs' stress experience in previous works of literature.

Prison officers' wellbeing, therefore, can be understood as a dynamic balance between an individual's available resources and the challenges they face [6]. In accordance with the literature concerning social factors, two categories were observed which describe elements of stress related to relationships between COs (correctional officers) and their peers and superiors.

Carnevale and colleagues (2018) strongly emphasized that different aspects of the prison environment lead to a lack of job satisfaction [6].

Organizational and operational stressors contribute to "burnout". The term "burnout" is frequently used to describe a state of emotional exhaustion that workers experience, which may be accompanied by a reduced sense of job role effectiveness and/or an attitude of indifference or callousness toward justice-involved individuals or other staff members [8,35].

Denhof explained corrections Fatigue as capture the range of stressors and types of exposure that can and do operate in corrections settings [8]. The three major types of stressors in the Corrections Fatigue Process Model have been described as Organizational, Operational, and Traumatic. Organizational stressors specifically include such facets as dual role conflict, difficult/demanding social interactions, low organizational support, and insufficient education and training on coping strategies [8].

Denhof and colleagues mentioned corrections occupation stressors and described the following figure [8].

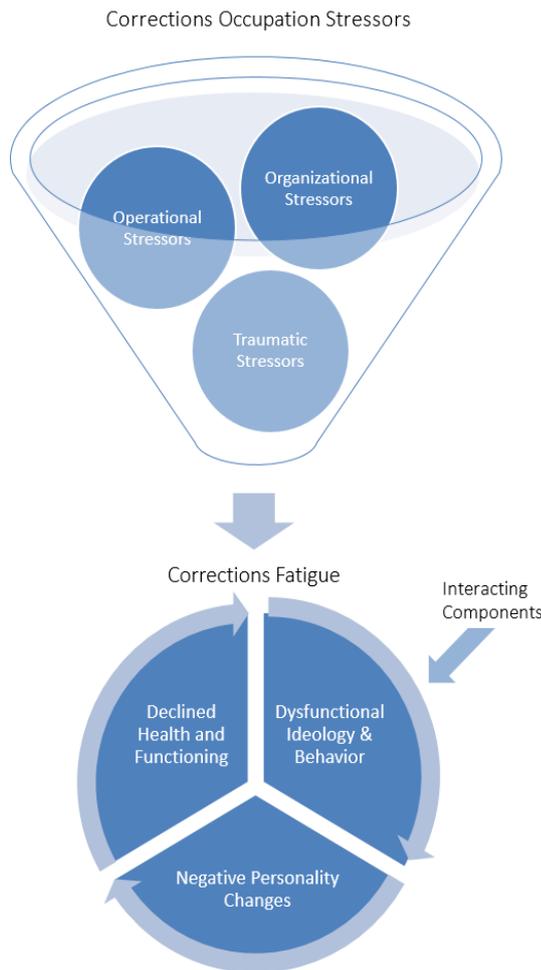


Fig. 1: Correction occupation stressors (<https://info.nicic.gov/nicrp/system/files/028299.pdf>)

The literature reports that prisoners’ mental health affect the mental health of prison staff. Role conflicts, environmental conditions, lack of family and relatives support, stressful events put elderly inmates’ mental health at risk, meanwhile the officers are faced with these difficulties in their daily lives. Corrections Fatigue can be understood as the cumulative toll upon the health and functioning of the corrections workforce that follows from traumatic, organizational, and operational stressors. Meanwhile workplace problems and stress can be reasons of negative changes in personality characteristics, and in declined health and functioning of workers.

**II. METHODS AND RESULTS**

During 2021, a seminar-training on "Development of social and emotional skills, creation of a supportive environment" was organized with 35 officers who started their new service in the Penitentiary Service. At the same seminar, officers conducted a “Social Emotional Skills Self-Assessment Questionnaire”. The questionnaire consists of 5 sections: self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, social management and responsible decision-making, 5 questions for each section, a total of 25 questions.

Self-awareness (12,89±2.63; min.0, max.15), self-regulation (12,46±2,51; min.4, max.15), social-awareness

(11.03±1.99; min.4, max.15), social management (12,08±2.6; min.2, max.15), and responsible decision-making (12,46±3,2; min.1, max.15) scores fluctuated between 0-15.

The strong positive correlation was determined between questionnaire sections, and it was statistically significant result.

- Self-awareness and self-regulation ( $r=0,595^{**}$ ;  $p<0,01$ );
- Self-awareness and social-awareness ( $r=0,634^{**}$ ;  $p<0,01$ );
- Self-awareness and social management ( $r=0,728^{**}$ ;  $p<0,01$ );
- Self-awareness and responsible decision-making ( $r=0,554^{**}$ ;  $p<0,01$ );
- Self-regulation and social management ( $r=0,741^{**}$ ;  $p<0,01$ );
- Self-regulation and responsible decision-making ( $r=0,737^{**}$ ;  $p<0,01$ );

*A. Assessment stress coping level of officers.*

The scale consists of 9 items and frequency assessed from 0-3 as a Likert scale, (Often-0, randomly-1, never-2).

- 0-3 high level of coping skills;
- 4-7 medium level;
- 8- and more; low level of coping skills.

The average scores of officers’ stress coping reaction were 6,66±3,48; min:1; max.14 (test of normality: 0.197; df=35; p=0.01). Majority of their stress coping reaction was low, it was shown on the boxplot.

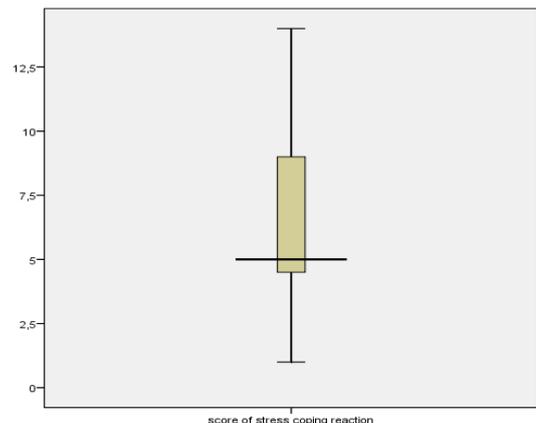


Fig. 2: Boxplot of stress coping reaction scores.

The aging process has an impact on elderly inmates’ QOL, although they don’t have any previous prison experience, they QOL indicators changed negatively. The relationship and communication have an impact on the aging prison population, however, the interpersonal relationship in the prison influenced their daily mood and quality of life more than personal relationship with family members, and relatives. Officers’ attitude and their approach was one of the strong influential factors on elderly offenders. At the same time, officers self-awareness, self-regulation, social management and responsible decision-making skills were interrelated each others. Prison officers’ stress coping skills and techniques were low, so these facts let us work on support program model.

Social-emotional support program was planned as a short training model for 3 days.

Days	Sessions and targets	Expectations
The first day	1 <sup>st</sup> session: -social emotional learning process; map of the training; 2 <sup>nd</sup> session: -interpersonal and intrapersonal relationship skills; -social-emotional skills; -assessment of the skills; 3 <sup>rd</sup> session: -empathy; -social awareness; -social management skills;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess and apply skills, including self-awareness, to protect the well-being of them and prisoners;</li> <li>• Understands the importance of their own well-being as a factor influencing the well-being of others;</li> <li>• Learns different approaches to enhance professional development</li> </ul>
The second day	1 <sup>st</sup> session: -positive emotions; positive thinking; 2 <sup>nd</sup> session: -steps for positive relationships;	using all available resources, including self-reflection, as well as leadership and collaboration with colleagues;
The third day	1 <sup>st</sup> session: -stress; the reasons and symptoms; -stress coping skills; 2 <sup>nd</sup> session: -creating supportive environment;  Reflection and evaluating the program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the importance of a supportive environment for the psychosocial well-being of older prisoners and learns how to create it in an institution.</li> </ul>

Table 1: Social-emotional program model

**B. Limitation of the study**

Since the attendance at the study was voluntary, not all the staff made themselves available to participate in interviews. This is the first limitation, as more participation was expected.

Another limitation is due to variables, during the research limited numbers of variables were chosen and checked correlation between these factors. Based on these data, in the future, the qualitative study could be realized related to subjective attitude of participants.

Considering this project as a first local experiment, in the future, we would like to expand this kind of survey to other prisons of regions with more participants.

**III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The main purpose of research intended to illustrate interpersonal relationship is focused on officers’ attitudes. Although the different studies have been realized in other countries about prison officers’ behavior, (Owen (1983) Liebling and colleagues (1999), Lemmergard and Muhr (2012), Ibsen (2013) Ricciardelli and Perry (2016) Halsey and Deegan (2017)) but this research is the first in our country.

The implementation phase involves the actual roll out of trainings, interventions, changes, or other improvement effort activities. While improvement effort options could vary widely in their form and extent, examples targeting Corrections Fatigue in specific ways that follow from quantitative assessment results, should be prioritized.

Denhof and colleagues give examples of some currently available resources:

- Psychological First Aid, an evidence-informed approach for individuals and groups in the aftermath of traumatic exposure;
- Resilience-promoting trainings;
- Trainings on the topic of Emotional/Social Intelligence;
- Trainings on the effects of traumatic stress exposure for Probation and Parole Officers, offered by KSL Research, Training & Consultation, LLC [8].

Based on the statistical operation the following significant figures were summarized:

- The strong positive correlations were determined between Social Emotional Skills Self-Assessment Questionnaire items, Self-awareness and self-regulation, social-awareness, social management, responsible decision-making ( $r=0,595^{**}; p<0,01; r=0,634^{**}; p<0,01; r=0,728^{**}; p<0,01; r=0,554^{**}; p<0,01$ ); also self-regulation and social management, responsible decision-making skills of officers ( $r=0,711^{**}; p<0,01; r=0,737^{**}; p<0,01$ ).
- The average scores of officers’ stress coping reaction were  $6,66\pm 3,48$ ; majority of their stress coping reaction was low ( $0.197; df=35; p=0.01$ ).

• **Recommenadation:**

- Enlightenment about geriatric syndromes (frequent falls, cognitive impairment and dementia, incontinence, sensory impairment and polypharmacy) should be realized among prisoners and staff personnel. Persons ageing in prisons should receive periodic medical and psychological care to identify new geriatric syndromes as they arise. It was emphasized in International Review of the Red Cross in 2016 [5, 11].
- Prison staff should be informed about risk factors and warning signs on risk of self-harm, depression symptoms and future effects. This can be main topic of seminar with officers.
- Psychologist should involve elderly inmates to group therapy to prevent social isolation and make connection with relatives. Because of social isolation can lead to diminished functional capacity or may be exacerbated by it, putting older adults at a risk for subsequent loneliness and other diseases [28].

- -Prisons can be staffed in part by prisoners-volunteers, who may receive extensive training and mentored experience in hospice practices as other countries [3,6,8].
- Job satisfaction of the officers' need to be learnt more detailed and make special program consists of social-emotional skills. The problem has been highlighted in other research, too [6, 33].

### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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