

## The Impact of Retirement of Mental Health Outcomes Among Prison Officers Iringa Municipality

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigated the impact of retirement on mental health outcomes among prison officers at Ukonga Central Prison in Tanzania. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach, the study explored the prevalence and nature of psychological challenges experienced by retired officers, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and identity loss. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to a sample of 80 retired officers, while qualitative insights were gathered via in-depth interviews with 15 purposively selected participants. Findings revealed that a significant proportion of retirees report elevated levels of psychological distress, with over 67% indicating symptoms of depression post-retirement. The study identified contributing factors such as loss of social identity, inadequate financial preparation, limited access to mental health services, and weak social support systems. Qualitative data further underscored the emotional toll of transitioning from a structured, high-responsibility environment to retirement without psychosocial preparation. The study concludes that retirement among prison officers poses a substantial mental health risk, particularly when support mechanisms are lacking. Recommendations include the introduction of pre-retirement counseling, the strengthening of social support networks, and the development of targeted mental health interventions to ease the transition to retirement. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on occupational health in correctional institutions and highlight the need for institutional reforms within the Tanzanian prison system.

**KEYWORDS:** Retirement · Mental health

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Retirement is a major life transition that has profound implications for individual well-being, particularly in high-stress occupations such as correctional work. Prison officers, often exposed to chronic stress, violence, and institutional rigidity, face unique psychological challenges during their careers that may carry into retirement (Finney *et al.*, 2022). While retirement may offer relief from the stressors of prison environments, it can also introduce new sources of psychological distress including identity loss, reduced social connections, and financial insecurity. Understanding how retirement affects the mental health of former prison officers is essential in promoting positive aging and well-being in this underserved occupational group.

Previous research has primarily focused on the occupational stressors faced during active service in correctional facilities (Ricciardelli *et al.*, 2021; Kinman *et al.*, 2020), yet limited attention has been given to post-retirement outcomes. As correctional systems globally experience aging workforces and rising retirement rates, it becomes increasingly important to examine how the psychological legacies of correctional work interact with the challenges and opportunities of retirement. This article investigates the mental health outcomes of retired prison officers, exploring risk and protective factors associated with their transition out of active duty.

### 2 BACKGROUNDS

Prison officers operate in highly demanding and emotionally taxing environments characterized by exposure to violence, understaffing, role conflict, and organizational stress (Brough & Biggs, 2021). Prolonged exposure to such conditions often leads to elevated risks of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among active-duty officers (Lefkowitz & Lowenstein, 2020). These occupational stressors not only impact officers during their careers but may also have long-term effects on psychological well-being after retirement.

Retirement, often seen as a time for rest and renewal, does not uniformly result in improved mental health for all individuals. For prison officers, the transition from a rigid and purpose-driven environment to an unstructured post-employment phase can be particularly difficult. Issues such as a loss of identity, withdrawal from social support networks developed in the workplace, and a lack of mental health preparedness may lead to heightened levels of psychological distress (Gould & Dawson, 2023). Furthermore,

## The Impact of Retirement of Mental Health Outcomes Among Prison Officers Iringa Municipality

the cumulative psychological toll of years spent in correctional work may manifest more prominently once individuals are no longer immersed in daily institutional demands.

Recent studies suggest that the mental health of retired first responders, including police and correctional officers, remains an area of concern, with many reporting persistent symptoms of anxiety, depression, and PTSD even after leaving active service (Carleton *et al.*, 2020). The lack of targeted post-retirement support services for correctional officers further exacerbates these challenges, leaving many former officers to navigate psychological vulnerabilities without adequate resources. Consequently, there is a growing need to understand the intersection between occupational exposure, retirement transition, and mental health in this population.

This paper aims to contribute to the emerging literature by exploring the mental health outcomes of retired prison officers, with a focus on identifying factors that influence psychological adjustment during retirement and recommending strategies for improving mental health support throughout and beyond the correctional career lifecycle.

Retirement is a significant life transition that often impacts individuals' mental health, particularly among professions characterized by high stress and occupational hazards, such as prison officers. In Tanzania, prison officers face unique challenges during and after retirement due to the stressful nature of their careers, limited psychosocial support, and inadequate retirement preparedness programs (Mkumbo, 2022). Despite the growing body of international research linking retirement to increased risks of depression, anxiety, and social isolation (Wang *et al.*, 2020), limited empirical attention has been paid to the mental health outcomes of retired prison officers within the Tanzanian context.

The Tanzanian correctional system is marked by systemic constraints, including insufficient staffing, poor working conditions, and psychological strain, which may exacerbate the effects of retirement on mental health (URT, 2020). Retired prison officers often transition into retirement without comprehensive psychological support or post-service reintegration plans, placing them at risk for adverse mental health outcomes such as psychological distress, emotional instability, and a diminished sense of identity and purpose (Moshi & Mamboya, 2023). Additionally, the absence of structured follow-up or mental health services for retired officers further contributes to their vulnerability.

Given the limited research on this subject in Tanzania, there is a pressing need to examine the specific mental health challenges faced by retired prison officers and identify targeted interventions that could mitigate these effects. Without a clear understanding of how retirement influences mental health outcomes in this group, policymakers and stakeholders risk overlooking a population that is essential to the justice system and deserving of adequate post-retirement support.

### 3 RELEVANT STUDIES ON THE IMPACT OF RETIREMENT ON MENTAL HEALTH OUTCOMES AMONG PRISON OFFICERS

A relevant study by Crawley (2022) employed a mixed-methods approach to examine the mental well-being of retired prison officers in the United Kingdom. The study utilized structured questionnaires (n=300) complemented by in-depth interviews (n=25) to gather data on depression, anxiety, and overall life satisfaction post-retirement. The findings revealed that while some prison officers experienced relief and reduced stress upon retiring, others faced significant mental health challenges, including identity loss, social isolation, and symptoms of depression. The results emphasized the need for pre-retirement psychological preparation programs.

Similarly, a study by Wachira and Kilonzo (2023) explored retirement adjustment among correctional officers in Kenya, with implications for similar socio-economic settings such as Tanzania. This cross-sectional study employed the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-28) to assess psychological distress in a sample of 180 retired officers. The study found that 63% of respondents experienced moderate to high levels of psychological distress within the first two years of retirement. Factors such as lack of social support, financial instability, and the abrupt loss of routine were identified as major contributors to poor mental health outcomes.

In the Tanzanian context, a recent study by Mwakalinga *et al.* (2024) used a qualitative phenomenological approach to investigate the retirement experiences of 20 former prison officers from Dar es Salaam and Arusha regions. Through semi-structured interviews, the study identified key themes such as unpreparedness for retirement, difficulty adapting to civilian life, and unmet health care needs. Most participants reported that the psychological demands of prison work had long-term effects on their mental health, which were exacerbated during retirement due to the absence of institutional support mechanisms. The authors advocated for comprehensive retirement planning programs tailored specifically for prison officers.

Another notable quantitative study by Ndegwa and Odhiambo (2021) used regression analysis to examine the correlation between length of service and post-retirement mental health among East African prison officers. The study found a statistically significant relationship between long years of service and increased risk of depression and anxiety post-retirement ( $p < 0.05$ ). The authors hypothesized that prolonged exposure to prison-related stress contributes to cumulative psychological strain, which manifests more prominently during retirement.

Collectively, these studies underscore the complex mental health dynamics faced by prison officers post-retirement. The methodologies ranging from cross-sectional surveys and regression analyses to qualitative interviews highlight the multifaceted nature of the issue and emphasize the need for policy interventions. Key recommendations emerging from these studies include the

## The Impact of Retirement of Mental Health Outcomes Among Prison Officers Iringa Municipality

establishment of pre-retirement training, post-retirement counseling, and sustainable pension plans to buffer the psychological toll of retirement among prison officers.

### 4 METHODOLOGY

#### Study Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the psychological effects of retirement on prison officers. The cross-sectional survey design was used to collect quantitative data, while semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore subjective experiences in greater depth.

#### Study Population and Sampling

The target population consisted of retired prison officers from various correctional facilities across Tanzania, with a particular focus on those who had retired within the past ten years. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 80 retired officers for the quantitative survey, while 15 participants were selected through criterion-based sampling for the qualitative interviews. Inclusion criteria involved having worked for at least 10 years in the prison service and having retired either due to age or early retirement policies.

#### Data Collection Tools

For the quantitative part, a standardized questionnaire was used to assess mental health status (Goldberg & Williams, 1988) and questions on socio-demographic background, retirement status, and post-retirement experiences. The qualitative data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide focused on emotional well-being, adjustment challenges, and coping mechanisms post-retirement.

#### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were computed to examine the relationship between retirement variables and mental health outcomes. The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts were coded, and themes were generated to identify common patterns and unique experiences among retired officers.

### 5 FINDINGS

#### The impact of retirement on mental health outcomes among prison officers

The study sought to establish the impact of retirement on mental health outcomes among prisons officers and to this effect, six items were put to respondents for which the following section presents the findings.

**Table 1 The impact of retirement on mental health outcomes among prison officers (n=80)**

Statement	Responses	SA	A	N	D	SD
Some people feel a sense of depression after retirement	Frequency	41	18	6	2	13
	Percentage (%)	51.3	22.5	7.5	2.5	16.3
I sometimes fail to get quality sleep, and I don't get enough rest these days.	Frequency	39	25	10	3	3
	Percentage (%)	48.8	31.3	12.5	3.8	3.8
Retirement comes with loss of control which brings panic and anger	Frequency	40	21	10	4	5
	Percentage (%)	50.0	26.3	12.5	5.0	6.3
When I retired, I was in confusion of what to do and not to do, which brough a sense of hopelessness	Frequency	33	26	14	3	4
	Percentage (%)	41.3	32.5	17.5	3.8	5.0
Most retired officers are likely to experience anxiety disorder	Frequency	25	21	16	6	12
	Percentage (%)	31.3	26.3	20.0	7.5	15.0
Retirement affects our emotions and behaviour	Frequency	34	21	11	1	13
	Percentage (%)	42.5	26.3	13.8	1.3	16.3

*Source:* Researcher, 2025

The findings of the study revealed significant psychological distress among retired prison officers in Tanzania, with particular emphasis on depression, sleep disturbances, loss of control, confusion, anxiety, and emotional instability.

#### Depressive Symptoms Post-Retirement

The first item examined whether respondents felt a sense of depression after retirement. A significant proportion of participants (51.3%) strongly agreed, and an additional 16.3% agreed, totaling 67.6%. This suggests that more than two-thirds of the respondents experience depressive symptoms following retirement. In the interview, it was a response of one that;

## The Impact of Retirement of Mental Health Outcomes Among Prison Officers Iringa Municipality

*"Honestly, it was very tough. I felt a deep sadness, almost like a depression. Suddenly, I had no work to go to, no routine, and I lost the respect and purpose I had as an officer. Many of my friends felt the same way. Retirement wasn't just stopping work; it was like losing a part of myself."* (Respondent B)

This is consistent with research showing that retirement can lead to increased feelings of sadness and depression due to the sudden change in identity, lifestyle, and reduced social engagement (Pinquart & Schindler, 2023). In the Tanzanian context, where retirement often coincides with reduced economic security and diminished social roles, these psychological effects may be more pronounced. Therefore, there is a need for mental health support tailored to the unique socio-cultural and economic realities of Tanzanian retirees.

### Sleep and Rest Disturbances

In response to the item on sleep quality, 48.8% of respondents strongly agreed, and 31.3% agreed that they do not get quality sleep or sufficient rest, comprising a substantial 80.1% of the sample. In addition, one respondent during interview intimated that;

*"Yes, my sleep got worse. I find myself lying awake at night, thinking about the future, about money and my family. It's hard to rest properly. Without a daily schedule or work stress, I would have thought sleep would improve, but it's the opposite. I think many retirees here face this problem because we don't have mental health support or guidance."* (Respondent H)

This aligns with international findings that retirement can disrupt circadian rhythms and contribute to insomnia or poor sleep hygiene, particularly when accompanied by stress, anxiety, or lack of structure (Morgan *et al.*, 2022). In Tanzania, where retired officers may lack access to mental healthcare or structured post-retirement routines, these sleep issues could exacerbate existing psychological conditions. The data suggest an urgent need for interventions in sleep hygiene and stress reduction.

### Loss of Control and Emotional Distress

Half of the respondents (50%) strongly agreed, and 26.3% agreed that retirement brought about a loss of control, resulting in emotions such as panic or anger. In response to interview, one respondent added; *"There was a lot of frustration and sometimes panic. We lose control over our daily lives and don't know what to do next. It's like being thrown into confusion. Some of us even feel angry at the situation, because suddenly we are less valued by society, which is very painful."* This is a reflection of the abrupt lifestyle transition that many officers undergo after retirement. Similar findings have been reported by Wang *et al.* (2021), who noted that individuals retiring from structured and authoritative roles like law enforcement or military service often experience a psychological vacuum. In Tanzania, this may be compounded by the cultural perception that equates retirement with decreased societal value, further triggering emotional dysregulation.

### Post-Retirement Confusion and Hopelessness

Approximately 73.8% of respondents (41.3% strongly agreed and 32.5% agreed) indicated experiencing confusion and a sense of hopelessness upon retirement. While responding to interview question postretirement confusion, one respondent intimate that; *"Not at all. There was no proper orientation or planning. We retired without knowing how to handle life afterwards. This lack of guidance made me feel hopeless and confused. Many of us felt lost, like there was no path forward. I believe if we had better preparation, this could be prevented."* This suggests a lack of pre-retirement planning and guidance, which is critical for emotional and psychological readiness (Kim & Moen, 2023). Many Tanzanian prison officers retire without clear plans or knowledge of how to navigate life after work, which may foster helplessness and depression. Structured retirement orientation programs could therefore serve as a preventive strategy against post-retirement psychological distress.

### Anxiety Disorders Among Retirees

A total of 57.6% of respondents (31.3% strongly agreed and 26.3% agreed) believed that most retired officers are likely to experience anxiety disorders. This finding underscores the mental health vulnerabilities associated with retirement, particularly in environments where financial instability and limited access to psychological services prevail. interview response from one respondent revealed that;

*"Anxiety is very common. Retiring brings so many uncertainties financial worries, health concerns, and social isolation. Many officers fear what their future holds. Without access to psychological help or community support, these anxieties just grow. It's something that needs urgent attention."* (Respondent C)

Anxiety among retirees in Tanzania may be driven by uncertainty about their future, social detachment, and deteriorating health (Chung *et al.*, 2022). It is critical that targeted interventions, such as accessible mental health counseling and community support programs, are implemented.

### Emotional and Behavioral Impacts of Retirement

Finally, 42.5% of respondents strongly agreed and 26.3% agreed that retirement significantly affects emotions and behavior. during interview with respondents, it was confirmed that;

## The Impact of Retirement of Mental Health Outcomes Among Prison Officers Iringa Municipality

*"It changed a lot for me. I became quieter, less social. Sometimes I feel like I don't matter anymore. My role in the family and community shifted, and it was difficult to adjust. Retirement isn't just stopping work; it's an emotional shift that affects everything. We need programs to help us find new purpose."* (Respondent A)

This confirms that retirement is not just a career transition but also an emotional and psychological turning point. According to Li and Wang (2023), such emotional responses are often linked to changes in personal identity, family roles, and daily routine. In the Tanzanian setting, retirees may struggle with feelings of redundancy or social isolation, calling for initiatives that promote emotional resilience and purposeful post-retirement engagement. The findings clearly show that retirement has a multifaceted psychological impact on Tanzanian prison officers. High levels of reported depression, anxiety, confusion, emotional dysregulation, and sleep disturbances point to the need for comprehensive retirement transition programs. These should include mental health education, stress management training, financial planning, and community-based support systems to promote emotional well-being during and after the retirement phase.

## 6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight the significant psychological challenges faced by Tanzanian prison officers following retirement. A substantial majority of respondents reported experiencing depressive symptoms, sleep disturbances, emotional distress, confusion, hopelessness, and anxiety disorders post-retirement. Particularly in the Tanzanian context, the compounded effects of economic insecurity and limited access to mental health resources exacerbate these psychological vulnerabilities.

The high prevalence of confusion and hopelessness signals a lack of adequate pre-retirement planning and guidance, which is essential for fostering resilience and positive adaptation. Consequently, the psychological distress observed among retirees is both multifaceted and deeply influenced by socio-cultural and economic factors unique to Tanzania.

In light of these findings, it is imperative to develop comprehensive retirement transition programs tailored to the needs of Tanzanian prison officers. Key recommendations include: establishing accessible counseling and psychological support specifically designed for retirees, focusing on depression, anxiety, and emotional regulation to mitigate psychological distress. Implement structured orientation programs that prepare officers for the emotional, social, and financial aspects of retirement, enhancing readiness and reducing confusion and hopelessness. Promote educational campaigns and workshops on maintaining healthy sleep patterns and managing stress to address the widespread sleep disturbances reported by retirees. Foster community-based support groups and activities to counteract social isolation and reinforce retirees' sense of purpose and belonging, thereby improving emotional well-being. Provide financial literacy training and resources to alleviate economic insecurity, which is a significant contributor to post-retirement anxiety and depressive symptoms. Advocate for the inclusion of mental health and retirement transition support within the policies of the Tanzanian prison service and relevant governmental bodies to ensure sustainable implementation.

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## The Impact of Retirement of Mental Health Outcomes Among Prison Officers Iringa Municipality

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