

WELFARE AND WELL-BEING OF PRISON PERSONNEL

(SPECIFIC TO MENTAL, PHYSICAL HEALTH AND SAFETY)

Background

World over, it has been established that prisons have a high prevalence of mental health and substance use problems.

Estimates from different countries suggest that

- The prevalence of mental health problems in prisons is three to five times higher than in the general population.
- Of the nine million prisoners world-wide, at least one million suffer from a significant mental disorder and even more suffer from common mental disorders such as depression and anxiety.(WHO Report 2008)
- There is often co-morbidity with conditions such as personality disorder, alcohol and drug dependence.

Background Continued...

- Work in a prison is demanding and has a significant emotional impact on staff.
- Prisons are punitive and often violent environments, with a climate of hopelessness, anxiety, fear and distress.
- Prison officers experience an 'ever-present risk' of assault, and at the same time have to deal with challenging situations such as contraband smuggling, assaults, self-harm, suicide attempts etc.,.
- Suffer from depression, a sense of isolation, poor physical health, sleepless nights, difficulties relaxing, 'bringing the job home', and emotional desensitisation, sometimes resulting in alcohol and drug dependency.

Background continued...

- Prison staff experience high levels of work-related stress.
- Now their job has become much more complex.
- Feeling overstrained and unable to find the necessary time for the different tasks required are common sources of stress.
- Some prison officers report having difficulties knowing how to reconcile the two main aims of their work: 'custody', ie maintaining security and control, and 'care' ie building relationships with prisoners and helping them to deal with their offending behaviour.
- Feeling unrecognised and unsupported by management can add to stress levels.

Mental Health and Substance Use Problems in Prison
(*The Bangalore Prison Mental Health Study*)
Research study-2011

National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences Bangalore

Findings on Prison staff:-

- 29.2% of the staff was overweight.
- 97% had symptoms of stress including ulcer symptoms
- headaches (46%), worries (39%), aches and pains (34%),
- inability to relax (32%), depression and sadness (32%),
- tiredness (33%), anger/irritation (30%),

Continued.....

- 81% reported moderate to high levels of overall stress,
- personal safety concerns (82%),
- difficulties in managing prisoners (69%),
- family problems (40%),
- fear of suspension (39%),
- reduced sleep (15%) and backache (18%).

Continued....

- financial problems (38%),
- and fear of transfer (23%).
- 40% of the staff felt unappreciated by their superiors
- 91% reported verbal abuse from their superiors
- and 12 % physical abuse.

Sources of Stress

Difficulties in managing prisoners
Anticipation of transfer and fear of suspension
Night duty shift
Unfairness in posting for duties
Financial issues
Family related problems(82% spend less than 3 hours with family)
Low salary(40%)
Low morale due to lack of appreciation from superiors(40%)
Lack of respect

Sources of Stress continued...

(Report of NIMHANS-2011)

Organisational

- Poor budget allocation
- Understaffing
- Overcrowding
- Overtime
- Shift work
- Role conflict & Ambiguity
- Rigid hierarchy
- Lack of training

Work

- Threats from Inmates
- Inmate violence
- Inmate manipulation
- Underpayment
- Corruption
- Poor security
- Lack of Incentives
- Poor job satisfaction/monotonous
- Illicit drug trafficking
- Concerns for personal safety

Sources of Stress Continued...

Social

- Poor public image
- Family stress
- Health issues
- Societal scrutiny

Others

- Human rights
- Media
- Crime syndicates
- Complaints from other agencies

Other research studies reveal

- The use of technology in prison settings can support officers, but also does have negative implications, for example if resulting in reduction of staff levels or in the monotonous duty of only one officer to monitor a screen for a whole day/shift.
- Prison staff are also exposed with regard to their health.
- Risk of infection with diseases such as hepatitis B and C and tuberculosis (TB) is significantly higher among prisoners than in the general population, in particular where prisons are overcrowded and detainees subject to unhealthy conditions such as lack of air, light, sanitary facilities and means of personal hygiene, and adequate nutrition.

STRESS AND BURN OUT IN PRISON PERSONNEL

- Stress is the result of a discrepancy between situational demands and available resources whether they are physical, mental, or emotional (Sarafino, 1990).
- Burnout is a form of job-related stress, it is a state of being physically and emotionally depleted or exhausted from excessive demands in a working environment (Lambert, Hogan, & Altheimer, 2010; Whitehead & Linqvist, 1986).
- Stress is associated with physical safety. Numerous articles have noted the significant amount of stress that is placed on correctional employees partially due to the dangerous nature of their occupation.
- Correctional employees are surrounded by potentially violent individuals who have been convicted of crimes and are being held against their will. These crimes range from drug possession to rape and murder

A US STUDY REPORT

- A recent study of the consequences of job stress in correctional officers revealed that
- the life expectancy of a correctional officer is **59 years**, compared to **75 years** for the national average.
- 33.5% of all assaults in prisons and jails are committed by inmates against staff.
- A Prison officer's 58th birthday, on average, is their last.
- A Prison officer will be seriously assaulted at least twice in a **20 year** career.
- On average a Prison officer will live only **18 months** after retirement.
- Prison officers have a **39%** higher suicide rate,
- PTSD rates ten times higher than the general population,
- A divorce rate that's 20% higher than the national average,
- And heart disease affects staff at a rate that is **50%** higher than any other occupation.

Impact of Stress (Findings of NIMHANS study 2011)

- Medical Problems such as headache, hypertension etc
- Mental illness such as depression, anxiety and alcoholism
- Family discord
- Burn out and absenteeism
- Suicide and deliberate self harm
- Poor quality of life
- Human rights violation of the prisoners
- Effect on the prisoners rehabilitation

What need to be done

- Training should include subjects like stress management, lifestyle management, Personality development;
- 3 shift duty system-Not more than 8hrs of duty and weekly holiday;
- Facilities while on duty like Toilets, one free meal, dining hall, resting place Lockers, first aid boxes, Rain coats, umbrellas, torch lights etc.,
- Medical facilities as recommended by Model Prison Manual 2016;
- Housing for prison staff on modern lines with adequate community services and facilities; Maintenance of Parks and other utilities;
- Staff quarters should have periodical disinfection, Conservancy and sanitation services
- Service conditions as recommended by Mulla Committee

Continued....(Model Prison Manual 2016)

- Staff welfare committees at each institution which meets every month;
- Central welfare Committee at headquarters with DG as President, DIG(Hqtrs) as Vice President, Range DIGs and others as members;
- The Central welfare committee shall inter alia, chalk out programme for staff welfare, build a welfare fund, organize Cooperative Credit Society and multipurpose cooperative shop;
- Welfare fund shall be created at every institution for providing amenities to staff and their families. Fund will be developed as suggested by Model Prison Manual;

Welfare benefits

(Model Prison Manual-2016)

- Relief in case of sudden illness
- Medical aid/grant in deserving cases
- Aid for education of children
- Facilities to family members for running cottage industries and handicrafts;
- Staff canteen; Staff club; Libraries;Recreational and Cultural activities;
- Staff sports, Institutional and inter-institutional fixtures etc.,
- Forum at institutional and State level for ventilation of staff grievances;

Conclusion

- Prisons damage people, both Prisoners and staff.
- Prisons should not be resorted to lodging people who are not threat to society
- Measures to reduce overcrowding should be immediately taken
- Short term imprisonment has no benefit to either prisoner or society
- Instead of imprisonment, alternatives like community service orders should be used
- Electronic monitoring for non serious undertrials should be considered
- Finally, Prisons should be resorted to when 1.offence is grave
2.offender is dangerous or 3.when there is no alternative.