

# Mental health conditions among correctional officers in Nusakambangan, Indonesia

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## Mental health conditions among correctional officers in Nusakambangan, Indonesia

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### Abstract

**Background:** Several studies have found a relationship between work environment conditions and employee mental health. However, there are very few studies on the mental health of employees working in correctional institutions, with different levels of risk and security threats.

**Purpose:** To find differences in the mental health of correctional officers in correctional institutions who work with different levels of security medium, maximum, and super-maximum.

**Method:** Data were collected using a mental health scale on one hundred and sixteen correctional officers on Nusakambangan Island, Cilacap Regency, Central Java. (Super-maximum n = 37, maximum n = 50, and Medium n = 29. The Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38), created by Veit and Ware (1983), was used to measure mental health. The MHI-38 has been translated into Indonesian and tested into 24 items after being modified for validity and reliability.

**Results:** Correctional guards' mental health differed between medium, maximum, and super-maximum security correctional institutions, according to the test of difference (Sig.<0.05, F = 4.034). Officers at medium security scored lower on the danger perception scale than those at Max and Super-Max prisons. On the other hand, medium correctional officers demonstrated better mental health than Super-Max correctional officers. A substantial difference in mental health was found between the Med and Max prisons (0.046, CI =0.09:8.54) and Super-Max (0.06, CI = 1.87:10.85) according to the difference tests conducted on the mental health of officers at medium, maximum, and super-maximum security correctional institutions.

**Conclusion:** This study found that there are differences in the mental health of officers in correctional institutions with different security levels. Officers working in super-maximum correctional institutions showed the lowest level of mental health compared to the other two prisons. The implication of this study recommends the importance of officer mental health maintenance programs with a policy of rotation of employees to correctional institutions in different security levels.

**Keywords:** Correctional Institution Officer; Level of Security; Mental Health.

### INTRODUCTION

Workplace stress plays a role in triggering employee mental health problems (Marcatto, Colautti, Filon, Luis, Di Blas, Cavallero, & Ferrante, 2016). Employees experienced greater mental health problems in those who reported experiencing work stress than those who reported not experiencing stress (Mino, Shigemi, Tsuda, Yasuda, & Bebbington, 1999). Factors that contribute to the

emergence of stress consist of personal and environmental or external factors. Personal factors include role conflict, role ambiguity, and conflict in personal goals. Environmental factors consist of organizational policies, communication factors, job requirements, and physical conditions of the organization (Amiri, 2019).

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Previous references found that a number of external factors, such as work demands and atmosphere, determine employee well-being as an indicator of mental health. The existence of high job demands with low control is a greater risk of mental health problems (Harvey, Modini, Joyce, Milligan-Saville, Tan, Mykletun, Bryant, Christensen, & Mitchell, 2017). Previous research concluded that heavier workloads, high skill demands, disharmonious coworker relationships, role conflicts, and irregular employment status lead to high psychological distress and psychosomatic complaints (Callard, Dorling, Friedli, Parsonage, & Cohen, 2007). External factors, such as peer support, well-designed organizational structures, and reward systems, also play an important role in balancing the negative impact of work factors that are detrimental to employees' psychological well-being (Schneider & Weigl, 2018). These research findings illustrate that the external conditions of the work environment are strongly related to a number of indicators of employees' mental health.

Several types of jobs have high-risk work characteristics that can impact employees' mental health. Those who work in emergency tasks with various psychosocial risk factors, such as high time pressure and variable workload, have the potential to experience trauma (Schneider & Weigl, 2018). Occupations that have high occupational risks and require mental health roles to deal with them include airline pilots, air traffic controllers, and police (Butcher, Front, & Ones, 2018). Other occupations that often deal with emergency and security situations showing a high risk of stress are firefighters, paramedics, members of the armed forces and security guards, including correctional institution officers (Kinman, Clements, & Hart, 2016). These types of jobs are potential sources of high job stress that impact employees' mental health.

Correctional officers' primary duties include regulating correctional institution security, guiding inmate behavior, and maintaining a balanced level of "order" within a hierarchical relationship between officers and offenders (Ferdik & Smith, 2016). The work environment in correctional institutions is a challenging and physically and mentally risky external factor for officers. Correctional institution officers experience stress and impaired mental well-being due to their high-risk work (Kinman, Clements,

& Hart, 2016). The risk of mental disorders in correctional officers to be 56.9%, institutional governance officers 60.3%, and probation/parole officers 59.2% (Ricciardelli, Mitchell, Taillieu, Angehrn, Afifi, & Carleton, 2021). Officer health problems are related to stress stemming from poor job skills (Walker, Jackson, Egan, & Tonkin, 2015), role ambiguity, role conflict, task overload, career development, overwork, safety issues, and correctional institution riots (Stern, 2019; Triplett, Mullings, & Scarborough, 1996). Even some prison officers experience mental health problems as a negative impact of occupational trauma (Dennard, Tracy, Beeney, Craster, Bailey, Baureek, & Kothari, 2021).

The Indonesian Correctional System has been revitalized since 2018 to anticipate the threat of unrest, reduce the level of the risk and improve the quality of the Inmate development program. Correctional revitalization for Inmate development applies the classification of correctional institutions listed in the Regulation of the Minister of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia Number 35 of 2018. The placement of Inmates based on the classification of the risk level is carried out in correctional institutions of super-maximum security level (Super-Max), maximum (Max), medium (Med), and minimum security (Min). Revitalization creates a different working environment for officers regarding the level of security and risk of inmates. However, studies that explain the level of work risk, level of security and mental health of correctional officers are still very limited.

The revitalization system places Inmates based on the level of risk of conviction based on risk assessment. The risk assessment determines the classification of Inmates, which has implications for determining the treatment pattern, placement, and level of security used, including the type of sanctions if they have the potential to escape and violate the rules (Haryono, 2017). Thus, security strategies and the interaction of correctional officers with Inmates are applied differently based on threats and risks and the level of correctional institution security. In the Super-Max category of correctional institutions, the development program for high-risk Inmates endangers state security and endangers public safety (Article 10). While Inmates are placed alone in one residential room, Inmates placed in Max

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correctional institutions are initially inmates of Super-Max correctional institutions who have shown changes in attitude and behavior and a decrease in the level of risk, according to the results of the assessment. Correctional institutions at the Med security level place inmates in groups in a block according to interests and talents and provide job skills training. In minimum-security-level correctional institutions, inmates are placed in groups in residential blocks by taking into account their competence, abilities, and skills. They carry out assimilation activities and are entitled to a reintegration program in the community.

This research was conducted on Nusakambangan Island. The island, which is under the special authority of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, has correctional institutions with all levels of security. Nusakambangan Island is an island off the southern coast of western Central Java that, since 1608, has been used as a place of exile by the rulers of Mataram and a place for Dutch political Inmates from Aceh (Boomgaard, 2001). The isolated island of Nusakambangan is often referred to as a "prison island" or "Indonesia's Alcatraz." The surroundings of the penitentiary are forested. Correctional officers and visitors still often encounter wild animals, such as leopards, panthers, monkeys, and crocodiles. The island's prisons house high-risk inmates transferred from correctional institutions across Indonesia (including foreign nationals). With these working environments, correctional institution officers are in a high-risk work situation.

Workplace stress can be caused by a variety of factors, including "poor work organization (the way we design jobs and work systems, and the way we manage them), by poor work design (e.g., lack of control over work processes), by poor management, unsatisfactory working conditions, and a lack of support from colleagues and supervisors (Maulik, 2017). Correctional officers' work stress occurs due to working with a shift system, continuing to work on weekends and holidays, and limited opportunities to take leave because they must be ready twenty-four hours in the event of a security disturbance. The employees in security and guard squads with high workloads experienced high work stress (Alfandra, 2019). In addition to the problem of working time, correctional officers also experience stress related to double duties, namely carrying out the function of

rehabilitating prisoners and being responsible for maintaining prison security (Micieli, 2013).

A series of studies have identified several factors that contribute to mental health problems among correctional officers. Empirical findings using self-report suggest that correctional officers face sources of stress, such as unreasonable demands from inmates, unexpected behavior from inmates, confrontations with inmates, and riots (Launay & Fielding, 1989). Research using self-report methods found significantly more correctional officers experienced higher symptoms of mental disorders, social anxiety, panic disorder, trauma, and depression (Fusco, Ricciardelli, Jamshidi, Carleton, Bamim, Hilton, & Groll, 2021). The level of risk of inmates, security systems, and inmate guidance in different correctional institutions at Supermax, Max, and Med can be minimized by implementing measures aimed at reducing the risk of those concerned committing acts of violence in correctional institutions (Haryono, 2017). Risks that often arise in correctional institutions relate to violence, riots, fires, smuggling, escape, and the spread of disease (Alarid & Marquart, 2009; Russo, Woods, Shaffer, & Jackson, 2019; Wibowo, 2020). The study on perceptions of occupational risk found that employees who perceive more occupational risk experience more dissatisfaction and increased psychological distress at work (Migisha, Ario, Kwesiga, Bulage, Kadobera, Kabwama, Katana, Ndyabakira, Wadunde, Byaruhanga, Amany, Harris, & Fitzmaurice, 2021; Rundmo, 1995).

The difference in officer work risk arises from the interaction of officers with inmates in each correctional institution. The Med security correctional institution provides an opportunity for inmates and officers to interact longer and more intensely in coaching activities. However, Max and Super-Max correctional institutions apply different interaction patterns. This difference in interaction can be a source of risk for psychological distress. Contact with inmates is one source of stress for correctional officers. Previous research found a close relationship between burnout and prison staff contact with inmates (Gerstein, Topp, & Correll, 1987). The interaction between correctional officers and inmates in correctional institutions will develop in a context of conflict of interest, where officers have the responsibility to control the behavior of inmates

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(Martinez-iñigo, 2021). Inmates who are cooperative in their interactions with officers lead to a lighter emotional burden on officers (Misis, Kim, Cheeseman, Hogan, & Lambert, 2013), while argumentative and arrogant inmates add to officers' anxiety. The differences in officers' interactions with inmates in correctional institutions with different levels of security may be related to differences in officers' mental health.

Based on the previous explanations, the research hypothesized that there are differences in the level of mental health of officers at different levels of correctional institutions security: Super-max, Max, and Med.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This study involved one hundred and sixteen Super-Max (n = 37), Max (n = 50), and Med (n = 29) correctional officers on Nusakambangan Island, Cilacap Regency, Central Java. The number of participants consisted of: Participants were civil

servants who worked in the field 5 security or guidance in correctional institutions. Mental health was measured using the Mental Health Inventory (MHI-38), developed by Veit and Ware (1983). The MHI-38 has been adapted to the Indonesian language and tested for validity and reliability into 24 items with four answer options: almost all the time, very often, rarely, and never. The health aspects measured include psychological well-being (emotion, love, and contentment) and psychological distress (anxiety, depression, and loss of control) (Aziz & Zamroni, 2020).

Researchers also conducted three days of observation to observe the routine activities of security officers during morning working hours at super-maximum, maximum, and medium correctional institutions. The aspects of activities observed included inmate-officer interactions during cell opening, food and health services, and coaching activities.

**RESEARCH RESULTS**

10 Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=116)

Variables	Result
<b>Age (n/%)</b> <b>(Mean±SD)(Range)(Years)</b>	(33.22±9.64)(22-58)
20-30	74/63.8
31-40	20/17.2
41-50	9/7.8
51-60	13/11.2
<b>Gender (n/%)</b>	
Female	6/5.2
Male	110/94.8
<b>Education (n/%)</b>	
High school	55/47.4
Diploma	6/5.2
Bachelor	49/42.2
Magister	6/5.2
<b>Working place (n/%)</b>	
Medium security	29/25.0
Maximum security	50/43.1
Super maximum security	37/31.9

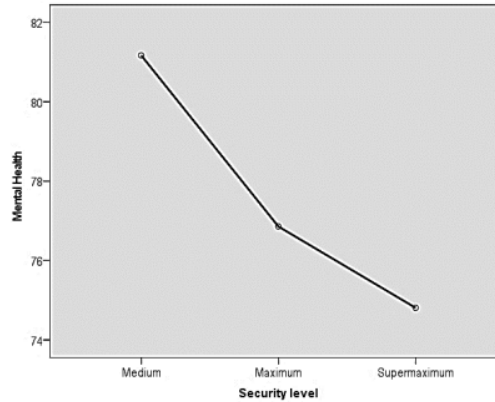
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Correctional officers in the Nusakambangan Island area are predominantly male (94.8%), and only six respondents are female officers who serve as administrative staff in the security section of the correctional institution. Based on education level, respondents with a high school education background were most dominant (47.4%) and undergraduate (42.2%). The age of the respondents with a mean and standard deviation of (33.22±9.641) and the age range is between 22 to 58 years.



Picture 1. Chart of differences in mental health in officers of super-maximum, maximum, and medium security correctional institutions

The test of difference in this study found a difference in the mental health of correctional officers in Med, Max, and Super-Max security correctional institutions (Sig.<0.05, F = 4.034). Figure 1 shows the difference in officers at MED correctional institutions having more positive contact with inmates than Max and Super-Max correctional institutions. Likewise, the risk perception aspect of officers at MED correctional institutions showed lower scores than at Max and Super-Max correctional institutions. However, Super-Max correctional officers showed lower levels of mental health than MED correctional officers.

Tabel 2. Multiple comparisons of mental health in super-maximum, maximum and medium-security correctional institutions

Variable	Security Class	Security Level	14	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
			Mean Difference			Lower	Upper
Mental Health	Medium	Maximum	4.312*	2.133	.046	.09	8.54
		Supermaximum	6.362*	2.266	.006	1.87	10.85
	Maximum	Medium	-4.312*	2.133	.046	-8.54	-.09
		Supermaximum	2.049	1.982	.303	-1.88	5.98

Further difference tests on the differences in mental health of officers at Med, Max, and Super-Max security correctional institutions (Table 2) showed a significant difference in mental health between Med and Max correctional institutions (0.046, CI = .09:8.54) and Super-Max (0.06, CI = 1.87:10.85). However, there is no significant difference in the mental health of officers in Max and Super-Max correctional institutions.

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## DISCUSSION

8 Regulation No. 33/2015 of the Minister of Law and Human Rights of the Republic of Indonesia regulates the security classification of correctional institutions. Article 4 divides correctional institutions into very high, high, medium, and low security groups and divides them based on their building and supervision patterns. Correctional institutions categorized as very high have layered fencing, separate placement, closed-circuit TV surveillance, movement restrictions, visitation restrictions, and coaching activities, as well as communication control.

This study found differences in the mental health of Med, Max, and Super-Max correctional officers. Max and Super-Max correctional institutions create more negative and very limited working conditions for officers. These correctional institution officers carry out tasks with strict procedures and interact with high-risk inmates. Whereas in medium-security correctional institutions, officers interact with medium-risk inmates with a lighter level of mental stress because officers face fewer potential threats. The different forms of security have implications for the different patterns of contact between officers and inmates. Therefore, Med correctional institution officers have more confidence in being able to control inmates. The ability to control job risks is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression and higher job satisfaction (Mark & Smith, 2012).

In Max and Super-Max correctional institutions, officers face different conditions as they have higher potential threats. The status of inmates in these correctional institutions is included in the high-risk category. The security surveillance system is implemented for twenty-four hours using CCTV. Officers must handcuff inmates. Communication and interaction between officers and inmates must be conducted in complete and closed security.

Needs and risk assessments place inmates in super-maximum, maximum, and medium correctional institutions. Super-max and Max correctional institutions contain high-risk inmates and are supervised with a high level of security, so that Super-Max and Max correctional officers face inmates and work environments that are higher risk than medium. High-risk inmates are placed in intensive treatment programs, taking into account

aspects of antisocial behavior history, antisocial behavior patterns, antisocial cognitions, and antisocial associations, which have a major impact on recidivism (James, 2018). In addition, inmates placed in Max correctional institutions have strong criminogenic factors in family factors, education, employment, poor social relationships, and anti-social attitudes. The nature of maximum security correctional institutions has high-risk inmates with a background of violent cases, part of gangs able to smuggle goods and escape from prison (Binswanger, Stern, Deyo, Heagerty, Cheadle, Elmore, & Koepsell, 2007; Mullings, Marquart, & Brewer, 2000). Under these conditions, correctional officers work in dangerous conditions because they face threats that appear constantly (Ferdik, Smith, & Applegate, 2014). In contrast to medium- and low-risk inmates who are placed in medium-security-level correctional institutions. Based on observations, medium correctional institutions place inmates in rooms in groups and allow them to participate in job training activities, spiritual development, and sports in groups. Medium correctional institutions also prepare inmates to participate in reintegration programs such as assimilation and parole.

In medium correctional institution, officers are autonomously able to order inmates in and out of their cell rooms, worship, exercise, and gather inmates in one place to participate in coaching activities every day according to a specified schedule. Whereas in Super-Max and Max correctional institutions, the authority of officers is very limited. Officers monitor inmates with CCTV and open and close cell doors based on a strict schedule, including feeding and escorting activities in open areas. This finding is in line with the explanation of previous research, which states that high authority and task control for officers are negatively associated with psychological distress, somatic complaints, and low emotional exhaustion. This means that when officers are given autonomy and authority to supervise and control inmates, such as in medium correctional institutions, it can minimize the symptoms of mental health disorders. Officers working in Super-Max and Max correctional institutions are more likely to experience psychological distress when facing threatening and high-risk situations (Akerboom & Maes, 2006).

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The level of threat to the work environment in prisons is strongly influenced by the perception of risk, which is strongly influenced by the subjective assessment of hazard characteristics (Ferdik, 2016). Subjective assessments of danger in supermax and max correctional institutions are related to the characteristics of inmates with serious criminal backgrounds (such as terrorists, drug dealers, murderers, and inmates with death sentences) and the potential for inmate violence and rebellion. The perceived danger of such officers contributes to higher job stress (Misis et al., 2013). Unsafe work environments and interactions with inmates risk being a source of mental health threats. Job demands cause strain for employees, and they become uncomfortable. Specific job demands, such as dangerous work, role ambiguity, and job autonomy, are work environments that have life satisfaction effects (Lambert, Hogan, Worley, & Worley, 2022).

The current study found that super-max correctional institution officers had lower mental health tendencies compared to max and med. Super-max officers have high psychological distress characterized by anxiety, depression, and loss of behavioral and emotional control, which is stronger than the other two correctional institutions. This finding is in line with previous references that state that perceived life safety risks, job insecurity, and work-family conflict negatively and significantly impact employee performance (Zhang, Gu, Xie, Khakimova, & Zolotarev, 2023). Working in an insecure environment has a high risk of causing significant effects of anxiety and depression in later life (Aguiar-Quintana, Nguyen, Araujo-Cabrera, & Sanabria-Díaz, 2021; Ahlin, Halonen, Madsen, Rugulies, Sørensen, & Hanson, 2021; Khudaykulov, Changjun, Obrenovic, Godinic, Alsharif, & Jakhongirov, 2022). Job insecurity is considered one of the most common causes of stress (Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002) and is associated with negative psychological and physical health (Nelson & Simmons, 2003). Employees' short- and long-term reactions to stress caused by job insecurity can lead to physical and mental problems and emotional and psychological exhaustion such as depression, anxiety, and tension (Li, Lin, & Fang, 2010).

Low mental health in super-max correctional institution officers is also related to a loss of control

over the task. Low job control, high demands, and insecurity are associated with poor psychosocial job quality (Too, Leach, & Butterworth, 2021). Poor psychosocial quality of work can lead to common mental disorders in the future. In contrast, the control capacity of officers in medical correctional institutions is greater, so their mental health is better than in supermax and max correctional institutions. Perceived control (individual level) can positively contribute to reducing the impact of job insecurity on life satisfaction (Lee & Tsai, 2022). Based on the different control authority factors in supermax, max, and med correctional institutions, there are differences in the psychological well-being and psychological distress of correctional institution officers.

## CONCLUSION

Correctional officers are among the occupations that have higher occupational risks. This study illustrates the differences in the level of mental health of correctional institution officers based on the work environment and characteristics of correctional institutions with different levels of security. The work environment with different security measures includes the level of risk of inmates, the relationship between officers and inmates, security rules, the treatment of inmates, and the potential threat of violence. Based on these findings, the Directorate General of Corrections can formulate a transfer policy and develop a mental health service program for correctional officers.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author(s) declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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