

# **A Research on the Relationship between Role Stress and Job Involvement for Prison Security Officers**

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## **Abstract**

In the past, correctional institutions and the prisoners being housed inside were viewed negatively by society. Today, the human rights of those behind bars have been greatly improved due to better understanding and continuous reform of the judicial and criminal systems. But these reforms have placed tremendous pressure on prison security officers. Employees' physical and psychological well-being, including those working in jailhouses, is key to institutional success; thus, preventing employees from developing role pressure, helping them become more involved in their job, and guiding them to obtain more confidence in their work are crucial matters that need to be addressed. This study aims to investigate the relationship between role stress and the job involvement of prison security officers in correctional institutions. We developed an online survey questionnaire and circulated it over the Internet. Next, the invalid parts were removed, and the data collected was analyzed. The results showed that role stress significantly impacts job involvement. Based on this, the following suggestions are proposed: (1) external counseling resources could be introduced for prison security officers; (2) grass-root security manpower could be added in correctional facilities; (3) means to relieve stress needs to be provided for security officers; (4) individual tasks should be clearly described and assigned; (5) retention incentives should be increased; (6) professional training should be improved; (7) self-learning should be encouraged; (8) more opportunities for experience-sharing among peers could be given; and (9) senior officers must be urged to give speeches to boost their colleagues' morale.

**Keywords:** Prison security officers, Role stress, Job involvement.

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## 1. Introduction

A prison is a mysterious place in the eyes of the general public, especially since working in a correctional facility may be difficult for some. Some of the main tasks of a prison security officer include protecting the safety and managing the life of detainees and assisting in important affairs such as the education of detainees, investigation and classification proceedings, health consultation, government decree publicity, etc. Since prison security officers are expected to play various roles, they often experience anxiety in performing their work. Oftentimes they are required to be strict in implementing laws as enforcement officers, but there are instances when they need to be gentle, caring, and understanding of the needs of the detainees. Extreme work role-switching may cause role ambiguity, conflicts, and excessive load. If prison security officers are unable to adjust to this, it results in stress leading to psychological burdens or emotional distress. This unnecessary pressure from work could impact the physical and mental well-being of security officers and may affect the safety of everyone in the workplace.

In recent years, enterprises have begun to recognize and consider the effects of work pressure on employees' productivity. Scholars have also acknowledged pressure at work as one of the crucial reasons that affect employees' job involvement. When employees have a good psychological state, they can focus on their tasks, enjoy the work that they do, and agree with the value of their job. Article 21 of Taiwan's Law of Execution in Prison stipulates that prisons should be strictly guarded day and night, clearly stating that prison security officers are required to have a high degree of concentration. The prison environment imposes a high degree of pressure on its employees making it dangerous for everyone involved; thus, it is not surprising that prisons are currently facing a shortage of manpower, high capacity ratios, and frequent prison violence. Studies have shown that work pressure may affect work morale and work commitment. Wen (2012) pointed out that although the government appoints security management personnel like ordinary public servants, the nature of their duties is different from that of ordinary public servants.

Due to the special nature of correctional institutions, their security management personnel need to strictly guard the facility all day and all night. The meager salary, job promotion issues, negative public perception, and other undesirable factors have caused correctional officers to try their best to quit and transfer to other public agencies, resulting in a high turnover rate. Based on the above, this study explored the status of prison security officers in terms of their task performance; role stress was assigned as the independent variable and job involvement as the dependent variable to explore and verify the relationship between the two. Finally, based on the research results, some suggestions are provided to improve the management of correctional work, modify the roles of security officers, and enhance work efficiency.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 Role Stress**

Lin (2014) referred to role stress as the role expectations demanded of individuals in the group. When certain external environmental and personal internal factors result in an inconsistent perception of role expectations or when some unfavorable role activities are requested to be done, it leads to an unbalanced psychological burden preventing the individual to perform the appropriate behavior role and achieve the task role. Chen and Lai (2021) pointed out that role stress occurs when individuals face the requirements of organizational position responsibilities, and the role perceived does not match their and others' expectations. This could lead to the individual not performing inadequately or not meeting expectations. Tsai (2023) noted that role stress is the subjective and objective influence of internal factors and the external environment when an individual plays a role, resulting in a state of tension and imbalance in the course of behavior. Based on scholars' definitions of role stress, this study defined role stress as the individual's expectation of the assigned role in a social group; because of unclear or cognitive differences, it could lead to a negative impact on internal psychology or an imbalance in external behavior.

Based on the review of the literature, this study divided role stress into three dimensions: (1) role conflict, (2) role ambiguity, and (3) role load (Su, 2011; Wang, 2012; Liu, 2013; Kuo, 2013; Chou, 2013; Kung, 2015; Chen & Lai, 2021; Chen & Hsiao, 2021). These are described in detail below:

#### **1. Role Conflict**

According to Chou (2013), role conflict occurs when the role recipient has established expectations for the role, and other people have too many and inconsistent sources of expectations for this role resulting in contradictions between personalities. It also emerges when the role player accepts two or more different role identities, making it difficult to take care of themselves, which leads to tension and unnecessary conflicts. Chen and Lai (2021) stated that role conflicts happen when employees' role expectations, norms, performance, or behavioral demands are not met simultaneously, resulting in an inner imbalance. Tsai (2023) regards role conflict as the conflict individuals face when two or more sets of expectations or commands are different, resulting in expectations that may be difficult to achieve. Prison security officers often play several roles simultaneously; they are required to act as the security police force, nurse, drug delivery, supervisor, colleague, and subordinate. When conflicts arise between these roles, it could lead to role conflicts and further stress.

#### **2. Role Ambiguity**

Role confusion or role uncertainty refers to unclear role rights and obligations resulting in ill-defined or inconsistent role expectations (Kung, 2015). Chen and Lai (2021) stated that role ambiguity means employees lack explicit authorization and

guidance for their responsibilities and powers. They have no clear expectations for roles or proper feedback on role performance, and cannot correctly perform role behaviors. According to Tsai (2023), role ambiguity involves individuals having conflicts or confusion about their role identity, and not having adequate understanding of the rights and obligations of playing the role, resulting in confusion and uncertain behavior. Prison security officers experience role ambiguity when the management system is not transparent, when they are required to do tasks that are not related to their business, or when they misunderstand the information conveyed by officials. These make it difficult for them to clearly determine the status of their duties and play their role well.

### 3. Role Load

Kung (2015) pointed out that when the role giver, based on his legal status, has too high expectations for the role receiver's work requirements, exceeding the range of the role receiver's ability to bear, it results in a psychological burden. Role load can be subdivided into two types: quality and quantity overload. Quantity overload develops when the outside world requires too much of the role, so the individual cannot complete it within a specific time limit. It can be measured by the amount of work that must be done in a specific time. Meanwhile, quality overload happens when the level of requirements is too high and is beyond the scope of one's ability. It can be evaluated by the degree of work difficulty. According to Chen and Lai (2021), qualitative role overload refers to work that exceeds the skills, knowledge, and abilities of employees; while quantitative role overload refers to the conflict between organizational requirements and the time needed to fulfill them. Tsai (2023) referred to role load as having too many tasks with very high standards that needed to be accomplished in an insufficient time frame; the expectation of the role exceeds the individual's ability to bear it. Security officers experience role load since they are mostly required to strictly guard an overcrowded correctional facility, and work overtime and in shifting schedules resulting in overwork, job exhaustion, and burnout.

## 2.2 Job Involvement

Wu (2016) noted that job involvement is an internal state of mind. It entails individuals showing a positive and ambitious attitude toward work, a positive and stable emotional and cognitive state, and a high degree of enthusiasm and strong identification with work. Chao (2016) believed that job involvement is an attitude consisting of high enthusiasm, willingness to pay extra for work, unconditional effort, and joy. Employees with high job involvement generally have better performance at work and exhibit good attitudes and confidence toward their work. Wen, Yang, Hong, Lin, and Yang (2021) believed that job involvement refers to employees' personal psychology on work identification, self-realization, and demand satisfaction. Kuo (2023) described job involvement as an attitude of focusing on work, being responsible for work, showing a sense of participation and

identity at work, gaining self-worth, status, and dignity from work, and injecting emotions into work.

Based on past literature, this study divided job involvement into four aspects: (1) job evaluation, (2) job concentration, (3) job pleasure, and (4) job recognition (Chiu, 2014; Wang, 2016; Tseng, 2017; Li, 2020; Wen, Yang, Hong, Lin, & Yang, 2021). These are explained in detail below:

1. *Job evaluation* refers to the subjective value judgment of the prison security officers on their work and their evaluation of the job that they do based on their work achievements.
2. *Job concentration* refers to the earnestness, activeness, sense of responsibility, and dedication of prison security officers to the work they are engaged in.
3. *Job pleasure* refers to prison security officers gaining happiness in their work and developing a positive psychological state or work attitude during the work process.
4. *Job recognition* refers to prison security officers accepting the goals and values of their work, regarding the achievement of their work goals as their responsibility, and having the willingness to do their best at work.

### **2.3 Relationship between Role Stress and Job Involvement**

Previous research on role stress and job involvement included teachers, financial practitioners, medical staff, civil servants, long-term care attendants, military training instructors, etc. as research subjects, but there is no current research that focuses on prison security officers as subjects. Lian (2017) found that role ambiguity has a negative predictive power on job involvement. Meanwhile, Hung (2019) and Hsu (2016) pointed out that role stress has a significant negative impact on job involvement, and Li (2020) received partial support for the significant negative impact of employee role stress on job involvement. Liou (2021) pointed out that role ambiguity is the main predictor of civil servants' job involvement. Based on the above, the present study proposes the following hypotheses:

#### **H1: Role stress has a significant negative impact on job evaluation of job involvement.**

H1-1: Role conflict has a significant negative impact on job evaluation.

H1-2: Role ambiguity has a significant negative impact on job evaluation.

H1-3: Role load has a significant negative impact on job evaluation.

#### **H2: Role stress has a significant negative impact on job concentration of job involvement.**

H2-1: Role conflict has a significant negative impact on job concentration.

H2-2: Role ambiguity has a significant negative impact on job concentration.

H2-3: Role load has a significant negative impact on job concentration.

**H3: Role stress has a significant negative impact on job pleasure of job involvement.**

H3-1: Role conflict has a significant negative impact on job pleasure.

H3-2: Role ambiguity has a significant negative impact on job pleasure.

H3-3: Role load has a significant negative impact on job pleasure.

**H4: Role stress has a significant negative impact on job recognition of job involvement.**

H4-1: Role conflict has a significant negative impact on job recognition.

H4-2: Role ambiguity has a significant negative impact on job recognition.

H4-3: Role load has a significant negative impact on job recognition.

### **3. Research Method and Analysis**

This study included prison security officers as the subject of research and investigated the impact of role stress on job involvement. We utilized the quantitative research method wherein survey questionnaires were distributed and the data collected was analyzed.

#### **3.1 Research Tools**

##### **1. Questionnaire on Role Stress**

Based on the review of the literature, this study divided role stress into three dimensions and adopted the role stress questionnaire used by Wen (2012). It is made up of 11 items and is divided into three parts based on the three dimensions e.g., role conflict (3 items), role ambiguity (5 items), and role load (3 items).

##### **2. Questionnaire on Job Involvement**

This study adopted the job involvement questionnaire proposed by Chang (2008) which is a modified version of Kuo's (2011) questionnaire. It consists of attributes involving the work characteristics of prison security officers and is divided into four dimensions e.g., job evaluation (4 items), job concentration (4 items), job pleasure (3 items), and job recognition (3 items), with a total of 14 items.

#### **3.2 Reliability and Validity**

To make this research questionnaire more representative and appropriate, three senior prison security officers were invited to serve as reviewers for the first draft of the questionnaire (the relevant background information is shown in Table 1). The questionnaire was modified based on their suggestion of changing the expression of the questions to help the respondents in understanding the items more efficiently and to ensure that the questionnaire has good content validity.

**Table 1: Information on Reviewers for Content Validity**

Code	Unit	Position
1	Prison A	Chief Administrator
2	Prison B	Security Officer
3	Prison C	Security Officer

Table 2 shows the detailed results of the reliability analysis of the questionnaire. It can be seen that the internal consistency of the scale is good.

**Table 2: Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaire**

Variable	Dimension	Cronbach $\alpha$	Cronbach $\alpha$ of Variable
Role Stress	Role Conflict	0.698	0.829
	Role Ambiguity	0.702	
	Role Load	0.732	
Job Involvement	Job Evaluation	0.715	0.896
	Job Concentration	0.734	
	Job Pleasure	0.856	
	Job Recognition	0.801	

### 3.3 Sampling

Prison security officers in Taiwan were recruited for this study. They include prison administrators, chief administrators, guard officers, commissioners, guard chiefs, and wardens who guard, maintain order in the prison, and protect the lives of detainees.

The questionnaires were distributed in the prison Facebook community with the most significant number of security officers. In addition to working day and night in different divisions, oftentimes, group A members cannot meet with group B members; therefore, online questionnaires were used for data collection. A questionnaire is considered invalid if there are missing items or if the same option is checked in the entire questionnaire. A total of 131 questionnaires were returned, and after excluding the invalid questionnaires, a total of 127 valid questionnaires were analyzed.

### 3.4 Analysis Results

This study utilized Pearson correlation to analyze the collected data and explore the correlation between the various dimensions and between "role stress" and "job involvement" as a whole. As shown in Table 3, the correlation coefficients between role conflict and job evaluation, role conflict and job concentration, and role load and job concentration did not reach the significant standard of 0.05, while the rest reached a significant level.

**Table 3: Correlation between Role Stress and Job Involvement**

Pearson Correlation		Job Involvement				
		Job Evaluation	Job Concentration	Job Pleasure	Job Recognition	Job Involvement
Role Stress	Role Conflict	-0.171	-0.064	-0.391***	-0.221*	-0.240**
	Role Ambiguity	-0.402***	-0.414***	-0.493***	-0.492***	-0.534***
	Role Load	-0.200*	-0.073	-0.503***	-0.314***	-0.305***
	Role Stress	-0.345***	-0.277**	-0.567***	-0.451***	-0.477***

\*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05

Regression analysis was performed with the three dimensions of role stress as independent variables, and each dimension of job involvement as the dependent variable.

**Table 4: Regression Model of Role Stress on Job Evaluation of Job Involvement**

Variables	Job Evaluation
Role Conflict	0.015
Role Ambiguity	-0.405***
Role Load	-0.006
F Value	7.893***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.141

\*\*\*p<0.001; \*\*p<0.01; \*p<0.05

It can be seen from Table 4 that the regression coefficient of role ambiguity is significant. The explanatory power in the role stress model affects the job evaluation of job involvement is 14.1%. Its F value is 7.893, which is significant (p<0.001), and the role ambiguity  $\beta$  value is negative ( $\beta=-0.405$ , p<0.001), indicating that role ambiguity hurts job evaluation of job involvement, that is, the higher the degree of role ambiguity, the lower of job evaluation.

**Table 5: Regression Model of Role Stress on Job Concentration of Job Involvement**

Variables	Job Concentration
Role Conflict	0.082
Role Ambiguity	-0.518***
Role Load	0.135
F Value	10.235***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.180

\*\*\*p<0.001 ; \*\*p<0.01 ; \*p<0.05



Table 5 shows that the regression coefficient of the role ambiguity is significant, and the explanatory power in the role stress model affecting job concentration is 18.0%. Its F value is 10.235, which reached a significant level ( $p < 0.001$ ). The  $\beta$  value of role ambiguity is negative ( $\beta = -0.518$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that role ambiguity harms job concentration of job involvement, that is, the higher the degree of role ambiguity, the lower the degree of job concentration.

**Table 6: Regression Model of Role Stress on Job Pleasure of Job Involvement**

Variables	Job Pleasure
Role Conflict	-0.047
Role Ambiguity	-0.314***
Role Load	-0.315**
F Value	20.353***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.315

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$

It can be seen from Table 6 that the regression coefficient of role ambiguity and role load are significant. The explanatory power in the role stress model affecting job pleasure is 31.5%. Its F value is 20.353, which reached a significant level ( $p < 0.001$ ). The  $\beta$  value of role ambiguity ( $\beta = -0.314$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and role load ( $\beta = -0.315$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) are negative, which indicates that the higher the degree of role ambiguity or role load, the lower the degree of job pleasure.

Table 7 shows that the regression coefficient of role ambiguity is significant. The explanatory power in the role stress model affecting job recognition is 23.2%. Its F value is 13.686, which reached a significant level ( $p < 0.001$ ). The  $\beta$  value of role ambiguity is negative ( $\beta = -0.458$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), which means that the effect of role ambiguity on job recognition is negative.

**Table 7: Regression Model of Role Stress on Job Recognition of Job Involvement**

Variables	Job Recognition
Role Conflict	0.066
Role Ambiguity	-0.458***
Role Load	-0.127
F Value	13.686***
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.232

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Results**

The results of the regression analysis indicated that role ambiguity had a negative and significant impact on the four dimensions of job involvement (e.g., job evaluation, job concentration, job pleasure, and job recognition), and that role load had a negative impact on job pleasure. However, role conflict had no significant impact on the four dimensions of job involvement. The results of the hypothesis testing are listed in Table 8.

Currently, most of the security personnel in prisons are front-line officers. It often takes ten years to be promoted to chief administrator. It is even rarer to obtain the required qualifications for recommending officers. Due to narrow promotion channels, the need to work under a high-pressure environment, and the lack of incentives, some people tend to choose to transfer to general administrative staff outside the prison after working for six years. Further, since the management system is not clear, security officers often take on tasks that are not part of their job. They are also given few opportunities for future promotion. These are the possible reasons why unclear role goals had a negative but significant impact on the four dimensions of job involvement (e.g., job evaluation, job concentration, job pleasure, and job recognition).

At present, there is a shortage of manpower in prisons, and working overtime is the norm. Moreover, the workload of security officers far exceeded personal loads, making it more difficult for them to work in a high-pressure environment. This makes it challenging to be happy and contented at work resulting in the role load having a negative impact on job pleasure.

Prison is a highly managed environment with strict discipline and a military-like organizational hierarchy. Security officers are often expected to switch between highly conflicting job roles. For example, inmates experience behavioral changes due to long-term imprisonment. Most also have violent personalities upon entering the prison, but then exhibit change to comply with the prison rules and cooperate with the prison management to obtain early parole opportunities. Changes like this in various situations affect the feelings and roles of security officers. Since security officers are used to quickly adjusting to different roles, role conflicts had no significant impact on the four dimensions of job involvement.

**Table 8: Results of the Hypothesis Testing**

Hypothesis	Testing Results
H1: Role stress has a significant negative impact on job evaluation of job involvement.	Partially Supported
H1-1: Role conflict has a significant negative impact on job evaluation.	Unsupported
H1-2: Role ambiguity has a significant negative impact on job evaluation.	Supported
H1-3: Role load has a significant negative impact on job evaluation.	Unsupported
H2: Role stress has a significant negative impact on job concentration of job involvement.	Partially Supported
H2-1: Role conflict has a significant negative impact on job concentration.	Unsupported
H2-2: Role ambiguity has a significant negative impact on job concentration.	Supported
H2-3: Role load has a significant negative impact on job concentration.	Unsupported
H3: Role stress has a significant negative impact on job pleasure of job involvement.	Partially Supported
H3-1: Role conflict has a significant negative impact on job pleasure.	Unsupported
H3-2: Role ambiguity has a significant negative impact on job pleasure.	Supported
H3-3: Role load has a significant negative impact on job pleasure.	Supported
H4: Role stress has a significant negative impact on job recognition of job involvement.	Partially Supported
H4-1: Role conflict has a significant negative impact on job recognition.	Unsupported
H4-2: Role ambiguity has a significant negative impact on job recognition.	Supported
H4-3: Role load has a significant negative impact on job recognition.	Unsupported

## 4.2 Discussion

Based on the research results, this study put forward some suggestions that could serve as a reference for improving the management of correctional facilities.

### 1. Reduce the formation of role pressure

#### 1) Introduce external counseling resources

Security officers work in prisons under 24-hour strict surveillance, with stern closeness and high discipline, resulting in higher role stress. In recent years, society has paid attention to the human rights of detainees and the prison environment. Security officers who stay in the same place with the detainee are the largest team in prison, but few people care about their mental health. This study believes that a community counseling system can be introduced, with professional psychologists assessing and assisting to reduce the harmful effects of role stress.

#### 2) Addition of grass-roots security manpower

The problems of high recidivism rates and overcrowding in prisons in Taiwan have been discussed in recent years. The manpower ratio of prisoners and security officers is much higher than in other countries. Because of that,

guarding accidents are prone to occur. Prisons have a saying: “Guard first, Education priority”, which shows that the primary goal of prisons is to assist detainees to return to society. Faced with the shortage of manpower, security personnel frequently work overtime. Several attacks on security personnel in recent years show that correctional facilities are currently facing significant challenges which need to be addressed. Adequate manpower will result in a reduced role load of security officers which could increase the degree of their job involvement.

3) Provide opportunities to relieve security officers’ stress

In addition to work, cultivating one's hobbies such as planting flowers and trees, exercising, and participating in clubs can not only cultivate one's temperament but also divert attention and reduce the negative impact of role pressure.

4) Clearly describe and assign individual tasks

Although the work of security offices in prisons is complicated, they have to play different roles in various situations. Providing them with clear job descriptions and assignments will help them feel confident about their job and reduce uncertainty, which could assist in the establishment of personal development plans, helping them develop enthusiasm at work.

## 2. Increase job involvement

1) Increase retention incentives

It is vital for correctional facilities to retain their senior personnel. The Agency of Corrections in Taiwan is currently expected to achieve a ratio of 5 junior administrators for every 1 senior administrator. If it goes smoothly, prison security officers will have confidence in their role goals, and the degree of role ambiguity will be reduced making it easier to focus on work.

2) Improve professional training

Under the leadership of senior security personnel, junior security officers who have passed the national examination are expected to have practical knowledge of various emergencies and security breach situations. The inheritance of experience from senior personnel will help junior administrators to deal with difficult inmates and reduce role conflicts, which could lower the negative impact of role stress.

3) Encourage self-learning

Correction theory in prisons is a profound knowledge. After the work is over, the knowledge and practical skills of prison security officers should be constantly enriched. A diligent study of correction theory can improve problem-solving ability through the improvement of professional knowledge. Although civil servant life is stable, employees should not become too lenient. Prison security officers have a responsibility to establish a professional image. Having advanced degrees can also help in job promotion, reduce the role stress of security work, and increase the degree of job involvement.

- 4) Foster experience-sharing among peers  
Holding regular gatherings or security experiences and knowledge-sharing clubs to share the joys and bitterness of work will not only deepen the interpersonal relationship among security officers but will also allow them to exchange experiences and knowledge.
- 5) Urge senior officers to give speeches to boost morale  
Since the organization holds regular lectures internally, outstanding senior colleagues should be invited as speakers to inspire and motivate junior administrators. They may adopt the honor system and issue certificates and medals to increase the employees' sense of honor. The beginning of learning is to imitate first so that new colleagues can imitate and exchange experiences.

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