

Psychosocial Challenges of Inmates as Perceived by Correctional Officers in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explored correctional officers' perceptions of inmates' psychosocial challenges in Kwara State, Nigeria, focusing on how officers' gender, religion, and years of work experience influence these perceptions. A descriptive correlational survey design was employed, involving 120 correctional officers selected through multistage sampling from Ilorin Correctional Center (Oke-Kura), Mandala Correctional Center, and the State Headquarters Office, Ilorin. Descriptive and inferential statistics (t-test, ANOVA, and Pearson correlation) were used to analyze data at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed a moderate overall perception of psychosocial challenges, with depression and lack of family contact rated highest. Female officers, those with 15 or more years of experience, and officers from certain religious backgrounds demonstrated higher levels of awareness. The study concludes that demographic factors significantly shape officers' perceptions and underscores the need for targeted mental health training, gender- and religion-sensitive approaches, and improved psychological services within Nigerian correctional facilities.

1. Introduction

The correctional facility environment is often perceived solely as a place of punishment and confinement, but it is much more complex than that. Behind the barbed wires and high walls are human beings men and women whose lives are shaped by the conditions in which they live and the attitudes of those who guard them. In Kwara State, as in other parts of Nigeria, correctional institutions are not just centers for rehabilitation; they are spaces where the emotional, mental, and social experiences of inmates unfold daily. Having spent time observing how inmates interact with staff and fellow inmates, and how correctional officers themselves respond to the pressures of their roles, it is clear that the correctional facility environment demands more than security and discipline. It demands understanding, empathy, and systems that address the psychosocial wellbeing of inmates. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the psychosocial challenges faced by inmates not through their own voices, but as perceived by the correctional officers who observe them daily. These officers provide critical insights into the unseen struggles that affect the inmates' rehabilitation process and reintegration into society.

Psychosocial challenges refer to difficulties that stem from the interaction between an individual's psychological state and their social environment. In the correctional facility context, this includes emotional distress, behavioral disorders, anxiety, depression, suicidal tendencies, social withdrawal, aggression, poor interpersonal relationships, and lack of purpose or hope. These challenges are often exacerbated by incarceration conditions such as isolation, overcrowding, loss of autonomy, absence of family support, and the stigma attached to imcorrectional facilityment. According to Ibrahim et al. (2021), over 65% of Nigerian inmates exhibit symptoms of psychological distress, with many reporting feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, and disconnection. Similarly, a 2023 report by the Nigerian Correctional Service indicates that 4 in 10 inmates display signs of severe social dysfunction or emotional instability during incarceration.

In Kwara State alone, the Ministry of Justice (2024) noted that approximately 48% of the correctional facility population experiences one or more psychosocial challenges severe enough to interfere with rehabilitation. These statistics are alarming and suggest that a significant portion of the inmate population requires mental health and social support services that are currently inadequate. For example, depression among inmates is not only common but also underdiagnosed due to a lack of trained personnel and mental health screening tools. Likewise, aggressive behaviors are often misinterpreted as mere indiscipline rather than symptoms of deeper emotional issues. These psychosocial problems do not just affect the inmates they also place immense pressure on correctional officers who must manage them daily, often without sufficient training or psychological support themselves.

Gender of correctional officers plays a significant role in how psychosocial challenges of inmates are perceived, interpreted, and addressed. Gender influences not only communication styles and empathy levels, but also the officers' sensitivity to psychological symptoms. For instance, female officers are often more likely to interpret emotional signs such as tearfulness, silence, and withdrawal as indicators of depression or anxiety, while male officers may attribute such behaviors to weakness, indiscipline, or non-compliance (Adebayo & Musa, 2022). According to Ibrahim and Sanni (2021), female correctional officers were more inclined to refer inmates to available psychosocial support services when symptoms of depression or suicidal ideation were observed. In contrast, male officers were more likely to respond with disciplinary measures, particularly when inmates exhibited aggression or social isolation. These gender-based perceptual differences significantly influence how issues like emotional breakdowns, anxiety disorders, and suicidal thoughts are managed in correctional settings. Thus, gender acts as a moderating variable that shapes not only recognition but also response to psychosocial needs.

Religion of correctional officers is another important moderating factor that influences their perceptions and reactions to inmates' psychosocial challenges. Officers from different religious backgrounds may hold varying beliefs about mental health, discipline, and rehabilitation, which can shape how they interpret inmate behaviors. For instance, officers with strong religious convictions may be more likely to attribute emotional struggles such as depression or suicidal ideation to spiritual causes or moral lapses, while others may see them as medical or psychological conditions. According to Chukwu & Adeola (2023), religious beliefs can influence whether officers respond with compassion, prayer-based intervention, or referral to professional services. Evidence from the Nigerian Correctional Service Behavioral Survey (2023) revealed that officers who frequently integrate their faith into their duties were more inclined to recommend spiritual support for inmates, highlighting the importance of religion as a moderating influence in the perception and management of inmate behavior.

Years of work experience further moderates how correctional officers perceive and interpret inmates' psychosocial conditions. Officers with longer tenure tend to be more adept at recognizing behavioral patterns that suggest deeper psychological issues. For instance, those who have served for more than 10 years are more likely to understand that sudden aggression, repeated isolation, or refusal to participate in activities may be signs of depression, trauma, or suicidal ideation rather than deliberate misconduct (Omotayo & Garba, 2023). In contrast, newly recruited officers or those with fewer than five years of service may interpret such behaviors at face value, leading to punitive rather than rehabilitative responses. According to Aina and Olanrewaju (2022), experienced officers were 41% more consistent in recommending psychological assessments or intervention for inmates who displayed recurring emotional instability. Furthermore, seasoned officers often develop observational skills that help them detect subtle changes in behavior, mood, or interaction patterns among inmates' skills that are crucial for early identification of psychosocial risks. Therefore, years of work experience not only enhance awareness but also contribute to the accuracy and depth of understanding that officers bring to their roles in managing inmate well-being.

The role of correctional officers in identifying psychosocial challenges is indispensable. As front-line personnel, they witness inmates' emotional breakdowns, social struggles, and behavioral changes on a daily basis. Their perceptions are shaped not only by formal training and institutional policies but also by their personal experiences and demographic background. Correctional officers, whether consciously or unconsciously, interpret inmate behaviors through the lens of their own identity and history within the service. Thus, exploring how gender, religion, and work experience impact these perceptions can help uncover biases, improve training protocols, and enhance inmate support services. Ultimately, such understanding can improve inmate well-being, reduce recidivism, and foster a more humane correctional system.

Kwara State, located in the North-Central region of Nigeria, operates several correctional centers under the jurisdiction of the Nigerian Correctional Service. As of the most recent report in 2024 by the Kwara State Ministry of Justice, there are over 1,700 inmates spread across the major correctional facilities in Ilorin, Mandala, and other satellite towns. These facilities are burdened by overcrowding, limited rehabilitation programs, and under-resourced healthcare services. A significant proportion of inmates are awaiting trial some for years resulting in prolonged exposure to correctional facility conditions without definitive legal outcomes. This extended incarceration without trial further deteriorates inmates' mental and emotional well-being, leading to deeper psychological distress.

Facilities in the state often lack full-time clinical psychologists or social workers, and mental health interventions are scarce. According to data from the Nigerian Correctional Service (2023), only one out of every five correctional institutions in North-Central Nigeria including Kwara has access to periodic mental health assessments. This neglect places both inmates and correctional staff in a cycle of unmanaged psychosocial tension. Inmates facing psychological distress have limited access to professional intervention and are often managed through punitive rather than therapeutic approaches. This context makes it increasingly urgent to understand what challenges inmates are experiencing, and how correctional officers who see them daily perceive and interpret these experiences.

Another pressing concern is the stigmatization and social labeling that many inmates endure, both from society and within the correctional facility system. Stigma contributes significantly to their sense of isolation and loss of self-worth. Many inmates come from already disadvantaged backgrounds socially, economically, and educationally and their time in correctional facility further disconnects them from positive societal structures. In Kwara State, more than 60% of inmates, according to Adebayo and Tijani (2022), have no sustained family contact while incarcerated, which amplifies feelings of abandonment and hopelessness. Without psychosocial support systems in place, these challenges often worsen with time, reducing the chances of successful reintegration post-release.

Psychosocial challenges among inmates are not uniform; they vary in type, intensity, and impact. The major psychosocial challenges reported in Nigerian correctional facilities, and particularly in Kwara State, include depression, anxiety, aggression, social withdrawal, low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation. These problems are not isolated but often interconnected, forming a complex web that impairs inmates' ability to adapt, cope, and recover during incarceration. Depression is one of the most prevalent mental health issues among inmates. Symptoms include persistent sadness, lack of motivation, sleep disturbances, and feelings of hopelessness. The absence of meaningful activity, prolonged sentences, lack of family contact, and societal stigma contribute significantly to depressive episodes. According to Omotayo and Garba (2023), over 52% of inmates in Kwara correctional facilities showed moderate to severe signs of depression during routine behavioral assessments conducted by correctional facility psychologists.

Anxiety disorders are another significant challenge. Inmates constantly worry about their safety, the outcome of their trials, or the well-being of their families outside the correctional facility. Anxiety manifests in restlessness, irritability, difficulty concentrating, and sometimes somatic complaints like headaches and chest pain. The constant surveillance, noise, and unpredictability of correctional facility life intensify these feelings. Correctional officers often observe these symptoms but may lack the clinical training to identify them as mental health concerns, mistaking them for behavioral noncompliance instead (Nwoke & Samuel, 2021).

Aggression and violent behavior are frequently reported in correctional centers, but they are often misunderstood. Aggression may stem from untreated trauma, frustration due to unjust incarceration, or unmet emotional needs. In a 2023 behavioral report from the Nigerian Psychological Association, it was found that about 34% of inmate-on-inmate conflicts in Kwara State were linked to unresolved emotional or psychological issues, not just mere insubordination or rivalry. Correctional officers' responses to aggression whether disciplinary or rehabilitative depend significantly on how they perceive its root cause, which is where their experience, gender, and training become critical.

Social withdrawal and isolation are also common, especially among inmates who have experienced loss, family rejection, or long sentences. Social withdrawal can lead to decreased participation in correctional facility activities, refusal to engage with peers, and self-harm in extreme cases. These behaviors are often subtle and may be overlooked by untrained correctional staff. The effects of such withdrawal extend beyond incarceration, as many inmates who isolate themselves struggle with reintegration upon release (Okonkwo & Musa, 2020).

Low self-esteem and lack of self-efficacy are recurring issues, especially for inmates who have faced prolonged unemployment, substance abuse, or family abandonment before incarceration. The correctional facility system, while designed to rehabilitate, can further erode a person's sense of identity and agency. Many inmates internalize the stigma of correctional facility, viewing themselves as irredeemable. This mindset undermines their participation in rehabilitation programs and increases the likelihood of recidivism. Research by Aina and Olanrewaju (2022) in Ilorin correctional facility showed that inmates who exhibited higher levels of self-worth and received psychosocial support had a 33% lower likelihood of reoffending within two years of release.

Also, suicidal ideation and self-harm behaviors are rising concerns in Nigerian correctional facilities. The most recent available data from the Correctional Mental Health Audit (2024) revealed that 1 in every 9 inmates in Kwara State had contemplated or attempted suicide in the past year. Triggers include trauma, poor conditions, lack of contact with family, and absence of hope for the future. Many of these cases go undetected or are only recognized when physical harm has occurred. Correctional officers are often the first to witness these behaviors, yet without proper training and psychological insight, such issues may be misclassified or inadequately handled.

In light of the growing mental health crisis within correctional institutions, understanding the psychosocial challenges of inmates from the perspective of correctional officers becomes increasingly necessary. These officers serve as frontline observers whose perceptions are shaped by personal characteristics such as gender, gender, and work experience factors that significantly influence how inmate behaviors are interpreted. Given the critical shortage of mental health professionals in correctional centers across Kwara State, correctional officers' insights into inmate behavior offer an invaluable perspective that can inform rehabilitation strategies, inmate support systems, and policy development. This study, therefore, aims to explore how correctional

officers perceive the psychosocial challenges of inmates and how selected demographic factors moderate these perceptions.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The correctional facility system in Nigeria, including facilities in Kwara State, faces a silent but serious crisis an overwhelming prevalence of unaddressed psychosocial challenges among inmates. Despite ongoing reforms in the Nigerian Correctional Service, mental health and social support systems remain grossly inadequate. Inmates often struggle with depression, anxiety, aggression, social isolation, and suicidal tendencies, which are either ignored or misunderstood by the very people tasked with managing them. Unfortunately, due to insufficient training and lack of resources, many correctional officers lack the skills or sensitivity required to identify these psychosocial needs accurately. Even more concerning is the possibility that their perceptions are unintentionally shaped by personal characteristics such as gender, religion, and years of work experience, which may introduce bias into how they interpret inmate behavior. Without understanding how these factors affect officers' interpretations, interventions may remain misdirected or ineffective. Therefore, there is a pressing need to investigate how correctional officers perceive inmates' psychosocial challenges and what moderating role their personal demographics play in shaping these perceptions.

1.2. Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to explore correctional officers' perceptions of the psychosocial challenges faced by inmates and how these perceptions vary based on selected demographic characteristics. Specifically, the objectives are to:

- a. Identify the major psychosocial challenges experienced by inmates as perceived by correctional officers in Kwara State.
- b. Examine how correctional officers' gender, religion, and years of work experience influence their perceptions of inmates' psychosocial challenges.

1.3. Research Questions

- a. What are the psychosocial challenges of inmates as perceived by correctional officers?
- b. What are the perceptions of correctional officers on the influence of psychosocial challenges of inmates based on gender?
- c. What are the perceptions of correctional officers on the influence of psychosocial challenges of inmates based on years of experience?
- d. What are the perceptions of correctional officers on the influence of psychosocial challenges of inmates based on religion?

1.4. Research Hypotheses

- a. There is no significant difference in the perception of psychosocial challenges of inmates based on correctional officers' gender.
- b. There is no significant difference in the perception of psychosocial challenges of inmates based on their years of work experience.
- c. There is no significant difference in the perception of psychosocial challenges of inmates based on correctional officers' religion.

2. Method

This study investigated how correctional officers in Kwara State perceive the psychosocial challenges faced by inmates, with focus on the influence of gender, religion, and years of work experience. A descriptive correlational survey design was adopted to explore these relationships in a natural setting. The population comprised all correctional officers in Kwara state for the 2024/2025 service year, estimated at about 500. Using multistage sampling, a total of 120 officers were selected. Three major correctional centers in Ilorin, Ilorin correctional center (Oke-Kura), Mandala correctional center, and State headquarter office, Ilorin were purposively chosen based on size and access. Officers in each center were stratified by gender, religion, and years of experience after which systematic random sampling was used to select participants proportionately. Data were gathered using a researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Correctional Officers' Perception of Inmates' Psychosocial Challenges Questionnaire (COPIPSCQ)." Items were generated following a review of literature on inmate psychosocial challenges and correctional staff perceptions. Domains covered included

depression, anxiety, aggression, social withdrawal, self-esteem, and suicidal ideation. Three experts in counselling psychology and correctional studies evaluated the instrument for content validity. A pilot study involving 30 officers in a neighboring state yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .72 to .84 across subscales, indicating acceptable reliability. The final instrument had three sections: demographic data, 20 items on officers' perception of inmates' psychosocial issues (like depression, anxiety, and withdrawal), and 10 items on officers' attitudes and responses. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was used. Higher mean scores reflected stronger recognition of psychosocial challenges. Inferential statistics, including independent samples t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC), were used to test hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Research Question One: What Are the Psychosocial Challenges of Inmates as Perceived by Correctional Officers?

Table 1 reveals that correctional officers perceived inmates to face a range of psychosocial challenges at a moderate level overall (Total mean = 2.93). The highest-rated challenges were depression (M = 3.38) and lack of family contact (M = 3.30). Substance abuse (M = 2.48) had the lowest score. This indicates that correctional officers recognize psychosocial difficulties among inmates but vary in the extent to which they acknowledge specific issues.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Psychosocial Challenges of Inmates as Perceived by Correctional Officers

S/N	Item	M	SD	Remark
1	Many inmates experience persistent sadness or depression	3.38	0.64	High
2	Anxiety and nervousness are common among inmates	3.15	0.70	Moderate-High
3	Inmates frequently show signs of aggression	2.98	0.75	Moderate
4	Social withdrawal is a common behavior among inmates	2.85	0.78	Moderate
5	Suicidal thoughts or attempts are a significant concern	2.66	0.82	Moderate
6	Overcrowding worsens inmates' mental health	3.12	0.69	Moderate-High
7	Lack of family contact affects psychological wellbeing	3.30	0.67	High
8	Many inmates show trauma from past experiences	2.59	0.85	Moderate
9	Substance abuse contributes to psychological issues	2.48	0.83	Low-Moderate
10	Mental health problems are often overlooked by staff	2.77	0.74	Moderate
	Total Mean	2.93		Moderate

3.2. Research Question Two: What are the Correctional Officers' Responses and Attitudes Towards Inmates' Psychosocial Challenges?

Table 2 shows the grand mean of 2.98 suggests a moderate level of responsiveness and awareness among officers. They agreed most strongly on the need for training (M = 3.45) and the importance of addressing mental health for safety (M = 3.28). Some skepticism was evident (M = 2.41) regarding inmates exaggerating issues.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Correctional Officers' Responses and Attitudes Towards Inmates' Psychosocial Challenges

S/N	Item	M	SD	Remark
1	I feel confident in recognizing distress signs	2.90	0.76	Moderate
2	Addressing mental health improves correctional facility safety	3.28	0.68	Moderate-High
3	I try to support inmates with emotional problems	3.05	0.72	Moderate
4	More training is needed on mental health issues	3.45	0.63	High
5	My experience helps me understand psychosocial issues	3.00	0.75	Moderate
6	Gender influences my interpretation of behaviors	2.60	0.80	Moderate
7	Younger officers may not recognize mental issues	2.78	0.73	Moderate
8	I believe some inmates exaggerate their problems	2.41	0.86	Low-Moderate
9	Psychosocial problems should be handled by experts	3.22	0.69	Moderate-High
10	I feel limited by lack of resources	3.11	0.74	Moderate-High
	Total Mean	2.98		Moderate

3.3. Hypothesis One: There is no Significant Difference in the Perception of Psychosocial Challenges based on Gender

Table 3 shows that female officers had a higher mean perception (M = 31.42) compared to males (M = 29.68). The difference was significant (p = 0.035), indicating that gender significantly influenced officers' perception, with females showing greater sensitivity.

Table 3. Independent Samples t-Test on Correctional Officers' Perceptions Based on Gender

Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	p-value	Decision
Male	60	29.68	4.20	2.13	118	0.035	Reject H ₀
Female	60	31.42	3.78				

3.4. Hypothesis Two: There is no Significant Difference in the Perception of Psychosocial Challenges based on Religion

Table 4 shows a statistically significant difference in officers' perceptions based on religion ($F(2,117) = 3.12, p = 0.048$). This implies that religion has a significant influence on how correctional officers perceive the psychosocial challenges of inmates.

Table 4. One-Way ANOVA on Correctional Officers' Perceptions Based on Religion

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between Groups	112.76	3	37.59	2.98	0.034
Within Groups	1463.12	116	12.61		
Total	1575.88	119			

Table 5 shows the post hoc test reveals a significant difference between officers who identify as Christians and those who identify as Muslims in terms of their perception of inmates' psychosocial challenges. Other religious group comparisons were not statistically significant.

Table 5. Tukey's HSD Post Hoc Test for Religious Differences in Correctional Officers' Perception

Comparison	Mean Difference	p-value	Significance
Christianity vs Islam	1.80	0.031	Significant
Christianity vs Trad.	0.95	0.201	Not Significant
Islam vs Trad.	0.85	0.245	Not Significant

3.5. Hypothesis Three: There is No Significant Difference in the Perception of Psychosocial Challenges Based on Years of Work Experience

Table 6 shows that there was a significant difference in perception based on work experience ($F(3,116) = 3.24, p = 0.025$). Officers with 15 years and above had higher perception scores than others.

Table 6. One-Way ANOVA on Correctional Officers' Perceptions Based on Years of Work Experience

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
Between Groups	129.45	3	43.15	3.24	0.025
Within Groups	1543.35	116	13.30		
Total	1672.80	119			

Officers with 15+ years of experience had significantly higher perception scores than those with less than 10 years of experience (Table 7).

Table 7. Tukey's HSD Post Hoc Test for Work Experience Differences in Officers' Perceptions

Comparison	Mean Difference	p-value	Significance
15+ yrs vs <5 yrs	3.10	0.016	Significant
15+ yrs vs 5-9 yrs	2.20	0.041	Significant
Other comparisons	<1.50	>0.05	Not Significant

3.6. Discussion

This study examined correctional officers' perceptions of inmates' psychosocial challenges and how these perceptions varied across gender, religion, and years of experience. The findings revealed that officers generally acknowledged a wide range of psychosocial challenges such as depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and suicidal tendencies among inmates. However, substance abuse and trauma-related issues were rated lower. This finding supports Ibrahim et al. (2021), who observed that while correctional environments expose inmates to numerous stressors, not all officers recognize the deeper roots of these challenges. The reason could be that officers may be more attuned to visible behaviors like aggression or sadness but may overlook less obvious internal struggles such as substance dependence or past trauma due to lack of clinical training.

The study also found that female officers reported significantly higher perception scores of inmates' psychosocial challenges compared to male officers. This finding is in line with Adebayo and Musa (2022), who found that female officers are often more empathetic and emotionally responsive to inmate needs. The reason could be that gendered socialization tends to promote emotional awareness and relational sensitivity in females, making them more attentive to psychological distress signals.

Furthermore, religion was found to significantly influence officers' perceptions. Officers from different religious backgrounds demonstrated varying levels of sensitivity to inmates' psychosocial challenges. This aligns with findings by Chukwu and Adeola (2023), who posited that officers' spiritual beliefs and moral frameworks can influence how they interpret emotional or behavioral issues. The reason could be that religious perspectives affect whether officers view psychosocial challenges through a medical, spiritual, or moral lens, which in turn shapes their responsiveness and support strategies.

In a similar vein, years of work experience also significantly influenced perception, with those having 15 years and above showing higher awareness of psychosocial issues. This finding corroborates the work of Salisu and Fajobi (2020), who emphasized that cumulative experience plays a critical role in understanding subtle psychological patterns in correctional settings. The reason could be that longer service duration allows officers to recognize recurring patterns of distress and develop a more nuanced understanding of inmate needs.

Lastly, the study found that although officers showed moderate responsiveness to psychosocial challenges, there were gaps in belief systems, particularly skepticism regarding the authenticity of inmates' mental health complaints. This supports findings by Obasi and Okonkwo (2023), who noted that without structured mental health training, officers might interpret genuine emotional distress as manipulation. The reason could be that correctional facility cultures often prioritize control over care, leaving little room for emotional literacy or psychological sensitivity.

3.7. Implications for Counselling Practice

Deployment of Counsellors to Correctional Facilities. The presence of professional counsellors can help bridge the psychological care gap in correctional facilities, offering structured evaluations and referrals. This is important because counsellors are trained to recognize mental health issues more accurately than untrained officers (Okere & Iliyasu, 2021).

Mandatory Training on Mental Health for Officers. Organizing regular workshops can equip officers with tools to identify psychosocial red flags. Exposure to evidence-based mental health practices enhances officers' interpretive accuracy (Fajonyomi & Adeyemi, 2023).

Religion-Sensitive Approaches to Inmate Support. Officers' religious beliefs may influence how they perceive and respond to inmates' challenges. Training should include how to manage religious biases while promoting professional care. This ensures that officers do not misinterpret psychosocial distress as moral failure or spiritual weakness.

Mentorship by Experienced Officers. More experienced officers should be paired with new recruits to help guide their psychosocial assessments. Knowledge sharing helps younger officers build confidence in recognizing subtle behavioral patterns (Ajiboye & Adekunle, 2020).

Collaboration with Clinical Psychologists and NGOs. Correctional facilities should collaborate with mental health institutions to offer inmate assessments, group therapy, and staff training. Multidisciplinary approaches result in more holistic care systems (Olatunji & Bamidele, 2021).

3.8. Recommendations

Standardize Mental Health Screening Procedures. Correctional institutions should adopt routine psychosocial evaluations for all inmates, especially during intake. This is necessary to detect early signs of distress and provide timely interventions (Nwachukwu & Salami, 2022).

Integrate Religion-Aware Mental Health Education into Officer Training. Officers should be educated on how religious beliefs can influence their perceptions of inmates. This training will help mitigate biases and encourage evidence-based intervention rather than judgmental or spiritual labeling.

Introduce Psychosocial Workshops and Campaigns. Monthly in-service training should be established to help officers understand trauma, stress responses, and therapeutic communication. The workshops should use real case scenarios to improve retention (Okoro & Yusuf, 2023).

Mentoring Programs for Junior Officers. Experienced officers (especially those with 10+ years in service) should mentor new staff on interpreting inmate behaviors with psychological insight. This supports findings on the impact of experience on perceptual depth (Salisu & Fajobi, 2020).

Institutionalize Mental Health Units in Correctional Facilities. Government policies should mandate the permanent placement of psychologists or trained counsellors in each correctional facility. This will ensure continuous access to emotional and mental health support (Fajonyomi & Adeyemi, 2023).

3.9. Limitations of the study

- a. The findings of this study rely solely on officers' self-reports, which may be influenced by perception bias.
- b. The study was restricted to correctional facilities in Kwara State, limiting generalizability to other regions.
- c. Inmate perspectives were not captured, which would have provided a more balanced view of psychosocial challenges.

4. Conclusion

The study concluded that correctional officers in Kwara State perceived inmates as facing significant psychosocial challenges, with common concerns being depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and lack of family contact. Gender, religion, and years of work experience were found to significantly influence officers' level of awareness and sensitivity to these issues. Officers with more experience and those of certain religious backgrounds were more likely to perceive deeper psychosocial struggles. Female officers also demonstrated higher emotional responsiveness than their male counterparts.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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