

Navigating Mental Health in Prison: A Study on Inmates Help Seeking Behavior

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Abstract. Help-seeking behavior involves deliberate attempts by individuals to address physical or mental health problems. In prisoners, these behaviors may assist them in expressing their needs and identifying sources of stress. This review aims to provide an overview of the literature on help-seeking behaviour among prisoners. The review utilised online databases such as BMC, Wiley, Sage Publications, and Emerald Insight, following the PRISMA-Scr protocol. The inclusion criteria for this study were: 1) Research Articles, 2) Published from 2014 to 2024, 3) Prisoners as research subjects, 4) English Language, 5) Open Access, 6) Accessible through Institutions. Five articles were selected for review, and thematic analysis revealed that help-seeking behaviors are critical for prisoners during incarceration and after their release. Maintaining good mental health is essential for prisoners to cope with the stresses of incarceration and to prevent recidivism. Help-seeking also helps in recognising and meeting the needs of prisoners. Prisoners should engage in help-seeking behavior because prisoners need help to express their needs, both with regard to physical and mental health.

Keywords: Help-Seeking Behavior; Inmates; Mental Health

1 Introduction

Living life inside a prison is a very heavy challenge, especially for newly sentenced inmates who often face various internal problems. The adaptation process in a prison environment is filled with difficulties, where inmates frequently experience mental health issues during their sentence. They may feel the urge to commit suicide, engage in self-harm, experience physical and sexual violence, and become victims or perpetrators of fellow inmate fraud [1]. One of the main problems they often face is related to mental health. Life in prison, which is limited by various constraints, inability to engage in activities as desired, the obligation to follow strict rules, and the presence of discrimination, can trigger mental health decline and disturbances in inmates. The combination of these factors can make inmates feel isolated, pressured, and face various serious psychological problems.

Experiencing mental health issues without adequate support can make inmates extremely stressed and more susceptible to unwanted behavior. Providing mental health support to inmates not only benefits them individually but also plays a crucial role in reducing the likelihood of recidivism or repeated offenses [2]. However, field conditions show that mental health services within correctional institutions are still very limited or even non-existent [3].

Inmates often have to wait for external activities, such as programs organized by universities or hospitals near the correctional institution, to receive mental health support. An alternative for them is to undergo a diagnosis at the nearest clinic or hospital; if they are found to have a mental disorder, they will be referred for further treatment. Conversely, if no indication of a disorder is found, no referral is given. The lack of interventions or ongoing programs to support their mental health is a serious issue. Physical and religious activities are some other options available to help them cope with prison life and maintain their mental health. As stated in the research by Indriani et al, religious activities are one way for inmates to alleviate stress and pressure during their prison sentence [4].

Help-seeking behavior in inmates is crucial in helping them understand and meet their needs. This behavior, known as Help Seeking Behavior, is a deliberate attempt to seek help from others to solve problems or achieve specific goals [5]. This phenomenon is very beneficial for correctional institution employees in identifying and meeting the needs of inmates that may not be met, whether related to physical health, daily needs, or mental health. By understanding and supporting this help-seeking behavior, correctional institution employees can develop more effective strategies to improve the well-being of inmates. Inmates with good help-seeking behavior are expected to adapt better to the prison environment because they are able to seek and obtain the necessary support to face daily challenges.

This study aims to identify the impact of help-seeking behavior on inmates, as well as the consequences when their needs are met or not met. The expected results of this study are hoped to provide valuable insights for managing inmates and designing programs that can improve their well-being within correctional institutions.

This research is both significant and timely, offering valuable insights into the experiences of incarcerated individuals and the support they require. By exploring how inmates seek help and the methods they use, we can enhance their ability to adjust to prison life. Understanding and addressing their needs can facilitate rehabilitation and reduce the chances of future recidivism. A central question of this research is whether help-seeking behavior can contribute to preventing crime within the prison, fostering genuine remorse, and ultimately improving inmates' overall quality of life during incarceration.

2 Method

This study employs a scoping review methodology to examine articles related to help-seeking behavior from various databases, utilizing inclusion and exclusion criteria to select the most relevant journals for review. The inclusion criteria used in this systematic review include: 1)

Articles that are research results; 2) Articles published in the last 10 years; 3) Articles that make inmates the research subjects; 4) Articles written in English; 5) Articles available in open-access (open-access); 6) Articles accessible through institutions. The article selection process for this study follows the steps outlined in the PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines. The first step involves determining the main topic that will be the focus of the article search. Next, an initial screening is conducted to establish inclusion criteria that align with the study's objectives. After the inclusion criteria are set, the researcher screens the titles and abstracts of articles found in various databases to identify relevant articles.

The articles that pass the initial screening will then be comprehensively reviewed. This comprehensive review includes a full evaluation of the complete text of the articles to ensure their suitability with the inclusion criteria and relevance to the research question. Each selected article will be analyzed in-depth to assess its quality and contribution to understanding the topic being studied. This process not only ensures that the articles used have high scientific value, but also that they can genuinely provide the necessary insights to answer the research question about the importance of help-seeking behavior (Help-Seeking Behavior) for inmates during their prison sentence. Therefore, this study aims to present a comprehensive and structured overview of the existing literature, as well as identifying gaps and opportunities for further research in this field. This study relies on primary data obtained from academic journal articles. The databases used in this study include various platforms such as BMC (1), Wiley (2), Sage Publications (3), and Emerald Insight (4). These four databases were chosen because they have extensive and relevant collections for the topic being studied. In the article search process, specific keywords or keywords were used to ensure the relevance of the results obtained. The keywords used include "Help-Seeking Behavior," "Inmates," and "Mental Health."

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3 Result and Discussion

The subjects used in this study consisted of male inmates still serving their sentences [6]-[8]; former political inmates [9]; and female inmates [10]. This study utilized five journal articles taken from various databases and met the inclusion criteria. All the articles used were published within the last 10 years, from 2014 to 2024. The study was conducted in different regions worldwide, including the United Kingdom [6]-[8]; the United States [7]-[10]; and Myanmar [9]. The studies provided research results on the importance of an inmate having help-seeking

behavior [6]-[9] and the impact that can occur if the help-seeking behavior already performed is not met [10].

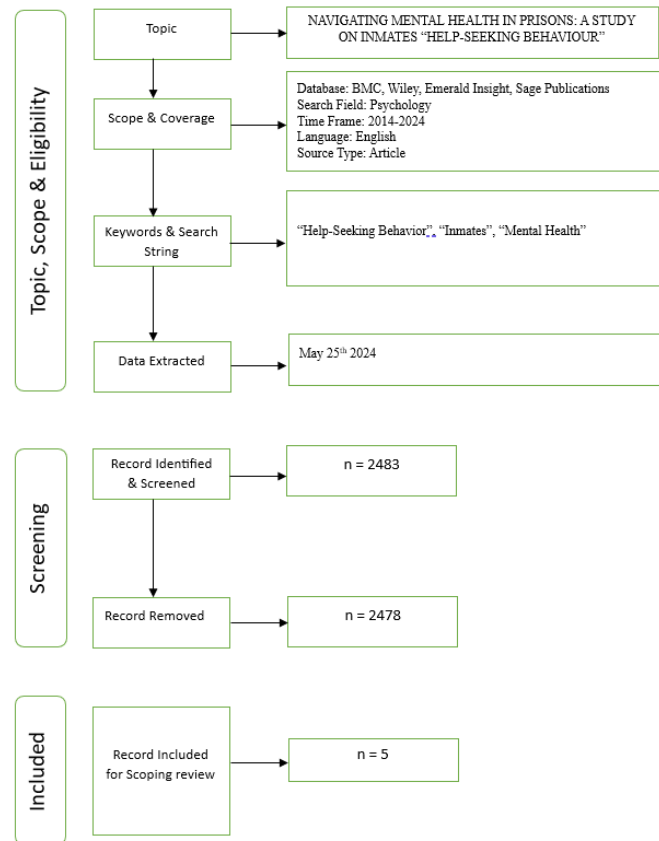


Fig 1. PRISMA-scr for Help Seeking Behavior

This study aims to investigate the importance of help-seeking behavior among inmates during their prison sentence. The study will delve into the importance of this behavior [6]-[9], as well as its impact [10]. The study conducted by Woods et al revealed the importance of increasing mental health awareness among inmates through innovative methods, such as the State of Mind Sport (SOMS) program. The SOMS program was designed to enhance mental health and well-being among inmates, although its implementation in prison settings faced significant challenges. This study hoped that the application of SOMS would increase inmates' understanding of the importance of mental health and encourage them to seek help if they experience mental health symptoms. The study's results showed that the SOMS program was well-received by the inmates and successfully increased their knowledge about mental health issues. Participants also demonstrated improved abilities in addressing these issues, particularly through seeking help and involving fellow inmates and prison officials. This program is

expected to serve as a model for mental health interventions in prisons, ultimately aiming to enhance the overall mental well-being and coping abilities of inmates [8].

According to Cobb & Farrants, their research found out that seeking help is a fundamental need for every inmate to maintain their mental health and well-being. However, this study highlights the challenges faced, especially by male inmates, when trying to seek help. They often encounter negative responses such as "toughen up" or "face it," which reinforce the view that men should be strong and capable of handling mental health issues without help. In some cases, there are also aspects of solidarity that make it difficult for inmates to seek help because they fear being seen as weak by their peers. The stigma associated with seeking help leads many inmates to be reluctant to seek professional support, fearing they will be labeled as "crazy" or seen as unable to handle their problems alone. As a result, many inmates choose not to disclose or discuss their mental health issues, which can worsen their condition. This study emphasizes the need to address this stigma and create a more supportive environment in prison, so inmates feel more comfortable seeking the help they need without fear of being judged or belittled [6].

The study conducted by Lakin et al revealed similar findings, examining the perceptions of 30 political prisoners in Myanmar regarding the importance of mental health and seeking help. The prisoners were divided into two groups: those who believed that seeking help for mental health was important and those who disagreed. The group that did not consider seeking help necessary believed that most men did not trust that they were experiencing mental health issues. This was due to strong cultural norms and traditions, so they trusted cultural beliefs more than considering mental health and seeking professional help. Another reason was the lack of understanding about counseling and its benefits, which made them hesitant to participate in the process. On the other hand, prisoners who acknowledged the importance of seeking help for their mental health believed that, especially with increasing age, any kind of support became increasingly necessary. Those who participated in therapy and counseling reported that these interventions provided them with valuable guidance in their efforts to become more useful and independent. Therapy and counseling were considered essential tools that helped them overcome the challenges they faced and improve their mental well-being [9].

Life in prison is a heavy challenge. Inmates serving life sentences live alongside inmates from various backgrounds, personalities, and types of criminal offenses. These offenses vary, ranging from minor ones like theft and traffic violations to serious ones like murder, corruption, and arson. Despite these differences, help-seeking behavior is an essential trait that inmates must possess to meet their physical and mental health needs. However, the urge to seek help is often hindered by fear. As discussed in the study by Ratkalkar & Atkin-Plunk, inmates often become victims of physical and sexual violence. Male inmates, in particular, are reluctant to seek help because they fear being seen as less masculine compared to other inmates. They are afraid that seeking help will be seen as a sign of weakness. This stigma causes many male inmates to be reluctant to show vulnerability, although help-seeking behavior is crucial for maintaining their physical and mental well-being [7].

However, this problem is not only experienced by male inmates. In the study by Wennerstrom et al, female inmates in a correctional institution in Louisiana, United States, also showed a pressing need for mental health care. The female inmates who participated in the study reported that they had tried to seek help, but the response from the prison authorities was often inadequate. They felt that their requests for help were ignored and not considered important by the correctional institution. The female inmates stated that their efforts to obtain help often failed because the necessary support was not available or not prioritized. The limited number of mental health professionals also became the main obstacle in meeting their needs, even after they tried to seek assistance. As a result, many female inmates were forced to diagnose their mental conditions themselves, which often led to incorrect management and worsened their mental health. This study highlights the challenges faced by female inmates in obtaining adequate mental health care and emphasizes the need for increased support and access to mental health services in correctional institutions to prevent further negative impacts [10].

In conclusion, help-seeking behavior is essential for inmates to reduce the risk of recidivism and maintain their mental well-being. A lack of access to appropriate help can lead to serious consequences, including self-harm, violence, and sexual harassment. Rather than being a sign of weakness, seeking help is a proactive step that can prevent mental health crises and enhance overall well-being. Inmates engage in help-seeking behavior to address unmet needs, such as mental health support, peer connections, and a sense of safety within the prison environment. Those who effectively seek help gain access to vital resources, including mental health services, medical care, and emotional support, which contribute to an improved quality of life during incarceration.

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