

A study on mental disorders among prisoners and its prevention in India

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Abstract

Mental illness is a range of psychological disorders that could be an individual's cognition, emotional or behavioural disturbance. There exists a high rate of mental health problems among prisoners. The prisoners are among the ones that constantly need their mental health to be checked. Hence, the major objectives of this research is to determine the factors that lead to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners, to find the consequences of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners, to find the measures that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders and to find the measures the prison authorities should implement to reduce mental disorders among inmates. For this purpose, empirical research was conducted. Through convenient sampling methods, 202 samples were collected. The sample frame includes the individuals from Chennai. Age, gender, educational qualification, occupation and monthly income are the independent variables. The factors that lead to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners, consequences of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners, measures that can be availed in prisons and by prison authorities to prevent mental health disorders are the dependent variables. Graphical charts and correlation analyses are used as statistical tools for the analyses in SPSS. It is deduced that cornering by fellow inmates, Abuse by fellow inmates, Substance abuse, Confinements and Lack of coping skills as the major factors that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners; abusing other inmates, Violent behaviour, Self-harm, Suicide and Personality disorders as the major factors which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners; reduction in misuse of substances, Including frequent community service programs, physical activities such as yoga and similar practices and Introducing recreation centres as the effective measures that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders; transfer to open prisons, transfer to rehabilitation centres, Admit to asylums temporarily and Provide medical assistance as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders and engaging inmates in group activities is the most effective measure that the prison authorities should implement to reduce group mental disorders among inmates. Hence, to ensure complete mental health of the inmates measures such as Frequent monitoring of behavioural changes, Monitoring prevalence of substance usage, Provide counselling and Engage inmates in group activities should be ensured. Ensuring mental health of each individual irrespectively is one of the prime duties of the State, this includes the prisoners.

Keywords

Rehabilitation, psychology, aggravation, prison, mental health.

INTRODUCTION

The mental health of prisoners is a major concern for the prison authorities. It can be defined as the psychological well-being and emotional stability of an individual. The term 'mental health' includes both physical and psychological aspects. Mental health problems are commonly associated with various types of disorders such as depression, anxiety, personality disorder, schizophrenia etc. The most common mental illnesses in prisons include depression, bipolar disorder and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The prevalence rate of these mental illnesses varies from country to country but it is estimated that about 15% to 20% of all inmates suffer from some form of mental illness at any given time. The government of India through the Ministry of Home Affairs initiates various measures for the mental well-being of inmates. During the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, the Ministry along with National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS) published a handbook "Dealing with Mental Health Issues in Prisoners during COVID-19: A HANDBOOK" which set forth the guidelines which ensures the mental health needs of prisoners and prison staff with a view to empowering them in managing such issue. The NIMHANS also initiated the 'Gatekeeper Model' and 'Buddy system' which supports the prisoners from having suicidal thoughts. Though various initiatives for the mental well-being of the prisoners are implemented there exists various constraints for its effectiveness such as continuity in treatments, less manpower, prison overcrowding, funding gaps, lack of acceptance, stereotyping, et cetera. Moreover, there is only one psychologist or psychiatrist for every 16,503 people in prison, with 21 states not having any prison psychiatrists or psychologists. Oflate, most of the Indian jails show a high occupancy rate and 80% of the total inmates were reported to be mentally ill. A recent study conducted by the Narcotics Control Bureau of India in 2019, observed that 28.8% psychiatric morbidity among convict prisoners. As per reports by 2020, the number of people living with anxiety and depressive disorders rose significantly because of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to its previous year wherein 1 in every 8 persons or 970 million people were living with these disorders. In just a year the initial estimates show a rise in 26% and 28% respectively for anxiety and major depressive disorders. The world has started realising the importance of mental health of every individual including prisoners, various measures by different countries can be observed which includes PRI is facilitating mental health training, screening and support for people in prison by Uganda, Justice Project that has developed mental health awareness toolkits, which aim to support staff in dealing with people in prison with mental illness by Pakistan. In Lebanon, the NGO Restart provides mental health services in prisons in the North of the country as mental healthcare is otherwise not available in detention facilities.

Objectives

- To determine the factors that lead to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners
- To find the consequences of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners
- To find the measures that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders
- To find the measures the prison authorities should implement to reduce mental disorders among inmates

Literature Review

Safitri (2021) analyses the relationship between prison characteristics and prisoners mental health. The author observed that Less overcrowding, Increasing family visitation, More work access and Recreational facilities will lead to better mental health and better person on release outside prison. **Wendy Dyer (2021)** examines the prevalence of mental disorders in prisoners. Through descriptive research the author suggests that early prevention, detection and alleviating common mental disorders should be implemented in prison. **Judith Lipopai Museve (2020)** aims to establish the prevalence and associated factors of mental disorders among prisoners in maximum

prisons. The author established that mental disorders can be reduced by active participation and rehabilitation.

Aish Lovett (2019) through a scientific study approach analyzed the various needs of prisoners. The author proposed a policy that will guide interventions for coordinated service development, and better align policy with the aim of the Sustainable Development Goals' to leave no one behind in achieving equitable, universal health coverage. **Timothy G. Edgemon (2018)** determines to find out mental health prevention activities in prison. The author discusses three themes by which worsening of mental health can be avoided. Firstly, mental health assessment; secondly, mental health education, and finally, mental health therapies. The author also observed that Mental health education and therapy being the most effective method. **Prof S.T. Janetius (2017)** through an empirical study describes the situation of prisoners and various causes of mental health problems, with the special reference to suicides, and evaluates the various services provided and introduced an Evidence-Based Peer-help counselling Model for prevention of suicide in prisons. The author observed that a constant, preventive program and a positive approach to inmates selectively can give favourable results to contain and reduce the incidence of suicide attempts inside the prison. The study also reiterates that a systematic, scientific ecological approach 'Peer-Help counselling' as provocative and comprehensive treatment programs in prisons, coupled with state-of-the-art diversionary measures for mentally ill arrestees and programs such as prisoner community reentry, be initiated and pursued in order to prevent a high rate of recidivism and morbidity of prisoners and to facilitate their adjustment in the community.

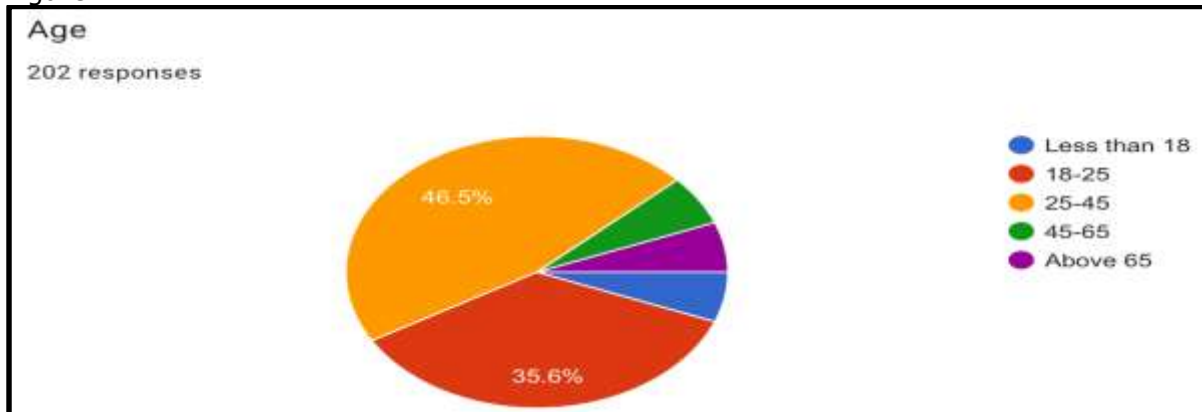
Prof. Arintan Nur Yigrem Ali (2016) discusses the complex issue of how to reduce waiting time for prisoners to be shifted to hospitals for mental health. The author suggests that Mental health improvement can be helped by speech therapy and occupational therapy. **Seena Fazel (2016)** examined the efficiency of tests available to detect the reliability of emotional distress of prisoners. According to the author the tests can only be used as a screening measure. The author suggests more Self reporting measures should be initiated that are initially on imprisonment and then be periodically evaluated. **M. R. Krespi Boothby (2010)** conducted a descriptive research with the objective to find whether facilities are enough for mitigating mental health issues in prisons and whether sufficient resources are provided. The author observed that more resources and training to staff connect with incarcerated people to help diagnose mental health issues at an early stage to mitigate problems in future. **Anasseril E. Daniel (2007)** examined the needs for mental health for different vulnerable groups like women and older prisoners. The author observed that the women with families and older men are more vulnerable to mental disorders in prison increasing risk of suicide. The author observed that tragic consequences can be expected due to such situations such as Self harm, victimization and depression.

METHODOLOGY

An empirical research has been followed. Through convenient sampling methods, 202 samples were collected. The sample frame includes the individuals from Chennai. Age, gender, educational qualification, occupation and monthly income are the independent variables. The factors that lead to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners, consequences of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners, measures that can be availed in prisons and by prison authorities to prevent mental health disorders are the dependent variables. Graphical charts and correlation analyses are used as statistical tools for the analyses in SPSS.

Analyses
Demographic variables

Figure 1



Legend Figure 1 represents the age distribution of the respondents.

Figure 2

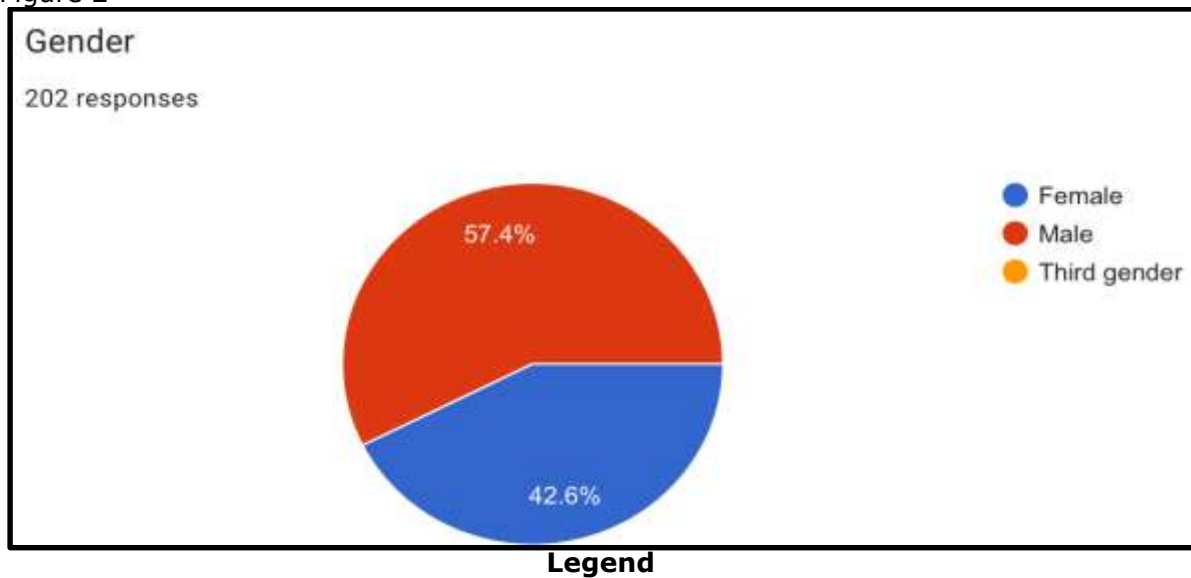
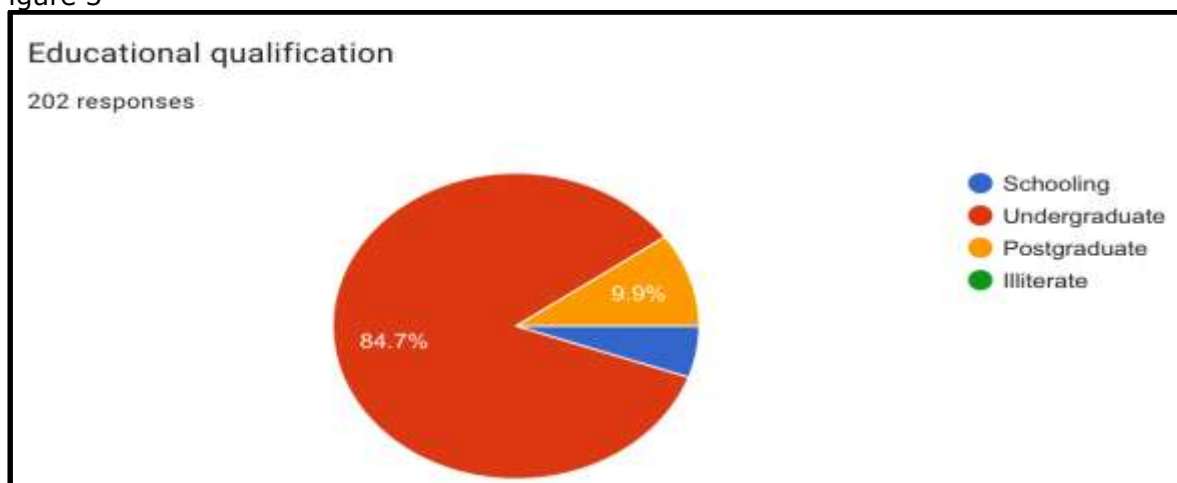


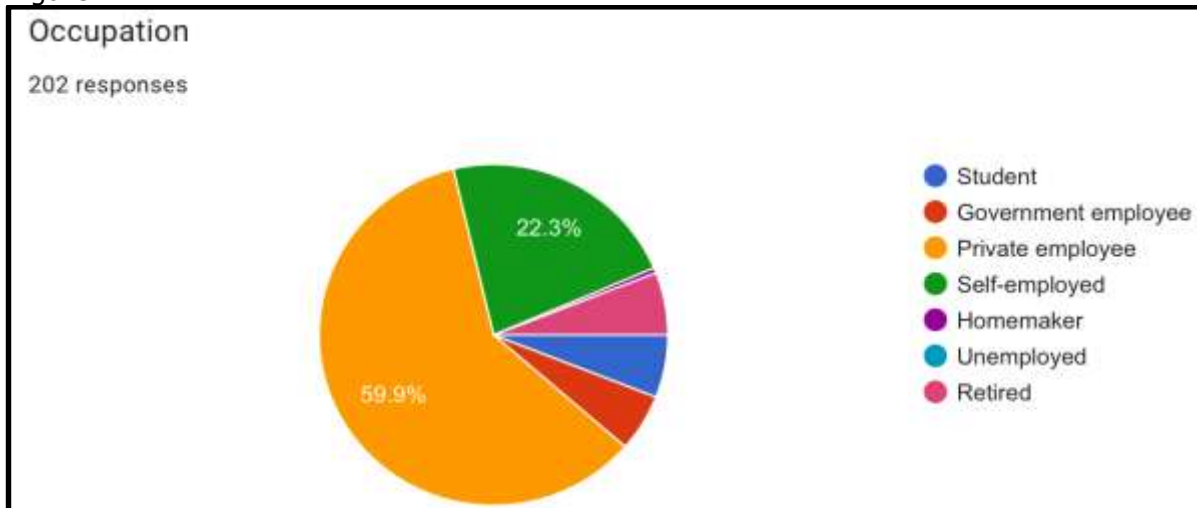
Figure 2 represents the gender distribution of the respondents.

Figure 3



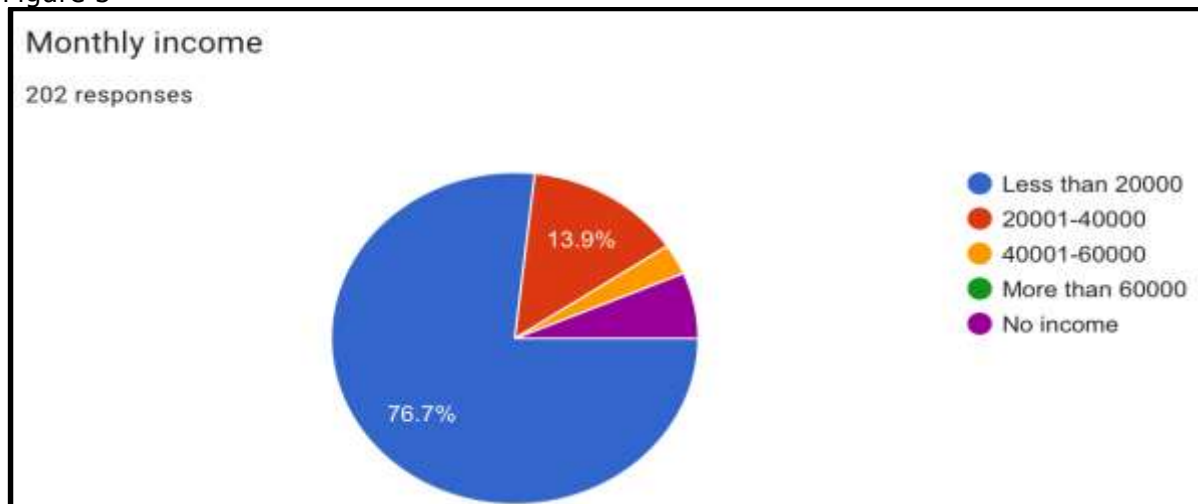
Legend Figure 3 represents the educational qualification of the respondents.

Figure 4



Legend Figure 4 represents the occupation distribution of the respondents.

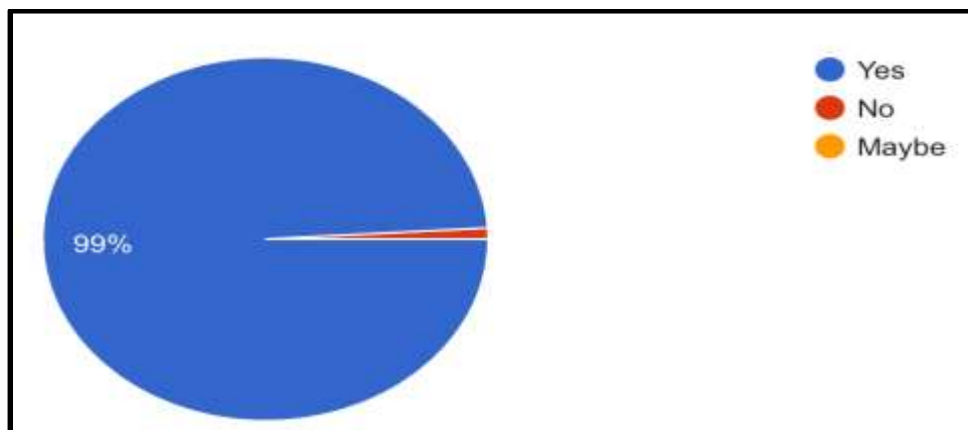
Figure 5



Legend Figure 5 represents the monthly income of the respondents.

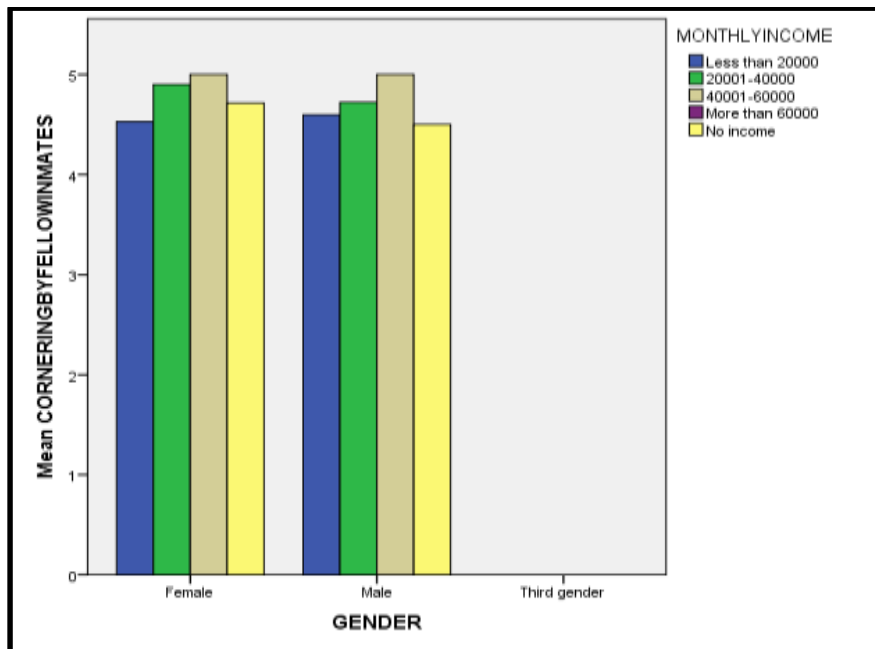
- **Medical examinations prior to arrest should include a mental health check up**

Figure 6



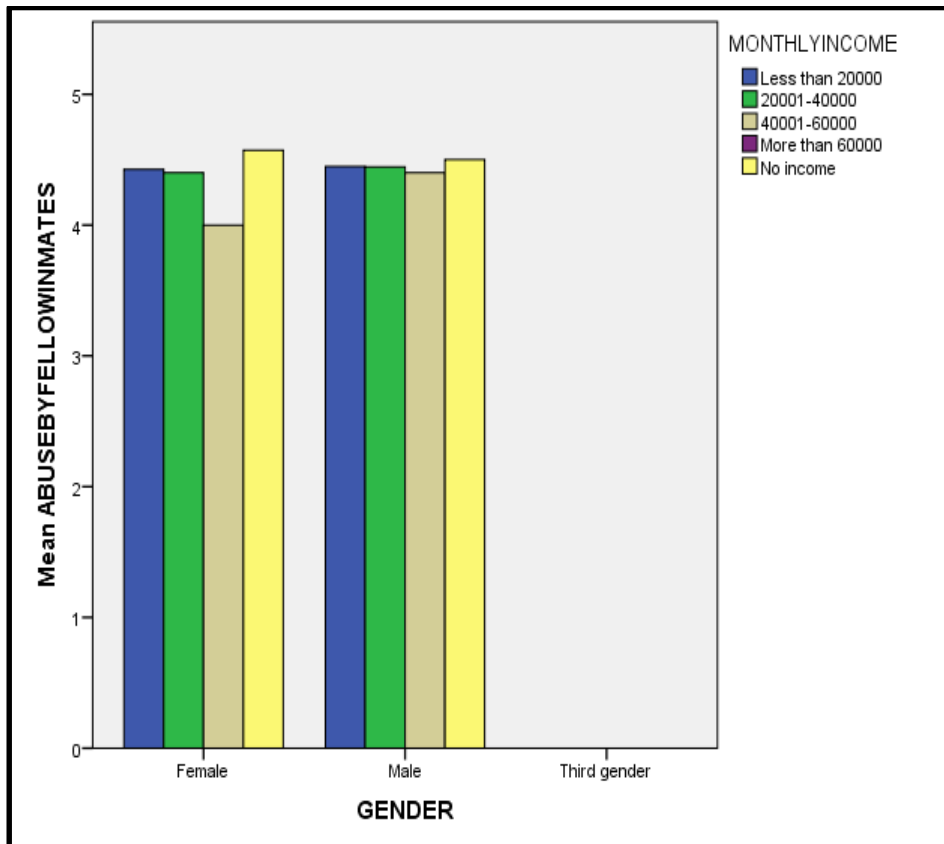
Legend Figure 6 represents the opinion of respondents in including mental health check up in medical examinations prior to arrest.

• **Factors that lead to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners**
Figure 7



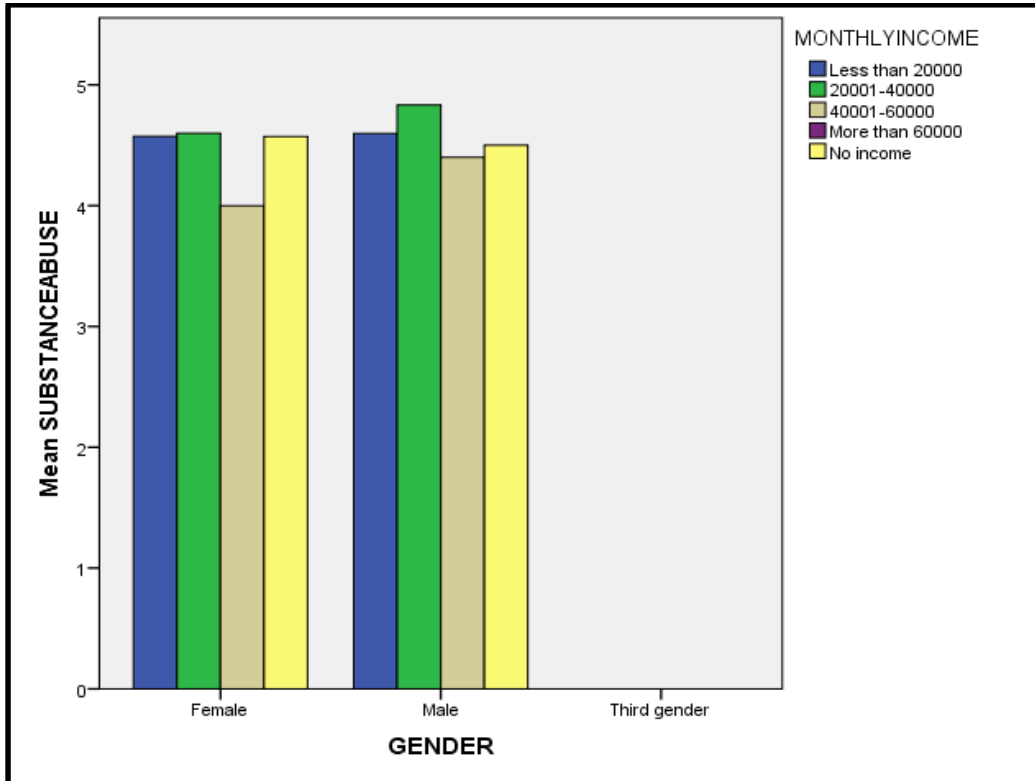
Legend Figure 7 represents the opinion of respondents on cornering by fellow inmates as the major factor that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners compared to their financial status and gender

Figure 8



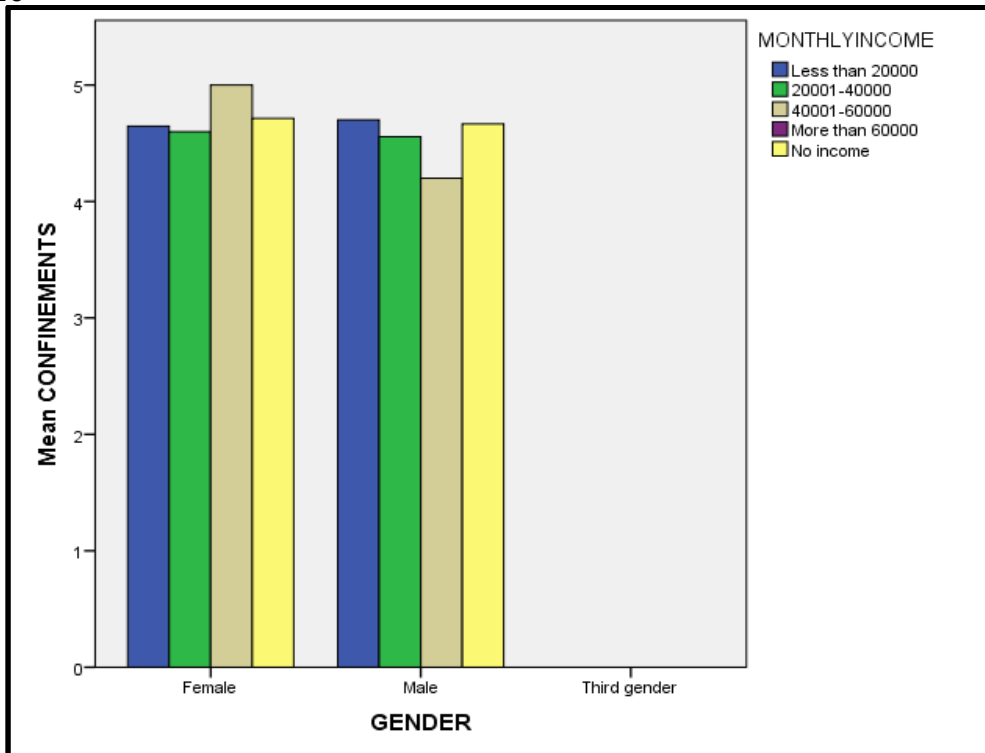
Legend Figure 8 represents the opinion of respondents on abuse by fellow inmates as the major factor that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners compared to their financial status and gender.

Figure 9



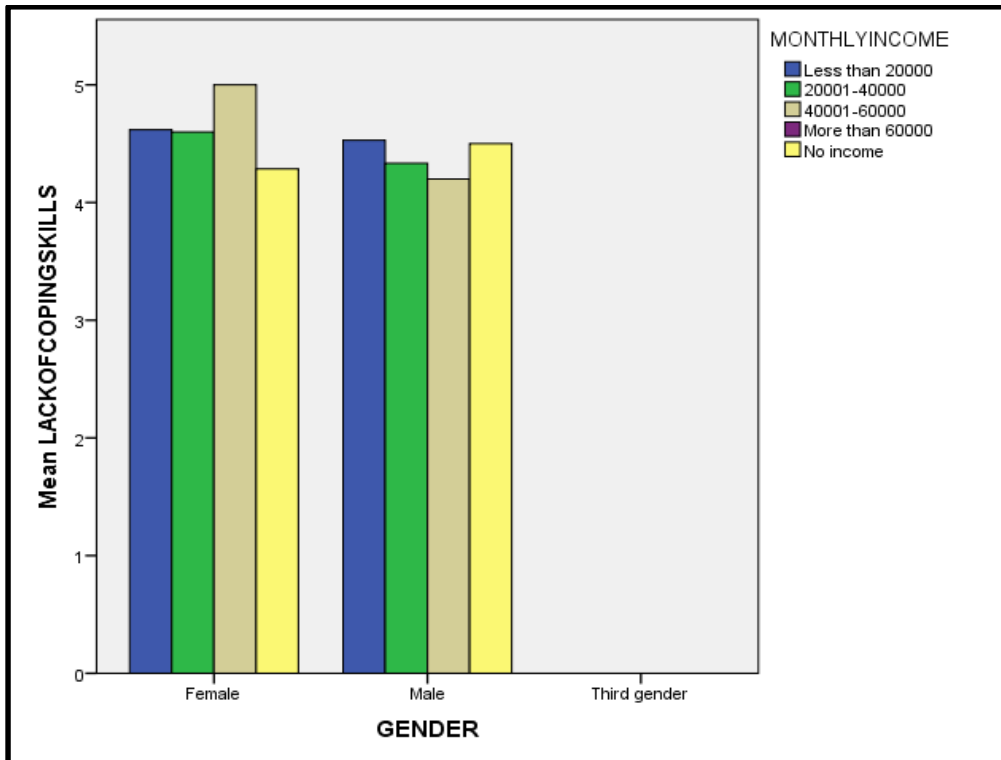
Legend Figure 9 represents the opinion of respondents on substance abuse as the major factor that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners compared to their financial status and gender.

Figure 10



Legend Figure 10 represents the opinion of respondents on confinements as the major factor that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners compared to their financial status and gender.

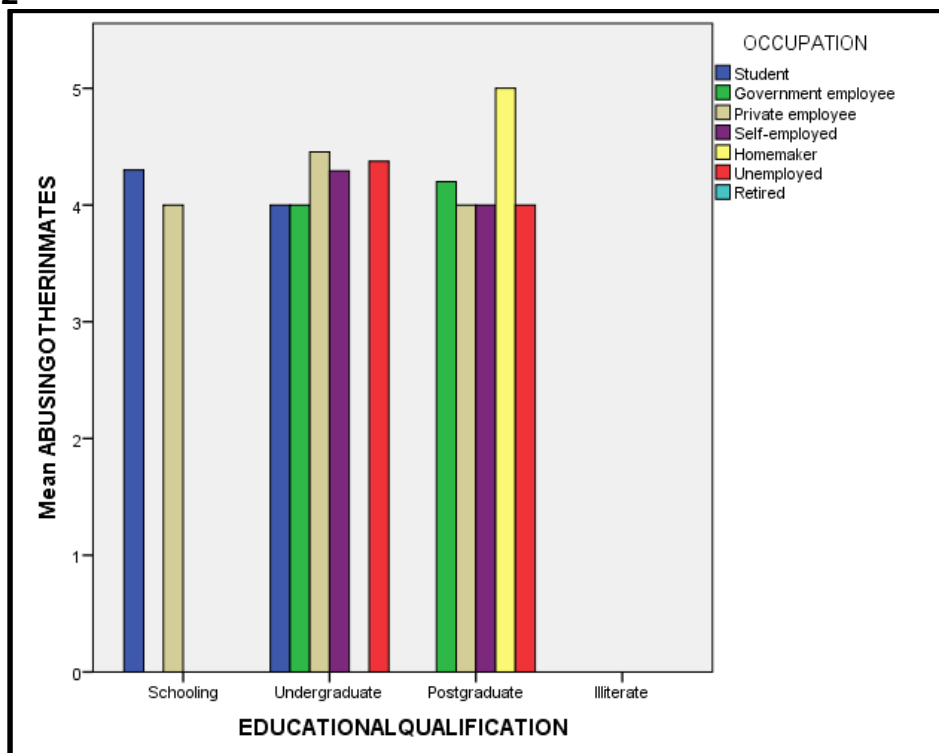
Figure 11



Legend Figure 11 represents the opinion of respondents on lack of coping skills as the major factor that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners compared to their financial status and gender.

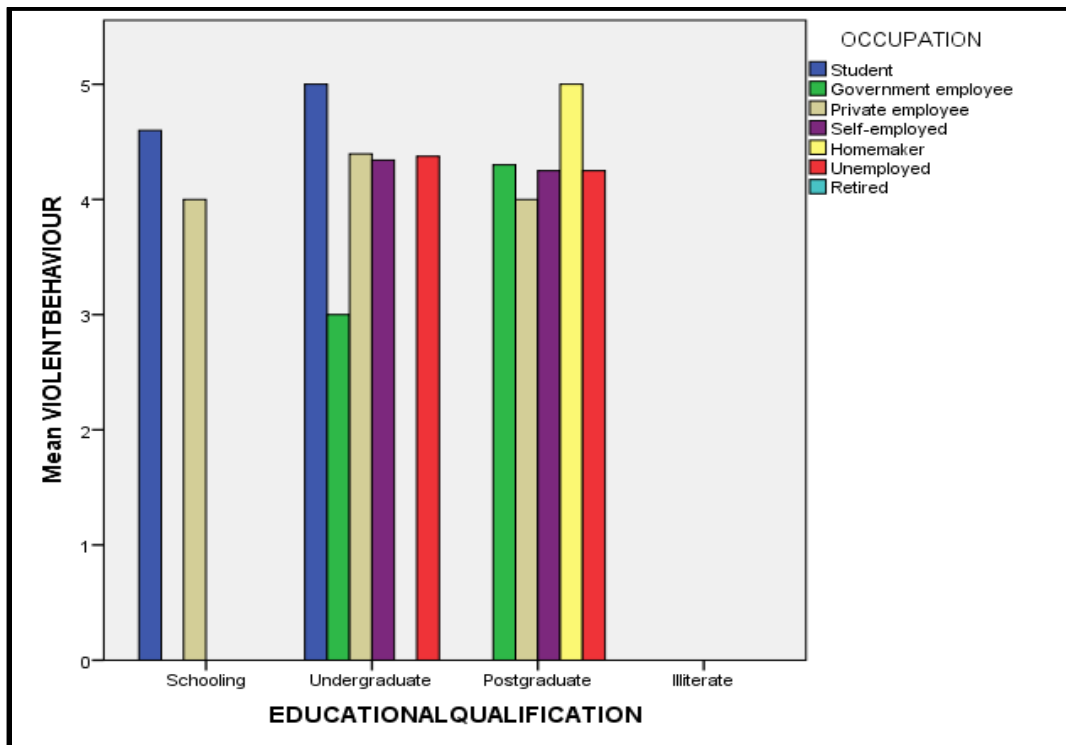
- **Consequences of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners**

Figure 12



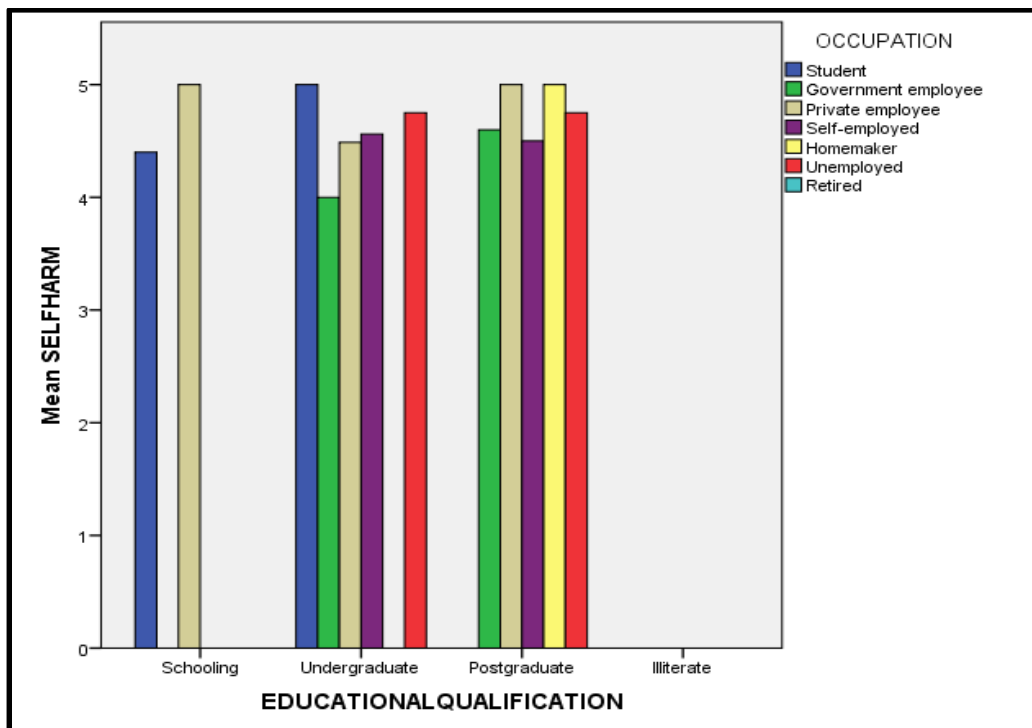
Legend Figure 12 represents the opinion of respondents on abusing other inmates as the major factor which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners compared to their educational qualification and occupation.

Figure 13



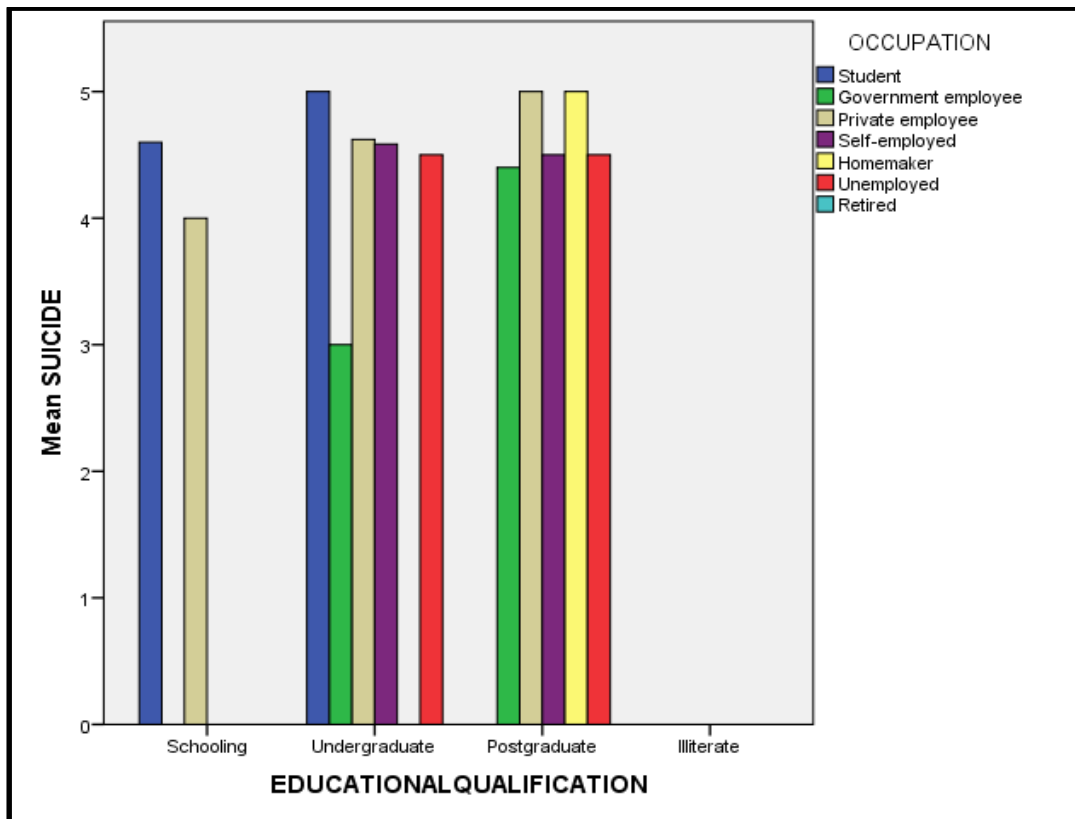
Legend Figure 13 represents the opinion of respondents on violent behaviour as the major factor which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners compared to their educational qualification and occupation.

Figure 14



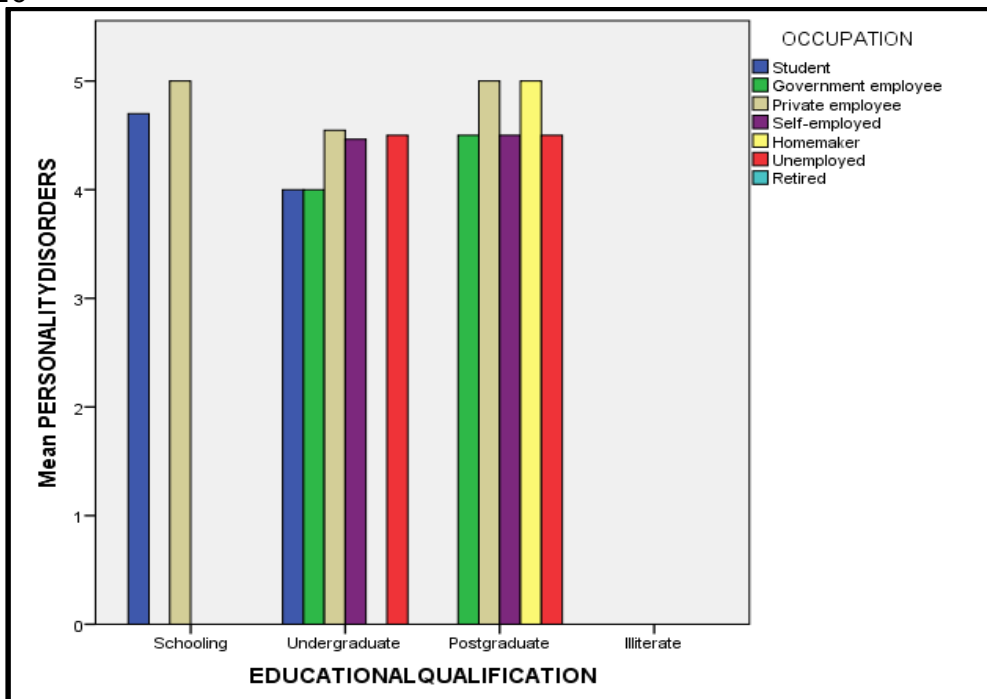
Legend Figure 14 represents the opinion of respondents on self harm as the major factor which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners compared to their educational qualification and occupation.

Figure 15



Legend Figure 15 represents the opinion of respondents on suicide as the major factor which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners compared to their educational qualification and occupation.

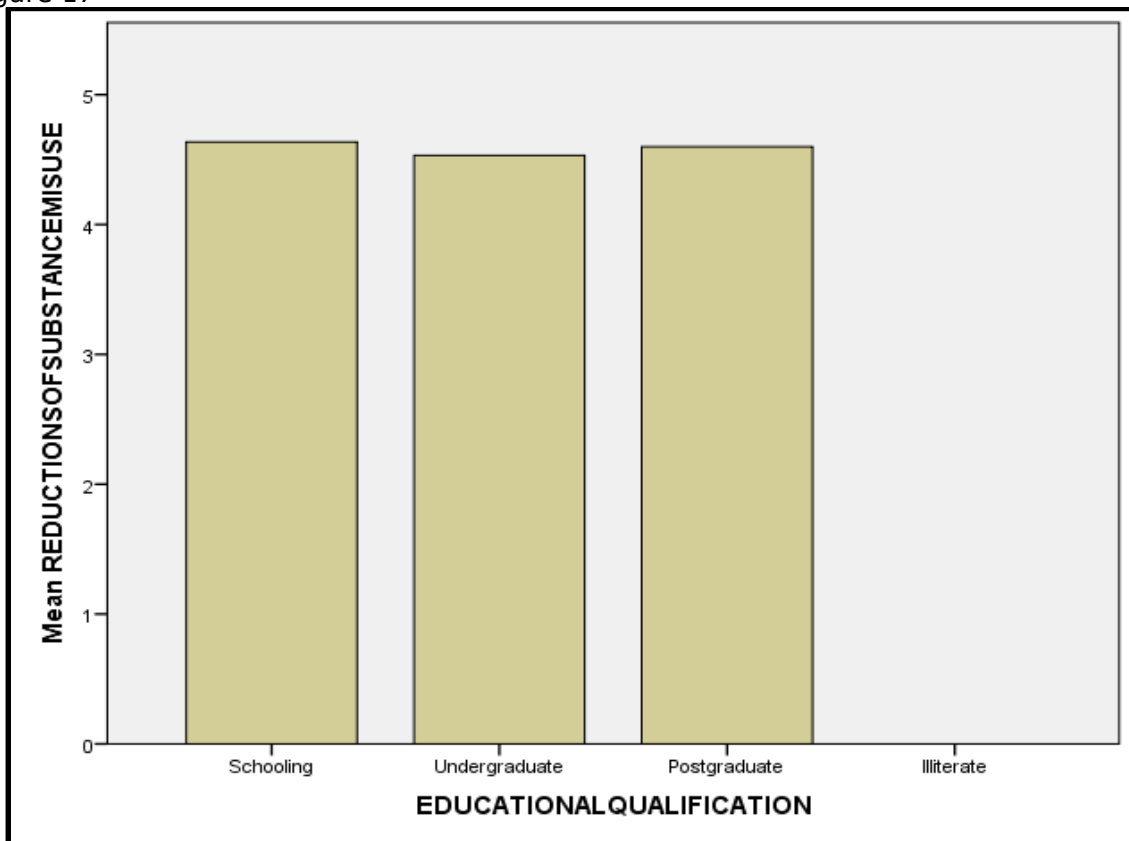
Figure 16



Legend Figure 16 represents the opinion of respondents on personality disorders as the major factor which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners compared to their educational qualification and occupation.

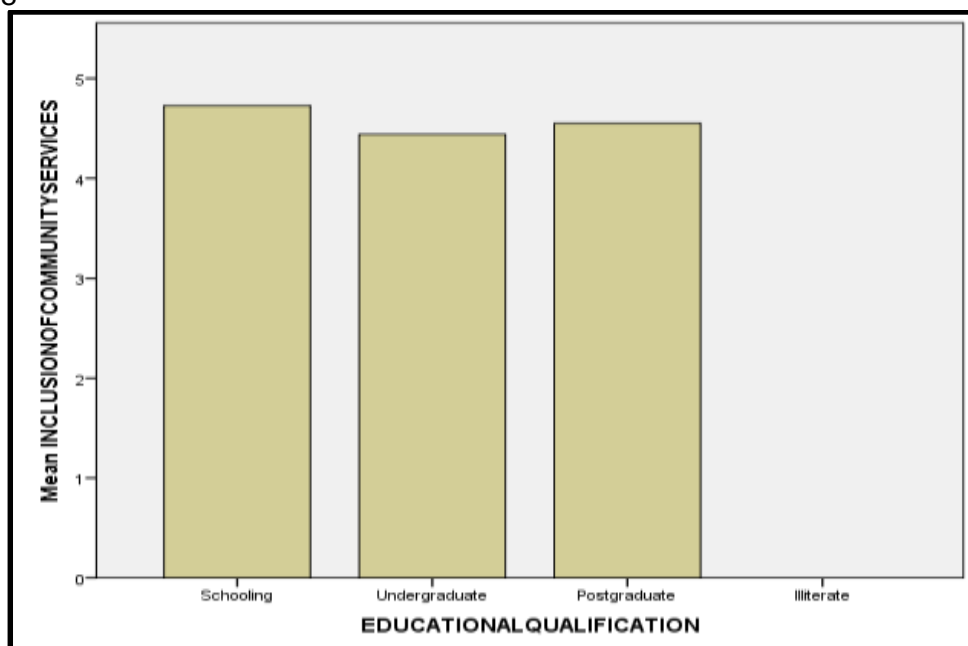
- Measures that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders

Figure 17



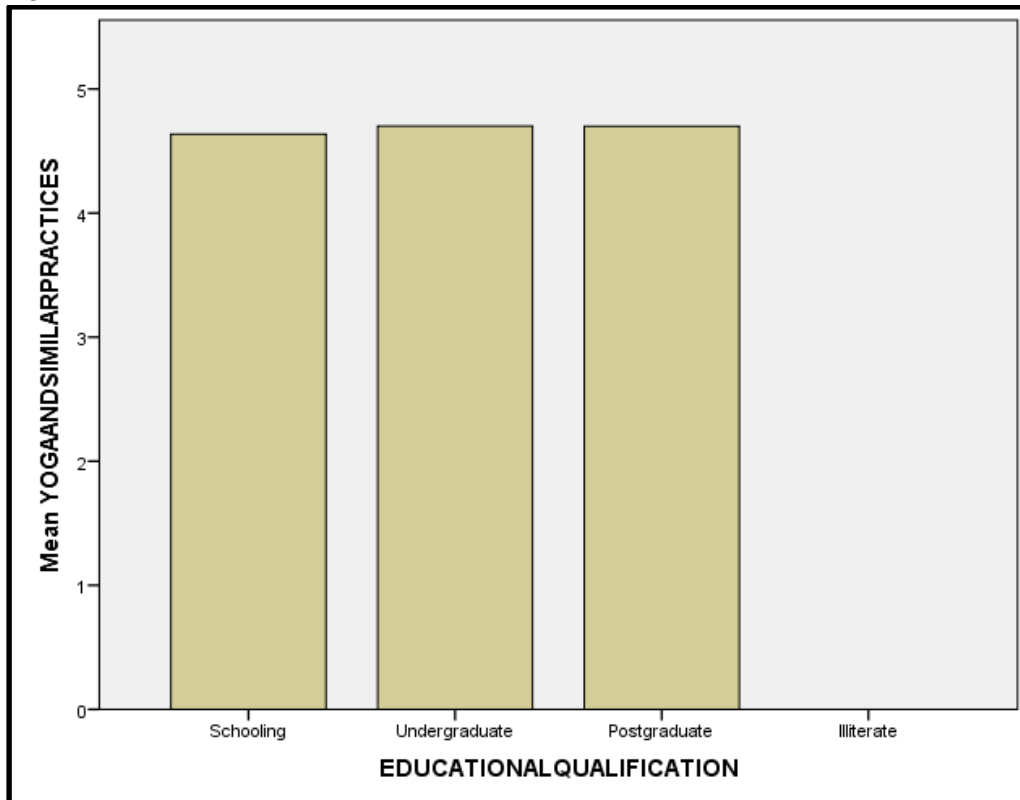
Legend Figure 17 represents the opinion of respondents on reduction of substance misuse as the effective measure that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders compared to their educational qualification.

Figure 18



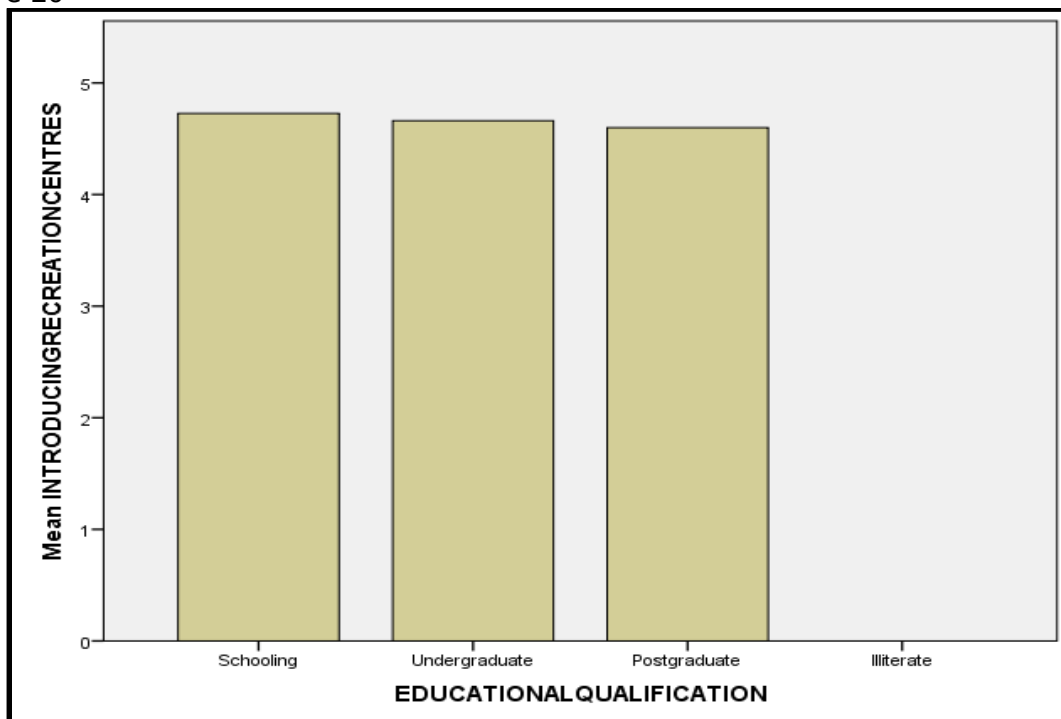
Legend Figure 18 represents the opinion of respondents on inclusion of community services as the effective measure that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders compared to their educational qualification.

Figure 19



Legend Figure 19 represents the opinion of respondents on yoga and similar practices as the effective measure that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders compared to their educational qualification.

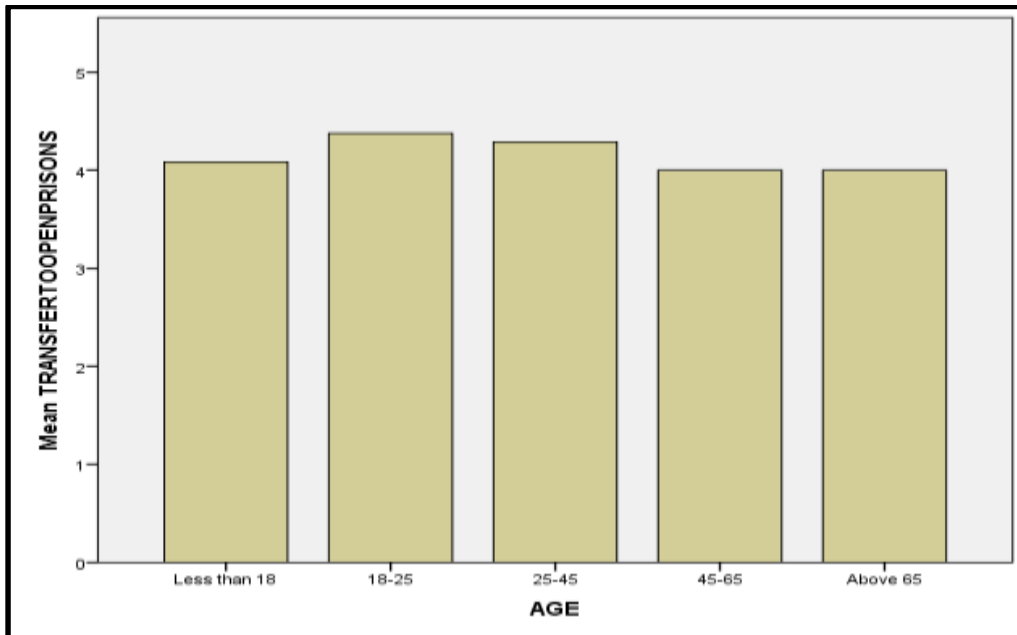
Figure 20



Legend Figure 20 represents the opinion of respondents on introducing recreation centres as the effective measure that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders compared to their educational qualification.

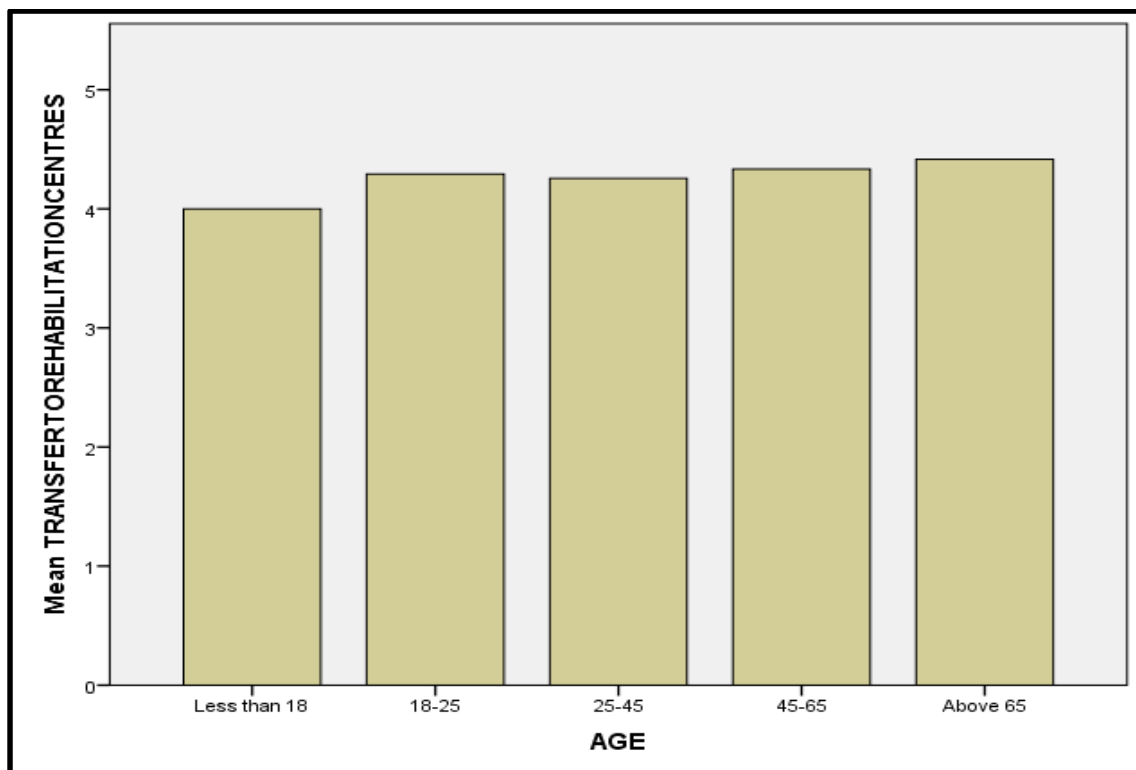
- **Alternative measures that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders**

Figure 21



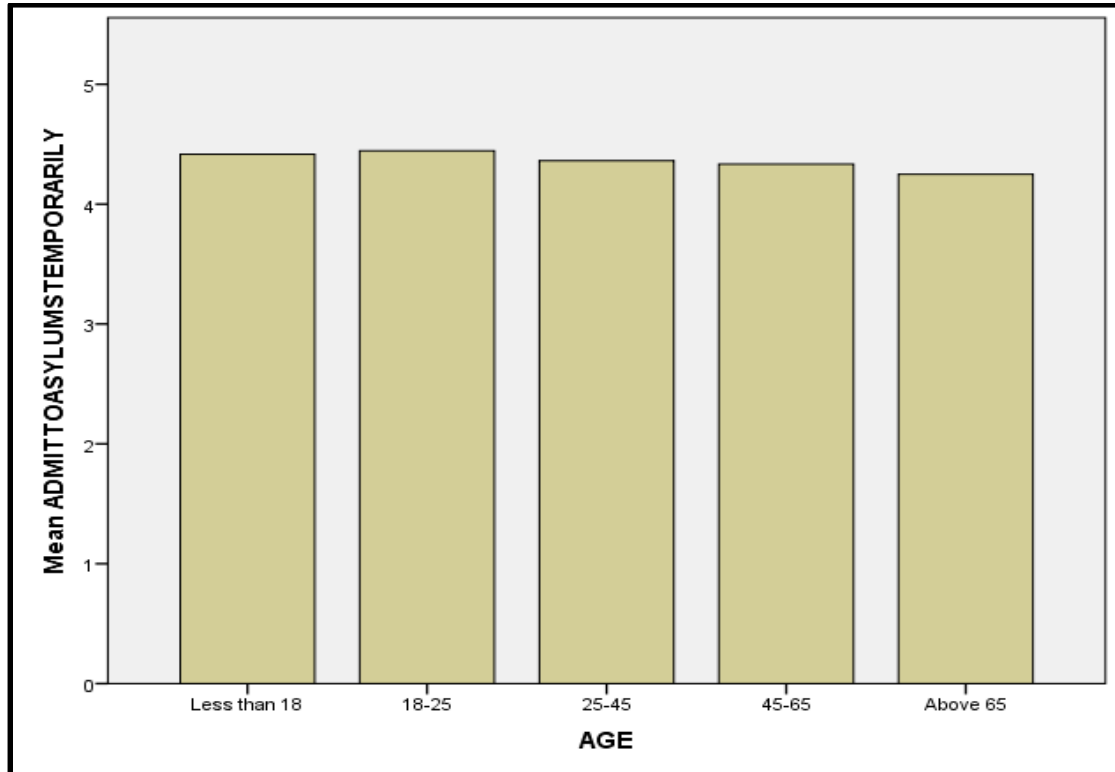
Legend Figure 21 represents the opinion of respondents on transfer to open prisons as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders is compared to their age.

Figure 22



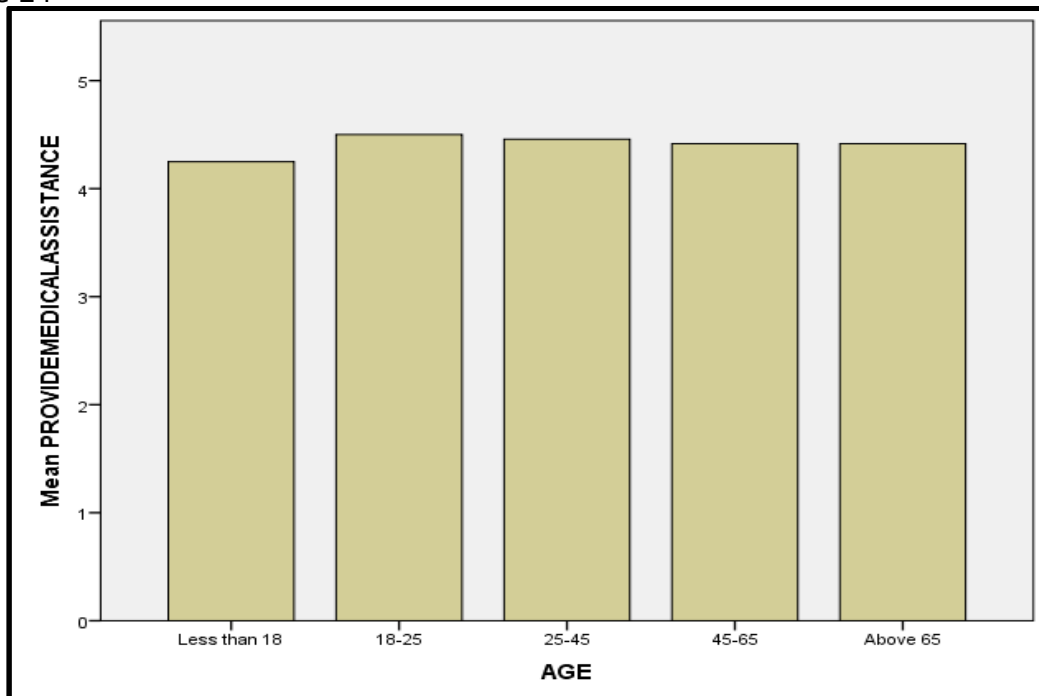
Legend Figure 22 represents the opinion of respondents on transfer to rehabilitation centres as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders is compared to their age.

Figure 23



Legend Figure 23 represents the opinion of respondents on admitting to asylums temporarily as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders is compared to their age.

Figure 24



Legend Figure 24 represents the opinion of respondents on providing medical assistance as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders is compared to their age.

Table 1

Null hypothesis (H0): There is no correlation relationship among the factors that aggravate mental disorders and measures that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders.

Alternative hypothesis (H1): There is correlation relationship among the factors that aggravate mental disorders and measures that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders

		Correlations									
		CORNERING BYFELLOW MATES	ABUSEBYFEL LOWINMATE S	SUBSTANCE ABUSE	CONFINEME NTS	LACKOFCOPI NGSKILLS	REDUCTION OFSUBSTA NCEMSUSE	INCLUSIONO FCOMMUNIT YSERVICES	YOGANDSIM ILARPRACTI CES	INTRODUCI NGRECREATI ONCENTRES	
Spearman's rho	CORNERINGBYFELLOW MATES	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.508**	.480**	-.197**	.087	.155*	.038	.093	.188**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.008	.219	.028	.586	.189	.007
		N	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202
ABUSEBYFELLOWINMATE S		Correlation Coefficient	-.508**	1.000	-.537**	.095	-.070	-.019	-.076	.067	-.021
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.191	.321	.785	.283	.341	.763
		N	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202
SUBSTANCEABUSE		Correlation Coefficient	.480**	-.537**	1.000	-.144*	.058	.099	.104	.009	.146*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.040	.403	.160	.140	.904	.039
		N	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202
CONFINEMENTS		Correlation Coefficient	-.197**	.095	-.144*	1.000	.049	.115	.072	.096	.070
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.191	.040	.	.489	.105	.389	.176	.321
		N	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202
LACKOFCOPINGSKILLS		Correlation Coefficient	.087	-.070	.058	.049	1.000	.063	-.083	-.060	.066
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.219	.321	.403	.489	.	.375	.242	.397	.353
		N	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202
REDUCTIONSOFSUBST NCEMSUSE		Correlation Coefficient	.155*	-.019	.099	.115	.063	1.000	.119	.550**	.479**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.028	.785	.160	.105	.375	.	.082	.000	.000
		N	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202
INCLUSIONOFCOMMUNIT YSERVICES		Correlation Coefficient	.038	-.076	.104	.072	-.083	.119	1.000	.160	.279**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.586	.283	.140	.309	.242	.082	.	.023	.000
		N	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202
YOGANDSIMILARPRACTI CES		Correlation Coefficient	.093	.067	.009	.096	-.060	.550**	.160	1.000	.573**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.189	.341	.904	.176	.397	.000	.023	.	.000
		N	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202
INTRODUCINGRECREATI ONCENTRES		Correlation Coefficient	.188**	-.021	.146*	.070	.066	.479**	.279**	.573**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	.763	.039	.321	.353	.000	.080	.000	.
		N	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202	202

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Legend

The correlation relationship among the factors that aggravate mental disorders and measures that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders

- **Measures the prison authorities should implement to reduce mental disorders among inmates**

Figure 25
Legend

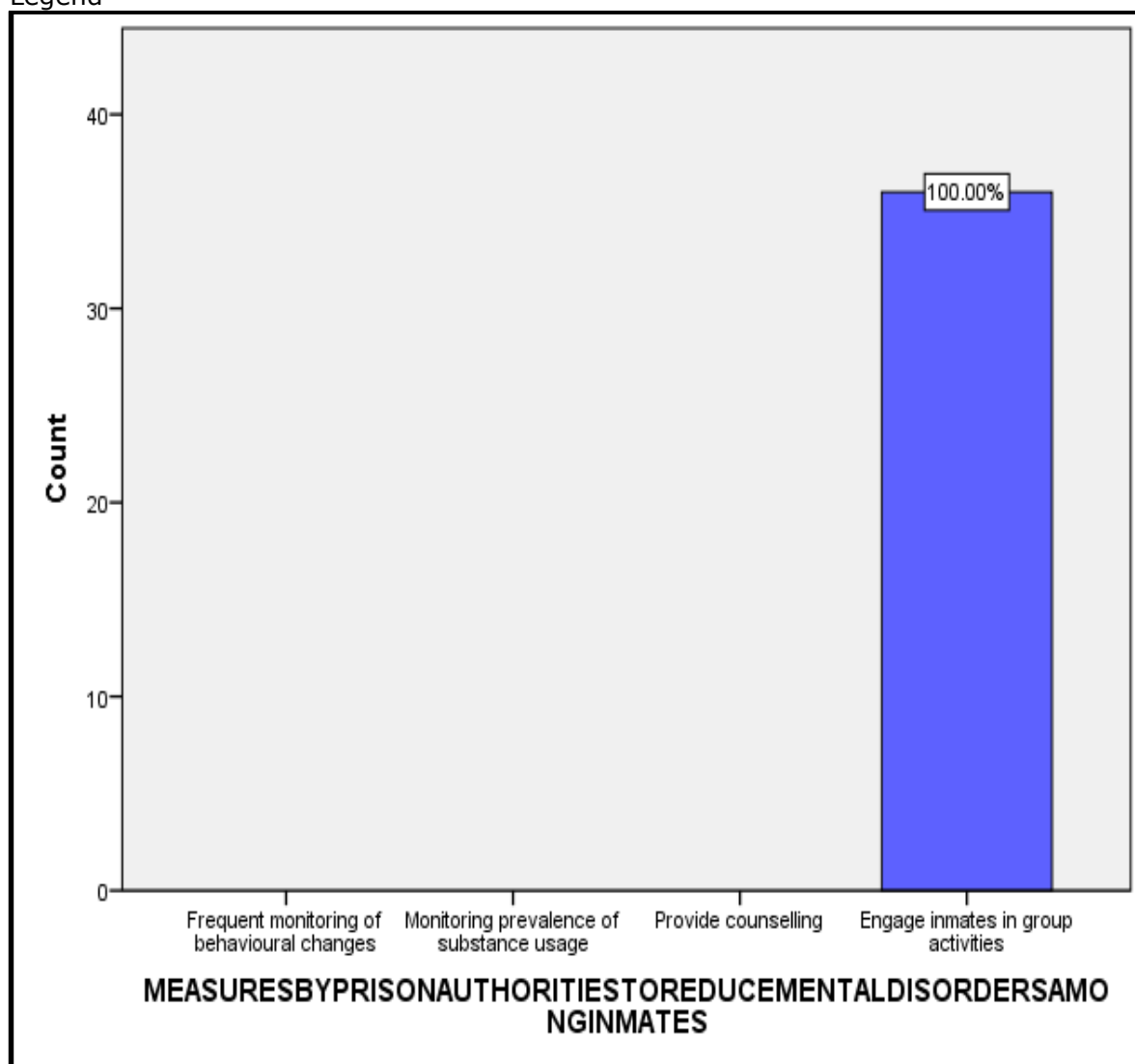


Figure 25 represents the opinion of respondents on most effective measures the prison authorities should implement to reduce mental disorders among inmates.

RESULTS

99% of the respondents agree that a mental health check up in medical examinations prior to arrest is necessary. **(Figure 6)**

The respondents irrespective of their financial status and gender agree on cornering by fellow inmates as the major factor that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners. **(Figure 7)**

The respondents irrespective of their financial status and gender agree on abuse by fellow inmates as the major factor that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners. **(Figure 8)**

The respondents irrespective of their financial status and gender agree on substance abuse as the major factor that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners. **(Figure 9)**

The respondents irrespective of their financial status and gender agree on confinements as the major factor that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners. **(Figure 10)**

The respondents irrespective of their financial status and gender agree on lack of coping skills as the major factor that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners. **(Figure 11)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification and occupation agree on abusing other inmates as the major factor which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners. **(Figure 12)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification and occupation agree on violent behaviour as the major factor which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners. **(Figure 13)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification and occupation agree on self-harm as the major factor which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners. **(Figure 14)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification and occupation agree on suicide as the major factor which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners. **(Figure 15)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification and occupation agree on personality disorders as the major factor which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners. **(Figure 16)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification agree on reduction of substance misuse as the effective measure that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders. **(Figure 17)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification agree on inclusion of community services as the effective measure that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders. **(Figure 18)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification agree on yoga and similar practices as the effective measure that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders. **(Figure 19)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification agree on introducing recreation centres as the effective measure that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders. **(Figure 20)**

The respondents irrespective of their age agree on transfer to open prisons as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders. **(Figure 21)**

The respondents irrespective of their age agree on transfer to rehabilitation centres as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders. **(Figure 22)**

The respondents irrespective of their age agree on admitting to asylums temporarily as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders. **(Figure 23)**

The respondents irrespective of their age agree on providing medical assistance as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders. **(Figure 24)**

There is a positive correlation between the cornering by fellow inmates and reduction in substance abuse and introducing recreation centres; substance abuse and introducing recreation centres. Hence, the alternative hypothesis is accepted whereas for the rest of the factors null hypothesis is accepted. **(Table 1)**

All the respondents irrespectively have opined that engaging inmates in group activities is the most effective measure that the prison authorities should implement to reduce mental disorders among inmates. **(Figure 25)**

DISCUSSION

Almost all the respondents have opined that including mental health check-up in medical examinations prior to arrest is necessary this is because once the mental status of the offender is know at the earliest measures suitable for such persons can be taken to avoid further aggravation. **(Figure 6)**

The respondents irrespective of their financial status and gender agree on cornering by fellow inmates, Abuse by fellow inmates, Substance abuse, Confinements and Lack of coping skills as the major factors that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners, this is majorly because of the inefficiency of the prison guards, them being corrupted easily and also lack of required manpower in prisons. **(Figure 7-11)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification and occupation agree on abusing other inmates, Violent behaviour, Self-harm, Suicide and Personality disorders as the major factors which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners, this is because in most of the psychological disorders the patient either becomes extremely quiet or extremely violent and being in the environment like prisons the probability of them becoming violent is natural. **(Figure 12-16)**

The respondents irrespective of their educational qualification agree on reduction in misuse of substances, Including frequent community service programs, physical activities such as yoga and similar practices and Introducing recreation centres as the effective measures that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders, this is because when engaging prisoners in evolving practices there are studies that shows that there will be change in their actions, self-realisation and a sense of hope within themselves for betterment. **(Figure 17-20)**

The respondents irrespective of their age agree on transfer to open prisons, transfer to rehabilitation centres, Admit to asylums temporarily and Provide medical assistance as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders, this is because the probability of petty offenders becoming vulnerable to other higher criminal offenders and becoming influenced by them can lead to unexpected consequences. So in order to avoid such negative impacts the wiser choice would be to choose the alternatives. **(Figure 21-24)**

There is a positive correlation between the cornering by fellow inmates and reduction in substance abuse and introducing recreation centres; substance abuse and introducing recreation centres. Hence, the policies and regulations must take into consideration these factors and new effective measures should be initiated for reducing the factors that aggravate mental disorders. **(Table 1)**

All the respondents irrespectively have opined that engaging inmates in group activities is the most effective measure that the prison authorities should implement to reduce mental disorders among inmates, this is because in general humans being social animal, this measure will help them to realise the importance of being there for somebody and distract them from having unwanted thoughts that is usually observed among isolated people. **(Figure 25)**

Limitation

The limitation to this study is the sample frame, as only the general opinion of the individuals living in Chennai has been collected. Hence, there is a lack of opinion of people in other areas

CONCLUSION

Mental health is one of the primary rights of an individual. The prisoners though do not have the same rights as that of other citizens, the basic rights are required to be ensured. The major objectives of this research is to determine the factors that lead to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners, to find the consequences of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners, to find the measures that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders and to find the measures the prison authorities should implement to reduce mental disorders among inmates.

Based on the analyses it is deduced that cornering by fellow inmates, Abuse by fellow inmates, Substance abuse, Confinements and Lack of coping skills as the major factors that leads to aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners; abusing other inmates, Violent behaviour, Self-harm, Suicide and Personality disorders as the major factors which is the consequence of aggravation of mental disorders among prisoners; reduction in misuse of substances, Including frequent community service programs, physical

activities such as yoga and similar practices and Introducing recreation centres as the effective measures that can be availed in prisons to prevent mental health disorders; transfer to open prisons, transfer to rehabilitation centres, Admit to asylums temporarily and Provide medical assistance as the effective measure that can be availed to petty offenders who have mental disorders; positive correlation between the cornering by fellow inmates and reduction in substance abuse and introducing recreation centres; substance abuse and introducing recreation centres and engaging inmates in group activities is the most effective measure that the prison authorities should implement to reduce mental disorders among inmates. Moreover to bridge the existing gap measures such as Frequent monitoring of behavioural changes, Monitoring prevalence of substance usage, Provide counselling and engage inmates in group activities should be ensured.