STUDY ON CORRECTIONAL OFFICER STRESS

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Job Stress and Job Burnout

• Limited research has been conducted focusing on correctional employee stress and burnout.

• There are 3 dimensions to job burnout:
  • Emotional exhaustion (fatigue from the job)
  • Depersonalization (objectifying people and inmates)
  • Reduced self-confidence (feeling infective)
Effects of Job Burnout

- Adverse effects on relationships
  - Strained family life
  - Work-family conflict

- High morbidity rates
  - Hypertension and heart disease
  - Depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
  - Alcohol and/or drug abuse

- Death
  - Staff suicides (14 known corrections officer suicides between 2010 and 2015 in the Massachusetts DOC)
Quick Stats

- According to a recent article in *American Jails Magazine*:
  - The life expectancy of someone living in the United States is 77 years of age – this drops to 59 years of age for corrections officers.
  - The suicide rate for CO’s is 39% higher than the average of other occupations.
  - 33.5% of all assaults in prisons and jails are committed by inmates against staff.
  - On average, a CO will live only 18 months after retirement.
  - A CO will likely be seriously assaulted at least twice in a 20-year career.
  - According to a 2011 survey, 27% of corrections employees meet the criteria for PTSD.
Correctional Officer Stress

- **Title of Project:** Measuring the Effects of Correctional Officer Stress on the Well-Being of the Officer and the Prison Workplace and Developing a Practical Index of Officer Stress for Use by Correctional Agencies

- **Funding Agency:** U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice

- **Award #:** 2014-IJ-CX-0026

- **Universities:** ASU, Northeastern University, and University of Nebraska, Omaha

- **Northeastern University Co-Principal Investigators:**
  - Natasha A. Frost, Ph.D. and Carlos E. Monteiro, Ph.D.
Acute Stress

There is a growing body of empirical evidence to suggest:

1) that correctional officers are exposed through their work to a number of stressors and, as a result, have a higher level of job-related stress than is found in other occupations, and

2) that stress has a variety of debilitating effects on the medical, behavioral, attitudinal, and emotional well-being of correctional officers
Study Objectives

1. advance current knowledge about the effects of correctional officer stress on the prison workplace and,

2. create and validate a practical “stress index” developed on the basis of administrative data routinely collected and maintained by the correctional agency.
Phase One: Understanding CO Stress

Phase 1 of the study involves intensive interviews with 500 correctional officers (250 in Massachusetts and 250 in Nebraska).

- Randomly selected 350 Massachusetts correctional officers at the rank of CO I (officers) and CO II (Sergeants) from one of 8 facilities across the state:
  1. MCI–Concord (medium)
  2. Northeastern Correctional Center (minimum/pre-release)
  3. Souza-Baranowski Correctional Center (max/supermax)
  4. MCI-Shirley (minimum and medium)
  5. Bridgewater State Hospital (medium)
  6. MCI–Norfolk (medium)
  7. MCI–Cedar Junction (maximum)
  8. MCI–Framingham (medium)
Research Process

• Interviewers
  • On shift, on site interviews:
    • 7am – 3pm
    • 3pm – 11pm
    • 11pm – 7am
  • Hour long interviews
  • Separate consents for the interview and administrative data

• Interview rejection rates have ranged from 3% to 33% across interviews requested thus far at the DOC facilities.
• Following the interview, most consent to providing access to the administrative data to the NU research team.
Phase One: Data Collection Through Structured Interviews

- Alternates between interview and self report
  1. **Background – Interview** (post/inmate contact/stress)
  2. **Employment – Interview** (working with inmates, assaults, use of force, witnessing)
  3. **Employment – Self Report** (leaving early, swearing, workplace behavior, etc.)
  4. **Employment – Interview** (complaints filed, misconducts issued, promotion)
  5. **Acute Stress – Self Report** (depression/PTSD/symptoms)
  6. **Aspects of Job – Self Report** (job satisfaction, willingness to violate rules/report others)
  7. **Aspects of Job – Interview** (job satisfaction, feeling valued, pride in work)
  8. **Behavioral Effects – Self Report** (using alcohol, drugs, weight gain/loss)
  9. **Closing Questions – Interview** (stress here compared to other places)
Phase One: Data Collection Through Administrative and Personnel Data

- Absenteeism
- Late Arrivals/Early Departures
- Performance Evaluations
- On-the-job Injuries
- Inmate Complaints
- Coworker Complaints
- Misconduct Reports Issued
- Use of Force Incidents
Phase Two: Develop and Validate an Index

1. using the initial sample coupled with administrative data to see if we can link the measurement model of stress with the structural effects of stress on task performance, organizational citizenship, and counterproductive behaviors.

2. the creation of a risk index based solely on administrative data. This risk index will combine administrative measures typically available in administrative records, thus providing a useful and non-intrusive tool for identifying acute stress.

3. validate this risk index by using a follow up sample.
Phase Two: Data Collection

• Two Samples (each sample will be comprised of 150 consenting officers, for a total of 300 officers).
  • a purposive sample whose participants were identified on the basis of elevated stress index scores derived solely on administrative data;
  • a random sample of officers, selected without reference to stress scores or stress outcomes (or any other factor).

*If the stress index has predictive validity, we will find that the stress scores (and other self-reported stress-related effects) will be significantly greater among the purposive sample of officers than among the randomly selected officers.*
Employee Assistance Service Unit (MA DOC)

- Created in early 1986, the mission of EASU (formally known as the “Stress Unit”) is to assist employees, retirees and their families with an array of challenges both simple and complex. Some of the issues they assist with include alcohol and drug dependencies, debt problems, traumatic incidents, domestic violence, marital issues and divorce, job stressors, military support and overall staff wellness with confidentiality.
- Staff is available 24/7, 365 days a year
- Staff functions as “peer counselors” and have an extensive resource directory to address issues beyond the scope of the unit itself
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