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The Comparison of Contact with Inmates, Risk Perception, and Mental Health of Officers in a Correctional Institution with Different Levels of Security

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Correctional institutions (LP) have various levels of security that are adjusted to the characteristics of the inmates accommodated in it. This level of security includes minimum, medium, and maximum prisons and often includes special prisons for prisoners with special needs or high danger. Differences in security levels present unique dynamics and challenges in contact between officers and inmates, perceptions of risk, and their impact on officers' mental health. **Methods:** This study is an analytic observational study with a cross-sectional approach. A total of 116 research subjects participated in this study. This study observes contact between officers and inmates using the contact with inmate scale. Perception of risk is measured by a scale compiled by Ferdik. The mental health assessment of correctional worker participants used the mental health inventory (MHI-38) made by Veit and Ware. **Results:** Officers in medium-security level penitentiaries have more positive contact with inmates than in maximum and super-maximum security level penitentiaries. Likewise, the aspect of officer risk perception in medium-security level penitentiaries shows a lower score than in maximum and super-maximum security level penitentiaries. However, super-maximum security level penitentiary officers show a lower level of mental health than medium security level penitentiaries. **Conclusion:** There are differences in correctional officers' contact with inmates, risk perception, and mental health of correctional officers in prisons with different levels of security.

1. Introduction

Correctional institutions (LP) are institutions that have an important role in the criminal justice system, especially in carrying out their duties to guard, supervise and rehabilitate inmates. In this environment, prison officials play a central role in maintaining the order and security of the facility. However, prison is also a place where there is direct interaction between officers and inmates, as well as an environment that can affect their mental well-being. Correctional institutions (LP) have various levels of security that are adjusted to the characteristics of the inmates accommodated therein. This level of security includes minimum, medium, and maximum prisons and often includes special prisons for inmates with special needs or high danger. Differences in levels of

security present unique dynamics and challenges in contact between officers and inmates, perceptions of risk, and the impact on staff mental health.¹⁻³

In prisons with a minimum security level, inmates who are nearing the end of their prison term or who are at low risk are usually accommodated. Interaction between officers and inmates tends to be more open, with a focus on rehabilitation and preparation for reintegration into society. Officers' perceptions of risk may be lower, but challenges in building rehabilitation and leadership skills for inmates remain. The impact on staff mental health may be more positive as there is an opportunity to see positive results from rehabilitation efforts. In prisons with a medium security level, inmates with a more diverse risk profile and needs are accommodated. Interactions between

officers and inmates tend to be more complex, with attention to tighter supervision. Officers' perception of risk may be higher due to the need to anticipate potential conflicts or security incidents. Psychological pressure on officers can be greater because they have to maintain a balance between control and rehabilitation. Meanwhile, penitentiaries with maximum security levels accommodate high-dangerous inmates or serious cases. Interactions between officers and inmates are carried out with very strict security protocols. Officers' perception of risk in these situations is very high, and they are constantly exposed to potential threats. The impact on the mental health of staff in these institutions may be more significant because prolonged pressure and stress can lead to impaired mental well-being.⁴⁻⁶

The interaction between officers and inmates in the prison environment is the core of the dynamics of life behind the prison walls. These relationships form the basis of many decisions and strategies implemented by officers in carrying out their daily duties. One of the key factors influencing this dynamic is officers' perception of risk to inmates. Officers' perceptions of risk can greatly influence how they approach and interact with inmates. If officers perceive a prisoner as potentially high risk, they may be more inclined to take more stringent precautions, such as limiting interactions or increasing surveillance. On the other hand, if officials feel the prisoner is at lower risk, they may be more inclined to take a more open and supportive approach to rehabilitation. This study aimed to determine the comparison of inmate contacts, risk perception, and mental health of correctional officers with different levels of security.

2. Methods

This study is an analytic observational study with a cross-sectional approach. A total of 116 research subjects participated in this study. The research subjects were civil servants working in the field of security or coaching at Correctional Institutions on Nusakambangan Island, Cilacap District, Regional Office of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights in

Central Java Province, Indonesia. A total of 37 research subjects were prison security officers with super-maximum security levels, 50 research subjects were prison security officers with maximum security levels, and 29 research subjects were security officers in prisons with medium security levels.

This study observed officer-prisoner contact using the contact with inmate scale developed by Gerstein, Topp, and Correll. This scale measures how correctional officers feel when dealing with inmates. Lower scores indicate officers' more positive perceptions of interactions with inmates. Respondents were selected among seven sets of bipolar adjectives indicating the extent to which these adjectives describe appropriate experiences. These adjectives: in control-out of control, unsuccessful-successful, active-inactive, helpless-helpful, effective-ineffective, powerful-less-powerful, and confident lacking-confidence. Perception of risk is measured by a scale compiled by Ferdik, which has seven components with five response options (very low-very high). The officers' risk perception components include being with convicts with infectious diseases, the presence of gangs in prisons, disturbing inmates, being with mentally ill inmates, the presence of smuggling, riots, and community retaliation for released convicts to return to society. The mental health assessment of correctional worker participants used the mental health inventory (MHI-38) made by Veit and Ware. MHI-38 has been adapted to the Indonesian language, validity, and reliability tests into 24 items with four possible answers: Almost all the time, very often, rarely, and never. The health aspects measured include negative characteristics (anxiety, depression, and loss of control) and positive characteristics (emotions, love, and satisfaction).

3. Results

The correctional institution, the place of this research, is located on the isolated island of Nusakambangan, Indonesia, which only contains male inmates. The demographic description of the participants shows the gender of the participants

(Table 1). It shows that most of the participants are male (94.8%). The six respondents were female officers who were administrative staff in the correctional security section. Most of the participants were under

the age of 40 (n=94). The highest educational background was high school (n=55) and bachelor (n=49).

Table 1. Demographic variables.

	n	Percentage (%)
Age		
20-30	74	63.8
31-40	20	17.2
41-50	9	7.8
51-60	13	11.2
Gender		
Female	6	5.2
Male	110	94.8
Education		
High school	55	47.4
Diploma	6	5.2
Bachelor	49	42.2
Postgraduate	6	5.2
Number of participants		
Medium security (MED)	29	25.0
Maximum security (MAX)	50	43.1
Super maximum security (SMAX)	37	31.9

Responding to the first research objective, this study found differences in contact between correctional officers and inmates, risk perception, and mental health of correctional officers in correctional institutions MED, MAX, and SMAX security. The results of testing with Anova showed differences in contact with inmates, risk perception, and mental health (Table 2) in three different types of prison security (MED, MAX, and SMAX), concluding that

there were differences in these three variables between each prison (Sig.< 0.05). Figure 1 shows the difference between officers at MED prisons having more positive contact with inmates than MAX and SMAX prisons. Likewise, the aspect of risk perception of officers at the MED Correctional Institution shows a lower score than MAX and SMAX. However, SMAX correctional officers show lower levels of mental health than MED prisons.

Table 2. Anova test of contact with inmates, risk perception, and mental health in prisons at medium, maximum, and super-maximum security levels.

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Contact with inmate	585.107	2	292.554	9.424	.000
Risk perception	2776.171	2	1388.085	4.983	.008
Mental health	673.778	2	336.889	4.034	.020

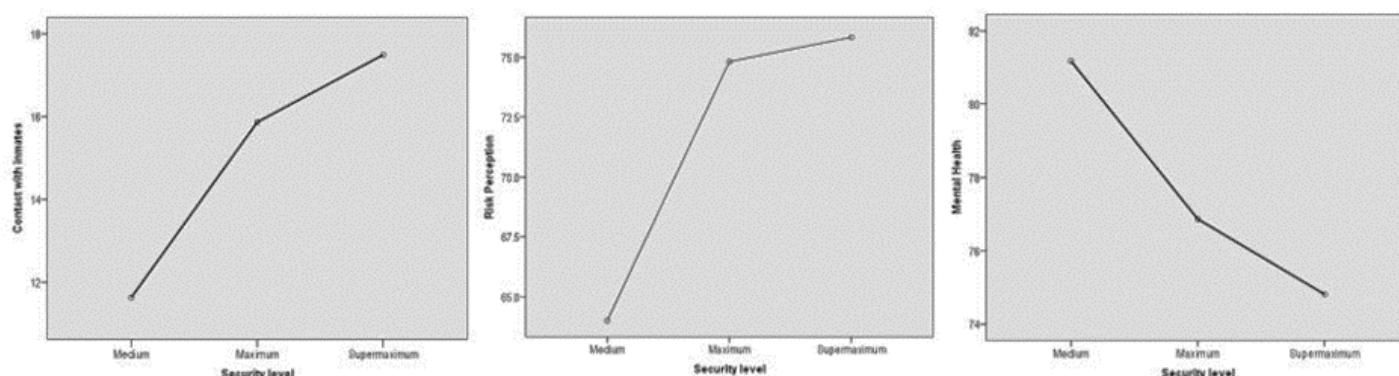


Figure 1. Chart of differences in contact with inmates, risk perception, and mental health in prison officers medium, maximum, and super-maximum security.

Test further differences in officers' contact with inmates, risk perception, and mental health in prison security levels MED, MAX, and SMAX with multiple comparisons, describing in more detail the three variables. Significant differences were found between medium prisons with maximum and super-maximum security (Table 3). Comparison of the relation variable between MED and MAX security correctional officers shows relatively the same significance as the

differences in contact between correctional officers between the levels of MED security and MAX security and officers at super-MAX security. Likewise, the significance of the comparison of the risk perception variable between MED-MAX correctional officers and MED-SMAX security (Sig <0.05). However, there is no significant difference between the MAX and SMAX penitentiaries in terms of contact with inmates, risk perception, and mental health.

Table 3. Multiple comparisons of contact with inmates, risk perception, and mental health in medium, maximum, and super-maximum security prisons.

Variable	(I) Security class	(J) Security class	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.	95% Confidence interval	
						Lower bound	Upper bound
Contact with inmate	Medium	Maximum	-4.239*	1.301	.001	-6.82	-1.66
		Super-maximum	-5.866*	1.382	.000	-8.60	-3.13
	Maximum	Medium	4.239*	1.301	.001	1.66	6.82
		Super-maximum	-1.626	1.208	.181	-4.02	.77
Risk perception	Medium	Maximum	-10.820*	3.896	.006	-18.54	-3.10
		Super-maximum	-11.838*	4.139	.005	-20.04	-3.64
	Maximum	Medium	10.820*	3.896	.006	3.10	18.54
		Super-maximum	-1.018	3.619	.779	-8.19	6.15
Mental health	Medium	Maximum	4.312*	2.133	.046	.09	8.54
		Super-maximum	6.362*	2.266	.006	1.87	10.85
	Maximum	Medium	-4.312*	2.133	.046	-8.54	-.09
		Super-maximum	2.049	1.982	.303	-1.88	5.98

The second aim of this study was to examine differences in the relationship between officers' contact with inmates and perceptions of risk with the mental health of officers in correctional institutions MED, MAX, and SMAX security. Correlation tests between

officer-prisoner contact and risk perception with mental health in each prison with different levels of security show varying results (Table 4). On the contact factor between officers and inmates, the smaller the score, the more positive the feelings. Among MED

correctional officers, a significant association was found between positive feelings of contact and high mental health ($p < 0.01$, $r = .64$). On the other hand, SMAX correctional officers showed a significant negative relationship with low mental health ($p < 0.01$, $r = .452$). Meanwhile, risk perception was not found to

be related to the mental health of officers in correctional institutions with MED and SMAX safety levels. However, in the SMAX prison, high staff risk perceptions were significantly negatively related to low mental health ($p < 0.05$, $r = .346$).

Table 4. Comparison of contact associations with inmates, risk perception, and mental health of correctional officers at medium, maximum, and super-maximum security.

	Medium security (r)		Maximum security (r)		Super maximum security (r)	
	Contact with inmate	Risk perception	Contact with inmate	Risk perception	Contact with inmate	Risk perception
Mental health						
Medium security	-0.64**	-0.146				
Maximum security	-0.053	-0.146	-0.154	-0.219		
Super-maximum security	0.354	0.173	-0.197	0.090	-0.452*	-0.346*

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

How do contact with inmates and risk perception contribute to the mental health of officers in MED and SMAX correctional institutions? Regression analysis

concluded that these two aspects were the strongest predictors of officers in MED correctional institutions ($R^2 = 0.412$) and SMAX ($R^2 = 0.246$) (Table 5).

Table 5. Regression of contact with inmates, risk perception with the mental health of correctional officers at medium, maximum, and super-maximum security.

Security type	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	RMSE	R ² Change	F Change	df	p
Medium	0.642	0.412	0.367	8.513	0.412	9.118	2	0.0009
Maximum	0.260	0.067	0.028	7.843	0.067	1.697	2	0.1943
Super-maximum	0.496	0.246	0.202	8.331	0.246	5.544	2	0.0082

4. Discussion

The finding that officers in medium-security level penitentiaries have more positive contact with inmates compared to maximum and super-maximum security level penitentiaries indicates that there are significant differences in the dynamics of interaction at various levels of security. More positive interactions in medium security level penitentiary could be caused by various factors. It may be that inmates at medium security levels have a lower risk or are more exposed to rehabilitation programs. This can create a more conducive environment for officers to work with

inmates in efforts to facilitate rehabilitation and preparation for return to society.⁷⁻⁹

Perceptions of lower staff risk in medium security prisons may be reflected in the risk profile of inmates placed in those institutions. Inmates at medium security levels may have a lower history of crime or a less violent history, which can reduce the perception of risk for officers. However, this could also be the result of a management approach that is more focused on rehabilitation and reintegration, so officers are more likely to see inmates as individuals with potential for change.¹⁰⁻¹³

However, the finding that officers in super-maximum security level penitentiaries have lower levels of mental health indicates a significant impact of a stressful and risky work environment. The super-maximum level of security often houses high-risk or dangerous inmates, so officers in these environments may be in more challenging and potentially dangerous situations. Psychological pressure that comes from this environment can cause chronic stress, anxiety, and even depression in officers.¹⁴⁻¹⁶

This finding emphasizes the importance of paying attention to the mental well-being of officers in super-maximum security prisons. Appropriate support and mental health maintenance programs become very important to overcome the negative impact of stress and risks associated with the environment. Taken together, these findings demonstrate the complexity of interactions between officers and inmates and the impact this has on staff's perception of risk and mental health at different levels of security. This underscores the need for different approaches to prison management according to different levels of security, as well as strong efforts to maintain the mental well-being of staff in stressful environments.¹⁷⁻²⁰

5. Conclusion

Officers in medium-security prisons have more positive contact with inmates than in maximum and super-maximum security prisons. Likewise, the risk perception aspect of officers in medium-security prisons showed lower scores than in maximum and super-maximum security prisons. However, super-maximum-level correctional officers exhibited lower levels of mental health than medium-security correctional institutions.

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