Factors influencing incarcerated offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers in South African correctional centres

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Abstract: This article reports on an empirical study that examined incarcerated offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers in selected correctional centres in South Africa. Broadly, correctional officers require the voluntary compliance and cooperation of incarcerated offenders to realise the goals of the custodial institutions. But the perennial incidences of violence, abuse and brutality, and other forms of misconduct by correctional officers toward incarcerated offenders are inimical to the actualisation of such goals. Using a sample of 315 male participants from a cross-sectional survey, this study assessed whether experiences of abuse and brutality, social distance and corruption predict incarcerated offenders’ perception of correctional officers in South African correctional centres. The findings of this study corroborate broader attitudinal research findings in institutional corrections, and indeed in criminal justice studies. It points to the effects of abuse and brutality, and corruption in eroding confidence in correctional officers, decreasing the ratings of their procedural fairness, and their overall effectiveness or performance. The implications of our findings for appropriate policy implementation are discussed.

Subjects: Criminology and Criminal Justice; Sentencing and Punishment; Prisons; Criminal Justice

Keywords: incarcerated offenders; correctional officers; correctional centres; South Africa
1. Introduction

Incarcerated offenders face a myriad of problems while serving their sentence term(s) in corrections facilities. These problems include, but are not limited to social adaptation, loss of job, the trauma of isolation, and fear of community stigmatisation and ostracism, to mention a few (Colson, 2018; Grossi, 2017). Unless they receive appropriate treatment and support, they are likely to be at risk of being caught up “in a vicious cycle of reoffending, reconviction and social rejection” (United Nations, 2018, p. 3). The need to provide support for incarcerated offenders engendered the convergence of different countries (including South Africa) under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) to introduce some standards at international level to protect the rights of offenders.

Importantly, these international standards stipulate that the primary purpose of incarceration is rehabilitation. For instance, the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) specifies explicitly that the “penitentiary system shall comprise treatment of prisoners, the essential aim of which shall be their reformation and social rehabilitation.” Measures that can be adopted by correctional institutions to achieve both rehabilitative and reintegration goals are also spelled out in the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (also known as The Nelson Mandela Rules).

To ensure compliance with the above standards, signatories, including South Africa, have developed a variety of intervention programmes to cater for the general and specific needs of incarcerated offenders (Dissel, 2008; Farr et al., 2003; Nieuwoudt & Bantjes, 2019). Fundamentally, the programmes were to rehabilitate offenders, minimise misconducts, help offenders change from their criminal behaviour, and prevent their relapse to crime after release (Burnett & McNeill, 2005; Nieuwoudt & Bantjes, 2019; Piel & Useem, 2011). However, the relationship between correctional officers and incarcerated offenders is critical for the effectiveness of these programmes (see, Burnett & McNeill, 2005; Järveläinen & Rantanen, 2019). How incarcerated offenders perceive correctional officers will impact their active participation in correctional programmes (see, Hacin & Meško, 2018; Nieuwoudt & Bantjes, 2019). It will also boost trust and confidence, and shape offenders’ willingness to cooperate with correctional officers and comply with correctional rules and procedures (Baker et al., 2021).

Realising the importance of trust and confidence as preconditions for cooperation and compliance, a significant body of research has been conducted to understand and explain how trust and confidence in the corrections can be built and sustained (Bennet & Shuker, 2010). However, the trend in most of these studies is that they focused more on correctional officers’ perception of incarcerated offenders (see, Crewe et al., 2015; Liebling et al., 2011; Maguire & Raynor, 2017). The outcome has been a dearth of research explaining incarcerated offenders’ perception of correctional officers.

The study reported in this article sought to redress this lacuna using a representative sample from a transitional African society such as South Africa, to explain incarcerated offenders’ perception of correctional officers. Many factors account for the relevance of this study. First, it is important for correctional managers to be conversant with the perceptions of incarcerated offenders about correctional officers, and how such opinions are formed. It is also imperative to discover whether incarcerated offenders, some of whom may later be released on parole and re-integrated back into society, understand the complexity of the correctional facility, as well as the role played by correctional officers in the society. Second, as scholars, we need to be conversant with the understanding of the opinions or perceptions of incarcerated offenders about correctional officers, and how these have evolved throughout their incarceration.

In addition to bridging the gap in perception research concerning corrections, this study is the first to empirically examine incarcerated offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers from a racially classified African society setting like South Africa. The dearth of research in this area is inappropriate, considering the nature and extent of correctional officers’-incarcerated offenders’
relationship in contemporary correctional facilities in South Africa. Though not based on sound empirical evidence, media and institutional reports have shown that the relationship between the two groups is largely antagonistic as correctional officers have often abused offenders within correctional facilities in South Africa (see, Postman, 2020). For instance, in April 2020, violence broke out in Baviansport Correctional Centre between inmates and correctional officials where maximum force was used. In 2019, five current and former inmates at Leeukkop Correctional Centre have also sued the Minister of Justice and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) for alleged assault and torture (which took place on 10 August 2019) by correctional officers (see, Postman, 2020). These, and many other similar incidences underscore the importance of researching offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers in South African correctional centres.

The purpose of this study was to assess incarcerated offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers, and the factors that shape such perceptions. However, in the absence of a single universally agreed-upon definition of perceptions concerning the corrections, and for this study, we utilised some context-specific variables and constructs that are peculiar to the South African correction context. To this end, we endeavoured to determine offenders’ perceptions by incorporating constructs such as offenders’ experience(s) of abuse and brutality, the experience of officials’ corruption and social distance. The aim was to address the following research questions: (1) What are the specific perceptions of correctional officers among South African incarcerated offenders? (2) What factors shape incarcerated offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers in South Africa? This article is structured in this order: the first section focuses on the review of the general literature on perceptions. The next section reviews the scarce research on offenders’ perception of correctional officers. This section is followed by the methodology, results, and discussion sections. The last section provides a summary of the findings and discusses the implications for correctional policy and future research. For this article, incarcerated offenders, offenders, and inmates connotate the same and are used interchangeably.

2. Literature review
Previous research on perception in corrections points to the significance of the relationship between offenders and correctional officers in the production of order and in shaping cooperation between the two groups (Auty & Liebling, 2020; Kifer et al., 2003; Liebling & Arnold, 2012; Sparks et al., 1996). By contrast, most of these studies focused almost exclusively on correctional officers’ perceptions of incarcerated offenders. For instance, preceding research indicated that the extent of misconduct among incarcerated offenders is instrumental to correctional officers’ perceptions of them (Hacin & Meško, 2018; Shabangu & Koen, 2021; Wooldredge, 2020). These studies also found that high levels of misconduct among incarcerated offenders negatively shape correctional officers’ perception of offenders (Hacin & Meško, 2018; Di Placido et al., 2006; Wooldredge, 2020). A decrease in offenders’ level of misconduct was also found to positively shape correctional officers’ perception of incarcerated offenders (Di Placido et al., 2006; Steiner, 2018).

However, considering what seems to be a lop-sidedness in most perception research concerning corrections, where the focus has predominantly been on correctional officers’ perception of offenders, we contend that there is a need to find a balance. Besides contributing to the existing body of knowledge, the study sought to redress this conspicuous gap in corrections research by considering incarcerated offenders’ perception of correctional officers using a representative sample from selected correctional centres in South Africa.

Perception research about the justice system has identified trust and confidence, procedural justice (or fairness) and institutional effectiveness (or performance) as proxy measurements of people’s perceptions of the justice system (see, Boateng, 2016). That is, the judgment people form about the justice system (or legal authorities) could be measured against these three factors. Such judgements are usually formed out of people’s contact, or interactions with authority figures, and from their vicarious experiences (see, Brown et al., 2019; Cavanagh & Cauffman, 2015; Schuck, 2013). This denotes that people’s perceptions of legal authorities are usually influenced by their
personal experiences or encounters with authority figures, as well as their knowledge of how authority figures treat people known to them. For instance, offenders’ perceptions of the justice system have been associated with misconduct, such that those who form negative opinions about legal authorities tend to be involved in a greater level of misconduct (Brown et al., 2019; Fine & Cauffman, 2015).

Studies have also found a link between social distance and perceptions in corrections (Barkworth & Murphy, 2021; Meško & Hacin, 2019). Although correctional officers are duty-bound to enforce compliance and ensure that order is maintained in the corrections facilities, such mandates can only be achieved in a decorous and respectable atmosphere, particularly between inmates and the officials. Theoretically, there seems to be an artificial distance between correctional officers and incarcerated offenders somewhat as a direct consequence of the asymmetric power relations between the two groups (see, Rowe, 2016, 2015). Such relational imbalances still thrive even in this current era of correctional reforms. Correctional officers still abuse offenders, and there seems to be a high level of intolerance between the two groups (Haney, 2008). The use of excessive force by correctional officers in enforcing compliance inside the corrections facility often breed hostility, and also exacerbates the social distance between the two groups (Meško & Hacin, 2019).

Correctional officers’ decorous and respectable disposition towards incarcerated offenders stimulate trust and confidence, nurture feelings of procedural fairness and increase the chance for high-performance ratings (Barkworth & Murphy, 2021; Meško & Hacin, 2019). Contrastingly, where the social distance between the two groups is wide, it will foster feelings of cynicism toward authority figures (see, Barkworth & Murphy; 2021; Meško & Hacin, 2019). Moreover, offenders’ trust and confidence in correctional officers will also diminish. Judgment about the fairness of correctional officers will be negatively construed, and their ratings of the performance of correctional officers will be very low (Barkworth & Murphy, 2021; Meško & Hacin, 2019).

Moreover, correctional centres are high-risk environments for corruption, especially in the absence of transparency and public oversight (Penal Reform International, 2021). Correctional officers sometimes deny offenders access to beddings, water and even food as a form of punishment, even when the justifications for such are unfounded (Carney, 2020). There are also reports of correctional officers who were found complicit in corrupt practices, such as aiding and abetting crime in the correctional facilities (Goldsmith, 2020; Nel, 2017; Shayi, 2008). Correctional officers also accept bribes from offenders to look away from their misconducts and as an inducement to ignore the smuggling of contrabands into the facility and sometimes to clear their disciplinary records (Goldsmith, 2020). Research has shown that offenders who see correctional officers as corrupt will likely have low trust and confidence in them (Goldsmith, 2020; Nelson, 2021). Inmates who have witnessed correctional officers accepting a bribe from fellow inmates will likely see correctional officers as procedurally unfair and ineffective (see, Souryal, 2009; Wooldredge & Steiner, 2016).

Experience of abuse and brutality within the correctional facility could also shape perceptions (Haney, 2008). The adverse effects of incarceration often compel offenders to turn to correctional officers for their physical and emotional support (Brown et al., 2019). Unfortunately, their vulnerabilities are sometimes exploited by correctional officers resulting in altercations, conflicts, and violence (Franke et al., 2010). Conflicts may also ensue between the two groups when rules are broken by offenders on the one hand, and when their rights are violated by correctional officers, on the other hand (Franke et al., 2010). Such situations have sometimes been quelled through the use of maximum force, resulting in offenders’ abuse and brutality. Studies have shown that where such ill-treatment abound, there is the likelihood for trust or confidence in correctional officers to diminish (Franke et al., 2010; Symkowycz, 2019). Since the use of force contradicts the fundamentals of procedural fairness, offenders who are abused and brutalised are also likely not to assess the fairness of correctional officers positively, and their rating of institutional performance will be low or poor (see, Baker et al., 2021; Barkworth & Murphy, 2021; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2018).
3. Offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers

A considerable body of literature has explored perception of the criminal justice institution, focusing mostly on the police and the court (Baker & Gau, 2018; Boateng, 2016; Walters & Bolger, 2019). However, there is less report on perceptions concerning the corrections. This article intends to fill this void in criminological literature by exploring how incarcerated offenders perceive correctional officers. For this study, we consider procedural fairness, trust in correctional officers, and institutional effectiveness or performance, as key determinants of offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers.

As earlier enunciated, there is a dearth of research on inmates’ perception of correctional officials. Reliable statistics on inmates’ perception of trust and confidence, a judgment of procedural fairness and the effectiveness or performance rating of correctional officials are also not explicit in the literature. Therefore, our arguments are extrapolated from media reports and credible scientific journal articles. However, a few studies have shown that offenders’ negative experiences with correctional officers reduce trust and confidence in correctional officers, and by extension, perception of them (Hacin & Meško, 2018; Liebling & Assisted By Helen Arnold, 2004; Vieraitis et al., 2018). For instance, a 2016 study of 193 offenders in all corrections centres in Slovakia, Hacin and Meško (2018, p. 4344) found that “more than 50% of all prisoners did not trust prison staff, as they perceived them as the representatives of the prison system who want to harm them.”

In relative terms, correctional centres in South Africa have been plagued by an increased level of violence, particularly between correctional officers and inmates (The Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS), 2021; Geldenhuys, 2017). These incidents are mostly triggered by altercations between two groups, as a result of the use of force, assaults, maltreatment, and other forms of conduct by correctional officers (Bruce, 2019). For instance, between 2018 and 2019, the Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS) received a total of 335 complaints from correctional centres across the country (The Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS), 2021). These complaints essentially revolve around incidences such as correctional officers’ abuse of inmates, sexual assaults, torture, urgent healthcare complaints, to mention a few (see, The Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS), 2021). It is commonplace in South African correctional centres for correctional officers to abuse and torture inmates who fail to comply with correctional rules (see, The Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS), 2021). Such incidences will make it almost impossible for inmates to trust or have confidence in correctional officers, or assess their procedures as fair. Offenders’ judgment about the effectiveness of correctional officers and overall institutional performance will also be poor (Maguire et al., 2019).

Procedural fairness focuses on how legal authorities elicit voluntary compliance and deference from people based on their adoption of fair procedures when they encounter people (see, Murphy, 2020; Tyler, 2021, 2019). This argument emanates from the broader procedural justice theory which postulates that legal authorities generate and sustain legitimacy from people by aligning with fair procedures (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Realistically, it will be challenging for a single procedure to be adjudged as fair (Tyler, 2003). Many factors have been identified and proposed to assess the fairness of the procedures adopted by authority figures, especially when they come in close contact with people. These factors comprised of the quality of treatments people received from them (authority figures), trust, quality of decision making, social bonds, and the capacity of such procedures to solve different problems (see, Tyler, 2003). In the context of the current study, correctional officers will be considered to be procedurally fair when incarcerated offenders assess the quality of their decision-making processes, and the treatment they received from them positively (Liebling, 2011; Maguire et al., 2019).

Beyond procedural justice, incarcerated offenders are likely to have confidence in correctional officers whom they trust (see, Vieraitis et al., 2018). But when offenders receive unfair treatments
from correctional officers, or when they suspect or experience any element of favouritism in terms of the kind of treatment or service they receive from correctional officers, their trust or confidence in the latter will likely decrease (Maguire et al., 2019). In providing explanations on the concept of trust concerning the justice system, Tankebe (2010) avers that trustworthiness epitomises the value that people attach to legal institutions about the potential or possible consistency of their behaviour or actions. That is, people are likely to reposit confidence in authority figures whom they found to be consistently credible and honest in their dealings with them. While offenders’ trust in correctional officers stimulates positive behaviour, favouritism, nepotism or discrimination inhibit decent behaviour (Maguire et al., 2019).

In addition, the perception of legal authority or institution is motivated by the effectiveness or performance of such institution (Boateng, 2016). It involves the capacity of such legal institution or authority to deliver on its statutory or constitutional mandates. For example, the key objectives and functions of the correctional centres in South Africa are encapsulated in the 2005 White Paper on Corrections in South Africa (see Fourie, 2015). As the backbone of the custodial institution, correctional officers are duty-bound to ensure the objectives and the goals of the corrections are achieved (Fourie, 2015; Lambert et al., 2013). Therefore, the effectiveness or performance of correctional officers, and by extension correctional institutions, will be determined by how well they have performed in terms of their functions and overall statutory mandates. The ability of correctional officers to maintain order and guarantee safety and security in the corrections will serve as a strong motivation for their positive performance rating by incarcerated offenders (Maguire et al., 2019). Contrastively, when offenders feel unsafe owing to violence and other forms of illegality in the corrections, they are likely to rate the performance or effectiveness of correctional officers as poor (Maguire et al., 2019).

4. Methods and procedure

Data for our study were collected through a cross-sectional survey of participants from two male correctional centres in Gauteng Province of South Africa (i.e., Boksburg and Zonderwater Correctional Management Areas) during the first quarter of 2020. The data were collected by the authors with the support of two research assistants who were appreciated for their support. Boksburg and Zonderwater Management Areas (medium B) had a population of 1317 and 4149 inmates, respectively. This forms a total of 5,466 inmates at the time of data collection for this study. Although there are 12 correctional management areas in Gauteng Province, these two correctional facilities were considered suitable for our study owing to the diversity of the inmates there, and since our focus was only on male incarcerated offenders. Unlike some other correctional centres, these two correctional centres comprised incarcerated offenders of African, white, Asian, and coloured descent, and from different nationalities.

Another explanation for our choice of research site was to minimise cost, save time, and for safety. In addition, stringent measures were put in place by correctional authorities to minimise access to corrections centres owing to the spread of COVID-19. The country was also on partial lockdown at that time, and interprovincial vehicular movement was restricted. Therefore, a combination of relative safety, accessibility and proximity to correctional centres made Gauteng the most suitable site for the study.

A convenience sampling technique was adopted for the study. Before data collection, participants had been pre-informed by the authority of the facilities about our research. The purpose of the study was also conveyed to them by the corrections authority, as well as their rights to participate and withdraw from the study at any time. All these were reiterated to them on data collection day by the researchers, as well as their voluntary participation and other ethical issues. Thereafter, a total of 380 participants volunteered to participate in the study and completed the consent forms. However, only 315 of them fully completed the questionnaire and return it, making an approximately 83% response rate. The research was conducted in line with the ethical guidelines stipulated in the University of South Africa (Unisa) School of Criminal Justice, College of Law, Research Ethical Committee Protocol...
which indorses: confidentiality, informed consent, and avoidance of harm, among other criteria for conducting research with human participants. The demographic composition of the study participants is computed in Table 1:

### Table 1. Demographic composition structure of the sample

| Demographics | % | Education level | % |
|---------------|---|----------------|---|
| Age group     |   |                |   |
| Below 25      | 7.3 | No schooling   | 20.1 |
| 26–37         | 50.7 | Grade R-11     | 51.0 |
| 38–49         | 34.4 | Matric         | 19.4 |
| 50 and above  | 7.6 | Diploma/degree | 8.0 |
| Citizenship   |     |                |   |
| South Africa  | 87.2 |                |   |
| Foreign nationals | 12.8 |                |   |
| Categories of offense | | Race | |
| Aggressive    | 34.0 | Black          | 91.7 |
| Ecandalical   | 38.9 | White          | 3.1 |
| Sexual        | 16.0 | Asian          | 0.7 |
| Narcotics and alcohol | 3.8 | Coloured       | 4.5 |
| Others        | 7.3 |                |   |

4.1. Measures
We utilised a range of instruments to enable us to generate appropriate answers to the research questions. The instruments and their relevance to the study are explained in the following paragraphs. Notably, the outcome variables are measured as a composite. We also construct a composite measure of five variables believed to influence perception. All the instruments were measured on a four-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 4 = strongly agree. The details of the instruments and their relevance to the study are explained in the next sub-sections:

4.2. Trust and confidence in correctional officers
It assessed participants’ trust and confidence in correctional officers. The Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = 0.87$. A high score on this scale indicates a greater trust and confidence in correctional officers.

4.3. Procedural fairness
It assessed participants’ judgements about the procedural fairness of correctional officials. The Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = 0.86$. A high score on this scale shows that correctional officials are fair in their dealings with incarcerated offenders.

4.4. Officers’ effectiveness/institutional performance
It is structured to determine the participants’ assessment of the effectiveness of correctional officers and the performance of the correctional institution. The Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = 0.80$. A high score indicates that the correctional officers are effective in their responsibilities and that correctional institutions have performed well.

4.5. Abuse and brutality
This assessed the participants’ experiences of abuse and brutality in the corrections. The Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = 0.77$. A high score on this scale indicates a greater experience of abuse and brutality.
4.6. Correctional officers’ corruption
This assessed participants’ experiences of correctional officers’ corruption. The Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = 0.93$. A high score on this scale indicates that correctional officials are corrupt.

4.7. Social distance
It is structured to determine the participants’ assessment of social distancing in the corrections. The Cronbach’s alpha was $\alpha = 0.81$. A high score on this scale indicates a higher level of social distancing between correctional officers and incarcerated offenders.

5. Results
The main aim of this study was to assess incarcerated offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers. Data for this study were analysed with the aid of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Notably, three analyses were conducted, namely—Correlation and descriptive, percentage distribution, and regression analyses. Specifically, Table 2 shows Pearson's bivariate correlation and descriptive statistical analyses. Table 3 shows the percentage distributions of participants’ responses, and Table 4 presents the Ordinary Least Square Regression (OLS) analysis of the study.

Considering Table 2 (Correlation Analysis), a Pearson’s correlation analysis was conducted to explain the relationship between the study scale variables. However, it is expedient to state that before reporting the results, we conducted a preliminary check to ensure that none of the assumptions guiding correlation analyses was violated. Fortunately, our results show that the correlation between all the six constructs was within the acceptable threshold, and the singularity assumption was also not violated. Additionally, there was no concern over the issue of multicollinearity since the variables did not exceedingly correlate with each other. We also confirm this from the result of the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values. Besides the highest correlation value was 0.49, lower than the recommended value of 0.7 (see Pallant, 2010, p. 158).

From the result, we discovered a significant bivariate correlation exists between most of the variables, although not entirely in the expected direction. Specifically, institutional performance ($r = .49$, $p < .01$) has the highest significant correlation coefficient, and it was positively correlated with trust and confidence in correctional officers. Other variables with a significant correlation with trust and confidence in correctional officers are as follows: procedural fairness ($r = -.28$, $p < .01$), experience of abuse and brutality ($r = -.34$, $p < .01$) and experience of correctional officers’ corruption ($r = .33$, $p < .01$). While the first two are negatively correlated, the latter is positively correlated.

Interestingly, the results show that those who had received unfair treatment from correctional officers, and those who had suffered or experienced abuse and brutality from correctional officers, are more likely to trust or have confidence in correctional officers. Unexpectedly, the experience of correctional officers’ corruption though significant, was positively correlated. This implies that those who had experienced corruption from correctional officers are still likely to trust them.

Turning to Table 3, we assessed incarcerated offenders’ perception of correctional officials by computing the frequency distributions and the descriptive statistics. Generally, three inferences can be deduced from the observed pattern. First, the participants had moderately low confidence in correctional officers. Specifically, 63% of participants reported that correctional officers do their job with favouritism, while 58% reported that correctional officers are not trustworthy. In terms of correctional officers’ procedural fairness, a high percentage of the study participants (70%) believed correctional officers did not treat inmates fairly. Just as (76%) of them also believed correctional officers do not take time to listen to inmates. However, in terms of correctional effectiveness or institutional performance, participants had a moderately high belief that the DCS has effectively controlled violence within the facility. Specifically, (56%) of them held the notion that correctional officers are effective in their operations.
Table 2. Bivariate correlations and descriptive statistics

|       | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   |
|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| (1)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Confidence in corrections officials | 1   | −.28** | .49** | −.34** | .33** | −.02 |
| (2)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Procedural fairness                | 1   | −.26** | −.29** | −.27** | .24** |     |
| (3)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Inst. performance                  | 1   | −.26** | −.30** | −.10  |     |     |
| (4)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Abuse and brutality                | 1   | −.42** | −.01  |     |     |     |
| (5)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Corruption                          | 1   |     | .03  |     |     |     |
| (6)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| Social distance                     |     |     |     |     |     | 1   |
| MN   | 2.20| 1.88| 2.41| 2.14| 2.45| 1.90|
| SD   | .80 | .69 | .78 | .97 | 1.05| .72 |

N = 315

**Correlation was significant at p < 0.01; * correlation significant at p < 0.05

6. Determinants of incarcerated offenders' perceptions of correctional officers

To establish the key factors that shape incarcerated offenders' perception of correctional officers in South Africa, we conducted a regression analysis using three different (OLS) regression models (see, Table 4). The first model assessed the effect of trust and confidence on incarcerated offenders' perception of correctional officers. In this model, offenders' experiences of corruption by correctional officers, and their experiences of abuse and brutality by correctional officers engendered a significant effect on their level of trust and confidence in correctional officers. Specifically, a unit increase in offenders' experiences of corruption resulted in a .16 decrease in their trust and confidence in correctional officers. Also, offenders' experiences of abuse and brutality resulted in a reduction in their trust and confidence in correctional officers. A unit increase in offenders' experiences of corruption resulted in a .19 reduction in their confidence and trust in correctional officers. However, demographic variables did not show any significant effect on their level of trust and confidence in correctional officers. All the computed variables in this model explained 15% of the variation in trust and confidence.

Turning to the procedural fairness model, offenders' experiences of social distance, abuse and brutality, and corruption exerted a significant effect on their judgment about the procedural fairness of correctional officers. Precisely, a unit increase in offenders' perception of social distance resulted in a .10 reduction in their assessment of the procedural fairness of correctional officers. However, a unit increase in offenders' experiences of abuse and brutality, and corruption by correctional officers resulted in a .16 and .10 increase in their judgment of the procedural fairness of correctional officers, respectively. Unexpectedly, none of the demographic variables had any significant effect on offenders' judgment of the procedural fairness of correctional officers. All the computed variables in this model explained 13% of the variation in procedural fairness.

In the institutional performance or correctional officers' effectiveness model, only offenders' experiences of social distance and abuse and brutality exerted a significant effect on their judgment about the effectiveness of correctional officers. Precisely, a unit increase in offenders' perception of social distance resulted in a .10 reduction in their assessment of the effectiveness of correctional officers. Similarly, a unit increase in offenders' experiences of abuse and brutality by correctional officers resulted in a .12 decrease in their assessment of the performance of...
| Items                                      | (1)  | (2)  | (3)  | (4)  | M    | (SD) |
|--------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| **Trust/Confidence in Corrections officials** |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Correctional officers are trustworthy       | 25.4 | 32.1 | 35.2 | 7.3  | 2.24 | .92  |
| Correctional officers are honest            | 26.7 | 37.1 | 29.8 | 6.3  | 2.16 | .89  |
| Correctional officers do their job without favouritism | 25.4 | 37.1 | 31.1 | 6.3  | 2.18 | .89  |
| **Procedural fairness**                     |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| Correctional officers treat inmates with respect | 43.2 | 27.0 | 25.1 | 4.8  | 1.91 | .93  |
| Correctional officers treat inmates fairly   | 33.3 | 36.8 | 25.7 | 4.1  | 2.01 | .87  |
| Correctional officers are courteous         | 45.1 | 24.1 | 27.6 | 3.2  | 1.80 | .88  |
| Correctional officers offer explanations before taking actions | 46.0 | 28.6 | 22.2 | 3.2  | 1.89 | .91  |
| Correctional officers handle problems involving inmates fairly | 46.0 | 29.2 | 19.0 | 5.7  | 1.83 | .88  |
| Correctional officers take time to listen to inmates | 47.3 | 28.9 | 20.6 | 3.2  | 1.84 | .93  |
| **Institutional performance**               |      |      |      |      |      |      |
| The DCS has effectively controlled violence within the facility | 15.2 | 28.6 | 43.8 | 12.4 | 2.53 | .90  |
| The DCS has checked gang-related problem within the facility | 18.4 | 28.6 | 38.7 | 14.3 | 2.49 | .95  |
| The DCS has checked the sale of drug within the facility | 22.9 | 38.4 | 29.5 | 9.2  | 2.25 | .91  |
| The DCS always provides assistance when needed | 18.7 | 34.9 | 35.6 | 10.8 | 2.38 | .91  |

* a, b, c (1) Strongly disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Agree, (4) Strongly agree.
Table 4. Regression analysis of factors influencing offenders’ perceptions of correctional staff (N = 315)

|                       | Confidence | Procedural fairness | Performance |
|-----------------------|------------|---------------------|-------------|
|                       | B         | S.E.                | B           | S.E. | B     | S.E. |
| Constant              | 3.07***   | .31                 | 1.78**      | .28  | 3.23*** | .31 |
| Age-group             | -.02      | .06                 | -.08        | .05  | -.05  | .06  |
| Education Level       | -.08      | .07                 | .08         | .06  | .01   | .07  |
| Offence classification| -.02      | .05                 | -.02        | .04  | .04   | .05  |
| Citizenship status    | .09       | .12                 | -.14        | .10  | .13   | .12  |
| Social distance       | -.01      | .06                 | -.10*       | .05  | -.10* | .06  |
| Abuse and brutality    | -.19*     | .05                 | .16*        | .05  | -.12* | .05  |
| Corruption            | -.16*     | .05                 | .10*        | .04  | -.17  | .05  |

*p < .05; **p < .01; *p < .001.

correctional institutions. Again, none of the demographic variables had any significant effect on offenders’ assessment of the effectiveness of correctional officers. All the computed variables in this model explained 15% of the variation in institutional performance or effectiveness.

6.1. Discussion

Using the data delineated to male incarcerated offenders from selected correctional centres in South Africa, the study extends previous attitudinal research in institutional corrections, by exploring incarcerated offenders’ perception of correctional officers and the factors that shape such perceptions. Importantly, the study is the first to attempt quantitative empirical research on incarcerated offenders’ perception of correctional officers from a transitional and multiracial African society correctional setting. It also extends previous studies that focused almost exclusively on correctional officers’ perceptions of incarcerated offenders. Generally, the findings of the study show that incarcerated offenders have less favourable attitudes toward correctional officers, and their overall perception of them is low. Indisputably, this result calls radically into scrutiny contemporary behavioural approaches to corrections in South Africa, especially in terms of the relationships between correctional officers and incarcerated offenders.

How correctional officers relate with or treat incarcerated offenders in South African correctional centres predicts their attitudes toward or perceptions of them. Our findings corroborate that the relationship between correctional officers and incarcerated offenders in South Africa is not really rich, and that order maintenance in the corrections is often achieved through violence, abuse, brutality, and corruption, with a huge disregard for procedural fairness (Bruce, 2019; Liebling, 2011; Maguire et al., 2019). However, a plausible reason for such unhealthy relationships may be the difficulty in finding a balance between the overarching violence subculture of the custodial environment, and the need to enforce compliance. For instance, beyond the sporadic violent incidences or clashes in the corrections, gang-related violence is widespread in South African correctional centres (Barkhuizen et al., 2018; Nel, 2017). The need to deescalate or quash such violence could prompt correctional officers to resort to the use of force thereby causing some inmates to sustain the various degree of injuries. Although minimum use of force by correctional officers is permissible under certain conditions, it is unlikely that it will be acceptable by those at the receiving end (i.e., the offenders). This may breed cynicism towards correctional officers, and nurture an artificial negative perception of them. Therefore, negative perceptions of correctional officers by inmates in South African correctional centres may not always be defined or shaped by
the genuineness of the asymmetric power relations between the two groups, but by an over-
sensationalised feeling of subjugation.

Our findings also lend credence to the argument that social distance between incarcerated offenders and correctional officers often engenders negative perceptions of the latter (Barkworth & Murphy, 2021; Meško & Hacin, 2019). It is commonplace in South African correctional centres for different offenders to be denied their rights and privileges (though not absolutely). Such actions are often taken as a direct consequence of offenders’ fall out with correctional officers, or as a form of punishment for misconduct. Such an act may also widen the existing social distance between correctional officers and offenders in the corrections (see, Barkworth & Murphy, 2021; Hacin & Meško, 2019).

Beyond the effects of social distance and experiences of abuse and brutality on perceptions, experiences of corruption by correctional officers were also found to fuel incarcerated offenders' negative attitudes towards correctional officers. For instance, during the 2019/2020 DCS performance cycle, ten cases of corruption were reported to the Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS), and the JICS suspected a high level of underreporting of DCS officers’ corruption because inmates fear for their lives (see The Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS; The Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS), 2021, p. 61). Notable corrupt incidents that were reported include “payment for a service or for the enjoyment of privileges to which inmates are entitled, and smuggling and trading in contraband as a result of official-inmate dependent relationships (e.g., dagga and cellphones, etc.)” (see JICS; The Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS), 2021, p. 61). Shocking revelations from The Jali Commission also showed that the treatment of correctional offenders is intricately linked to corruption (Jali Commission, 2006; also see, Muntingh, 2008). Corruption in correctional centres is detrimental to the rights of incarcerated offenders and could determine offenders’ loyalty or confidence in correctional officers. Lending credence to our findings, previous research has shown that corruption is inimical to maintaining order in the corrections, and could spur inmates’ negative perception of correctional officers (see, Goldsmith, 2020; Maguire et al., 2019).

However, despite their experiences of abuse and brutality, as well as their experiences of correctional officers’ corrupt practices, participants still appeared to be concerned about how they are treated by the latter. This points to the invincibility factor of procedural fairness in the successful actualisation of correctional goals. It also shows that regardless of their negative experiences of abuse of brutality, and the discomforts that come with incarceration, incarcerated offenders in South Africa still yearn for better treatment.

To this end, it is important to propose a set of ideas that may be relevant to policymakers in reforming the South African Department of Correctional Services. Correctional officers need to be more accountable and develop a more permissible and humane mechanism to enforce compliance in a procedurally fair way and without prejudice. To achieve this, the DCS should strengthen existing accountability structure within each correctional centre where deliberations about incidences of inmates’ abuse and brutality, corruption, and social distancing can be discussed. Such a structure will be an internal arrangement. It is not to duplicate the role of the JICS, but to complement it by ensuring complaints and other critical issues are discussed and resolved within the corrections.

6.2. Conclusion
The current study sought to redress the gap in penological research by considering incarcerated offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers using a representative sample from selected correctional centres in South Africa. To achieve the objective of the study, we assessed some variables reputed to shape perceptions. While the current findings have implications for corrections management in South Africa, it is important to point out that the study is not immune from limitations.
First, since the study was cross-sectional, it will be impracticable to make causal conclusions. To this end, we propose that a longitudinal study be conducted to give room for broader and more accurate causal inferences to be made on offenders’ perceptions of correctional officers in South African correctional centres.

Secondly, we could not consider many variables because of the need to delineate the scope of our research project. Hence, because the study data were collected at two correctional centres in Gauteng Province of South Africa, our results should be treated with caution. Despite the diversity of the study participants and the largeness of centres considered for this study, it cannot replicate the diversity of the inmates’ population in all correctional centres in the country. Future research on offenders’ perception of correctional can therefore consider such diversity.

Beyond the limitations, our findings have helped cast some illuminations on some of the factors that account for inmates’ negative perceptions of, or attitudes towards South African correctional officers. Specifically, the study has underscored the significance of the cordial relationship between correctional officers and inmates in the production and maintenance of order in the correctional centres. Therefore, it is imperative to indicate that regardless of the gamut of projections made by the State and corrections management to transform the custodial institution in South Africa, if the relationship between the two groups is not cordial, actualising the goals of the corrections might be a futile exercise.

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**Note**
1. The Jali Commission was A Commission of inquiry into alleged incidents of corruption, maladministration, violence or intimidation into the department of correctional services appointed by Order of the President of the Republic of South Africa in terms of proclamation no. 135 of 2001, as amended.

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