

## Self-Efficacy and Psychological Distress Among Inmates in Correctional Centres in Benue State, Nigeria: The Mediating Role of Resilience

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### **Abstract**

*The mental health of inmates is a priority for the criminal justice system and the society at large. Inmates are often at risk of numerous psychological problems. This is not different for inmates under rehabilitation in Benue State. This study examined the mediating role of resilience between self-efficacy and psychological distress among inmates in correctional centres in Benue State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional design was adopted, and data were collected from 613 inmates sampled from correctional centres in Makurdi, Gboko, and Otukpo. The Psychological distress scale, self-efficacy scale and Brief resilience scale were used for data collection. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested. Findings revealed that self-efficacy significantly predicted psychological distress among inmates. Similarly, resilience significantly predicted psychological distress among inmates. However, resilience did not significantly mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and psychological distress. It was recommended that clinical psychologists serving as correctional officers should develop and implement a resilience training programme for inmates. The training should target building their efficacy levels and ability to bounce back in response to stressful situations*

**Key Words:** *Self-efficacy, Resilience, Psychological Distress, Inmates*

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### **Introduction**

Psychological distress continues to be a global trend in both print and social media indicating how inmates in corrections centres faces situations that leads them to psychological problems (Opoku et al., 2024). The Global Prison Trends (2016) posits that the prevalence of mental health issues which is partly the resultant effect of psychological distress has been found

to be considerably higher among inmates than the general community. Some of the factors affecting their distress levels include overcrowding, violence, isolation, lack of privacy and inadequate health services, especially mental health services among others (Abubakar, 2015). Psychological distress encompasses a range of negative emotional and cognitive experiences (Lewis-Fernández & Kirmayer, 2019). According to Nwefoh et al. (2020), in the context of incarcerated populations, it is crucial to consider the unique stressors and challenges of incarcerated life when understanding how distress manifests for inmates. Research has shown that between 16% and 64% of individuals who are incarcerated or have a history of involvement in the criminal justice system experience psychological distress (Al-Rousan et al., 2017). Many factors are implicated in explaining psychological distress among inmates.

Self-efficacy is one of the factors implicated in predicting psychological distress. It is a core concept in social cognitive theory. It refers to an individual's belief in their capability to successfully navigate challenges and achieve desired outcomes (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). Studies in correctional settings have shown that high self-efficacy equips inmates with the confidence to manage the stressors associated with rehabilitation, such as strict routines, potential violence, and limited social support. It could pertain to one's confidence in their capacity to mitigate psychological distress effectively. Research suggests that individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are better equipped to cope with stressors and employ adaptive emotion regulation strategies. Individuals with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to view challenges as opportunities for growth and engage in proactive coping mechanisms. Conversely, low self-efficacy can lead to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, thereby exacerbate psychological distress (Ickson et al., 2021). Because self-efficacy plays a key role in stress reactions and quality of coping in threatening situations, it does not only influence psychological distress but can lead to other symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Barrera, 2017).

It is pertinent to mention that self-efficacy alone does not fully explain psychological distress among inmates; resilience may also play a critical role in mitigating its impact. Resilience refers to an individual's ability to adapt and recover from adversity by drawing on internal strengths and external support systems (Emmanuel & Olarenwaju, 2022). In the correctional setting, resilience enables inmates to find purpose despite challenges, potentially offsetting the negative effects of low self-efficacy and poor emotional regulation. For example, an inmate with low self-efficacy may struggle with anxiety, but high resilience can encourage them to seek institutional support or engage in coping mechanisms such as journaling (Sheikh & Siddiqui, 2023).

### **Self-Efficacy and Psychological Distress**

Adegoke and Steyn (2017) investigated the influence of self-efficacy on psychological distress among inmates in a Nigerian correctional facility. The participants in the study were 250 inmates (180 males, 70 females) from a medium-security correctional facility in South-western Nigeria. The results of the study revealed a significant negative correlation between self-efficacy and psychological distress among the inmates. This suggests that inmates with higher levels of self-efficacy reported lower levels of psychological distress, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

In the same vein, Bruce and Larweh. (2017) examined the relationship between the self-efficacy, needs satisfaction and the psychological distress of prisoners in Ghana. They employed the correlation survey design method to solicit information from respondents who are prisoners in the James Camp Prison in Accra. The findings revealed the following; a significant positive

correlation existed between self-efficacy, needs satisfaction and psychological distress among inmates.

Also, Barrera. (2017) assessed the influence of self-efficacy in the association between variants of self-blame and post-assault distress. Results revealed positive associations between behavioural self-blame and depression. Positive associations were also found between character logical self-blame, PTSD and depression. Findings revealed that character logical self-blame was associated with reduced self-efficacy and self-efficacy was positively related to PTSD and depression symptom severity.

### **Resilience between Self-efficacy and Psychological Distress**

Amoke et al. (2020) examined the effects of group cognitive-behavioural therapy on psychological distress of awaiting-trial inmates and the role of resilience. Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the effects of the intervention. The result showed that there was no significant difference in psychological distress between the treatment and no-intervention groups when resilience was included as a mediating variable. Additionally, the efficacy of CBT on the psychological distress of awaiting-trial prison inmates was significantly sustained at the follow-up measurements (Time 3) with mediating role of resilience.

Dolcos et al. (2021) investigated psychological distress and resilience: the role of cognitive reappraisal and coping self-efficacy. Results point to a mediating role of reappraisal and coping self-efficacy as part of mechanisms that provide a protecting role of resilience against emotional distress. These results provide novel scientific evidence further validating millennia-old traditional coping practices and shed light on psychological factors influencing adaptive behaviours that promote increased resilience, reduce symptoms of distress, and maintain emotional well-being.

### **Hypotheses**

- i. Self-efficacy will significantly influence psychological distress among inmates of correctional centres in Benue state.
- ii. Resilience will significantly influence psychological distress among inmates of correctional centres in Benue State.
- iii. Resilience will mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and psychological distress among inmates of correctional centres in Benue State.

### **Design**

For the purpose of this study, a cross-sectional survey design was used. In cross-sectional research, the researcher observes variables without influencing them. Cross-sectional survey collects data to make inferences about a population of interest (inmates) at one point in time without intervention.

### **Population**

The total population of inmates in Benue State Correctional Centres is 754 inmates comprising of 520 from Makurdi Correctional Centre, 119 in Gboko Correctional Centre and 115 from Otukpo correctional centre.

## Sampling Technique

In other to obtain participants for the study, census sampling technique was used. Census sampling is a method of selecting the entire population. In this study, all the inmates in the correctional centres (Makurdi, Gboko and Otukpo) in Benue State were used for the study.

## Participants

The participants were 613 inmates. Among them, 496 (80.9%) were male, 100 (16.3%) were female while 17 (2.8%) did not indicate their gender. Their ages ranged from 17 – 58 years (M.age=28.76, SD = 7.91). On their marital status, 361 (58.9%) were single, 186 (30.3%) were married, 30 (4.9%) were divorced/separated, 19 (3.1%) were widows/widowers, while 17 (2.8%) did not indicate their marital status. Moreover, 460 (75.0%) were of Christian religion, 90 (14.7%) were of Islamic religion, 24 (3.9%) were of traditional religion while 39 (6.4%) did not indicate their religious affiliations. On their educational qualification, 45 (7.3%) had no formal education, 207 (33.8%) had primary education, 224 (36.5%) had secondary education, 62 (10.1%) had tertiary education while 75 (12.2%) did not indicate their educational qualification. On the category of inmate, 456 (74.4%) were awaiting trial, 144 (23.5%) were convicted while 13 (2.1%) did not indicate their category. On their convicted duration, only 127 (20.7%) respondents indicated a duration between 3 months to 26 years, while 486 (79.3%) did not indicate their convicted duration.

## Instruments

**Self-Efficacy Scale:** This scale was developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). It is a 10-item scale developed to assess a general sense of perceived self-efficacy. The scoring method showed that all the items should be added to sum the scores. The range is from 10 to 40 points. The researchers reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .87. Sample of items on the scale include: “I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough”, “If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want”.

**Brief Resilience Scale:** The resilience scale was developed by Smith et al. (2008). It is a 6-item scale designed to measure resilience. The response format is a 5–point Likert scale of 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The researchers found that the scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency of .87. Sample items include: “I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times”, “I have a hard time making it through stressful events”.

**Psychological Distress Scale:** This scale was developed by Kessler (1994) to measure psychological distress. The scale consists of 10 questions on non-specific psychological distress and is about the level of anxiety and depressive symptoms a person may have experienced in the most recent four-week period. The researchers reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .93. Sample items include ‘In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel tired out for no good reason?’, ‘In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel nervous?’

## Procedure

The researchers sought approval from the Controller of Corrections in Benue State to seek permission for the study. Following the approval, the researchers recruited and trained two research assistants to support the data collection process. The research assistants were carefully selected based on their ability to interact effectively with the study population and their understanding of ethical considerations in research involving inmates. Additionally, an official approval letter was obtained from the appropriate authorities, ensuring that all permissions were

properly documented before proceeding to the study areas. The research was conducted in three correctional centers: Makurdi, Gboko, and Otukpo. The researchers and assistants distributed copies of the questionnaire directly to the inmates. Those who could read and write completed the questionnaire independently, while those with limited literacy were assisted through an oral administration process. After the data collection process was completed, the questionnaires were carefully reviewed to ensure completeness before being collated for analysis.

### Data Analysis

The researchers used descriptive and inferential statistics for data analyses. Specifically, simple linear regression was used to test hypothesis one and two, while Hayes Process macro was used to test hypotheses three.

### Results

**Table 1: Summary of simple linear regression showing the influence of self-efficacy on psychological distress among inmates in Benue State**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
1		B	Std. Error	$\beta$		
Psychological Distress	Constant	29.754	1.004		29.650	.000
	Self-Efficacy	-.169	.055	-.128	-3.045	.002

Result in table 1 shows that there was a significant influence of self-efficacy on psychological distress among inmates of Correctional Centres in Benue State [ $\beta = -.128$ ,  $t = -3.045$ ;  $p = .002$ ]. This means that inmate with high level of self-efficacy significantly scored low on psychological distress while those with low self-efficacy scored high on psychological distress.

**Table 2: Summary of simple linear regression showing the influence of resilience on psychological distress among inmates of correctional centres in Benue State**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
1		B	Std. Error	$\beta$		
Psychological Distress	Constant	30.896	.615		50.209	.000
	Resilience	-.067	.022	-.130	-3.074	.002

Results in table 2 shows that there was a significant influence of resilience on psychological distress among inmates of Correctional Centres in Benue State [ $\beta = -.130$ ,  $t = -3.074$ ;  $p = .002$ ]. This means that inmates with high level of resilience significantly scored low on psychological distress while those with low level of resilience significantly scored high on psychological distress.

**Table 3: Summary of Hayes Process Analysis showing the mediating role of resilience on the relationship between self-efficacy and psychological distress among inmates in Benue State**

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Df	$\beta$	t	Sig	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	.143	.021	5.54**	2, 530					
Self-Efficacy					.102	1.82	>.05	-.008	.212
Resilience					.059	2.58	<.05	.014	.104
Int 1 (X * M)					.102	1.82	>.05	-.008	.212

**\*\*  $p < .001$**

The result shown in table 3 shows that resilience did not significantly mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and psychological distress among inmates in Correctional Centres in Benue State [ $R = .143$ ,  $R^2 = .021$ ,  $F(2, 530) = 5.54$ ,  $Int\_1(X * M)$  ( $\beta = .102$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

## Discussion

Hypothesis one stated that self-efficacy will significantly influence psychological distress among inmates of correctional centres in Benue state. Findings revealed a significant negative relationship between self-efficacy and psychological distress among inmates. Inmates with higher self-efficacy reported lower levels of psychological distress, suggesting that individuals who believe in their ability to cope with stressors are better equipped to handle the challenges of incarceration. This aligns with Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, which posits that self-efficacy plays a crucial role in stress management and psychological well-being. In contrast, inmates with low self-efficacy may experience heightened vulnerability to stress, which can manifest in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness. This is particularly important in the Nigerian prison context, where correctional facilities are often overcrowded and under-resourced, contributing to heightened psychological strain (Ajala & Adejumo, 2021). Prior studies (Ogundipe & Adejumo, 2019; Iwuagwu & Amaefula, 2018) have also supported this finding, emphasizing that inmates with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more likely to employ adaptive coping mechanisms. In contrast, inmates with low self-efficacy may feel powerless, exacerbating their psychological distress. However, contradictory findings by Brown and Latham (2021) found that in some high-stress environments, self-efficacy alone was insufficient to mitigate psychological distress, suggesting that additional social support systems are necessary to buffer stress effectively. Similarly, Chan and Mak (2020) argued that overconfidence in one's self-efficacy without corresponding coping resources can lead to increased frustration and eventual distress.

Hypothesis two stated that resilience will significantly influence psychological distress among inmates of correctional centres in Benue State. Findings revealed that resilience emerged as a significant factor in reducing psychological distress among inmates. This finding supports the resilience theory (Masten, 2014), which posits that individuals with higher resilience can adapt positively despite adversity. The study suggests that inmates who demonstrate resilience are better able to manage the emotional toll of incarceration. This aligns with research showing that resilient individuals in custodial settings tend to display lower levels of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness, and are better equipped to navigate the psychological challenges of incarceration (Windle, Bennett, & Noyes, 2011). Research by Akinyemi and Adeoye (2017) indicates that inmates who maintain strong familial ties and participate actively in rehabilitative initiatives demonstrate higher resilience levels, which in turn mitigate the psychological distress associated



with incarceration. Research by Eze and Okeke (2020) also highlighted that resilience-enhancing programs tailored to the cultural and contextual realities of Nigerian inmates, such as integrating community values, spirituality, and peer support can significantly improve inmates' mental health outcomes. Research by Wright et al. (2020) and Bonanno (2019) supports this finding, indicating that resilience acts as a buffer against stress and psychological distress. However, Ungar (2018) argues that resilience is highly context-dependent and may not always lead to positive outcomes, particularly when individuals face extreme deprivation and lack of external support.

Hypothesis three stated that resilience will mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and psychological distress among inmates of correctional centres in Benue State. The present study found that resilience did not mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and psychological distress. This suggests that while self-efficacy directly influences distress, resilience enhances the ability to withstand stress, further reducing distress levels. The finding that resilience failed to mediate the relationship between self-efficacy and psychological distress among inmates provides meaningful insight into the interconnected roles of personal strengths in mental health outcomes within correctional settings. High self-efficacy contributes to adaptive coping, but when combined with resilience, individuals gain an additional buffer that allows them to recover more effectively from adversity (Schwarzer & Warner, 2013). Expanding on this, the interplay between self-efficacy and resilience highlights the complex nature of psychological coping mechanisms among Nigerian inmates. A study by Okafor and Eze (2019) among Nigerian correctional populations found that inmates who possessed both a strong belief in their personal capabilities (self-efficacy) and demonstrated resilient behaviors were better able to navigate the psychological challenges of imprisonment, exhibiting fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression. A study by Ojo and Olowookere (2017) highlights that Nigerian inmates who draw on collective cultural resources alongside personal beliefs in their abilities show enhanced psychological stability and reduced distress. This finding corroborates research by Sheikh and Siddiqui (2023), who emphasized that resilience fosters a positive outlook and coping mechanisms. However, findings by Zimmerman and Arendt (2022) suggest that resilience alone may not always mitigate distress, particularly in inmates with prolonged incarceration periods and limited external social support. Therefore, combining resilience-building with efforts to enhance self-efficacy addresses both the emotional and behavioral capacities of inmates, enabling them to not only endure stress but also to actively engage in adaptive coping and goal-directed behaviors.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that clinical psychologists serving as correctional officers should develop and implement a resilience training programme for inmates. The training should target building their efficacy levels and ability to bounce back in response to stressful situations.

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