

Behind Bars, Beyond Stress: Management Strategies for Mental Well-Being of Prisoners in India

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Abstract: India's prison system faces an escalating mental health crisis. The 2022 Prison Statistics India report recorded 573,220 inmates, with occupancy at 131% and nearly 75% undertrials - conditions that amplify stress and uncertainty. Suicides accounted for 75% of all unnatural deaths, with a rate (20.8 per 100,000) far exceeding the national average. Yet only 1.6% of inmates are officially diagnosed with mental illness, revealing major underreporting and diagnostic inadequacies. This paper situates suicide and psychological distress within a management framework, linking empirical data with the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, to propose systemic reform. It examines overcrowding, staffing shortages, and poor screening through the lens of organizational behavior, advocating leadership accountability, workforce capacity building, structured intake screening, suicide-prevention protocols, and tele-mental health integration. Framing mental well-being as both a humanitarian and governance imperative, it calls for institutionalizing mental health within prison management to ensure safety, rehabilitation, and humane correctional administration.

Keywords: Prison Management; Mental Health; Mental Health of Prisoners; Stress in Prison

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