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The Implementation of COPE-A Technique in Reducing Stress on Women Correctional Officer: Indonesian Setting

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Background: In Indonesia, study on correctional officers is scarce. Limited attention is given to the psychological aspect of the correctional officers. This study was the first to report the implementation of COPE technique in reducing stress for women correctional officers. The aim of this study was to investigate the implementation of COPE technique in reducing work stress on women correctional officers in Indonesian setting. *Method:* Subject comprised of 34 women working at two prisons located in Central Java and West Java provinces. They were divided into experimental ($n = 17$) and control groups ($n = 17$). The COPE technique was modified to reduce the anxiety level in adults. The Work Stress Scale ($\alpha = 0.871$) was applied as pre-test and post-test given to both experimental and control groups. *Results:* The results of the mixed-design ANOVA showed a decrease in the stress level on women correctional officers with stress levels of 12% ($F = 4.539$; $p = 0.041$; $p < 0.05$). This study showed that the COPE-A training can reduce work stress of correctional officers. *Conclusion:* This study recommend the implementation of the modified COPE technique (COPE-A) to reduce stress on women correctional officers. Future studies on different profession are needed.

Keywords: COPE-A Technique, Work Stress, Correctional Officers, Prison, Women, Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Correctional officers hold the “key” in the correctional institution or prison whose main task is responsible in nurturing the prisoners inhabiting the penitentiary institution as well as maintaining the social and security internally. Studies have shown that working at such place is quite stressful, and officers are vulnerable in experiencing work stress.¹⁻³ Stress which occurs to correctional officers appears in form of physical exhaustion, disease, family problems, or inability to perform their duties.⁴

Work stress is basically a physiological and/or psychological reaction toward a stressor which can be perceived as a threat coming from working environment. This can cause a dysfunction in performing given tasks.⁵⁻⁷

Symptoms of work stress identified as physical, behavior, and degrading performance.⁸ Work stress can be triggered by the working atmosphere, organization’s or company’s environment, and personal or social issues.⁷ In general, stressors appearing in correctional officers are normally caused by the nature of work, role in the organization, negative view of the prison officers by the outside world.⁹ There are role conflict, depressing social contact in communicating to senior officers, prisoners, and co-workers, too much workload, overloaded capacity of prison, unbalanced number of personnel, unclear career, lack

of participation in decision making, insufficient reward, lack of knowledge and skills in performing duties, psychological intimidation which can contribute to the high level of work stress experienced by correctional officers.^{2, 10-13}

Such stress can affect correctional officers’ health and well-being¹⁴ which eventually will lead to physical and psychological illness, problems at work, disturbance in families and social life, addiction and, perhaps, even law-breaking behavior.⁹ Moreover, such high level of stress can develop into high level of turnover, absence, low level of productivity and life satisfaction, and increasing conflict between work and family.¹⁵ Female correctional officers experienced 57.7% stress with symptoms such as headache, more sensitive and/or more aggressive behavior, which eventually will affect their performance.¹⁶

Work stress is the unseparated part of an individual’s and organization’s life. If it cannot be handled with care, it will influence a person’s productivity and working performance. Thus, a stress management program should be implemented to reduce the risk of occupational stress among correctional officers.¹² To address this issue, an individual requires a coping strategy or adaptation process. A successful adaptation will improve an individual; make them feel happier and secured to improve loyalty to the institution.

The coping strategies are related to the improvement of correctional officers which can be in a form of training, stimulating social support, and offering psychological counseling.¹⁷ There

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are two types of coping approaches which can be applied to female correctional officers; problem focused coping and emotion focused coping.¹⁶

This research is aimed to re-evaluate the coping strategies' effectiveness which can benefit female correctional officers in lowering their work stress. Previous researches have proved that COPE technique can lower male correctional officers' stress.¹³ COPE technique consists of four main stages in which an individual tries to manage and overcome the suppressing atmosphere as a result of the problems that faced by conducting a cognitive or behavior adjustment to provide a self-secured sense.¹⁸ In this research, similar technique will be applied to the opposite sex, female; as it is known that different gender is one variable that has a considerable effect on occupational stress.^{3,19} In this case, female workers experienced higher work stress compared to men.²⁰

Hypothesis of this study was COPE-A technique is effective in reducing job stress in women correctional officer, which is seen from the significant difference in scores of work stress between pre and post scores on experiment group and control group and vice versa is not found significant differences in work stress scores between pre and post scores in the control group.

2. METHOD

This study was a quasi experimental research with non randomized control group pretest–posttest design. The research subjects were female correctional officers at female correctional institution located in two provinces in Indonesia, West Java and Central Java. There were 34 subjects divided into two groups, experimental group consisted of 17 officers aged 22–55 years old ($M = 38, 12$; $SD: 9.73$) provided with COPE-A technique training. Another, control group consisted of 17 female officers aged 22–55 years old ($M = 39.521$ $SD: 10.51$).

The main measuring instrument in this research was the work stress scale arranged by researchers and previously used in preceding research.¹³ Work stress scale measured the level of stress respond experienced by subjects based on work stress' indicators or symptoms, such as physical and behavior symptoms. There were 40 items in work stress scale with $\alpha = 0.871$.

Given intervention in this research was COPE-A technique training. Its module was assembled by researchers based on modified materials¹⁸ which had been tested previously.¹³ The main stages in the COPE technique is, Calming the nervous system, Originating an imaginative plan, Persisting in the face of obstacles and failure, and Evaluating and adjusting the plan.

Stage 1. Calming the nervous system. Participants invited to be aware of the reaction at the time to feel the pressure, trying to be able to think clearly about what is happening, can say what she wants and she felt, and can manage the stressor.

Stage 2. Originating an imaginative plan. Participants encouraged to think creatively and find insight about the cause of anxiety, found out about the strengths and weaknesses, can overcome feelings of anxiety.

Stage 3. Persisting in the face of obstacles and failure. At this stage, participants are encouraged to be excited and can overcome the barriers where they experienced failure and thus become stronger to face any situation. Participants were then given a positive suggestion and direction that the feeling of anxiety can be overcome by their self.

Stage 4. Evaluating and adjusting the plan. After successfully followed the three previous stages, the next one is encouraged to seek some alternatives to cope with feelings of anxiety and the problems that she faces. At this stage, participants are invited to conduct an evaluation of the plan and given feedback solutions to be more confident with the plans that they have.

There were several revisions in COPE technique which had been done before, mainly in stage one which was calming the nervous system as the sub-stage of relax in your mind. This adjustment was mainly in a form of relaxation, from progressive to transpersonal relaxation. The basic theory used in this adjustment,²¹ stated relaxation by releasing five mainly negative emotions: the desire to rule, the desire to be acknowledged, the desire to feel secured, the desire to be different and the desire to be something. Those five negative emotions will then be converted into three positive emotions: motivated, receptive and sincere. The next revision, in evaluating and adjusting the plan stage, group contemplation was added to give meaning to the job they have been doing at the correctional institution. Thus, this revision was, then, called as COPE-A technique.

Conclusion was made by analyzing the results of pre and post-test. Data were analyzed using Mixed Anava.

3. RESULTS

Based on the conducted research, the descriptive statistics is presented in Table I below.

Table I shows that there were equal numbers of subjects in both experimental and control groups, 17 subjects. The table shows that there were no significant differences in pre-test, and mean for both groups. For pre-test results, the mean for subjects in experimental group was 78.71, while the mean in control group was 78.88. Meanwhile, the post-test results show that there was a dip in the mean of work stress for experimental group reaching 74.71. By contrast, the control group experienced a surge to reach 80.71.

Based on the results of pre-test and post-test for both groups, it can be observed that both groups experienced low and moderate level of stress which indicated that the stress level was still considered as non-disturbing.

Parametric statistics technique using Mixed Anava (anava A-Mx-B) was used. This technique was selected as this experiment compared both experimental and control group with early measurement before the training and re-measurement after the training.²²

Table II indicates that $F = 4.539$ ($p = 0.041$; $p < 0.05$) which means that there was a significant decline in work stress after the intervention. The measurements before and after intervention showed a significant difference between experimental group and control group. The work stress in experimental group declined as much as 12% after the intervention. There was a significant change of work stress in experimental group ($MD = 4.0$, $p < 0.05$) while there was no significant change of work stress

Table I. Descriptive statistics.

	Group	N	M	SD
Pre-test	Experimental group	17	78.71	7.71
	Control group	17	78.88	8.86
Post-test	Experimental group	17	74.71	8.27
	Control group	17	80.71	10.89

Table II. Summary of variant analysis result.

Variation source	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F	Eta ²
Inter-groups					
Group	81.06	1	81.07	1.24	0.04
Errors (group)	2093.06	32	65.41		
In-group					
Repetition	20.13	1	20.13	0.63	0.43
Repetition* (group)	144.13	1	144.13	4.54*	0.12
Errors (repetition)	1016.24	32	31.76		

Note: * Significant at level 0.05.

in control group ($MD = 1.824$, $p > 0.05$). This indicated that COPE-A technique training was proven effective enough to lower the work stress. Hence, the hypothesis of this research which claims that COPE-A technique is effective in reducing the work stress level in female correctional officers is acceptable.

4. DISCUSSION

The experience of working in a prison is the most depressing experience compared to any negative events in a person's life.²³ There is a high possibility of stress suffered by correctional officers compared to any other jobs due to the combination of uncomfortable personal and environment deprives with bloodcurdling working environment. This condition supports Lazarus and Folkman's definition of stress as a union of events or environment condition with individual's cognitive perception towards the types and level of challenges, difficulties, lost or even threat.²⁴

COPE-A technique was used as a form of intervention for correctional officers in order to motivate them to be more expressive in expressing their anger, disappointment, and negative thought. Afterwards, they will feel more relieved, comfortable and without burden so they can understand themselves and their problems better. This form of understanding can cause individuals to adjust themselves and be able to find alternatives to solve their own problems. It can optimize subject's ability in coping their stress.

As a problem focused coping alternative, COPE-A technique proved effective in lowering work stress for female correctional officers in female prison. It supports explanation that work-related problems will make a person conduct a problem focused coping strategy such as doing a direct action immediately or asking for help from others.²⁵ This also happened to correctional officers whom some of them shared their work problems to colleagues or family members. COPE-A technique training influenced them by gaining more knowledge on analyzing the details of their problem and, eventually, finding possible solutions to their problems. Problem-focused coping involves efforts to face depressing, threatening or challenging situation.⁵ COPE-A technique basically includes individual-based stress coping using cognitive and relaxation approaches based on the result of meta-analysis that discovered several effective individual-based approaches to lower work stress by doing behavioral training, relaxation, cognitive restructuring, and stress inoculation training.¹⁰ The intervention which gives significant impact in lowering work stress is behavioral cognitive program, while the most often used is relaxation.²⁷ Both researches support the result of this research which aimed to analyze the effectiveness of COPE-A technique in lowering work stress.

The decrease in work stress for correctional officers is caused by the change in perception concerning on the stress that they

experienced. It is related to the cognitive function owned by correctional officers in managing their experience, making them sensible and connecting the past and present experience stored in their memory.²⁸

5. CONCLUSION

Based on this research, it can be concluded that there was a significant influence in the implementation of COPE-A technique as an alternative to lower female correctional officers' work stress. For further study, it is recommended to use the individual approach, organizational approach that can be implemented to reduce employee stress, such as to redesign the job, reduce workload, and activate leader-member communication.

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