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Article: **Depression and Subjective Well-Being in The Male Prisoners of District Jail Gujrat, Pakistan**

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Depression and Subjective Well-Being in the Male Prisoners of District Jail Gujrat, Pakistan

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Abstract

The current study was carried out to identify the relationship between depression and subjective well-being of prisoners in District Jail Gujrat, Pakistan. The study also focused on assessing the various levels of depression and subjective well-being by relating them with the demographic variables of the participants. To select the participants, simple random sampling technique was used in the current study, the scales used to assess the level of depression in the prisoners included the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) designed by Beck et al. (1996) and the General Health Questionnaire designed by Goldberg and Williams (1988). The adapted version in Urdu of both the questionnaires were distributed among the prisoners. The hypothesis of the study was that depression has a negative relationship with the subjective well-being of the male prisoners. Also, the results will highlight different levels of depression and subjective well-being when they are compared with the demographic variables of the participants. The results indicated that a negative relationship exists between depression and subjective well-being of the male prisoners.

Keywords: depression, male prisoners, subjective well-being

Introduction

Prisons are considered to be one of the vulnerable places for poor mental health around the globe. Prisoners usually experience various mental health issues which could be considered as the reasons of the criminal behavior. Their mental health issues seemingly increase during imprisonment. Whereas, it has been observed that usually there is an increase in conduct problems once the prisoner is released from the prison. The world that exists inside the prison is altogether different from the outside world. The lifestyle, communication and attitude of the prisoners is not relatable to the world outside the prison. Separation from their families and friends, a constant state of loneliness, feelings of rejection by the near and dear ones and a harsh prison system increase the risk factors and enhance the mental health problems in the prisoners. Restricted or no access to family members,

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friends and the outside world may adversely affect the mental condition of the prisoners which worsens with the passage of time and becomes more harmful for their physical and mental health.

The purpose of the current project is to investigate the relationship between depressive symptomology and the subjective well-being of the male prisoners in District Jail Gujrat, Pakistan. The construct of depression is among the most widely researched areas. It explains the manifestation of extreme mental distress that affects the thought pattern of a person. Constant negative thoughts based on worthlessness, hopelessness and suicidal thoughts which later lead towards disturbing emotions such as irritability, frustration, anger, disappointment, and sadness with regrets. The roller-coaster of emotions and uncontrollable thoughts push the person to manifest disturbing behaviors such as isolating oneself, unable to focus and not attending any kind of task properly, sleep fluctuation and the person is also not able to eat properly (NEBRASKA, [1999](#)). Many prisoners reported to experience constant feelings of guilt and shame due to their arrest and imprisonment which caused a great deal of embarrassment for them. When the prisoners are not able to accept the hardship of their imprisonment they experience depression. An individual suffering from depression shows various signs and symptoms such as sleeping difficulties, depressed physical appearance, a slow pace of walking, fatigue, weight loss and the loss of appetite. The person slumps when walking or sitting, sits in the corner in fetal position and experiences a general loss of energy. Furthermore, a depressed individual frequently cries without any specific reason, has retarded thinking, speaks slowly, exhibits a lack of interest and confidence, experiences sudden social withdrawal, makes little communication with others, suffers from the feelings of helplessness, hopelessness and worthlessness, talks about committing suicide, and talks about getting out of jail unrealistically. A depressed prisoner exhibits sudden changes in behavior such as unexpectedly attacking officers or other inmates. Sometimes, a prisoner become so depressed that he loses touch with the reality completely (NEBRASKA, [1999](#)).

Shahid et al. ([2014](#)) reported the prevalence of depression in identifying depression in the Pakistani male prisoners. Consulting ([2003](#)) reported that the majority of male prisoners (61.8%) actually experience a normal level of depression, whereas a minority (15.1%) experiences a mild level of depression. Moreover, 15.4% of prisoners suffer a moderate level of depression and 7.7% are victims of a severe level of depression. Palmer and Connelly ([2005](#)) mentioned in their work that depression is manifested by a massive amount of hopelessness and suicidal ideation in prisoners. Murdoch et al. ([2008](#)) reported that the prisoners

scored above the threshold for mild depression. Assadi et al. (2006) reported that a majority of the prisoners met the criterion of a moderate level of depression. Depressed individuals can also experience changes in their activity level. They show either retardation or agitation and they think about the world in self-defeating ways which affects their subjective well-being (Beck, 1967).

Subjective well-being is understood as a person's critical review of their positive and negative emotions and the way they perceive life. A person with high subjective well-being is one who maintains a balance between positive and negative emotions, whereas a person with low subjective well-being is one who experiences an excess of negative emotions. A person with high subjective well-being is one who is satisfied with life and seldom experiences negative emotions such as sorrow and rage. On the other hand, a person with low subjective well-being is one who remains dissatisfied with life, experiences little joy and happiness and often goes through unpleasant feelings (Fatima, 2010).

A person who is imprisoned experience increased level of anxiousness and stress. The reason behind these intense distressing situations is the distance created between the individuals and their families as well as the lives they live in isolation during their imprisonment. The constant fear of punishment can also leads to the severity of anxiety. All these intense emotions perpetuate negative feelings within the individuals, nurture negative emotions and eventually enhance a very poor image of self and well-being in imprisoned individuals. Gullone et al. (2000) highlighted that prisoners in any community experience a great deal of poor quality of life and also experience more worthlessness.

Joshi (2010) highlighted that subjective well-being is influenced by various personal and social factors, such as the personality of the individual and the interpersonal relationship status. An interesting element is the adaptation that leads towards the survival of the person. This highlights how well the person can adjust and adapt in the changing situations of life. Therefore, the individuals who find themselves unable to adjust had unhealthy life styles such as poor appetite, irregular sleep pattern, and unable to enjoy life around themselves. These are depressive symptoms that constantly make the person incapable of adjusting in the prison environment. Therefore, poor adaptation develop a feeling of failure for challenging environment of the imprisonment (Dhami, et al., 2007).

It is worthwhile to conduct this study because no prior study has been carried out to highlight the mental health issues of the male prisoners in District Jail Gujrat. Prisoners comprise the most stigmatized and labialized population in the world. People have a strong hatred toward this population due to their misconduct

and violence they have created in the community. Therefore, the focus of the current research is to highlight the psychological needs of the prisoners. Depression itself is progressing in the community and when it comes to the prison population, this issue is ignored due to the stigma attached to this population. The current study will develop awareness regarding how well-being and depression are associated and interlinked. Indeed, if we need a healthy society and prevention of the misconduct it is important that we treat depression to increase the well-being of the prisoners.

Research Questions

- What is the relationship between depression and subjective well-being in the male prisoners of District Jail Gujrat?
- What is the difference between the level of depression and subjective well-being among male prisoners?

Objectives

- To investigate the relationship between depression and subjective well-being of male prisoners in District Jail Gujrat.
- To investigate the difference between the level of depression and subjective well-being in male prisoners.

Hypotheses

- H₁: There is a negative relationship between depression and subjective well-being in the male prisoners of District Jail Gujrat.
- H₂: The level of depression and subjective well-being is higher among the unmarried male prisoners as compared to the married male prisoners.
- H₃: The level of depression and subjective well-being is higher among the male prisoners coming from the joint family system as compared to the prisoners coming from the nuclear family system.
- H₄: The level of depression and subjective well-being is higher among the male prisoners of low socioeconomic status as compared to that of middle and high socioeconomic status.
- H₅: The level of depression and subjective well-being varies in the male prisoners with respect to the duration of their sentence.

Method

Operational Definition of Depression

Depression is defined as a psychological state in which a person experiences negative changes in feelings, thoughts and behaviour. Depression is measured in

three dimensions, that is, physical or somatic, cognitive and affective dimensions. Physical dimension refers to the physical or bodily aspects of a person. It includes changes in appetite, lack of sleep, loss of energy, difficulty in concentration, agitation, irritability, tiredness, weariness and the loss of interest in sex. Cognitive dimension refers to mental processes such as how a person perceives, remembers, thinks, speaks and solves problems. It is measured in terms of worthlessness, suicidal ideation, indecisiveness, pessimism, past failure, guilt, punishment, self-dislike, and self-criticism. Affective dimension refers to a person's feelings, moods and emotions and it is measured in terms of crying, loss of interest, and loss of pleasure (Beck, et al, [1996](#)).

Operational Definition of Subjective Well-being

Subjective well-being is measured in two dimensions, that is, affective and cognitive. Affective dimension refers to the feelings, moods and emotions of a person; here, it is measured in terms of positive affect and negative affect. Positive affect refers to the pleasant mood, emotions and positive reactions of a person in response to life events and it is measured in terms of happiness and confidence. Negative affect refers to the unpleasant mood, emotions and negative reactions of a person in response to life events. It is measured in terms of worry and sadness. Cognitive domain refers to mental processes such as how a person perceives, remembers, thinks, speaks and solves problems. It is measured in terms of the life satisfaction of a person. Life satisfaction refers to the process through which a person makes judgments about his life as a whole in terms of living a useful and productive life, his ability to concentrate, to make decisions, to face problems and to handle stress (Goldberg & Williams, [1988](#)).

Sample

The target population of the current study comprised the male prisoners of District Jail Gujrat, Pakistan. The total number of prisoners was 1396.

Sample Size

Sample size was calculated using a simplified formula given by Yamane ([1967](#)).

n = Sample size N = Total population e = Margin of error (0.07)

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{1396}{1 + 1396(.07)^2}$$

$$n = 178$$

The authorities of District Jail Gujrat provided a list containing the serial numbers of all inmates. To avoid biasness, simple random sampling technique was used for the selection of sample which was selected using computer generated random numbers. The sample of the study comprised 178 prisoners out of which only 150 prisoners agreed to respond.

The majority of the prisoners fell in the age range of 20-30 years (n=66) and 31-40 years (n=52). Most of them were married (n=86), came from the joint family system (n=105), and had low (n=75) and middle socioeconomic status (n=74). Many were awarded the death sentence (n=61).

Inclusion Criteria

In the current study, due to the limitations imposed by the prison authorities only male prisoners of District Jail Gujrat were included irrespective of age, type of imprisonment and years of imprisonment.

Exclusion Criteria

Female prisoners and juveniles were excluded from the study.

Instruments

Instruments / Tools

In this study, to collect the required information from the prisoners two standardized tools (in Urdu language) were used with the permission of the corresponding authors. Additionally, a demographic questionnaire was developed by the researcher herself to collect the basic demographic information from the prisoners.

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the current project included the age of the participants in years, the marital status of the prisoners, their family system whether nuclear or joint, the level of their socioeconomic status, and the duration of their sentence.

Beck Depression Inventory

Beck Depression Inventory (BDI-II), originally developed by Beck et al. (1996), is a 21-item self-report instrument that aims to measure depressive symptoms. There is a four-point scale for each item ranging from 0 to 3. The scale has high internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha of .92 and .93 for clinical and

non-clinical population, respectively. The adapted version in the Urdu language translated by Farooqi (2000) was used to measure depression in male prisoners.

General Health Questionnaire

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ12) (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) is a self-administered questionnaire that aims to investigate the psychological and behavioral symptomology of the prisoners. Four areas are assessed including psychosomatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction and depression. Each item is rated on a four-point scale. Internal consistency of the scale ranges from 0.77 to 0.93. In the current project, the adapted version in the Urdu language translated by Minhas and Mubbasshar (1996) was used to measure the subjective well-being of male prisoners.

Procedure

In the current study, male prisoners of District Jail Gujrat were selected. The date was taken after getting the permission from the administration of the jail present in the city of Gujrat, Pakistan. The participants gave their verbal consent. Afterwards, they were briefed about the aim of the study and the interview was conducted. Scale administration for each participant took 15-20 minutes and a period of two months was required to complete the data.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher conformed to the ethical concerns of informed consent and confidentiality. The respondents were asked to sign the consent form and were ensured that all information was kept confidential and used only for research purpose. The respondents were briefed about the research purpose and were also informed that they have the right to terminate their interview at any stage.

Results

The study was conducted to find out the relationship between depression and the subjective well-being of male prisoners. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were computed to analyze the results.

Table 1 indicates that most of the respondents were in the age range of 20-30 years (n=66). Most of them were married (n= 86) and lived in a nuclear family system (n=105). Similarly, a majority of them belonged to the lower socioeconomic status (n=75) and many of them were awarded the death penalty (n=61).

Table 1*Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables (n = 150)*

Demographic Variables	Categories	<i>f</i>	% ages
Age of Prisoners	20-30	66	44.0
	31-40	52	34.7
	41-50	17	11.3
	51-60	10	6.7
	61-70	5	3.3
Marital Status	Married	86	57.3
	Unmarried	64	42.7
Family System	Joint	45	30.0
	Nuclear	105	70.0
Socioeconomic Status	Upper class	1	.7
	Middle Class	74	49.3
	Lower Class	75	50.0
	1-5 years	12	8.0
Duration of Sentence	6-10 years	2	1.3
	11-15 years	1	.7
	16-20 years	0	0.00
	21-25 years	12	8.0
	Death Penalty	61	40.7
	Under trial	49	32.7
	Less than a year	13	8

Table 2*Correlation Matrix for Depression and Subjective Well-being in Male Prisoners (n=150)*

Variables	Depression	Subjective Well-being	<i>p</i> -value
Depression	-	-.384**	.000
Subjective Well-being	-.384**	-	

***P* < 0.01

Table 2 indicates that the relationship between depression and subjective well-being in male prisoners is negatively significant since $r(148) = -0.384, p < 0.01$.

Table 3

Mean Ranks and p-values of Marital Status and Family System on the Scores of Depression and Subjective Well-being in Male Prisoners (n=150)

Variable	Categories	N	Mean Rank	p-value
Depression	Married	86	69.15	.038
	Unmarried	64	84.03	
Subjective Well-being	Married	86	86.49	.023
	Unmarried	64	67.15	
Depression	Nuclear	45	72.44	.634
	Joint	105	76.11	
Subjective Well-being	Nuclear	45	72.33	.619
	Joint	105	76.15	

Table 3 indicates significant differences in the level of depression and subjective well-being in male prisoners with respect to their marital status. On the contrary, a non-significant relationship is indicated with respect to the family system on scores of depression and subjective well-being.

Table 4 indicates that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of high socioeconomic class on scores of depression, while the results also indicate that the mean score of the middle class is high on scores of subjective well-being. Furthermore, there are significant differences found in the mean scores of the duration of sentences on scores of depression and subjective well-being among prisoners.

Table 4

Mean Ranks and p-values of Male Prisoners on Scores of Depression and Subjective Well-being with respect to their Socioeconomic Status and Duration of Sentence (n=150)

Variable	Socioeconomic Status and Duration of Sentence	N	Mean Rank	p-value
Depression	Low	75	78.63	.499
	Middle	74	71.91	
	High	1	106.00	
Subjective Well-being	Low	75	73.48	.276
	Middle	74	78.39	
	High	1	13.00	
Depression	less than a year	13	55.62	.001
	1-5years	12	69.29	
	6-10years	2	74.75	
	11years	1	57.50	
	25 years	12	73.33	
	death penalty	61	41.14	
	less than a year	13	25.58	
Subjective Well Being	1-5 years	12	43.62	0.002
	6-10 years	2	48.25	
	11 years	1	98.00	
	25 years	12	41.67	
	death penalty	61	59.02	

Discussion

The first objective of the current study was to find out the relationship between depression and subjective well-being in male prisoners. The results depicted in Table 3 reveal a significant negative correlation between depression and subjective well-being. These findings are consistent with the study by Kaz (2006) which focused on depression, positive emotions and subjective well-being among prison inmates in Malaysia. It revealed that positive emotions and subjective well-

being correlate negatively with depression. The findings of the current study are also consistent with the study of Gullone et al. (2000) on male prisoners in Australia. It revealed that prisoners have a markedly lower level of subjective quality of life and self-esteem and a much higher level of anxiety and depression amounting to a severely compromised psychological well-being. The possible reason behind this finding is that people are not allowed to develop intimate relationships, such as heterosexual relationships and relationships with friends and families and are not allowed to go outside and maintain social networks. Furthermore, experiencing the feelings of guilt can contribute to depression which ultimately results in poor subjective well-being. This fact is also supported by the findings of Dhimi et al. (2007) which revealed that prisoners ranked missing somebody as the most severe problem followed by missing social life, feeling that life is wasted and missing sex. Due to these deprivations and restrictions, prisoners start developing negative feelings which lead to depression and reduce the level of subjective well-being.

The second objective of the current study was to find out the differences in the level of depression and subjective well-being among male prisoners with respect to their marital status, family system and socioeconomic status. The results depicted in Table 4 indicate significant gender differences as unmarried prisoners exhibit a high level of depression and a low level of subjective well-being as compared to the married prisoners. These findings are not consistent with the findings of Lindquist (2000), who reported that married prisoners experience more depression as compared to single prisoners. The findings of the current study can be justified on the basis that the families of the married prisoners are sources of strong social and moral support for them as compared to the unmarried prisoners. This is also supported by Biggam and Power (1997) who stated that social support can be considered as an important psychological and social factor that helps in the adjustment of prisoners in prisons and it also serves as a coping mechanism against stress and depression.

However, the results depicted in Table 5 and Table 6 reveal no significant differences in the level of depression and subjective well-being of prisoners with respect to their family system and socioeconomic status. It can be justified on the grounds that the prison environment and the living conditions in prisons are the same for all the prisoners regardless of their family system and the socioeconomic class they belong to.

The first hypothesis of the current study is accepted as the results depicted a significant negative relationship between depression and subjective well-being.

The results depicted in Table 3 revealed that the prisoners with a high level of depression also demonstrated a low level of subjective well-being and the prisoners with a low level of depression also exhibited a high level of subjective well-being. The second hypothesis of the study was also accepted since the results depicted in Table 4 supported it. The third hypothesis of the study was not supported by the findings. The results depicted in Table 5 revealed no significant differences among prisoners with respect to their family system. The fourth hypothesis of the study was not supported either since the results depicted in Table 6 revealed no significant differences among prisoners with respect to their socioeconomic status.

Conclusion

Depression is inversely related to subjective well-being in the male prisoners of District Jail Gujrat. Married prisoners have a markedly lower level of depression and a higher level of subjective well-being. However, there is no significant difference in the level of depression and subjective well-being among male prisoners with respect to their family system and socioeconomic status.

Limitations

Although the current study provides significant results, there are also some limitations and drawbacks in it. The resources and time were very limited for this study. The original sample drawn for this study comprised 178 male prisoners of District Jail Gujrat, out of which only 150 prisoners agreed to respond. The sample size is not sufficient for the generalization of the results. Another limitation of the current study is that it was conducted only on the male prisoners of District Jail Gujrat. Female prisoners and juveniles were not included in this study. Further, previously developed measures were used in this study.

Recommendations

On the basis of the above limitations, there are some recommendations for future researches on this subject. In future researches, sample size should be enlarged so that the results could be generalized. It should also include female prisoners and juveniles in order to make comparison between them. Indigenous tools should be used in future researches. Further, there must be weekly counseling sessions for the prisoners to ensure their psychological health.

Implications of the Study

The findings of the current study are helpful for the prison authorities, specifically for the officers and staff to understand the behavior of the prisoners

and to take steps for the improvement of their well-being. This research may also become the basis of future researches in this particular area. This study draws the attention of the health care professionals and competent authorities and induces them to take notice of the psychological health of the prisoners.

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