



## PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF WIVES OF INCARCERATED AND NON- INCARCERATED MALES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

**Bukola Victoria BADA**

*Department of Psychology,  
University of Ibadan, Nigeria  
oluwabukololabada@gmail.com*

### ABSTRACT

*This article answers the question "Is the psychological wellbeing among wives of incarcerated males better compared to that of wives of non-incarcerated males?". The method of study was survey and the participants were of wives of men who are incarcerated and those whose husbands are not incarcerated. The total sample size of one hundred and sixty two (162) wives, comprising of fifty four (54) wives of incarcerated males and one hundred and eight (108) wives of non-incarcerated males participated in the study. The ages of the participants ranged between 18years to 54years with mean age of 34.94years and standard deviation of 8.13years. The data was gathered using a standardized questionnaire. T-test was used to test the hypothesis. The result shows that the psychological wellbeing was significantly better among wives of non-incarcerated males than wives of the incarcerated males, ( $t= 5.62$ ;  $df= 160$ ;  $p<.05$ ). The result confirms that the wellbeing of wives of incarcerated males is lower compared to that of wives of non-incarcerated males and this calls for attention as to what could be done in enhancing the psychological wellbeing of wives of incarcerated males.*

**Keywords-** *Psychological wellbeing, wives of incarcerated, wives of non-incarcerated.*

### INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being could be said to be to how people evaluate their lives. According to Diener (1997), these evaluations may be in the form of cognitions or in the form of affect. The cognitive part is an information based appraisal of one's life that is when a person gives conscious evaluative judgments about one's satisfaction with life as a whole. The affective part is a hedonic evaluation guided by emotions and feelings such as frequency with which people experience pleasant/unpleasant moods in reaction to their lives. Also Diener, Diener & Diener (1995) defines psychological wellbeing to be a persons' evaluation reaction to their life either in terms of life satisfaction (cognitive evaluations) or ongoing emotional reaction (Affects). One of the ways to think about psychological wellbeing is by observing how effectively and successfully a person functions, feels capable and competent, being able to handle normal level of stress, maintain satisfying relationship, being able to bounce back or recover from difficult situations. When the life of an individual is going on well, such could be said to have a good psychological wellbeing i.e. when you have feelings of goodness and effective functioning. Stress is a normal aspect of life which can be conceptualized as a life event that disrupts the equilibrium of a person's life (Oatley, Keltner & Jenkins, 2006b). In general, major life events that are positive tend to have either trivially stressful or actually beneficial effect (Stewart, Sokol, Healy & Chester, 1986; Thoits, 1983), but major life events that are negative can be stressful and associated with medical problems ( Sarason & Sarason 1984). However, possessing the ability to manage any negative emotions or stressful life events is very essential for a long-term wellbeing. World Health Organization (2001) refers to psychological wellbeing as positive mental health and it is defined as "a state of wellbeing in which individual realizes his or her abilities to cope with life productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". Making a comparison between the wives of incarcerated males and wives of non-incarcerated males can help in suggesting ways in which stress levels could be reduced and possessing good psychological wellbeing will be promoted among the wives.

Therefore from a comparative point of view, the psychological wellbeing of wives in this study could be based on the assumption that most people evaluate their life as either good or bad depending on their present state, so they are normally able to offer judgments i.e. people invariably experience different moods and emotions at different levels based on that



which they experience in the present situation they find themselves, which can have a positive effect or a negative effect on their level of perceived psychological wellbeing. For example, when we take a look at the psychological wellbeing of wives of incarcerated males and wives of non-incarcerated, the wives of the incarcerated males could become unhappy, depressed and unable to concentrate well compared to the other wives who might not be experiencing a stressful life situation such as incarceration of a partner. It has been documented that happy people, tend to function better in life than less happy people (Diener, 2000; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton 2001). There is every possibility that wives of the non-incarcerated will have experience of positive emotions than the wives of incarcerated males going through the situation that is likely to make her unhappy. For example, it's been found that people experiencing life positively, make more lenient attributions and behave in a more confident, optimistic and generous way in interpersonal situations. (Forgas, 2002; Sedikides, 1995). Equally, it has been suggested that making use of an effective coping strategy could help to moderate the effect of incarceration on psychological well-being of wives of incarcerated males (Bada et al 2013). For example, (Bada et al 2013) found that problem focused coping will help the wives of incarcerated males to confront the reality that they are responsible for their own state of good and balanced psychological well-being. On the other hand Ben-Zur (2005) in a study found that emotion focused strategies showed substantial positive association with distress and poor well-being than problem focused strategies

According to Stewart et. al. (1986) & Thoits, (1983), major life events that are positive tend to have either trivially stressful or actually beneficial effect but major life events that are negative can be stressful and associated with medical problems (Sarason & Sarason 1984). Considering the psychological wellbeing of wives of incarcerated males and wives of non-incarcerated males based on major life experiences, the wives of the incarcerated males could become depressed and unhappy due to the imprisonment of their spouse compared to wives of non-incarcerated males who might not be experiencing a stressful life situation such as incarceration of a partner. This is supported by the concept of stress given by Oatley, et.al. (2006b) that stress can be conceptualized as a life event that disrupts the equilibrium of a person's life.

Whether this phenomenon of psychological wellbeing would differ between people going through assumed stressful life vents such as having their partners incarcerated or not, informed the decision to embark on the present study, for two reasons: First, to have a better understanding of what psychological wellbeing entails among the two different set of participants especially the wives of incarcerated males because it has been documented by Bada et. al (2013) that when a partner is taken into custody, the wife may be subject to stressors, which impinge on her well-being i.e. the wife who is not incarcerated may be depressed, disorientated and feel unable to cope with the situation which can have a negative result on their psychological well-being. This in turn would help to suggest a solution to improve their state.; and second, this comparison will necessitate the introduction of coping strategies that will help to reduce the negative impact that stressful life event can have on the psychological wellbeing of wives of incarcerated males. The purpose of this study is to answer the question "Is psychological wellbeing among wives of incarcerated males better compared to that of wives of non-incarcerated males? The answer to this question can open the way to achieve a peaceful and better psychological wellbeing for the wives with the least amount of worry, discrimination, anxiety and dissatisfaction with life.

Following from the arguments and review of literature above, it was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference between reported psychological wellbeing of wives of incarcerated men and wives of non-incarcerated men, where it is expected that wives of non-incarcerated men would perform better than the wives of incarcerated men.



## Methods

### Research Design

The design of this study was survey research design.

### Participants

The participants for the study included two groups of wives namely, wives of incarcerated males (husbands were in prison) and non-incarcerated men's wives (was living with her husbands). Using purposive sampling technique, one hundred and sixty two (162) wives comprising of fifty four (54) wives of incarcerated males with proportion of (33.3%) and one hundred and eight (108) normal wives with proportion of (66.7%) participated in the study. The inclusion criteria were participants that are willing to participate and that will be available throughout the duration of the study. 119(73.5%) of the participants were Christians, 41(25.3%) were Muslims, while 2(1.2%) did not indicate their religious affiliation. The ages of the participants ranged between 18years to 54years with mean age of 34.94years and standard deviation of 8.13years. In terms of their family type, 132(81.5%) of the participants were from monogamous family while 30(18.5%) were from polygamous family.

### Research instruments

A well - structured questionnaire in two sections A and B was used to collect relevant data for this study.

**Section A:** This measures demographic characteristics of the wives including age, religion and family type.

**Section B:** Psychological well-being was measured using a 22-item index developed by Goldberg (1988) and revised by Revicki, Leidy and Howland (1996). It has six sub-scales, namely: anxiety, depressed mood, positive- well-being, self- control, general health and vitality. It is a Likert format scale with 5 response options ranging from 1= None of the time to 5= All of the time. The author reported the following alpha levels for each subscale: anxiety (0.82), depressed mood (0.89), positive well-being (0.88), self- control (0.76), general health (0.61), and vitality (0.85). From the pilot study, the researcher reported alpha co-efficient of .61 for the entire scale. The alpha level for each subscale is reported as follows: anxiety (0.61), depressed mood (0.73), positive wellbeing (0.68), self-control (0.66), general health (0.61), and vitality (0.55). The higher the score the better the level of perceived psychological wellbeing and vice versa. This means that participants who score low on the scale have poor psychological wellbeing while those with high score are said to have good psychological wellbeing.

### Procedure

Verbal consent of prospective participants was sought after brief explanation of the research. Those who consented were given the questionnaire with assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of responses.

### Results

Table 1 shows that the psychological wellbeing was significantly better among normal wives than wives of the incarcerated males, ( $t= 5.62$ ;  $df= 160$ ;  $p<.05$ ). This means that normal wives reported better psychological well-being than wives of the incarcerated males.

**Table 1: Summary of independent t-test comparing level of psychological well being among wives of incarcerated males and normal wives**

	Source	N	Mean	SD	t	Df	P
PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL BEING	Wives of incarcerated	54	59.62	4.30	5.62	160	< .05
	Normal wives	108	67.42	9.72			

### Discussion

In response to the question “Is the psychological wellbeing of wives of incarcerated males better compared to wives of non-incarcerated males? The result indicated that, in summary, wives of incarcerated males experienced reported lower level of wellbeing compared to wives of non-incarcerated males. Therefore the hypothesis in the study which stated that wives of non-incarcerated males will report a better psychological wellbeing than wives of incarcerated males was supported. This goes to show that when confronted with a stressful life event such as having a partner incarcerated may go a long way to affect the psychological wellbeing of such a person, as reported in the present study, it is therefore suggested that the wives of incarcerated males needs to put in enough attempts to help them manage the demands that the incarceration of their husbands placed on them which now has a negative effect on their reported level of psychological well-being. For example, it is expected that someone going through a probable stressful life event such as the husband being incarcerated may not feel happy about life generally, and more specifically about the situation at hand. This view is corroborated by the findings of Bada et al, 2013, Diener, 2000; Judge et. al. 2001) who found that people who are not undergoing any stressful life event are happy people, and tend to function better in life than less happy people. Though this was not tested in the present study, It is here being suggested that making use of the correct coping mechanism especially problem focused coping will help in restoring balance into their lives i.e. handling their present situation successfully rather than when they just look for self-pity which does not help in maintaining a balanced well-being, as reported by Bada et.al.(2013) and Ben-Zur (2005). The noticeable intensity of psychological wellbeing among all wives is consistent with the literature concerning stressful major life events. The incarceration of one’s husband could be said to be stressor especially for the wives of the incarcerated males, meaning that the experience of the incarceration goes a long way in determining the outcome of their psychological wellbeing.

### Conclusion

The psychological wellbeing of an individual going through a probable stressful life event such as the husband being incarcerated should be paid attention to because the surrounding situations or experiences of an individual explains to a great extent the level of their reported wellbeing. The level of psychological wellbeing reported by wives of incarcerated males and wives of non-incarcerated in the study depends on the situation that surrounds them and this will go a long way in determining how better their wellbeing is. Therefore, instead of the wives of incarcerated males being left alone to go through the stress of imprisonment of husbands alone ,they should be given enough support and encouraged to make use of the coping strategy that will yield positive result that will play a role in enhancing wellbeing among them.

**REFERENCES**

- Bada, B.V., Balogun, S. K. and Adejuwon, G. A. (2013). Psychological factors predicting psychological well-being among spouses of Incarcerated Males in Ibadan, Nigeria. *Journal of Health Care, 1(3)*,76-82.
- Ben-Zur, H. (2005) Coping, distress and life events in a community sample. *International Journal of Stress Management, 12*, 188 – 196
- Diener, E. (2000). Explaining differences in societal levels of happiness: Relative standards, need fulfillment, culture and Evaluation theory. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 1*. 41-78
- Diener, E, Diener, M &Diener, C (1995) Factors predicting the subjective well-being of nations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69(5)*, 851 - 864
- Forgas, J.P. (2000). Feeling and doing:Affective on influences on interpersonal behaviour. *Psychological inquiry, 13*, 1-28.
- Judge, T.A., Thoresen, C.J., Bono, J.E. and Patton, G.K. (2001). The job satisfaction- job performance relationship: A qualitative and quantitative review. *Psychological Bulletin, 127*, 376- 407.
- Oatley, K., Keltner, D. & Jenkins, J. M. (2006b). "Emotions and mental health in childhood." *Understanding emotions* (2nd ed.)</href> (pp. 321-351). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.
- Sedikides, C. (1995). Central and peripheral self- conceptions are differentially influenced by mood:Tests of the differential sensitivity hypothesis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*, 759- 777.
- Sarason, I. G., & Sarason, B. R. (1984). Life changes, moderators of stress, and health. In A. Baum, S. E. Taylor, & J. E. Singer (Eds.), *Handbook of psychology and health: Vol. 4. Social psychological aspects of health* (pp. 279-299). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Stewart, A. J., Sokol, M., Healy, J. M., Jr., & Chester, N. L. (1986). Longitudinal studies of psychological consequences of life changes in children and adults. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50*, 143-151.
- Thoits, P. A. (1983). Dimensions of life events that influence psychological distress: An evaluation and synthesis of the literature. In H. B. Kaplan (Ed.), *Psychological stress: Trends in theory and research* (pp. 33-103). New York, NY: Academic Press.
- World Health Organization (2001). *The world health report- Mental health: New understanding, new hope*, Geneva: World Health Organization.