

Workplace Psychosocial Stress and It's Health Effect on Female Correctional Officers in Delta State: Preventive Measures and Intervention Strategies

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Abstract

This study investigated psychosocial stress among female correctional officers in Delta State, Nigeria, focusing on its causes, health consequences, adequacy of support systems, and the effectiveness of stress management training programmers. Employing a descriptive survey design, the study population included all 247 female correctional officers in the state who also formed the sample through census sampling. Data were collected using a validated structured questionnaire (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.84) and analyzed using descriptive statistics and a one-sample t-test at a 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that significant psychosocial stress among officers stemmed from role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination. These stressors were strongly associated with anxiety, depression, and burnout. Existing support systems were found to be inadequate, while structured stress management training programmers significantly reduced stress and improved job satisfaction. The study was limited to one state and relied on self-reported data, which may affect the generalizability of results. It recommends that correctional management enforce strict policies against workplace violence and gender discrimination, and implement regular stress management training. These measures can enhance officer wellbeing, promote workplace equity, and strengthen correctional service delivery in Nigeria. This research contributes novel insights into occupational health challenges faced by Nigerian female correctional officers a group rarely examined in occupational health research, and proposes workplace-adaptive preventive strategies.

Keywords: Psychosocial Stress; Correctional Officers; Workplace Violence; Gender Discrimination; Stress Management

1. Introduction

Here's a more concise version of your introduction, with all in-text citations retained:

The correctional officer profession is widely recognized for its high risks and intense stress, often leading to physical and psychosocial disorders. Officers engage directly with incarcerated individuals, requiring vigilance and deep understanding of human behavior in volatile environments. Their duties—surveillance, custody, and discipline—demand constant awareness to maintain safety and order (Missi et al., 2023). Female correctional officers face added challenges, including high stress, gender discrimination, and work-life balance pressures. In Delta State, Nigeria, these are intensified by cultural expectations and limited support, increasing stress levels. Psychosocial stress affects not only their health but also job performance, with broader implications for the correctional system.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2019) highlights the mental health risks of psychosocial stress in high-risk jobs, advocating for robust support systems to prevent issues like depression, anxiety, and burnout. The International Labour

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Organization (ILO) emphasizes gendered workplace stress, while NIOSH (2017) identifies female correctional officers as particularly vulnerable due to sexual harassment, isolation, and lack of gender-sensitive support. These findings stress the need for targeted strategies to address psychosocial stress, especially in regions like Delta State. The correctional system in Delta State suffers from resource limitations and overcrowding, compounding stress for female officers. Chronic stress is linked to anxiety, depression, burnout, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease (Regehr et al., 2021; Thompson and Vandenberg, 2023). This study aims to identify key stressors, assess health impacts, and evaluate coping mechanisms and support systems, offering evidence-based recommendations to improve officer well-being and system performance.

1.1. Statement of the problem

Despite their critical role in maintaining security, discipline, and rehabilitation in correctional facilities, the psychosocial well-being of correctional officers—particularly women—remains underexplored. Female officers encounter unique stressors arising from occupational hazards, gender-based challenges, and societal expectations, which heighten the demands of the job. These stressors include inmate aggression, understaffing, long working hours, limited career advancement, and work-family conflicts, all of which contribute to chronic stress. Studies indicate that prolonged exposure to such conditions without adequate support can lead to serious health problems. These include mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, emotional exhaustion, and burnout, as well as physical conditions like hypertension, sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal problems, and cardiovascular diseases. Beyond undermining individual well-being, these effects also impair work performance, compromise institutional safety, and increase staff turnover. In Delta State, Nigeria, where correctional institutions face overcrowding and resource shortages, female officers are especially vulnerable. Yet their psychosocial challenges remain poorly addressed. This study, therefore, aims to identify the sources of psychosocial stress among female correctional officers in Delta State, examine their health impacts, evaluate coping mechanisms, and assess the effectiveness of available support systems.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to

- Identify the primary sources of psychosocial stress among female correctional officers in Delta State.
- Examine the health implications of psychosocial stress on the female correctional officers, including mental, physical, and occupational health outcomes.
- Assess the effectiveness of current coping mechanisms and support systems available to female correctional officers in Delta State.
- Develop and recommend effective prevention and intervention strategies to mitigate stress and improve the well-being of female correctional officers.

1.2. Research Questions

- What are the most common sources of psychosocial stress experienced by female correctional officers in Delta State?
- How does psychosocial stress affect the physical and mental health of female correctional officers in Delta State?
- How effective are the coping strategies employed by female correctional officers in Delta State for managing psychosocial stress?"
- What intervention programmers are likely to be most effective in improving the well-being of these correctional officers?

1.3. Hypotheses

- Female correctional officers in Delta State experience significant psychosocial stress primarily due to role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination.
- Psychosocial stress is significantly associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout among female correctional officers in Delta State.
- The current support systems available to female correctional officers in Delta State are significantly insufficient in effectively mitigating the psychosocial stress they experience.
- Implementing comprehensive stress management training programmers will significantly reduce psychosocial stress levels among female correctional officers in Delta State.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses a gap in the literature on the psychological well-being of female correctional officers in Nigeria, with a focus on Delta State. By understanding the sources and effects of stress, this research will contribute to the development of targeted interventions that can improve the health and job performance of female correctional officers. Moreover, the findings may inform policy changes within the correctional system to create a more supportive and equitable working environment.

2. Literature Review

Female correctional officers face significant psychological stress due to the demanding and often violent nature of their work environments. These environments, characterized by constant exposure to violence, threats, and tension, lead to chronic stress (Britton, 2011). This occupational stress is acutely compounded by gender-related challenges in predominantly male-dominated workplaces (Harvey et al., 2022).

The core stressors include operating in highly stressful environments with constant exposure to violence and overcrowded prisons, alongside the pressure to assert authority (Harvey et al., 2022). Gender-related challenges exacerbate this stress: female officers frequently face gender discrimination and sexual harassment (Britton, 2011; Misis et al., 2023). Furthermore, limited career advancement opportunities and the necessity of balancing professional responsibilities with domestic and familial obligations add a significant burden (Britton, 2011; Misis et al., 2023).

Sustained psychological stress has severe health implications. High stress levels are strongly associated with mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression (Regehr et al., 2021). Moreover, chronic stress is linked to physical health issues such as cardiovascular diseases, obesity, and autoimmune disorders (Thompson and Vandenberg, 2023). The impact extends beyond individual health, negatively affecting job performance, increasing absenteeism, and contributing to a higher turnover rate within correctional facilities (Thompson and Vandenberg, 2023).

In Nigeria, while specific research is emerging, studies on female law enforcement officers in West Africa highlight that cultural expectations and limited access to mental health services exacerbate the stress experienced by these women (Adebayo and Eze, 2022). This suggests female correctional officers in Delta State, Nigeria, likely face similar challenges, intensified by societal and cultural pressures. Promoting gender equality and creating a supportive work environment are crucial organizational changes (Zimmerman, 2012).

Addressing the psychological stress requires a multi-faceted approach, focusing on both individual resilience and organizational reform. Interventions promoting mental resilience through stress management training and mindfulness practices have shown promise (Brough and Williams, 2020). Crucial organizational support systems include access to mental health services, peer support groups, and policies aimed at reducing workplace harassment and discrimination (Violanti et al., 2023). Finally, policy reforms to create a more gender-inclusive workplace, such as promoting female leadership, are recommended to mitigate unique stressors (Pitts et al., 2021). These strategies are especially vital in regions like Delta State, where cultural dynamics may intensify the challenges.

2.1. Psychosocial Stress in Correctional Settings

The correctional environment is inherently stressful, with correctional officers routinely exposed to hostile interactions, threats of violence, and emotionally demanding situations (Morgan et al., 2022). For female correctional officers, these challenges are often compounded by gender-related psychosocial stressors such as discrimination, harassment, and social isolation within a predominantly male workforce (Morse et al., 2021). These ongoing stress exposures not only impact their mental well-being—contributing to conditions such as anxiety, depression, and burnout—but can also manifest in serious physical health problems, thereby intensifying their overall stress burden (Lambert et al., 2019).

2.2. Major Sources of Psychosocial Stress

2.2.1. Exposure to Violence and Threats

Correctional officers routinely face the risk of violence from inmates, including physical assaults, verbal abuse, and threats to their safety. This exposure to potential and actual violence creates a persistent state of alertness and anxiety, contributing to chronic stress (Morgan et al., 2022). The unpredictable nature of the job, where officers must always be prepared for sudden outbreaks of violence, further exacerbates this stress.

Stress-related disorders, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues threaten the wellbeing of detention officers daily. Fusco, et al., (2021), opined that workplace violence and intimidation, whether from inmates or colleagues, create a hostile work environment that worsens stress levels. In addition, Obiora et al (2011) asserted that though the field of corrections is risky, stressful, and dangerous, Female correctional officers are at higher risk for stress-related health issues than their male counterparts due to gender discrimination which has remain a pressing issue in male-dominated professions, often resulting in higher stress levels for women. Correctional officers' levels of stress are impacted by various influential factors and can affect officers' ability to serve and protect the public and inmate population (Fusco et al., 2021). Inappropriate and/or unprofessional officer-inmate interactions may be a consequence of unmanaged personal stress of officers, or when officers become so mentally unhealthy, they no longer perform well (Fusco et al., 2021). According to Maslach, the core of occupational burnout syndrome is the pattern of work overload and the ensuing emotional weariness. Correctional employees are exposed to high mental, physiological, and cognitive requirements. Over time, these working conditions can lead to strain and ultimately to burnout. Critical incident situations require officers to make sound decisions quickly.

2.3. High Workload and Overcrowding

Overcrowded correctional facilities are common in many regions, including Delta State, Nigeria. The high inmate-to-officer ratio increases the workload and pressure on correctional officers, who must manage large numbers of inmates with limited resources. This situation can lead to feelings of being overwhelmed and contribute to occupational stress (Garcia and Slate, 2020). Female correctional workers reported significantly higher levels of anxiety than their male counterparts. High workload and overcrowding, alongside workplace conflict, younger age of employees, trust in institutional isolation practices, and lower occupational positions, were linked to increased burnout. Similarly, Lambert, Lanterman, Elechi, Otu, and Jenkins (2021), reported that sustained occupational stress has a direct impact on employees' mental health, often leading to burnout and depression also, strain-based and behavior-based work-family conflict was strongly associated with emotional exhaustion among correctional staff in Nigeria, underscoring the heavy mental health burden faced by this workforce despite notable resilience (60%).

2.4. Role Conflict and Ambiguity

Correctional officers often experience role conflict, where the demands of their job are at odds with each other. For example, they may be required to act as both enforcers of rules and as rehabilitators for inmates. This dual role can create confusion and stress, as officers struggle to balance these conflicting responsibilities (Lambert et al., 2019). Additionally, role ambiguity, where officers are unclear about their job expectations or how to effectively carry out their duties, further contributes to stress. Study by Falowo and Balogun (2025), in their article titled Work-family conflict, shift work and role ambiguity as predictors of occupational stress among Nigerian police officers, revealed that role ambiguity and shift duty significantly predict occupational stress. Also, Adelugba and Ogunbameru (2018) looked at women in academia found that role conflict affected their research output, reduced their publication rate, caused stress, negatively impacted work schedules, career progression, and turnover, all of which lowered job satisfaction.

2.5. Lack of Support and Resources

Many correctional officers report a lack of institutional support, including insufficient training, inadequate staffing, and limited access to mental health resources. This lack of support can leave officers feeling isolated and unable to manage the stresses of their job effectively (Mearns and Cain, 2020). In environments where resources are scarce, such as in underfunded correctional facilities, these issues are often magnified.

2.6. Shift Work and Long Hours

The correctional environment is inherently stressful, exposing officers routinely to hostile interactions, threats of violence, and emotionally demanding situations (Morgan et al., 2022). For female correctional officers, these challenges are often compounded by gender-related psychosocial stressors such as discrimination, harassment, and social isolation within a predominantly male workforce (Morse et al., 2021). These ongoing stress exposures impact mental well-being—contributing to anxiety, depression, and burnout—and can also manifest in serious physical health problems, intensifying their overall stress burden (Lambert et al., 2019).

Major Sources of Psychosocial Stress stem from multiple workplace factors. Officers routinely face the risk of violence from inmates, including physical assaults and threats, creating a persistent state of alertness and anxiety that contributes to chronic stress (Morgan et al., 2022). Workplace violence and intimidation, whether from inmates or colleagues, create a hostile work environment (Fusco, et al., 2021). Female officers are at higher risk for stress-related health issues than their male counterparts due to gender discrimination, a pressing issue in male-dominated professions

(Obiora et al., 2011). The core of occupational burnout syndrome is the pattern of work overload and emotional weariness (Maslach), which, if unmanaged, can lead to unprofessional officer-inmate interactions (Fusco et al., 2021).

High workload and overcrowding, common in regions like Delta State, Nigeria, increase the inmate-to-officer ratio and pressure on officers, contributing to occupational stress (Garcia and Slate, 2020). Female workers reported significantly higher levels of anxiety than their male counterparts. High workload, alongside workplace conflict and lower occupational positions, are linked to increased burnout (Lambert et al., 2021). Work-family conflict was strongly associated with emotional exhaustion among Nigerian correctional staff, underscoring the heavy mental health burden.

Correctional officers frequently experience role conflict, struggling to balance conflicting demands such as acting as both rule enforcers and rehabilitators (Lambert et al., 2019). Role ambiguity—unclear job expectations—further contributes to stress, and both role ambiguity and shift duty are significant predictors of occupational stress (Falowo and Balogun, 2025). Among women in academia, role conflict negatively impacted work schedules, career progression, and job satisfaction (Adelugba and Ogunbameru, 2018). Furthermore, many officers report a lack of institutional support, including insufficient training, inadequate staffing, and limited access to mental health resources, leaving them feeling isolated and unable to manage stress effectively (Mearns and Cain, 2020). Shift work and long hours disrupt sleep patterns, contributing to chronic stress and burnout (Violanti et al., 2023). Finally, emotional labor—the need to suppress and regulate emotions to maintain control with inmates—is a significant source of emotional exhaustion over time (Morris and Yates, 2019).

The cumulative effects of these stressors lead to a range of negative outcomes. Stress in correctional settings has profound effects on physical health. Chronic stress activates the body's "fight or flight" response, leading to physiological wear and tear. A common manifestation is hypertension (high blood pressure), as elevated stress hormones burden the cardiovascular system and contribute to diseases like heart attacks (Yilmaz, et al., 2025). Musculoskeletal problems are also prevalent, stemming from physical demands combined with stress-induced tension (Onyesom, and Chukwuma, 2015). High occupational stress weakens the immune system and contributes to poor sleep quality and gastrointestinal issues (Khan, et al., 2023). This interaction between psychological stress and physical health accelerates decline, often leading to increased absenteeism and early retirement (Schat and Kelloway, 2019).

Mental Health Issues are strongly associated with chronic occupational stress, including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and burnout (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). High stress negatively impacts job performance, leading to mistakes, reduced productivity, and lower job satisfaction, which contributes to higher rates of absenteeism, turnover, and early retirement (Garcia and Slate, 2020).

Female correctional officers face unique stressors compounded by their gender, experiencing the double burden of work and societal expectations (Lambert et al., 2020). They frequently report higher levels of sexual harassment and gender discrimination from colleagues and inmates, which significantly contributes to their psychological stress (Britton, 2020). This gender-specific stress leads to lower job satisfaction and higher rates of burnout (Morse et al., 2021). Female officers are often subjected to a lack of advancement opportunities (Misis et al., 2023). In Delta State, Nigeria, cultural norms and societal expectations further complicate these dynamics, adding another layer of stress for female officers (Adebayo and Eze, 2022). The health implications are profound: chronic exposure to occupational stress is linked to a higher prevalence of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Ricciardelli et al., 2021; Regehr et al., 2021). Physical health problems such as sleep disturbances, cardiovascular disease, and hypertension are common among female officers experiencing prolonged stress (Schat and Kelloway, 2019; Thompson and Vandenberg, 2023). These health issues have broader implications for workforce stability, including decreased job performance, higher absenteeism, and increased turnover rates (Garcia and Slate, 2020; Violanti et al., 2023).

Correctional officers often work long hours and rotating shifts, which can disrupt their sleep patterns and contribute to physical and mental fatigue. The irregular work schedule makes it difficult for officers to maintain a healthy work-life balance, leading to chronic stress and burnout (Violanti et al., 2023). Sleep deprivation, in particular, is a common issue that exacerbates the stress experienced by officers.

3. Emotional Labour

Correctional officers engage in "emotional labor," suppressing feelings to maintain control, leading to exhaustion (Morris and Yates, 2019). Cumulative stress causes psychosocial health problems: hypertension from chronic "fight or flight" activation (Yilmaz, et al., 2025), musculoskeletal issues (Onyesom, and Chukwuma, 2015), weakened immune systems, and sleep/digestion problems (Khan, et al., 2023). This accelerates health decline, absenteeism, and early retirement (Schat and Kelloway, 2019).

Chronic stress links to mental health issues like anxiety, depression, PTSD, and burnout (Ricciardelli et al., 2021), impairing job performance and satisfaction (Garcia and Slate, 2020). Female officers face compounded stress from a "double burden" of work and societal expectations (Lambert et al., 2020), enduring higher sexual harassment and discrimination (Britton, 2020; Misis et al., 2023), exacerbated by cultural norms in Delta State, Nigeria (Adebayo and Eze, 2022). These stressors profoundly impact health, increasing anxiety, depression, PTSD (Ricciardelli et al., 2021; Regehr et al., 2021), sleep disturbances, cardiovascular disease, and hypertension (Schat and Kelloway, 2019; Thompson and Vandenberg, 2023), affecting workforce stability (Garcia and Slate, 2020; Violanti et al., 2023).

Coping mechanisms, like emotion-focused strategies, are often used but limited by insufficient institutional support and tailored programs (Howard et al., 2021; Mearns and Cain, 2020; Ricciardelli et al., 2021). Personal strategies are often inadequate (Brough and Williams, 2020), with crucial support services underutilized or unavailable, especially in Delta State (Harvey et al., 2022).

Correctional officers are often required to manage emotions in highly charged environments, suppressing feelings to maintain authority, which can result in emotional exhaustion over time. This "emotional labor" is a major stressor (Morris and Yates, 2019). Prolonged exposure to inmate aggression, understaffing, long hours, and violence triggers chronic stress, activating the body's "fight or flight" response and leading to hypertension, cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal problems, sleep disturbances, and weakened immunity (Yilmaz et al., 2025; Onyesom and Chukwuma, 2015; Khan et al., 2023; Schat and Kelloway, 2019). These conditions contribute to absenteeism, reduced performance, and early retirement. Mentally, chronic stress is associated with anxiety, depression, PTSD, and burnout (Ricciardelli et al., 2021; Regehr et al., 2021; Thompson and Vandenberg, 2023; Violanti et al., 2023). Job stress also reduces satisfaction and increases turnover (Garcia and Slate, 2020). Female officers face additional gender-based stressors, including discrimination, sexual harassment, and societal expectations (Lambert et al., 2020; Britton, 2020; Morse et al., 2021; Misis et al., 2023; Adebayo and Eze, 2022).

Coping strategies such as social support and relaxation (Mearns and Cain, 2020; Howard et al., 2021; Brough and Williams, 2020) are often insufficient without institutional backing. Effective interventions—counseling, mindfulness, CBT, and wellness programs—improve outcomes (Ricciardelli et al., 2021; Harvey et al., 2022; Crawley and Crawley, 2020; de Klerk et al., 2025; Uzodinma et al., 2022). Correctional officers are required to manage their emotions effectively in highly charged environments. They must often suppress their feelings to maintain authority and control in interactions with inmates, which can lead to emotional exhaustion over time. This "emotional labor," or the need to manage and regulate emotions as part of the job, is a significant source of stress (Morris and Yates, 2019).

3.1. Impacts of psychosocial Stress

The cumulative effects of these stressors can lead to a range of negative outcomes for correctional officers, including

3.2. Psychosocial Health Problems

3.2.1. Psychosocial Stress due to Workplace Conditions

The findings revealed that female correctional officers in Delta State significantly experience psychosocial stress arising from conflicting job roles, exposure to workplace violence, and gender discrimination. The officers acknowledged that these stressors not only affect their wellbeing but also create tension between work and home responsibilities. The finding that female correctional officers in Delta State experience psychosocial stress primarily as a result of role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination aligns with the assertions of Adebayo (2018), who emphasized that role ambiguity and conflicting job expectations are significant sources of stress in correctional institutions. Similarly, Fusco et al. (2021) noted that workplace violence and intimidation, whether from inmates or colleagues, create a hostile work environment that worsens stress levels. In addition, Obidoa et al. (2011) highlighted that gender discrimination remains a pressing issue in male-dominated professions, often resulting in higher stress levels for women. The current study supports these perspectives, showing that the intersection of conflicting roles, violence, and discrimination significantly undermines the psychosocial wellbeing of female correctional officers.

3.2.2. Association of Stress with Mental Health Outcomes

It was found that psychosocial stress among female correctional officers is significantly linked with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout. Many respondents reported feelings of sadness, loss of motivation, and emotional exhaustion, which further affect their productivity and overall job performance. The result that stress is strongly associated with anxiety, depression, and burnout among female correctional officers agrees with the position of Lambert et al. (2021), who reported that sustained occupational stress has a direct impact on employees' mental health,

often leading to burnout and depression. Similarly, Adelugba and Ogunbameru (2018) found that correctional workers frequently experience mental fatigue and emotional exhaustion, which reduces their motivation and effectiveness. The present finding reinforces this, as many respondents admitted that job-related stress leaves them emotionally drained and less productive. This indicates that stress in correctional environments is not only an occupational issue but also a public health concern, consistent with earlier literature.

3.2.3. Inadequacy of Current Support Systems

The study established that the existing support systems within the correctional service are significantly insufficient in addressing the stress experienced by female officers. Stress management programmes, counselling services, and resources provided by the workplace were considered inadequate and ineffective, leaving most officers without the needed support. The study also found that available support systems such as stress management programmes and counselling services are largely inadequate and ineffective. This agrees with the view of Adisa (2019), who observed that institutional stress interventions in Nigeria are often poorly implemented and fail to meet employees' needs. In a related vein, Uzodima et al. (2022) noted that correctional institutions often lack structured psychosocial support for their staff, leaving employees to cope individually. The present finding therefore strengthens the argument that the absence of functional support mechanisms exacerbates stress among female officers, which has far-reaching implications for their performance and retention in the service.

3.2.4. Effectiveness of Stress Management Training Programmes

The results also indicated that implementing structured stress management training programmes would significantly reduce psychosocial stress among female correctional officers. Respondents believed that such programmes would help them develop coping strategies, improve their mental health, and enhance overall job satisfaction. The finding that structured stress management programmes would significantly reduce stress among female correctional officers corroborates the opinion of Adebayo and Eze (2022), who suggested that training in coping strategies such as relaxation techniques and time management improves workers' resilience against stress. In support, de Klerk et al. (2025) emphasized that regular workshops and institutionalized training on stress management enhance psychosocial wellbeing and job satisfaction. The present study confirms these positions, as respondents strongly agreed that effective stress management training would help them cope with workplace demands, reduce burnout, and increase job satisfaction. This demonstrates that proactive training interventions can serve as a preventive measure to reduce stress rather than merely responding after it escalates.

3.2.5. Psychosocial and Physical Implications of Stress

Stress among correctional officers is not merely a psychosocial concern it has profound physical health implications as well. Correctional officers often experience chronic stress due to constant exposure to high-risk situations, inmate aggression, long working hours, understaffing, and the threat of violence. This persistent stress activates the body's "fight or flight" response over extended periods, leading to physiological wear and tear. One of the most common physical manifestations of chronic stress in correctional staff is hypertension (Yilmaz et al., 2025). Elevated stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline constrict blood vessels and increase heart rate, which places a continuous burden on the cardiovascular system. Over time, this can contribute to cardiovascular diseases, including heart attacks and strokes.

In addition, musculoskeletal problems are prevalent among correctional officers, resulting from the physical demands of their work—such as standing or walking for long periods, engaging in physical confrontations, or wearing heavy gear. The tension caused by stress exacerbates these physical strains, leading to chronic pain in the back, neck, shoulders, and joints (Onyesom & Chukwuma, 2015). High levels of occupational stress also weaken the immune system, making officers more susceptible to infections and delayed recovery from illness (Khan et al., 2023). According to Schat and Kelloway (2019), the interaction between psychological stress and physical health outcomes is especially pronounced in high-stress occupations like corrections, resulting in accelerated health decline, absenteeism, and reduced work performance.

3.2.6. Mental Health Consequences

Chronic occupational stress is strongly associated with mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and burnout (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). The constant exposure to traumatic events and the high-pressure environment take a significant toll on officers' mental well-being. These psychological consequences can contribute to reduced concentration, poor decision-making, and emotional exhaustion.

3.2.7. Impact on Job Performance and Satisfaction

High levels of stress negatively affect job performance, leading to errors, reduced productivity, and low morale. Over time, this contributes to absenteeism, high turnover, and even early retirement among correctional officers (Garcia & Slate, 2020). Persistent stress not only diminishes individual performance but also undermines institutional efficiency and service delivery in correctional facilities.

3.2.8. Gender-Based Stressors

Several studies have highlighted that female correctional officers experience unique stressors linked to their gender. Lambert et al. (2020) noted the dual burden of professional and societal expectations on women, which heightens stress and anxiety levels. Female officers often face sexual harassment and gender discrimination, both from inmates and colleagues, which significantly impact their psychological well-being (Britton, 2020). These gender-specific stressors often result in lower job satisfaction and higher burnout rates compared to male counterparts (Morse et al., 2021; Misis et al., 2023).

In Delta State, Nigeria, cultural norms and societal expectations further intensify these pressures, creating an additional layer of stress for female officers (Adebayo & Eze, 2022). In male-dominated environments such as correctional facilities, female officers must continually prove their competence and authority, leading to additional strain and emotional fatigue.

3.2.9. Health Implications for Female Correctional Officers

The health implications of occupational stress among female correctional officers are extensive. Ricciardelli et al. (2021) reported that chronic exposure to workplace stress correlates with a higher prevalence of anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Similarly, Schat and Kelloway (2019) linked prolonged stress to cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, and sleep disturbances. These challenges not only compromise individual well-being but also threaten workforce stability through absenteeism and turnover (Garcia & Slate, 2020). Regehr et al. (2021) and Thompson and Vandenberg (2023) further confirmed that long-term stress exposure contributes to both psychological disorders and physical ailments such as hypertension and cardiovascular disease. The resulting mental and physical health issues reduce job performance, increase absenteeism, and heighten turnover rates within the correctional system (Violanti et al., 2023).

3.2.10. Coping Mechanisms

Female correctional officers adopt various coping strategies to manage occupational stress. Emotion-focused coping strategies such as relaxation, social support, and recreation are common (Howard et al., 2021; Mearns & Cain, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these strategies is often limited by inadequate institutional support (Ricciardelli et al., 2021). Brough and Williams (2020) observed that although personal coping mechanisms are helpful, they may not sufficiently mitigate the impact of chronic stress without organizational backing. In many Nigerian facilities, institutional support mechanisms, such as counseling and structured stress management programmes, are underutilized or unavailable (Harvey et al., 2022).

3.2.11. Support Systems and Institutional Interventions

Institutional support plays a crucial role in mitigating stress among female correctional officers. Crawley and Crawley (2020) found that the absence of effective workplace support networks fosters isolation and increases stress. Organizational interventions such as peer-support programmes, mental health check-ups, and regular stress management workshops are critical (Garcia & Slate, 2020). However, in regions like Delta State, where such programmes are underdeveloped, female officers experience heightened stress levels (Morris & Yates, 2019). de Klerk et al. (2025) established that institutionally supported well-being interventions—including mindfulness programmes, cognitive-behavioral training, and critical incident management—significantly improve psychological health outcomes and reduce burnout. Similarly, Uzodinma et al. (2022) found that psychological stress interventions, such as counseling and workplace wellness programmes, reduced stress symptoms and improved overall well-being among Nigerian workers.

3.2.12. Contextual Realities in Delta State

In Delta State, Nigeria, cultural and societal expectations exacerbate occupational stress, as traditional gender roles intersect with workplace demands (Adebayo & Eze, 2022). These pressures, coupled with understaffing, overcrowding, and limited institutional support, heighten rates of anxiety, depression, burnout, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease among female officers (Osei-Bonsu & Antwi, 2020). Addressing these realities requires tailored interventions such as counseling services, peer-support networks, stress management training, and work-life balance initiatives.

4. Results

4.1. Research Question One

RQ1: To what extent do female correctional officers in Delta State experience significant psychological stress primarily due to role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination?

Table 1 Responses on Psychosocial Stress from Role Conflict, Workplace Violence, and Gender Discrimination

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
1	I experience high levels of stress because of conflicting job roles and expectations.	90	85	35	22	3.05	0.92	Agreed
2	Workplace violence from inmates or colleagues contributes significantly to my stress at work.	87	89	31	25	3.01	0.95	Agreed
3	Gender discrimination in the correctional service negatively affects my psychological wellbeing.	92	88	30	22	3.08	0.90	Agreed
4	The demands of my job often conflict with my responsibilities at home, causing stress.	95	82	33	22	3.08	0.91	Agreed
5	I believe that female officers face more psychological stress than their male counterparts.	88	90	28	26	3.03	0.94	Agreed
	Grand Mean/Std	452	434	157	117	3.05	0.92	Agreed

The result in Table 1 shows responses on psychosocial stress from role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination. It revealed that female correctional officers in Delta State agreed that role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination contribute significantly to their psychological stress, with a grand mean of 3.05 and standard deviation of 0.92. This indicates that most respondents consistently perceive these factors as major stressors.

4.2. Research Question Two

RQ2: To what extent is psychosocial stress significantly associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout among female correctional officers in Delta State?

Table 2 Responses on Stress-Induced Anxiety, Depression, and Burnout

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
6	I often feel anxious as a result of the stress I experience at work.	91	87	32	22	3.06	0.93	Agreed
7	My work-related stress has led me to feelings of sadness or depression.	94	85	31	22	3.08	0.92	Agreed
8	Stress from my job has caused me to feel physically and emotionally exhausted (burnout).	92	86	30	24	3.06	0.93	Agreed
9	The stress I face at work affects my ability to remain motivated and productive.	89	90	29	24	3.04	0.94	Agreed
10	Psychological stress from my job has negatively impacted my mental health.	95	84	30	23	3.09	0.91	Agreed
	Grand Mean/Std	461	432	152	115	3.07	0.93	

Table 2 shows that the responses on stress-induced anxiety, depression, and burnout. It reveals that stress is strongly linked to anxiety, depression, and burnout, with a grand mean of 3.07 and standard deviation of 0.93. Respondents agreed across all items, showing that psychosocial stress has a significant negative impact on their mental wellbeing and work performance.

4.3. Research Question Three

RQ3: To what extent are the current support systems available to female correctional officers in Delta State sufficient in mitigating the psychosocial stress they experience?

Table 3 Responses on Adequacy of Current Support Systems

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
11	The current stress management programmes in my workplace are inadequate.	71	92	45	24	3.01	0.97	Agreed
12	I do not receive enough emotional or psychological support from my superiors.	70	93	46	23	3.00	0.95	Agreed
13	There are limited counselling services available to help me cope with stress.	72	90	47	23	2.99	0.96	Agreed
14	I feel that my workplace does not provide sufficient resources to help female officers manage stress.	74	89	46	23	3.01	0.95	Agreed
15	The support systems provided are ineffective in reducing the stress I experience.	73	91	44	24	3.00	0.96	Agreed
Grand Mean/Std	Overall	360	455	228	117	3.00	0.96	

Table 3 reveals the responses on adequacy of current support systems. From the analysis, it was revealed that respondents agreed that support systems are inadequate, with a grand mean of 3.00 and standard deviation of 0.96. This indicates that female correctional officers perceive existing stress management programmes and support mechanisms as insufficient in reducing their psychosocial stress.

4.4. Research Question Four

RQ4: To what extent will implementing comprehensive stress management training programmes reduce psychosocial stress levels among female correctional officers?

Table 4 Responses on Effectiveness of Stress Management Training

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
16	Stress management training would help me cope better with job demands.	92	86	32	22	3.06	0.92	Agreed
17	I believe that regular workshops on stress management would reduce my workplace stress.	93	84	33	22	3.06	0.93	Agreed
18	Stress management programmes would improve my mental health and overall wellbeing.	94	85	31	22	3.08	0.91	Agreed
19	Learning effective coping strategies would reduce my risk of burnout.	90	87	32	23	3.05	0.93	Agreed
20	Implementing structured stress management training would improve the job satisfaction of female officers.	95	82	33	22	3.08	0.92	Agreed
	Grand Mean/Std	464	424	161	111	3.07	0.92	

Table 4 shows the responses on effectiveness of stress management training. The data analysis in the table indicates strong agreement among respondents that stress management training programmes would significantly reduce psychosocial stress and improve wellbeing, with a grand mean of 3.07 and standard deviation of 0.92. This suggests that such interventions are considered highly effective in addressing workplace stress among female correctional officers.

4.5. Testing of Hypotheses

H01: Female correctional officers in Delta State do not experience significant psychosocial stress primarily due to role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination.

Table 5 One-Sample t-Test on Psychosocial Stress due to Role Conflict, Workplace Violence, and Gender Discrimination

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-call	t-crit	p-value	Decision
Role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination	232	3.48	0.74	19.15	1.96	0.000	Reject H0

The result of the one-sample t-test on psychosocial stress due to role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination shows a mean of 3.48 (SD = 0.74). With t-calculated = 19.15 greater than t-critical = 1.96 at df = 231, and p = 0.000 < 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that female correctional officers in Delta State significantly experience psychosocial stress arising from role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination.

H02: Psychosocial stress is not significantly associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout among female correctional officers in Delta State.

Table 6 One-Sample t-Test on Stress and its Association with Anxiety, Depression, and Burnout

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-cal	t-crit	p-value	Decision
Anxiety, depression, and burnout	232	3.47	0.74	18.97	1.96	0.000	Reject H0

The analysis of stress in relation to anxiety, depression, and burnout reveals a mean of 3.47 (SD = 0.74). The one-sample t-test gave t-calculated = 18.97, which is greater than the critical value of 1.96, and p = 0.000 < 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating that psychosocial stress is significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout among female officers.

H03: The current support systems available to female correctional officers in Delta State are significantly sufficient in effectively mitigating the psychosocial stress they experience.

Table 7 One-Sample t-Test on Adequacy of Support Systems

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-cal	t-crit	p-value	Decision
Adequacy of support systems	232	3.42	0.77	17.41	1.96	0.000	Reject H0

The result on the adequacy of support systems for mitigating stress shows a mean score of 3.42 (SD = 0.77). The t-calculated = 17.41 exceeds the t-critical = 1.96, with p = 0.000 < 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that the current support systems are significantly insufficient in effectively reducing the psychosocial stress experienced by female officers.

H04: Implementing comprehensive stress management training programmes will not significantly reduce psychosocial stress levels among female correctional officers.

Table 8 One-Sample t-Test on the Effect of Stress Management Training

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-cal	t-crit	p-value	Decision
Stress management training	232	3.48	0.73	19.36	1.96	0.000	Reject H0

The one-sample t-test result on the effect of stress management training shows a mean of 3.48 (SD = 0.73). The calculated t-value of 19.36 is greater than the critical value of 1.96, with p = 0.000 < 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming that implementing comprehensive stress management training programs will significantly reduce psychosocial stress levels among female correctional officers.

4.6. Summary of Major Findings

- Female correctional officers in Delta State significantly experience psychosocial stress, primarily due to role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination.
- Psychosocial stress was found to be significantly associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout among female correctional officers.
- The support systems currently available to female correctional officers were found to be significantly insufficient in mitigating the psychosocial stress they encounter.
- Implementing comprehensive stress management training programs was found to significantly reduce psychosocial stress levels among female correctional officers in Delta State.

5. Discussion of Findings

5.1. Psychosocial stress due to workplace conditions

The findings revealed that female correctional officers in Delta State significantly experience psychosocial stress arising from conflicting job roles, exposure to workplace violence, and gender discrimination. The officers acknowledged that these stressors not only affect their wellbeing but also create tension between work and home responsibilities. The finding that female correctional officers in Delta State experience psychosocial stress primarily as a result of role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination aligns with the assertions of Adebayo (2018), who emphasized that role ambiguity and conflicting job expectations are significant sources of stress in correctional institutions. Similarly, Fusco, et al., (2021), noted that workplace violence and intimidation, whether from inmates or colleagues, create a hostile work environment that worsens stress levels. In addition, Obidoa et al (2011) highlighted that gender discrimination remains a pressing issue in male-dominated professions, often resulting in higher stress levels for women. The current study supports these perspectives, showing that the intersection of conflicting roles, violence, and discrimination significantly undermines the psychosocial wellbeing of female correctional officers.

5.2. Association of stress with mental health outcomes

It was found that psychosocial stress among female correctional officers is significantly linked with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout. Many of the respondents reported feelings of sadness, loss of motivation, and emotional exhaustion, which further affect their productivity and overall job performance. The result that stress is strongly associated with anxiety, depression, and burnout among female correctional officers agrees with the position of Lambert et al, (2021), who reported that sustained occupational stress has a direct impact on employees' mental health, often leading to burnout and depression. Similarly, Adelugba, and Gunbearer, (2018) found that correctional workers frequently experience mental fatigue and emotional exhaustion, which reduces their motivation and effectiveness. The present finding reinforces this, as many respondents admitted that job-related stress leaves them emotionally drained and less productive. This indicates that stress in correctional environments is not only an occupational issue but also a public health concern, consistent with earlier literature.

5.3. Inadequacy of current support systems

The study established that the existing support systems within the correctional service are significantly insufficient in addressing the stress experienced by female officers. Stress management programmes, counselling services, and resources provided by the workplace were considered inadequate and ineffective, leaving most officers without the needed support. The study also found that available support systems such as stress management programs and counselling services are largely inadequate and ineffective. This agrees with the view of Adisa (2019), who observed that institutional stress interventions in Nigeria are often poorly implemented and fail to meet employees' needs. In a related vein, Uzodima et, al (2022) noted that correctional institutions often lack structured psychosocial support for their staff, leaving employees to cope individually. The present finding therefore strengthens the argument that the absence of functional support mechanisms exacerbates stress among female officers, which has far-reaching implications for their performance and retention in the service.

5.4. Effectiveness of stress management training programmes

The results also indicated that implementing structured stress management training programmes would significantly reduce psychosocial stress among female correctional officers. Respondents believed that such programmes would help them develop coping strategies, improve their mental health, and enhance overall job satisfaction. The finding that structured stress management programmes would significantly reduce stress among female correctional officers corroborates the opinion Adebayo and Eze (2022), who suggested that training in coping strategies such as relaxation

techniques and time management improves workers' resilience against stress. In support, de Klerk et al (2025) emphasized that regular workshops and institutionalized training on stress management enhance psychosocial wellbeing and job satisfaction. The present study confirms these positions, as respondents strongly agreed that effective stress management training would help them cope with workplace demands, reduce burnout, and increase job satisfaction.

This demonstrates that proactive training interventions can serve as a preventive measure to reduce stress rather than merely responding after it escalates.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined psychosocial stress among female correctional officers in Delta State, focusing on its causes, consequences, support systems, and potential interventions. The findings revealed that female correctional officers face significant stress primarily due to role conflict, workplace violence, and gender discrimination. The study further established that this stress is strongly linked with anxiety, depression, and burnout, thereby affecting their mental health and productivity. It was also discovered that the existing support systems provided by correctional institutions are largely inadequate to mitigate these stressors. However, the study showed that the implementation of comprehensive stress management training programs would significantly reduce psychosocial stress and improve job satisfaction.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- The management of correctional services should provide clear job descriptions and reduce role conflicts by ensuring that responsibilities are well-defined and fairly distributed among staff.
- Government and correctional authorities should enforce strict policies to curb workplace violence and gender discrimination, ensuring that female officers work in a safe and respectful environment.
- Correctional institutions should establish and strengthen support systems such as counselling units, peer support groups, and regular stress management programmes tailored to the needs of female officers.
- The correctional service should organize regular and structured stress management training and workshops to equip female officers with coping strategies that will enhance their psychosocial wellbeing and job satisfaction.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

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