

# The Relationship between Wellness, Work Stress and Personality of Prison Warders

Awanis Ku Ishak  
OYAGSB / School of Business Management  
College of Business,  
[awanis@uum.edu.my](mailto:awanis@uum.edu.my)

Armanurah Mohamad,  
School of Business Management  
College of Business  
[armanurah@uum.edu.my](mailto:armanurah@uum.edu.my)

## Abstract

At prison, the frontline warders would continually confront both sustaining wellness and controlling strenuous stress at work. Prison warders' wellness was irrefutable due to intense pressure conditions at the workplace that continuously faltered their wellness. Gradual wellness fluctuation due to excessive stress would severely tarnish performance of prison warders and prison department. Nevertheless, their personality played an important role in conserving their wellness level despite continuous overrun of stress during work. Therefore this paper elaborated on prison warders' personality and work stress in order to maintain their wellness at work. This research examined the relationship between prison warders' wellness, their personality and work stress in Prison Department of Malaysia. Pertinent question of the study was to look at influence of prison warders' personality and work stress on their wellness degree. These findings were significant since prison warders' wellness, their personality and work stress remained loose issue particularly in Malaysia. Findings revealed that personality and work stress influenced prison warders' wellness.

**Keyword:** prison warders, wellness, stress, personality

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, more professionals, organizations and industry were more responsive and perceptive of employee wellness issues. The relationship between employee wellness and their performance also caught the interest of those dealing with high risk at work specifically frontline prison warders.

Being a wage earner as prison employee was dreadfully challenging and stressful since constant work stress due to routine tribulations might taint and damage prison warders' health and wellbeing in long term. In actual, threat of inmate violence against prison warders, actual violence committed by inmates, threat of assault, inmate demands and manipulation and problems with coworkers were among conditions that warders reported in recent years causing cause stress and deplete wellness (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006). These factors, combined with other sources of stress such as overcrowded prisons, intercultural conflicts, violent within the prisons, drug use, inadequate prison staff, shift work, staff with training deficits, understaffing, extensive overtime, rotating shift work, low pay and poor public image, could impair warders' health, caused them to bum out or retire prematurely, and impaired their family life and affected the organization (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006).

Not only the increasing absence rate due to illness was irrefutable constraint but also problems such as burnout, substance abuse, internal depression and inability to cope with traumatic experiences of daily work often lead to early retirement or retirement with physical or mental problems. Since prison warders' wellness and work stress in high-risk environment are two interrelated issues, it is important to accentuate wellness among prison warders in order to guarantee effective prison service that entails long-term benefit to the society. Nevertheless, some warders were still committed in their work, until they reached their set pension date. Such warders showed intense focus and high levels of enthusiasm that expectedly boosted their level of wellness. This was because they possessed certain personality trait that caused happiness instead of illness and motivated them to stay on. Regardless of the situation, prison warders' wellness and illness worked "shoulder-to-shoulder" throughout prison warders' struggled to maintain their sanity despite working in highly strenuous prison environment. Regrettably, despite these statements, most psychologists and criminologists study in prison issues focused almost exclusively on offenders (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006) instead of prison warders.

However, beginning in the late 1970s, there was a series of studies investigating employees who worked in the field of corrections. Most research explored how prison or prison workers viewed and reacted to their jobs, especially in terms of work stress, job satisfaction, and prison orientation (Britton, 1997; Cullen, Latessa, Burton, and Lombardo, 1993; Karasek and Theorell, 1990). Latest pertinent studies also validated on prison warders' poor health due to high level of stress and anxiety (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006, Sundt and Cullen, 2002). Since previous research and subjective evidences highlighted on the massive effect of work stress on prison warders this might seriously retard or cause prison warders' mental health to deplete unswervingly (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006; Pfeffer, 2010; Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton and Swart, 2003). Viewing these conditions, therefore, it is crucial for the prison department administrators to pursue into this matter. Regrettably, research on prison warders' wellness, their personality and their work stress are nonetheless quite scanty in Malaysia.

Several local studies conducted in prison facilities focused on incarcerated individuals such as imprisoned drug addicts, HIV sufferers in prison, female inmates, felon awaiting for delinquents, detainees under ISA act (Internal Security Act) viewing from pathological perspectives (Karofi, 2005; Yik 2006; Mazlan, Mat Saat and Ahmad, 2010; Choi, Kavasery, Desai, Govindasamy, Kamarulzaman, and Altice, 2010) but insufficient research are pursued on prison warders. Therefore, this study aimed to fill up the literature gap in prison study specifically on prison warders' health and wellbeing, their work stress and personality traits. Hopefully, the literature and empirical findings of prison warders' wellness, their personality and work stress would initiate future study of the keepers. The objectives of the study were:

1. To investigate the correlation between prison warders' wellness, work stress dimensions and personality domains.
2. To examine the influence of work stress dimensions and personality domains on prison warders' wellness.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Participants**

The required respondents sample for the populations of 4,783 (8 locations) was between 354 and 356 (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). In tandem, Nunnally (1978) advised appropriate sampling calculation should be subjected to the measured construct variable (in this research, parceled items) of 10:1. Meanwhile McMillan (2004) suggested the rate of return should be at least at 60%. Considering all suggestions, the authors settled for the usable returned questionnaires amount because it was between the recommended sample size and also suitable for item parceling purposes. The returned

questionnaires were totaled at 570 whilst usable returned questionnaires were at 417. The sample size had satisfied the proposed minimum by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and Nunnally (1978). This indicated acceptable returned questionnaires were at 62.68% and had met the suggested rate (McMillan, 2004). The questionnaire was completed by front line prison warders as selected respondents (n=417; mean age 33 years).

## **Instruments**

Three instruments (using likert-type formatted scales) were incorporated to establish an appropriate questionnaire for the study; the 5F-WEL (91 items) (Myers and Sweeney, 2004), the Five Factor Personality Inventory (60 items) (Costa and McCrae, 1992) and the Work Stress Scale for Prison Warders (35 items) (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006).

## **Statistical Analyses : Correlation and Regression Analyses**

The researchers attempted to examine the relationship of work stress dimensions, personality domains and wellness through Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and Stepwise Regression as statistical tools.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Demographic Information**

Respondents consisted of 417 prison warders (of 233 male and 184 female; 56% and 44% respectively). This sample reflected real situation of prison warders population where majority were male dominated. Most female prison warders were at Kajang Female Prison. This sample also reflected true populace of the profession where it was dominated by Malay ethnic (94.24%). Mean age of respondents was at 33 years. 284 respondents worked 10 years and below. Another 31.8% respondents served the department between 11 to 30 years.

### **Reliability Analysis**

In this study, the cronbach alpha values of 5F-Wel, NEO FFI and WSSCO instruments were .90, .90 and .89 respectively, indicating acceptable values. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each measurement battery was adequate. However, two dimensions of Work Stress Scale for Prison Warders scale namely Work Overload and Inadequacies in Physical Conditions of Prison revealed cronbach's alpha value of .614 and .602 respectively and two personality domains, extraversion and openness revealed cronbach value of .646 and .670 respectively. Albeit low alpha values, they were still acceptable (Sekaran, 2000).

### **Factor Analysis**

Exploratory factor analyses were performed on the measurement instruments for the purpose of investigating the factor structure of the measurement battery as well as to objectively trace natural groupings of factors (Suhr, 2006). By performing exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the number of constructs and the underlying factor structure were identified. Since this was the first time 5F-WEL and WSSCO were adapted into Malay language and were tested in Malaysia, exploratory factor analyses (EFA) were performed to investigate the factorial validity of the translated instrument measurements (Suhr, 2006). Through EFA, the underlying factor structures of three measurement

instruments were identified. Factor analyses results revealed that the measurement instruments fitted well with this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Correlation between Wellness, Work Stress and Personality Characters of Prison Warders.

Hipotesis 1 There is a relationship between frontline prison warders' wellness, work stress (role conflict and role ambiguity, work overload, inadequacies in physical conditions in prison, threat perception and general problems) and personality (neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness).

**Table I Correlation Analysis**

Construct / Dimensions / Domains	Wellness	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Work Stress (Construct)	<b>-.132*</b>	<b>.007</b>
Dimensions:		
Role Conflict Role Ambiguity	<b>-.112*</b>	<b>.004</b>
Inadequacies in Physical Conditions in Prison	-.043	.381
Threat Perceptions	<b>-.164</b>	<b>.001</b>
Work Overload	-.060	.221
General Problem	<b>-.187**</b>	<b>.007</b>
Personality (Construct)	<b>-.215**</b>	<b>.000</b>
Domains:		
Openness	-.079	.107
Agreeableness	<b>-.104*</b>	<b>.034</b>
Extraversion	.063	.198
Conscientiousness	<b>.161**</b>	<b>.000</b>
Neuroticism	-.062	.206

The results of Pearson correlation ( $r$ ) between work stress, personality and wellness are highlighted in Table I. Wellness construct was significantly negative correlated with work stress at  $r = -.132$  and personality at  $r = -.215$ . Therefore Hypothesis 1 was substantiated. There was similarity of results compared to previous research. This findings confirmed previous studies on the negative relation and impact of work stress on employee health and wellbeing (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006; Pfeffer, 2010; Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton and Swart, 2003). The present study also supported Kropp, Cox, Roesch and Eaves' (1989) study where they revealed the mentally disordered inmates as the main source of prison warders increasing stress (90%) causing them exhausting health and mental wellbeing.

In particular work stress dimensions namely role conflict and role ambiguity, threat perception and general problems were significantly negative related with the warders' wellness. First and foremost, the findings indicated that prison warders' perception of threat issues (such as risk of being involved in arguments and fights with prison inmates and the need to be cautious all the time) were significantly related to their wellness at work. This discovery supported previous research that cited prison warders' perceived threat of inmate violence as the major cause of stress at work and cause depleting health and wellbeing (Finn, 2000; Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006).

Next, these warders' general problems such as health problems due to the nature of work, not having enough quality time with family due to work, ignoring the needs of family due to work which were related to prison warders' wellness (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006). Eventually these problems drained off prison warders' health and wellbeing. Low salary to compensate with the high risk working in prison also caused stress (Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006). These warders wellness were also related to their role conflict and role ambiguity at work especially during the transition period from pure custodial-oriented to rehabilitative-oriented. Role conflict occurred when

prison warders' custodial responsibility (maintaining security) collided with the rehabilitation of inmates in prison. Role ambiguity occurred when prison warders were expected to go by the rules and at the same time be flexible and used judgment in their interactions with inmates. In this case, these warders were often engulfed by multiplicity of job demands, role, responsibilities and array of duties that implicated ambiguous job role resulting work stress. Prolong situation caused high strain and impairment; thus causing deteriorating prison warders' wellness (Young & Lambie, 2007, Senol-Durak, Durak and Gencoz, 2006).

As for the relation between personality and wellness, there was similarity and contradictory findings compared to previous research findings. Although contradicting to the personality of general population, yet this finding corresponded with previous researches particularly on the correlation between personality traits and individual's health and wellbeing (Booth-Kewley and Vickers, 1994). The similarity was on the positive correlation between wellness and conscientiousness that supported previous findings. According to Salgado (1997), an extent amount of research indicated that conscientiousness was among the best predictors of performance at work. Whilst Booth-Kewley and Vickers (1994) claimed that personality particularly conscientiousness and agreeableness had positive relation with health behavior. Traits under conscientiousness domain such as cautiousness, dutifulness, orderliness, self discipline were among the essentials to prison warders' wellness and performance. These traits ensured them to excel despite of strenuous working conditions in prison.

Meanwhile contradicting to previous findings, this finding revealed agreeableness was negatively correlated to wellness. The ground for negative correlation result was also mainly due to the strenuous working conditions in prison. At work, they were frequently vulnerable to inmate violence and aggression. Under major apprehension, they were assumed to be decisive in brief periods of time. They were also publicly and internally scrutinized for the choices and actions they took at work. Additionally, their jobs required shift work, long hours, and attention to strict organizational guidelines. Therefore, to effectively adjust with their kind of work, these warders had to adjust their personality at work. They restrained themselves from showing their true emotions and conduct themselves according to the nature of their work. Once they were at work, they were a different person due to the exigency of the nature of their work that differed from the usual.

Agreeableness personality traits such as trust, sympathy, altruism and morality were impractical in conditions that required tough or absolute objective decisions especially when they were attending the prison inmates (Mitchell & Bray, 1990). In reality, due to the nature of their work, they were low in trust, more guarded and not affected strongly by human suffering. This study had demonstrated agreeableness (although negatively correlated) and conscientiousness as relevant to wellness behavior; and supported Conway, Vickers, Wallston and Costa Jr. (1992) remark on extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness as three most important elements of personality in predicting health behavior (in this circumstance wellness).

### **The Influence of Work Stress and Personality on Prison Warders' Wellness**

Hipotesis 3     Frontline prison warders' work stress and their personality significantly influence their wellness.

Multiple regression analysis on five dimensions of both prison warders' work stress and personality was performed. The  $R^2$  indicated the percentage of variance in the prison warders' wellness was explained by their work stress and personality. Percentage of variance explained in frontline prison warders' wellness was significant at 11.0 percent; explained by five independent variables which are conscientiousness, threat perception, agreeableness, openness to experience and role conflict and role ambiguity respectively. Therefore Hipotesis 3 was substantiated.

Prison warders who worked under strenuous condition embraced positive conscientiousness characters (dutiful, cautious, organized and self control), negative agreeableness characters (Peabody & De Raad, 2002; Saucier & Ostendorf, 1999) and negative openness to experience characters to ensure they

maintained their wellness at work. Apparent display of prison warders' perception of threat and their experience of role conflict and role ambiguity at work also triggered their wellness to deplete. Glaring reason of the results was due to secluded prison condition and prison culture. The custodial and rehabilitative-oriented service rendered towards the prison inmates had demanded prison warders to strongly adopt conscientiousness character (dutifulness and dependable), the differing side of agreeableness (being suspicious and uncooperative to the demand of prison inmates) and disparate character of openness to experience (more guarded, low in trust, and change resistant) so that they would be able to control their stress at work specifically their perception of threat and their experience of role conflict and role ambiguity. Eventually, both work stress and personality components worked together to guarantee and maintained prison offices' wellness at work.

**Table II**      **Regression Analysis**

	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)		21.773	<b>.000</b>
Conscientiousness	<b>.263</b>	4.983	<b>.000</b>
Threat Perception	<b>-.225</b>	4.074	<b>.000</b>
Agreeableness	<b>-.270</b>	4.165	<b>.000</b>
Openness	<b>-.134</b>	-2.162	<b>.031</b>
Role Conflict Ambiguity	<b>-.115</b>	-2.059	<b>.040</b>
R value	<b>.331</b>	F Value	<b>10.081</b>
R <sup>2</sup> Value	<b>.109</b>	Sig F Change	<b>.000</b>

## CONCLUSIONS

This research demonstrated the relationship and influence of prison warders' personality and work stress on their health and wellbeing that ultimately have an effect on their performance. Based on the findings, work stress dimensions namely role ambiguity and role conflicts and threat perception correlated and influenced wellness. Meanwhile, personality characters which were agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience influenced wellness. To conclude, work stress at work and individual health and well-being appear to be closely intertwined. Whereas an acceptable work stress can bring good things to an organization, it also hurts health and well-being especially when it lingers on, when passivity and withdrawal dominate the way people cope with stress, and when socio-emotional and relationship issues are at stake causing depleting individual and organisational performance. Therefore these issues cannot be ignored. Once these issues were established, proper practical suggestions could be forwarded; to ensure these warders were well prepared. Any indication of poor health and low levels of well-being in the work place may be taken as a signal that high stress amongst frontline prison warders lingers on and need to be addressed.

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